

NO OTHER NAME

ACTS 4



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A Scriptorium Study from The Fellowship of Ailbe

No Other Name: Acts 4
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No Other Name: Acts 4

Introduction to Acts 4

We have seen that Christianity can have a powerful effect on people and their culture, bringing healing, restoration, and reconciliation to God for all aspects of life.

But as surely as Christianity makes an impact on culture, culture makes an impact on Christianity as well. That impact can be negative, bringing – or seeking to bring – harm or hindrance to the faith. Or it can be positive, enhancing our experience of Christ and contributing to the progress of His ongoing work.

In Acts 4 we'll see both sides of the impact of culture on the growing Christian movement. The Kingdom of God exists within the cultures of the world, bringing the Name of Jesus to diverse peoples; so we need to be well prepared, as Kingdom citizens and ambassadors, for understanding culture and how to make the best use of it for Christ and His glory.

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T. M. and Susie Moore

1 Here We Go Again

Pray Psalm 56.1, 2.

Be merciful to me, O God, for man would swallow me up;
Fighting all day he oppresses me.
My enemies would hound *me* all day,
For *there are* many who fight against me, O Most High.

Sing Psalm 56.1, 2

(Morecambe: *Spirit of God, Descend upon My Heart*)

Savior, be gracious, gracious unto me! Weary, I seek the shelter of Your wings.
'Til trouble passes, till my sighings flee, I seek the Lord Who for me does all things.

Read and meditate on Acts 4.1-4.

Preparation

1. Why were the religious leaders “greatly disturbed”?
2. What happened after Peter and John were arrested?

Meditation

The religious leaders regarded themselves as the arbiters of social, cultural, and spiritual life, and they were determined to keep it that way.

Good luck with that.

As Peter and John were doing the follow-up from Peter’s brief sermon, they were taken into custody and charged with teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead (v. 2). Guilty as charged. Note that they were arrested near evening (v. 3). Peter and John had gone up to the temple in the middle of the afternoon. They had been working this crowd for several hours, and that helps to explain why their ministry bore such wonderful fruit (v. 4). Peter and John had gone into the most prominent cultural arena in Jerusalem, where they brought the healing, restoring, and reconciling life of Christ to a lame man.

Now the tiger is out of the cage. The Holy Spirit is loose in the world, and nothing will be able to stop the advance of Christ’s rule on earth as it is in heaven. Peter and John knew this, and they had absolutely no fear that the religious leaders of Jerusalem, who thought they had stopped the work Jesus *began* to do, would have any more success impeding the work He was *continuing* to do. The religious leaders seem almost comical here as they fuss about, trying to silence the preaching of Jesus and the resurrection. Rather than scorn these men, however, we should look upon them with sadness and pity, for the depth of their spiritual blindness is great, as we shall see.

The keepers of the unbelieving *status quo* are ever vigilant against anything that threatens their place of authority and privilege. In their folly and blindness, they thought a harsh warning would get them their way. What they didn’t realize was that they weren’t just warning some Galilean fishermen. The Spirit of God is undeterred by the desperate actions of lost men.

Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

Here is the thing about working in our Personal Mission Field: We don’t always know what’s in store for us.

Peter and John were just going about their daily routine. And ended up in jail. I'm pretty sure they didn't get up that morning planning on an evening in lock-up. But I'm certain they got up and read their Scriptures, and prayed, fellowshiped with other believers, and encouraged one another in their faith and work. Then the rest of the day happened.

Please look at who the instigators were of the trouble: priests, the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees.

Yes. All the religious. At this point, it wasn't the government, or unbelieving neighbors, or complete followers of darkness. No. It was the church. The church stood first in line to persecute.

David experienced this and prophesied that Jesus and His followers would be equally troubled by it:

“For *it is* not an enemy *who* reproaches me; then I could bear *it*.

Nor *is it* one *who* hates me who has exalted *himself* against me; then I could hide from him.

But *it was* you, a man my equal, my companion and my acquaintance.

We took sweet counsel together, *and* walked to the house of God in the throng” (Ps. 55:12-14).

Granted, Jesus and Peter and John were never tight with the religious of their day, but still, the church should not attack its own!

The warning to us is clear. We don't know by whom, how, what, when, or where we will be called each day. But we, like they, need to be prepared and ready.

Prepare for anything and everything in the Word:

“The entirety of Your word *is* truth, and every one of Your righteous judgments *endures* forever.” “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.” “Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You.” (Ps. 119:160, 105, 11)

Sustain your preparation with prayer: “...praying always...” (Eph. 6:18).

“...pray without ceasing...” (I Thess. 5:17).

“Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation” (Matt. 26:41).

Dress for success: “Put on the whole armor of God...” (Eph. 6:11-17).

