Sermon- Praying for An Exit Strategy

Scripture: Acts 4: 23-31 Sunday, July 2, 2017

Forgive me if the title of today’s sermon has you rattled a little bit. It is not meant to rattle you in a bad way. But it is meant to stir you up in a good way and I hope I can do that this morning. Well, when you look at today’s text we get to swoop in on a time when so many exciting things were happening in the early church that every day was a real page turner. If you lived in those times you would want to wake up everyday just to see what amazing things God is going to do that day. Consider the day we are peeking into today. Well, our two super apostles Peter and John are just coming off an incredible series of events that took place in the Sanhedrin or the Jewish Supreme court. They had miraculously healed a lame man, preached the Gospel so effectively that 5000 people had became believers, they were causing such a stir in society that they get dragged to the supreme court, and there the most powerful men in the Sanhedrin try their best to stop the apostles. What actually happens is that the big shots are unable to deny the miraculous healing that has happened in Christ’s name, they are unable to get the Apostles to stop, because the apostles boldly tell then they will obey God over man every time, and all the big shots look so helpless and small in front of the Apostles that they let them go.

That is the background to where we pick up today. As soon as Peter and John are released they immediately go back to their church group and have a Holy huddle. In this Holy Huddle they first debrief the rest of the group about their amazing experiences. And how do the listeners respond? They break into a powerful time of prayer that sets them up for the next phase of their ministry. So today, I want us to look at what they were praying for and how they were praying and see what lessons we can pull from the way this group prayed.

“Sovereign Lord,” they said, “you made the heavens and the earth and the sea, and everything in them. **25**You spoke by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of your servant, our father David:

“‘Why do the nations rage  
    and the peoples plot in vain?  
**26**The kings of the earth rise up  
    and the rulers band together  
against the Lord  
    and against his anointed one.[[b](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=acts+4&version=NIV#fen-NIV-27049b)]’[[c](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=acts+4&version=NIV#fen-NIV-27049c)]

**27**Indeed Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed. **28**They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen.

So the first thing we notice in this prayer is that, the start by talking about the attributes of God. His sovereignty, his creativity and finally on his prophesy through scripture. It is always good to remind ourselves that God is in control. If God is in control then we don’t need to be worried right? Secondly, God has a lot of power and God uses his power and creativity in really beautiful ways, just look at the universe he created! After the apostles declare God’s sovereignty and his creativity only then do they then turn their attention to their life situation. Now let me remind you again that at this time, the rulers were turning the heat on the believers. But were the apostles worried about it? Not really. As they start talking to God about their situation in prayer, it is like God has turned on a special spiritual lens through which they get to see what most people not in prayer cannot see. They are able to see that what they are going through is just the fulfillment of Ps 2. Think about this, without google searches or smart phones, the Holy Spirit brings to mind the exact verse from the Old Testament that explain the opposition and obstacles that they had just experienced when the Messiah was dragged to the cross. When they look at all those horrible events from the scriptural point of view, they are able to understand very clearly the nature of the opposition to God. In Jesus’ case it was not just Pontius Pilot or the Jewish leaders opposing Jesus, it was nations and kings and rulers rising up against the Anointed Messiah. This understanding is very important. It is an important insight that the powers of this world are aligned against God. After all, it is important to recognize and understand the enemy is if you are going to fight any battle. Now after they get scriptural insights about the enemy, they also recognize that the enemies power is limited, not matter how intimidating it may seem. They declare that God’s enemies were functioning within God’s sovereignty and were permitted to do only that which happens to fulfill God’s larger purpose. So they began their prayers by focusing on God and his attributes and not their problems. And when they turn their attention to their problems, they are able to miraculously look at their problems through God’s eyes and the lens of scripture and see God’s sovereign purposes play out.

Now it is only after they spend a good amount of time focusing on God and looking at everything from his point of view, do they start asking for something. And what do they ask for? They ask for boldness to deal with the enemy. Isin’t that amazing? They don’t ask to be delivered from their problems, they don’t ask for the destruction of their enemies, but they ask for “great boldness in preaching God’s word”. Not only that, if you go back to the way the apostles dealt with the most powerful men in the Sanhedrin, they spoke with such amazing boldness that you would have never thought that boldness was their problem. Well, guess what? Boldness is everyone’s problem. Peter and John were able to boldly speak in front of all those big shots only because they prayed and God gave them the courage. And they know that the next time they are faced with a nasty crowd or are hauled before hostile officials God would have to supply their boldness. Remember, before Pentecost Peter was the one who denied Jesus in front of a servant girl. With prayer, you get what you pray for and you don’t get what you don’t ask for. Even the super apostles knew that they needed boldness and so they asked God for it.

