

“THAT OLD TIME RELIGION”

“Power Filled Prayer”

Scripture Reading – Acts, 4:23-33

On their release, Peter and John went back to their own people and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said to them. When they heard this, they raised their voices together in prayer to God. “Sovereign Lord”, they said, “you made the heaven and the earth and the sea, and everything in them. 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? The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against the Lord and against his Anointed One’.

“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. They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen. Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. Stretch out your hand to heal and perform miraculous signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus”.

After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly. All the believers were one in heart and mind. No-one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had. With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and much grace was upon them all.

‘They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles.’

Acts, 2:42-43, NIV

This series, based on THE BOOK OF ACTS, is entitled ‘THAT OLD TIME RELIGION’.

The reason I want to call this series ‘THAT OLD TIME RELIGION’ is that we need to look back in order that we might really look to the future. The old time religion needs to become the new time religion because it is the all time religion. If we get back to the basics of life in the Christian Church, we might better understand what the Holy Spirit can do in our hearts and lives today.

THE BOOK OF ACTS is the story of success; the story of a church triumphant.

It is the story of a small group of generally uncultured and unlearned people with meagre resources – very little money, no prestige, and no church buildings. This small group of people went out to tell the story of a publicly executed Jew. They went out against great obstacles – the imperial might of the Romans, the intellectual sophistication of the Greeks, and the religious bigotry of the Jews. They turned the world inside out and upside down for Jesus Christ.

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The New Testament\Acts\That Old Time Religion\06 Power -Filled Prayer

The Acts of the Apostles is the story of a church on fire with evangelism and growth...

“POWER FILLED PRAYER”

A few weeks ago, we looked at ‘THE KEYS TO A BEAUTIFUL LIFE’.

Peter and John were on their way into the temple for afternoon prayers when a lame man, who was forty years old and sitting at the beautiful Eastern Gate, cried out for alms. When he did, Peter did something that Jesus himself rarely did – he extended healing without being asked for it. Peter offered this healing in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth – and offered his own hand to help the man, lame from birth, rise to his feet. The man stood up, walked, and leaped into the temple, where he praised and glorified God. He asked for alms and got legs...

THIS MIRACULOUS SIGN LED TO PREACHING

‘Peter said to them: “Men of Israel, why does this surprise you? Why do you stare at us as if by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk? It is Jesus’ name and the faith that comes through him that has given this complete healing to him, as you can all see”.’

Acts, 3:12, 16, NIV

When people saw the lame man healed and heard Peter’s sermon, the number of believers increased dramatically. More people were convinced of the gospel in response to this miracle than were when the Holy Spirit came and Peter preached at Pentecost, where three thousand believed. Now the number of men was five thousand. How many women? How many children?

THIS MIRACULOUS SIGN LED TO PERSECUTION

‘They were greatly disturbed because the apostles were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead. They seized Peter and John, and because it was evening, they put them in jail until the next day.’

Acts, 4:2-3, NIV

Peter boldly faces the religious authorities and announces that he is not sure why such a good deed towards a sick man is being treated like a crime. He courageously claims the miracle was performed in the name of Jesus and states that Jesus is the only way to salvation. Whilst this took place, the cured man stands beside Peter and John. The apostles are told to be quiet and not to speak to anyone in the name of Jesus.

THIS MIRACULOUS SIGN LED TO PRAYER

‘On their release, Peter and John went back to their own people and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said to them. When they heard this, they raised their voices together in prayer to God.’

Acts, 4:23-24a, NIV

The Church was brought to prayer because of trouble. The gospel of Jesus Christ was being opposed and the apostles were being threatened to keep quiet about the resurrection of Jesus. This was the catalyst to this great prayer meeting.

The Church today needs to be brought to prayer.

Look around, what do you see? I see the rise of false cults and even the increase of devil worship within our land. I see the very real threat of militant Islam which surrounds our nation. I see the slaughter of unborn babies because women are pro-choice and have the right to choose (about killing unwanted babies). I see drug addicts and drug-related crime, alcohol abuse, and sexual perversion. I see city council's desperate to build new super casinos that will cause misery to many. I see people who are without Christ and without hope. I hear people to whom the name of Jesus is simply a curse, or a swear word.

'Christians are like tea; their real strength comes out only when they are in hot water.'

The world needs the Church to be in prayer today. These prayers do not have to be beautifully constructed, or methodical. They do need, however, to be power-filled and power-fuelled.

'After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly.'

Acts, 4:31, NIV

It was a prayer meeting that resulted in an earthquake and an infilling of the Holy Spirit...

1. THE CONFIDENCE OF POWERFUL PRAYER

'When they heard this, they raised their voices together in prayer to God.'

Acts, 4:24a, NIV

To begin with, this prayer was born out of witness and service for the Lord.

Peter and John had just come in 'from the trenches', and the church met to pray in order to defeat the enemy. Too often today, believers gather for prayer as though attending a concert festival or a party. There is little sense of urgency and danger because many are comfortable in their Christian walk. If more of God's people were witnessing for Christ in their daily life, there would be more urgency and blessing when the church meets for prayer.

'It was a united prayer meeting as they 'LIFTED UP THEIR VOICE TO GOD WITH ONE ACCORD'. The people were of one heart and mind, and God was pleased to answer their requests. Division in the church always hinders prayer and robs the church of spiritual power.'

Warren W Wiersbe

GOD IS THE CREATOR

"Sovereign Lord", they said, "you made the heaven and the earth and the sea, and everything in them".'

Acts, 4:24b, NIV

The Jewish Court had instructed the apostles not to preach or teach in the name of Jesus, but the Lord is the Creator, and they are the created. There was no way the apostles were going to be intimidated because the forces of nature are always at God's fingertips.