Be filled with the Holy Spirit of Jesus: “...He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever—the Spirit of truth...” (Jn. 14:16, 17). “...when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth...” (Jn. 16:13). “...be filled with the Spirit...” (Eph. 5:18).

Jesus told His disciples, and He tells us, “These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world” (Jn. 16:33). So, whether we are troubled by those inside the Church, or outside, the instruction is this: Be ready. “For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual *hosts* of wickedness in the heavenly *places*” (Eph. 6:12).

Here we go. Again.

For reflection

1. Why were the religious leaders upset with Peter and John? Do you expect such opposition as you work your Personal Mission Field? Why or why not?
2. How can you prepare each day to make the most of your time for serving the Lord throughout the day?
3. It has often been asked, “If you were taken into custody and charged with being a witness for Jesus, would

there be enough evidence to convict you?" Explain.

The harmless and useful servants of Christ, like the apostles, have often been troubled for their work of faith and labor of love, when wicked men have escaped. And to this day instances are not wanting, in which reading the Scriptures, social prayer, and religious conversation meet with frowns and checks. But if we obey the precepts of Christ, he will support us. Matthew Henry (1662-1714), *Commentary on Acts 4.1-4*

Pray Psalm 56.8-13.

The world is not always a friendly place for believers. Pray for Christians who are being persecuted for their faith. Pray for yourself, to have courage to stand for Jesus in face of any and all opposition.

Sing Psalm 56.8-13.

(Morecambe: *Spirit of God, Descend upon My Heart*)

Lord, see my wand'rings, see my anxious tears! Help me to trust and praise Your holy Word.
Gladly I know that when I call You hear; I will not fear but trust in You, O Lord.

I will not fear what foes might do to me. I give You thanks, my vows will I renew.
You have redeemed me, set my spirit free, and ever in Your light I'll walk with You.

2 Good Deed. Good Name.

Pray Psalm 72.12-15.

For He will deliver the needy when he cries,
The poor also, and him who has no helper.
He will spare the poor and needy,
And will save the souls of the needy.
He will redeem their life from oppression and violence;
And precious shall be their blood in His sight.
And He shall live;
And the gold of Sheba will be given to Him;
Prayer also will be made for Him continually,
And daily He shall be praised.

Sing Psalm 72.12-15.

(Martyrdom: [*Alas! And Did My Savior Bleed*](#))

The Lord the needy rescues when he cries to Him for grace.
All they who suffer violence find mercy before His face.

Let Christ be praised and all the gold of Sheba be His right.
Let blessings to His Name be told, and prayers made both day and night.

Read Acts 4.1-12; meditate on verses 5-12.

Preparation

1. What did the rulers, elders, and scribes want to know?
2. How was Peter able to respond so boldly to them?

Meditation

The religious leaders decided to let Peter and John think it over for an evening in the local jail. As if that was going to affect their testimony the next day. Following “due process,” the judge invited the apostles to explain their behavior – as if they didn’t know exactly what had happened.

Peter and John were filled with the Spirit, and the Spirit’s work is to testify about Jesus in and through the followers of Jesus (cf. Jn. 15.26, 27).

Note Peter’s emphasis: a *good deed* has been done to a crippled man (v. 9). We need always to make sure that good deeds back up our proclamation of the Gospel. Then Peter puts it right in their faces: “the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth.” Good Name, that. Then the indictment: “whom you crucified...” Peter turns the tables of the trial and makes God, not men, the Judge: “whom God raised from the dead...” This is skillful, bold defending of the faith. Then the Gospel: only in the name of Jesus must (note that, Greek: *dei*, literally, “it is necessary that”) men be saved.

Imagine the shock those religious leaders must have felt. I wonder if any of them began to have second thoughts about what they’d done, or what they *thought* they’d done. Mere human power has no defense against the proclamation of the Gospel supported by the evidence of the Kingdom – healing, conversions, bold witnesses, undeniable and irrefutable facts, conviction of sin.

The religious leaders had erected strong walls against the Name of Jesus. These walls would need a bit more battering, but soon enough, they would come down (cf. Acts 6.7). Here the highest court of Jewish culture bore down on the faith of Christ. But entrenched cultural powers are no match for one man, filled with the Spirit of God.

Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

Peter, now filled with the Holy Spirit, has gotten very busy preaching the whole Gospel of the Kingdom. So far, on three different occasions, he has told them they are guilty of having denied the Lord Jesus, participated in His killing, and desperately need to repent. But, because Jesus is risen from the dead, having appeased God's wrath, they also now can confess and turn away from their sin, and be the blessed recipients of God's grace and forgiveness. (Acts 2.13-36; 3.12-26; 4.8-12) The whole truth. The complete Gospel.