Then they prayed for miraculous signs and wonders and healing. You see the power of the word of God had to be seen and felt in tangible ways by the culture. So they prayed that God would show his power through the apostles as Jesus was able to do when he walked the earth.

By the end of their prayer time, the meeting place was shaking and they were all once again filled to the brim by the Holy Spirit.

Let me summarize. There are three things that stand out in this Holy huddle prayer. As they prayed they first focused on the attributes of God and seeing the most difficult events from God’s perspective and through scripture. Through the divine lens they are able to understand the nature of the enemy they were facing. Now that they understand the enemy, they ask for two things. The ability to preach the Word of God boldly and the ability to perform miraculous signs and healing miracles.

So how does this prayer speak to us. I think it really helps us in our prayer life in five ways.

The first is that we have to spend time simply praising God and reminding ourselves of his attributes. Because we are fallible and we are forgetful. When we focus on God, we start seeing things from his perspective and that changes everything.

The second is that, you cannot fight a spiritual battle without understanding who the enemy is and what he is doing. If we are going to be effective in our neighborhood, we have to have our spiritual radar turned on to get a read of the enemies position. When you have obvious persecution, one of the big advantages is that the enemy is exposed and that helps in formulating a response. But in our situation, there is no obvious persecution. Our enemy is very subtle. Of all the hundreds of households in our neighborhood, many don’t know Christ or many are involved in Church only at the most ritualistic levels. And what are people doing when they don’t go to church on Sunday morning? They are involved in either sleeping in, they are involved in recreation or entertainment or just spending time doing family activities. Not all these things are bad by themselves. What is problematic is the priority they take over God. So what is the nature of the enemy we are dealing with in Argentine District? Well, we are dealing with worldly priorities. We are also dealing with some lies that the enemy has said about our church. This is only the tip of the iceberg. To really fight the battle, we need to pray and ask God to complete the picture of the opposition forces to God’s work in our community.

The third thing is for us to ask for is surely boldness in action and words. If Peter and John were praying for boldness, then why are we Argentine Mennonite Church folks not asking for more boldness? There are conversations to be had, opportunities to be exploited. But we can do nothing if we don’t have a boldness to ask. We may be shy, but our limitations are not God’s limitations. After all this is not about us. God gifts those whom he has called and so we need to ask God for boldness to preach the Gospel and reach out to our community.

The fourth thing is that we have to ask God to show himself in miraculous ways and even through powerful healing. I would like to share a healing story that happened just in out congregation last week to encourage you and so that you will ask God for more. The story of Dallas’ surgery and a dream…. Now I believe this was a really big miracle that happened in our congregation. Now here is the thing. What God wants us to do is go find out what is going on in our neighborhood. What are the health issues that are begging for prayer in our neighborhood? What are the needs that are in our neighborhood. If we could create a prayer request list for our neighborhood, all the people that are connected to our little universes what would have look like? If we have to bless this neighborhood what would that look like? We now have a bunch of families who came for VBS. We even have their contact information. What are we doing with that information? What needs do those families have? How can we continue to serve them? It is though prayer that God will help us build on what we have. And God can do healing miracles and all kinds of miracles to get people’s attention. Why if our church people start witnessing boldly, I think that would be the biggest miracle of all, right? Won’t our neighbors be totally surprised? They totally will, I can tell you that.

There is an incredible prayer movement that is doing something really amazing in Kansas City. It is called BLESS. I will be talking more about BLESS in the coming weeks. But it is a ministry where they have mapped the whole of Kansas City so if you were to go and sign up and put your address, they will give you the names of people who live in your neighborhood and you can get involved in specifically praying for these people by name. Right now there are 50 churches who are doing this together and we could become part of this movement too.

5 things to pray about- Start with the attributes of God, ask God to show us the enemy, then pray for boldness, pray for miraculous signs and service opportunities with which to bless our neighbors. If we do that our strategy as we exit this building will be very clear. In football, the offensive team gets into a huddle to discuss strategy and then the quarterback breaks the huddle and makes the play. That is what the early apostles did. They got into a Holy huddle, they heard from God and then made some plays. Then they came back into their huddle and did it all over again. That is the rhythm of the Christian life. We get into the huddle so that we can be clear about our exit strategy, or what we do when our huddle is broken. So let’s imitate the apostles and get engaged in our neighborhood while we still have time. Let us pray.