

“BOLD PRAYERS.”

Rev. Robert T. Woodyard

First Christian Reformed Church, Lynden

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Text for the Sermon: Acts 4:23-31

Introduction.

We have before us a model of how to pray. This is the longest recorded prayer in the book of Acts. It is a model, an example for us, to help us to pray, especially in times of trouble.

Let's consider how a prayer prayed two thousand years ago still speaks into our lives today in twenty-first century post-modern America.

Retreat to pray.

The apostles have been issued a serious threat by the religious and political authorities. These people had real authority to do some pretty harsh things. To disobey them would invite severe consequences.

The very first thing they did in the face of this trial and trouble was not to run, hide or complain, but to pray. The real test of our Christianity is our prayer life and the priority we give to it.

What is prayer? In simplest terms it is communication with God. But drill down a bit and consider how radical prayer is.

This world of ours is ruled by Satan and filled with demons, it's a world where darkness and wickedness reigns, a world where kings and rulers and godless people plot against God.

In this world prayer becomes a subversive act, an act of military aggression. It is a declaration of allegiance with the other side in this great spiritual warfare on earth. Satan hates prayer because it humiliates him, it says he isn't winning, his will isn't being done.

Prayer is going over Satan's head, prayer is calling in superior fire power, prayer is going nuclear. Every single prayer is another humiliating defeat for the enemy of our souls.

Satan is defeated every time Christians pray, every time husbands and wives pray together, every time parents pray with their children, every time a meeting or appointment is opened in prayer.

Prayer is acknowledging the God of the universe is still on His throne and very much in control. Prayer says He who is in us is greater than Him who is in the world.

Notice the apostles met with their friends. We need the fellowship of believers in times of need. Don't miss the effect trials and troubles have on our lives. They drive us closer together with a community of support and they drive us to our knees in prayer. Don't despise times of difficulty and don't think God isn't in them. After all a time of crisis produced this prayer for us.

Pray to the Sovereign God.

Let's look more closely at this model prayer inspired by the Holy Spirit. Notice they spend five verses praying about who God is and only the last two verses about what they wanted.

They don't pray a general or generic prayer. Each word applies specifically to their present situation. When you are praying in the midst of a situation that is fearful or out of control, how do you want to come before God? What do you want to most emphasize?

Sovereign Lord, the one who made the heavens and the earth and the sea and everything in them out of nothing. Sovereign Lord, God of absolute power and supreme authority. The one who created the world is more powerful than those who are created, Satan, rulers, all people.

If God created the entire world and everything in it, then it is subject to Him, ruled over by Him, under His complete control. He is the potter and we are the clay, the entire world and everyone in it is clay in His hands.

How can clay say no to the potter, how can the clay say to the potter do this and not that?

Think about the utter futility of those who are scheming against God, when God is watching every step they are taking. How do you get an upper hand on the God who knew before the world was made exactly what you would be up to?

Look what the principalities and powers, spiritual and earthly did to Jesus. They raged and plotted and killed God's holy servant Jesus, but to what effect? None, they utterly failed. God exposed the futility of man's and Satan's rebellion. Jesus suffered greatly and He triumphed greatly. This was the source of their great courage, boldness and confidence to pray as they did.

Notice what they don't ask for. They didn't pray for safety, security, protection. They didn't call down fire on their enemies. They don't ask that they may lead quiet and peaceful lives without any trouble. They don't ask for favor from the authorities. Not that any of those kinds of prayer are necessarily bad or wrong. But they aimed higher, faithful obedience to the Lord's command.

They ask for obedience and boldness, strength and courage in the midst of the trouble.

They pray for more divine manifestations, the kind that got them in trouble in the first place. They don't care about themselves, they care about the building of God's kingdom. They want the power of God to be on full display.

Notice they only make one very brief comment on the actual problem, "Lord, look upon their threats." That's all the more they dwell on the problem. Before God it's not a problem.

When we are facing a serious problem, do we focus more on the problem than on God Himself and on our obedience?

This prayer is needed today because of the increasing threats and obstacles to the proclaiming and living out of our faith in our country and around the world. Our freedoms are slowly narrowing and being taken away. And we face an even greater threat.

The threat is not persecution but comfort, ease, entertainment, lack of interest in spiritual things. We are being amused to death. We are filling our souls with mindless entertainment from Netflix, YouTube, and cable TV. We are saturated with the junk food of our culture we no longer have any appetite for truth and God's Word.

All Christians need this prayer, those in countries where physical and spiritual persecution is great, and those in countries where there is affluence, comfort and ease.

Advance in boldness.

Acts 4:31 When they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness.

God confirms He heard their prayer and gives a visible sign from heaven. In the OT when the temple or ground shook, it was a sign that God was with them, in that place. What an encouragement to the faithful, to continue to be faithful. The presence of the Lord is with them.

This is not the only way God shows His presence. God speaks to our troubled souls by many means, signs of grace, simple answers to prayer, a peace that passes common understanding.

God loves prayer, because when He responds, it glorifies Him. His answers to prayer come back to Him with thanks, gratitude, worship. God is glorified by our asking and by His answering.

This prayer is completely relevant to our needs here today. Too many of us are just drifting along, complacent, content with the status quo, comfortable, at ease with the world.

How many of us wake up each day thinking about God's purpose for us in that day? How does God want to use me, what does He want to accomplish through me? How can I build or extend His kingdom today?

We need this outpouring of the Spirit in our church and community and our country more now than ever. Will you pray for this tonight and in this new season.

Implications and application.

Let's take to heart this model prayer and apply it to our own prayer lives.

First, in any need or trial or temptation, turn quickly to prayer.

Second, pray more vertically, acknowledging who God is, what He is like, what He has done. Put depth into your prayers. Pray to the sovereign God to strengthen and sustain you.

Third, pray Scripture, saturate your prayers with Scripture. Pray the Scriptures you read in our devotions. Find in Scripture a text that fits your situation.

Fourth, pray with and for others.

Fifth, pray more about God and His reputation and the advance of His Gospel and His kingdom. Pray thy kingdom come, thy will be done.

Sixth, pray for more of the Holy Spirit to be evident in more of your life. Pray for the salvation of sinners, pray for the glory of God to be spread.

God created the universe out of nothing. What can He not do for you?

He planned the crucifixion of His Son for your benefit. What can He not do for you?

His hands guide human history and your history. What can He not do for you?

We are praying tonight to the sovereign, creator God, who delights to hear and answer the prayers of His children. This knowledge is cause for worship, for trust, for rest, for comfort.

Let us sing and pray in confidence to our Father in heaven.

Prayer: Jesus, teach us what to pray and how to pray. We are so inadequate and we fall so far short. We ask too little and too infrequently. The Christian life you hold out to us is impossible without dependent, persistent prayer. Help us by your Holy Spirit. Holy Spirit, guide those who struggle and prod those who need a wakeup call. Father, thank you that you are sovereign, that you are the one true prayer-hearing and prayer-answering God. Help us to see your answers when they aren't what we asked for or wanted. And all of this we ask, believing in the strong name of Jesus our Savior, Amen.