And the capper, the third time, was to tell them that there is no other way. Absolutely none. If you want to be saved, this is it. "Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4.12). End of story.

They had been told this once before by Jesus Himself: "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me" (Jn. 14.6).

Peter was refreshing their memory.

His work with the lame man was complete in a different kind of way. He used a good work and a good word to speak forgiveness and healing to him. "Silver and gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk" (Acts 3.6) There is no other way or name.

Our good works and good words should have only one purpose: to make God's mighty power known. "...He saved them for His name's sake, that He might make His mighty power known" (Ps. 106.8).

"And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him" (Col. 3.17). Good deed. Good Name.

And as we are making His mighty power known, we long for others to know Him too; so that "...every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil. 2.11).

This is the whole Gospel of the Kingdom that we are also called to proclaim.

For we are "not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes..." (Rom. 1.16). Proud to preach it!

For reflection

1. Why is the Gospel called the Gospel of the Kingdom?
2. What is the basic message of the Gospel of the Kingdom? How does one receive this Gospel?
3. What does it mean to be "filled with the Spirit"? How does one realize such filling of the Spirit?

*The name of Jesus is given to men of every age and nation, as that whereby alone believers are saved from the wrath to come... And the followers of Christ should act so that all who converse with them, may take knowledge that they have been with Jesus. That makes them holy, heavenly, spiritual, and cheerful, and raises them above this world. Matthew Henry (1662-1714), *Commentary on Acts 4.5-14**

Pray Psalm 72.15-20.

Praise the Lord for His Kingdom, which is coming on earth as it is in heaven! Seek His Kingdom and glory

today for your life and Personal Mission Field.

Sing Psalm 72.15-20.

(Martyrdom: [*Alas! And Did My Savior Bleed*](#))

Let Christ be praised and all the gold of Sheba be His right.

Let blessings to His Name be told, and prayers made both day and night.

And let the earth abound with grain, let fields His fame proclaim.

And may our King forever reign and nations bless His great Name.

Now bless the God of Israel Who wondrous works performs.

And bless His Name, His glory tell both now and forevermore!

3 The Blinding Power of Sin

Pray Psalm 12.1-4.

Help, LORD, for the godly man ceases!
For the faithful disappear from among the sons of men.
They speak idly everyone with his neighbor;
With flattering lips *and* a double heart they speak.
May the LORD cut off all flattering lips,
And the tongue that speaks proud things,
Who have said,
“With our tongue we will prevail;
Our lips are our own;
Who *is* lord over us?”

Sing Psalm 12.1-4.

(Hamburg: [*When I Survey the Wondrous Cross*](#))

Help, Lord! The godly cease to be; they who believe in Christ are few.
Falsely the wicked confidently flatter, deceive, and mock Your truth.

Stop, Lord, the lips that utter lies, all those who speak with boasting tongue!
See how Your holy Word they despise, while their own praises they have sung.

Read Acts 4.1-17; meditate on verses 13-17.

Preparation

1. What did the religious leaders see in Peter and John?
2. What did they decide to do?

Meditation

I supposed we'd be amazed, too. These men were *Galileans*, for crying out loud! Rubes, not religious leaders. Fishermen, not theologians, like these judges! “Where do they get off preaching to *us*! After all, their only ‘credentials’, such as they were, were that they had been with...but let's not go there.” Look at the evidence! A healed man standing there. Two fishermen boldly taking on the religious leaders of the day. A “notable miracle”, indeed!

The apostles are dismissed while the leaders deliberate. But they only deliberate about one thing: This has got to stop! Didn't they care that others might also be healed? Didn't they want to hear a bit more about this Jesus from those who'd known Him? No. No, they did not. They wanted all this to stop. Now.

So the religious leaders made an epic decision: “Let's tell them to stop preaching.” See what I mean about comical? This is utterly laughable to think that the words and threats of mere men could keep the Gospel from going forward. Well, it was in Peter and John's day, anyway.

Does being with Jesus make a difference? By being with Him we *participate* in Him, in His Presence and glory, and there we are transformed, as Peter and John were, by the Spirit of God working with the Word of God in our lives (2 Cor. 3.12-18). Nothing can substitute for being with Jesus if we are to be faithful witnesses to His resurrection.

The religious leaders were completely flummoxed at the courage and conviction of Peter and John. Yet, despite the miracle and the bold preaching, they determined to try to contain the threat to their authority and status. The religious leaders had a problem, all right, but it wasn't Peter and John. It was the blinding power of sin.

Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

The religious leaders, then and now, have another problem too, and that is the incomparable power of the Holy Spirit working through ordinary people.

Think of it. The religious leaders certainly were. All their training, all the education, all the preparation, all the church politics, all the self-seeking displays, and that putrefying preening were no match for ordinary people full of the love and grace and wisdom of God. "Oh, the depth and the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out!" (Rom. 11.33).

And how absolutely irritating this was to the religious leaders of the day. Sadly, their belief system was fueled by the father of lies, our enemy Satan. Jesus said to folks of the same ilk, "You are of *your* father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own *resources*, for he is a liar and the father of it" (Jn. 8.44).

Let's review this situation: Peter and John are duly noted as uneducated, untrained men. They, through the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit have performed a "notable miracle" that, as an inconvenient truth, everybody has seen! The leaders' astute conclusion: perhaps this happened because they had "been with Jesus" (Acts 4.13).

And here is where their genius becomes evident. The light bulb goes on, and poof, they've got it! We'll command them "that from now on they speak to no man in this name." (Acts 4.17).

Sure enough. That'll do it.

But it didn't do it then.

But would it do something today?
Would the church be silenced by such a warning?
Would we?

Not if we are filled with the Holy Spirit. "For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind" (2 Tim. 1.7).

Our backgrounds, our educational status, our prosperity or lack of it, our standing in the community, nothing is relevant.

Only our relationship with Jesus matters.
Can people tell that we have been with Him?

"For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God" (1 Cor. 1.18).

For reflection

1. What does it mean for you to be with Jesus? What can you do to get more time with Him?
2. How had being with Jesus affected Peter and John?

3. We don't expect everyone who hears us to believe the Gospel. But does this mean we should not share the Gospel with everyone? Explain.

What stupidity to suppose that those who had tasted of the struggle would now take fright! And it would be even greater stupidity if, after their initial failure, they expected to accomplish something after such a specimen of oratory. The more they wished to hinder, the more it prospered. John Chrysostom (344-407), Homilies on the Act of the Apostles 10.

Pray Psalm 12.5-8.

Thank God that His Word is reliable, powerful, and true. Ask Him to fill you with His Word and Spirit as you go forth into your Personal Mission Field today.

Pray Psalm 12.5-8.

(Hamburg: [*When I Survey the Wonderful Cross*](#))

Rise up, O Lord, and rescue all Your precious children sore distressed.
Save those who faithfully on You call; grant them deliv'rance, peace, and rest.

Your words are pure and proven true, like silver seven times refined;
You will preserve Your Word ever new, and keep the heart to You inclined.

Proudly the wicked strut and stand; Your indignation builds on high.
Men may exalt their wicked plans, but You will judge them by and by.

4 “We cannot but speak”

Pray Psalm 52.8, 9.

But I am like a green olive tree in the house of God;
I trust in the mercy of God forever and ever.
I will praise You forever,
Because You have done it;
And in the presence of Your saints
I will wait on Your name, for it is good.

Sing Psalm 52.8, 9.

(Warrington: *Give to Our God Immortal Praise*)

But as for me may I be seen in God an olive ever green!
Ever in God, most kind and just, shall I with joy and gladness trust!

Thanks evermore to our Savior be raised! His faithfulness be ever praised!
Here with Your people, loving God, I wait upon Your Name, so good!

Read Acts 4.1-22; meditate on verses 18-22.

Preparation

1. What did the religious leaders tell Peter and John?

2. What did Peter and John say in reply?

Meditation

I suspect the religious leaders were feeling magnanimous here. After all, they didn't *crucify* Peter and John. They just admonished them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus.

Fat chance the apostles would obey that.

Peter's response to the court's warning was concise: "Not gonna do it." They were respectful, concise, and firm. They made it clear that they must obey God, not men.

Since they had no intention of obeying that unjust ruling, Peter and John said so. We are not obliged to obey unjust laws, especially such as pose a threat against the progress of the Gospel. So how did the religious leaders respond to these words? They threatened them again (v. 21). It's all they could do. They knew the people would not abide punishing Peter and John for having done a good work, and the religious leaders feared the people as much as they feared Rome.

Peter and John knew they could not possibly *not* talk and teach about Jesus. They'd been with Him, and now He was alive in them, by His Spirit. How could they help themselves? How can we?

Peter and John had crossed a spiritual Rubicon; they had made the Kingdom turn into a new world, a new reality, and a new power. There would be no going back, but only pushing forward in the ongoing work of Christ. Such is life in the Kingdom, in pursuit of the ongoing work of Jesus Christ. For there is no other Name than His that can bring salvation and healing to the world.

Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

The power of the Holy Spirit was infusing the multitudes!

Where were these people when Jesus was on trial?

These were a lot of the same people who cried out for Barabbas to be released and for Jesus to be crucified. (Lk. 23.14-23) But now they were filled with the courage of Jesus and their presence and peer pressure was being felt by the religious leaders. “So when they had further threatened them, they let them go, finding no way of punishing them, because of the people, since they all glorified God for what had been done” (Acts 4.21). This is what happens when the Holy Spirit comes upon us (Acts 1.8). He changes us from the inside out. We are truly new creations, and the old has passed away (2 Cor. 5.17).

Since all of us will be persecuted in one way or another (Jn. 16.33), it is of the utmost importance that fellow-believers encourage one another and stand together as a united front against those who wish us ill. If it worked for Peter and John, it will be effective for us, too.

“Everyone helped his neighbor, and said to his brother, ‘Be of good courage!’” (Is. 41.6)

“...that I may be encouraged together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me” (Rom. 1.12).

“...likeminded toward one another, according to Christ Jesus, that you may with one mind *and* one mouth glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom 15.5, 6).

Let us strive to be an encouragement to others as “they speak the things which [they] have seen and heard” (Acts 4.20); and pray for others to come along side us as we go out into our Personal Mission Field to do the same. Who knows? Perhaps our solidarity and prayers will make peace abound for a brother or sister in Christ.

“These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world” (Jn. 16.33).

For reflection

1. Do you think Christians and churches today expect large numbers of people to come to Jesus? Explain.
2. How can believers help one another to prepare for persecution?
3. Living from within the Kingdom made a huge difference in Peter and John. Why? How can we know that difference, too?

...when they said, “We gave you strict orders not to teach in this name,” the disciples, although they were able to work countless miracles, neither said nor did anything harsh but answered with all gentleness, saying, “Whether it is right to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge.” John Chrysostom (344-407), *Homilies on the Gospel of Matthew 33.3*

Pray Psalm 52.1-7.

Pray for Christians in lands where persecution is not uncommon. Pray that God would stop the raging of persecutors and turn many of them from enemies to friends. Pray for boldness for yourself and all Christians, to persevere in your witness for the Lord despite opposition.

Sing Psalm 52.1-7.

(Warrington: *Give to Our God Immortal Praise*)

Why do the mighty boast in sin? God’s love endures, it knows no end!

They with their tongues vain boasts repeat, and like a razor, work deceit.

Men more than good in evil delight, and lies prefer to what is right.

They utter words, both harsh and strong, with their devouring, deceitful tongue.

No Other Name: Acts 4

God will forever break them down, uproot, and cast them to the ground!
He from their safety tears them away, no more to know the light of day.

The righteous see and laugh and fear, and say, "Behold, what have we here?
Such are all who at God conspire, and wealth and evil ways desire."

5 Borrowed Blessings

Pray Psalm 146.5-7, 10.

Happy *is he* who *has* the God of Jacob for his help,
Whose hope *is* in the LORD his God,
Who made heaven and earth,
The sea, and all that is in them;
Who keeps truth forever,
Who executes justice for the oppressed,
Who gives food to the hungry.
The LORD gives freedom to the prisoners...
The LORD shall reign forever—
Your God, O Zion, to all generations.
Praise the LORD!

Sing Psalm 146.5-7, 10.

(Hallelujah! What a Savior! [*Man of Sorrows*](#))

Blessed are they whose hope resides in the Lord, Christ at His side.
By Him heav'n and earth abide – God forever reigns in Zion!

He is faithful evermore; He gives justice to the poor,
feeds the hungry from His store – God forever reigns in Zion!

Read Acts 4.1-28; meditate on verses 23-28.

Preparation

1. How did the people respond to the threat from the religious leaders?
2. What did they ask God to do?

Meditation

People in ancient Israel prayed the Psalms, using them to guide daily devotions and corporate worship. Here we see the new Christian community doing the same. The Jews may have hated them, but that was no reason for the believers to forfeit a *bona fide* blessing God had provided.

Here, the believing community borrowed from Psalm 146 (v. 24) and Psalm 2 (vv. 25, 26) to guide their prayer. This spontaneous, unison praying could happen because these people regarded the Psalms as their prayer book. God had given these scripts, and the people had prayed them all their lives. Start anywhere, and most folks could join in. As if someone in your group started singing, *Amazing grace, how sweet the sound...* You'd know it and join in, right?

Praying the psalms was relevant (v. 27). Praying the psalms assuaged their fears. Praying the psalms united their intentions and focus. Praying the psalms stiffened their resolve and gave them confidence. We don't know how to pray as we should (Rom. 8.26). God knows how we should pray. If you were asked to audition for a performance of *Hamlet*, you'd be sure to follow the script. You wouldn't just start babbling on, thinking that your own words would be good enough to persuade the director of your skills. If you want to talk with God, *get a script He's prepared and learn to use it well*. He's written 150 for your convenience.

This passage reminds us that prayer is indispensable to the ongoing work of Christ. Joshua and Israel sinned

in the matter of the Gibeonites because they failed to seek the Lord before entering a covenant with them (Josh. 9). The apostles, filled with the Spirit, would not make the same mistake, nor should we. Prayer is the go-to place for everything we are called to do in the ongoing work of Christ.

Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

“Prayer is indispensable...”

Like breathing. We cannot live without it, and we are commanded to do it without ceasing (1 Thess. 5.17; Eph. 6.18).

The disciples asked Jesus to teach them to pray (Lk. 11.1). So He did (Lk. 11.2-4; Matt. 6.6-13).

Then He showed them how to pray. (Mk.14.32-39): “Abba, Father, all things are possible for You. Take this cup away from Me; nevertheless, not what I will, but what You will” (Mk. 14.36).

That is exactly how the disciples prayed on this occasion: “For truly against Your holy Servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, were gathered together to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose determined before to be done” (Acts 4.27, 28).

“Your will be done.”

And prayer is a discipline. We cannot live without it in this form either.

Here is where the use of the scripted prayers from God are so useful:

“Evening and morning and at noon I will pray, and cry aloud, and He shall hear my voice” (Ps. 55.17).

“Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak” (Matt. 26.41).

“Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God...” (Phil. 4.6).

To God, our discipline of communicating with Him is like “golden bowls of incense...the prayers of the saints” (Rev. 5.8).

Singing hymns is another way to commune with God. (Acts 16.25; Eph. 5.18-21)

This hymn implores the Lord to fill us with His Spirit, help us do His will faithfully to the end, allow us to glow with His life and light, and to ultimately take us home to be with Him eternally. More borrowed blessings:

*Breathe on me, Breath of God, fill me with life anew,
that I may love what Thou dost love, and do what Thou wouldst do.*

*Breathe on me, Breath of God, until my heart is pure,
until my will is one with Thine, to do and to endure.*

*Breathe on me, Breath of God, till I am wholly Thine,
until this earthly part of me glows with Thy fire divine.*

*Breathe on me, Breath of God, So shall I never die,
but live with Thee the perfect life of Thine eternity.*

(Edwin Hatch, 1878/Robert Jackson,1888)

For reflection

1. Do think learning to pray the psalms could enhance your prayer life? Explain.

2. What are some other examples of “borrowed blessings” God has provided for us in serving Him?
3. There is strength in believers praying together. Are you part of a prayer group? Could you start your own prayer group, using psalms to guide you?

*These [are the] voices of the church from which every church had its origin; these are the voices of the metropolis of the citizens of the new covenant; these are the voices of the apostles; these are voices of the disciples of the Lord, the truly perfect, who, after the assumption of the Lord, were perfected by the Spirit, and called on the God who made heaven and earth and the sea... Irenaeus of Lyons (135-202), *Against Heresies* 3.12.5*

Pray Psalm 146.1-4, 8-10.

What are you facing today? Give it all to the Lord. Ask Him to fill you with His Spirit, to watch over all your ways, and to strengthen you to serve Him for His glory.

Sing Psalm 146.1-4, 8-10.

(Hallelujah! What a Savior!: [*Man of Sorrows*](#))

Praise the Lord, my soul, give praise! While I live, His Name I'll raise!
And exalt Him all my days – God forever reigns in Zion!

Trust we not in prince or man – no salvation's in their hand.
Death shall take them, breath and plans – God forever reigns in Zion!

Jesus sets the pris'ner free, heals blind eyes that they may see,
lifts those burdened painfully – God forever reigns in Zion!

He the righteous loves the best; wand'ers in His grace are blessed;
needy ones in Him find rest – God forever reigns in Zion!

But the wicked who defame His eternal blessèd Name,
them He brings to ruin and shame – God forever reigns in Zion!

6 Sign of the Kingdom

Pray Psalm 56.3, 4.

Whenever I am afraid,
I will trust in You.
In God (I will praise His word),
In God I have put my trust;
I will not fear.
What can flesh do to me?

Sing Psalm 56.3, 4.

(Morecambe: *Spirit of God, Descend upon My Heart*)

When I'm afraid I'll put my trust in You, You, Lord, Whose everlasting Word I praise.
I will not fear what foes to me might do, but will in faith to You my crying raise.

Read Acts 4.1-37; meditate on verses 29-37.

Preparation

1. How did God respond to the prayer of the disciples?
2. How did this affect the ongoing work of Christ?

Meditation

It is important to note that the disciples prayed not that God would remove this obstacle, but that He would enable them to be faithful (v. 29). Here is no trembling and whining about the “threat to their religious liberty.” They could have cared less. They were engaged in the ongoing work of Jesus Christ, and no threats or restrictions imposed by mere men were going to stop them.

God’s response to their faithfulness was to grant them a renewed filling of the Spirit, the operative power of the Kingdom of God (v. 31). The ongoing work of Christ is the work of the Spirit. He brings the power, according to the promises of God, so that we can practice the Kingship of Jesus the way we should (cf. Acts 17.1-9).

The boldness (v. 31), selflessness, and generosity of this new community (vv. 32-35) stood out in stark contrast to what was typical in that culture. Here is the reality of the Kingdom: The Good News is boldly proclaimed. A new society has come into being. The poor are cared for and those with means gladly relinquish them – not all at once, but as needs arose. The shepherds of the community exercise oversight in care and instruction and prayer, and the power of the Spirit is flowing in every direction for life and fruitfulness.

This is what God intends for His people, and it is the Church’s privilege to present a model of such a just and loving society for the rest of the world. The Church is God’s sign that His Kingdom has come, and that it is coming on earth as it is in heaven.

Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

These early disciples, being so steeped in the Scriptures, knew and believed God’s promises. They absolutely trusted that His Words were true, and they could take it to the bank. Literally.

“Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be food in My house. And try Me now in this,” says the LORD of hosts, ‘If I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you *such* blessing that

there will not be room enough to receive it" (Mal. 3.10).

God's desire for His people is that we won't have to worry about food, clothes, shelter, and such. He wants us to be free to "lay up for [ourselves] treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where [our] treasure is, there [our] heart will be also." "For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you" (Matt.6.20, 21, 32,33).

It is interesting to note, that amongst the outstanding courage displayed, the attitude of boldness, the Holy Spirit's filling, and the house shaking, God also is dealing with the nuts and bolts of life in the Kingdom. God is a God of beauty and detail. He cares about every aspect of our lives, and the lives of all who are a part of His glorious kingdom. All of it is important to Him and should be important to us.

God has a particular way of doing everything, and we would do well to follow His plan. The end game of the plan is this: "And with great power the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And great grace was upon them all" (Acts 4.33). Sharing Christ and His grace with believers and non-believers alike is His plan; and the less extra-curricular stuff the people have to worry about, the better.

"And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith" (Gal. 6.9, 10). Sharing and living Christ is the priority. Worrying about how to sustain our lives shouldn't be.

Imagine what the world would be like if the Church hadn't dropped the ball on this Kingdom Sign.

For reflection

1. Why does the ongoing work of Jesus entail the creation of this new community as a sign of His Kingdom?
2. What should a church look like that is fulfilling its calling as a sign of the Kingdom?
3. Jesus promised that the Spirit would give us power (Acts 1.8). How are we supposed to use that power? How can we access it?

After those threatening conditions, they gained increased boldness. Since it was the beginning of their ministry and they had prayed for a sensible sign for their persuasion (this never happens again afterwards), great was the encouragement they received. John Chrysostom (344-407), Homilies on the Acts of the Apostles 11

Pray Psalm 56.8-13.

Thank the Lord that He watches over you constantly, hears when you come to Him in prayer, and guards your steps throughout the day. Renew trust in Him, and commit the day ahead to His service and glory.

Sing Psalm 56.8-13.

(Morecambe: *Spirit of God, Descend upon My Heart*)

Lord, see my wand'rings, see my anxious tears! Help me to trust and praise Your holy Word.
Gladly I know that when I call You hear; I will not fear but trust in You, O Lord.

I will not fear what foes might do to me. I give You thanks, my vows will I renew.
You have redeemed me, set my spirit free, and ever in Your light I'll walk with You.

7 Kingdom Actions

Pray Psalm 122.5-9.

For thrones are set there for judgment,
The thrones of the house of David.
Pray for the peace of Jerusalem:
“May they prosper who love you.
Peace be within your walls,
Prosperity within your palaces.”
For the sake of my brethren and companions,
I will now say, “Peace be within you.”
Because of the house of the LORD our God
I will seek your good.

Sing Psalm 122.5-9.

(Nettleton: *Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing*)

On the throne of David, Jesus sits to judge the nations all.
As our holy peace increases we are safe who on You call.
Grant us peace, Lord, by Your favor, for Your people’s sake we pray.
For the Church’s sake, O Savior, we will seek Your good today.

Read Acts 4.1-37; meditate on verses 32-35.

Preparation

1. What actions are described in these verses?
2. How were these actions possible (v. 32)?

Meditation

It’s important in our study of Acts that we maintain focus on the idea of the ongoing work of Christ. This, after all, is what Luke intends us to learn from his book (1.1-4). It might be helpful to summarize what we’ve seen thus far in terms of the kinds of action entailed in the coming of the Kingdom of God. Hence, the following summary:

Acts 1: *Waiting* on the Lord and His promises

Acts 2: *Bearing witness* in the Spirit

Acts 3: *Doing good, speaking truth*

We are the heirs of what began in the book of Acts. Thus, we need to make sure there’s plenty of the same action as these first chapters indicate as we begin our day and go forth into our Personal Mission Field.

Acts 4 expands the remit of Kingdom actions for our consideration. *Prepare to suffer*: Not everyone will be thrilled to hear the Good News of Jesus, and some may even respond angrily, with hostility, or worse. Make up your mind, and reinforce that mindset every day, that just as the suffering of Jesus led to our being saved, so our suffering will further the ongoing work of Christ in our lives and the world.

Hang together: We need fellow believers to help us persevere in the ongoing work of Christ in our Personal Mission Fields. Do you have a prayer partner? A mission partner? A small group of believing friends who pray with and for you? We must work hard to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Eph. 4.3).

But what blessings of great goodness will flow to and through us as we do (v. 33)!

Stay in the Word: Let Scripture be your constant and ultimate guide in all things, including how you pray.

Attend to the details: The ongoing work of Christ unfolds in words and deeds devoted to loving God and our neighbors. We must make the most of every opportunity and redeem all the time God gives us for attending to the details of a life of love (Eph. 5.15-17). Make sure your Personal Mission Field abounds with the fragrance of Christ and His love (2 Cor. 2.15-17).

Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

How did they do it? How did ordinary people carry on the work of Jesus with such boldness?

How did they do it so obediently and with one heart, one soul, and one accord?

How did they manage to set their own egos and possessions aside?

How did they make their lives all about Jesus, and we, and not about me and mine?

How was it that there was no one among them who lacked anything?

The people of the early Church based all their beliefs, hopes, and dreams on the risen Jesus! They had read about Him, they experienced Him, they believed in Him, and they loved Him. And they wanted to serve Him exclusively, and share Him with others. And they knew they could do it because they were now filled with Jesus' Spirit.

They had *confidence* that God would strengthen them to do His will. "I will run the course of Your commandments, for You shall enlarge my heart" (Ps. 119. 32).

They experienced the adoring and *comforting* love of God: "The LORD your God in your midst, The Mighty One, will save; He will rejoice over you with gladness, He will quiet you with His love, He will rejoice over you with singing" (Zeph. 3.17).

They knew the guiding, freeing, and *constraining power* of the Law: "...all the words of the law (Ex. 20.1-17). For it is not a futile thing for you, because it is your life, and by this word you shall prolong your days..." (Deut. 32.46, 47).

They lived in *courage* because they believed every word of God to be true "Be strong and of good courage, do not fear nor be afraid of them; for the LORD your God, He is the One who goes with you. He will not leave you nor forsake you" (Deut. 31.6).

What could we do if we experienced that same confidence, comfort, constraint, and courage?

We have all the same resources available to us.

If we belong to Christ, and are filled with His Spirit, our Kingdom actions will look like theirs. One heart, one soul. Not mine, but ours.

"And with great power [we will give witness in our Personal Mission Field] to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And great grace [will be] upon [us] all"! (Acts 4.33)

For reflection

1. How does your work in your Personal Mission Field reflect the Kingdom actions described here?

2. Confidence, comfort, constraint, courage: Write one sentence, using all these words, to describe your desire for your own experience of the Kingdom of God?

3. In what areas are you primarily pursuing the ongoing work of Christ at this time?

There were evident fruits of Christ's grace in all they said and did. They were dead to this world. This was a great evidence of the grace of God in them. They did not take away others' property, but they were indifferent to it. They did not call it their own; because they had, in affection, forsaken all for Christ, and were expecting to be stripped of all for cleaving to him. No marvel that they were of one heart and soul, when they sat so loose to the wealth of this world. Matthew Henry (1662-1714), Commentary on Acts 4.32-37

Pray Psalm 122.1-4.

Thank God for your church. Pray that your church may take its proper and full place in the ongoing work of King Jesus. Ask the Lord to show you today how you can seek and advance His rule of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit (Rom. 14.17, 18) in your own Personal Mission Field. Go forth for Kingdom action!

Sing Psalm 122.1-4.

(Nettleton: [*Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing*](#))

I was glad when they said to me, "To the Lord's house let us go!"

Holy City, let our feet be firmly planted in your soil.

Jesus builds His Church forever, where His people sing His praise!

As Your Word decrees forever, we will thank You all our days.

No Other Name: Acts 4

For reflection or discussion

1. Why should we expect some people to be hostile toward us because of the Gospel? How should we respond to this hostility?
2. Why is letting our prayers be guided by the Psalms a good idea?
3. What actions describe the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Eph. 4.3)?
4. Review the Kingdom actions summarized in part 7 of this study. In which of these do you hope to see improvement? How will you achieve that?
5. What's the most important insight or lesson you've learned from Acts 4?

For prayer:

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