When we are opposed and when trouble comes, we need to get things into perspective, looking beyond the visible to the invisible, looking beyond the creature to the Creator. When we get the focus right, we can pray with true confidence.



GOD IS THE CONTROLLER

"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? The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against the Lord and against his Anointed One'. 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. They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen."

Acts, 4:25-28, NIV

They addressed God as 'SOVEREIGN LORD'.

He is the God who is in control of all things. The Greek word gives us our English word 'DESPOT', a ruler who exercises absolute power, either benevolently or abusively. Incidentally, Simeon used this same title when he prayed in the temple (see **Luke, 2:29**).

When they looked back at what had happened to Jesus, it would have been easy to conclude that God had lost control. Despite how the Jewish High Court, Herod and Pontius Pilate conspired against the Son of God in events that led to the crucifixion of Jesus, God was still in control. God had foreseen it all and David, in **Psalms, 2**, was able to point to the future. Nothing has ever happened in the universe that God has not already foreseen and that God does not control.

The Holy Trinity in heaven never has to meet in emergency session.

'A little boy was up late reading a murder mystery. He got to a troubling part when the villain of the story was plotting all kinds of mayhem and dastardly things against the heroine. The reader was so afraid that he decided to read the last chapter to find out how the story ended. He read there how the villain was defeated and how the heroine was finally delivered. Then he turned back to the page he was reading and began to read with a smile on his face. Whenever the villain plotted something nasty, the boy would say, "If you knew what I know, you would not be so smart right now – in fact, you would run away to avoid your fate".'

We know what the world is coming to – it is coming to Jesus.

God is still on the throne. Sin cannot win and faith will not fail. Sometimes, when we pray we forget to thank God for the victory that he has assured and so we do not pray with the same mighty confidence these disciples prayed with so long ago.

2. THE COMMITMENT OF POWERFUL PRAYER

“Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. Stretch out your hand to heal and perform miraculous signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus.”

Acts, 4:29-30, NIV

They recognised their position as servants.

Some people have some peculiar ideas about their relationship with God. He is our Sovereign Lord and we are his servants. The word for ‘SERVANTS’ literally means ‘BOND SLAVE’. Is it possible that sometimes our prayers are not answered because we have not made that commitment to the Lord? We have not committed ourselves to be his servant, his bond slave.

They did not ask for protection; they asked for power.

They did not ask for fire from heaven to destroy the enemy; but for power from heaven to preach the Word of God and heal the sick. Their great desire was for boldness in the face of opposition. The emphasis was on the hand of God at work in the life of the church, not the hand of man at work for God. The Early Christian’s believing prayer released God’s power and enabled God’s hand to move.

POWER TO EXPRESS GOD’S WORD

“ENABLE YOUR SERVANTS TO SPEAK YOUR WORD WITH GREAT BOLDNESS”

Is that the desire of your heart? Do you desire to spread the wondrous Gospel of Jesus Christ and to obey the Great Commission to preach the Gospel and make disciples?

It was as though the disciples prayed: *“Lord, we are in big trouble for preaching your Word. Now God, give us boldness to preach it some more. Lord, get us into more trouble”.*

POWER TO EXTEND GOD’S HAND

“STRETCH OUT YOUR HAND TO HEAL AND PERFORM MIRACULOUS SIGNS AND WONDERS”

If Jesus was in heaven, how could he stretch out his hand?

Their hands were to become his hands. It was as though they were praying: “Lord, take our hands and do through our hands what you would do if you were here in the flesh”.

How did Jesus answer their prayer?

‘The apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders among the people.’

Acts, 5:12a, NIV

Now that we are the Body of Christ, he wants to inhabit our humanity.

Through our humanity, he wants to display his divinity, his deity. Are you available to him? Those that are can truly commit themselves in powerful prayer, by saying: *“Lord, these hands are your hands and if you want to stretch forth your hands, all you have to do is say the word and my hands will be stretched forth”.*

‘HE HAS NO HANDS, BUT OUR HANDS’

‘During the second world war, a cathedral was destroyed in Central Europe. Some American soldiers decided to rebuild the cathedral and after months of hard work, they succeeded. In the cathedral was a once magnificent statue of Jesus Christ with his arms outstretched and underneath was the scripture: ‘COME UNTO ME ALL YE WHO LABOUR AND ARE HEAVY LADEN AND I WILL GIVE YOU REST’. The statue had been broken into many pieces and after laboriously searching through the rubble, the soldiers found some pieces and assembled them back together. But when it came to the hands, they just could not find them. They did not know what to do until someone had an idea and he wrote below the statue with those arms without hands stretched forth: ‘HE HAS NO HANDS, BUT OUR HANDS’.

POWER TO EXALT GOD’S NAME

“THROUGH THE NAME OF YOUR HOLY SERVANT JESUS”

At the end of our prayers, we usually say: “In Jesus’ name. Amen”.

Praying in the name of Jesus is not some magical formula that secures answered prayer. The name of a person stands for the character of that person. When we pray in the name of Jesus, then we want Christ to receive glory and praise for the answered prayer. We want the name and person of Jesus to be exalted.

We know that God is not some glorified bellboy running up and down the corridors of heaven to find things for us and bring them to us in order to satisfy our every whim and want. We know that God is not a sanctified Santa Claus. We know that God is not a grocery store worker that runs around to supply our shopping list.

Prayer is a means of bringing the power of heaven into our lives.

‘A few days after a hurricane destroyed much of Miami, the editor of The Miami Herald Newspaper received a letter from a woman, who wrote: “I have never believed in God, I have never believed in prayer, I thought it was all superstition. But as the storm was coming, I thought I would give prayer a try to see whether it really works or not, so I asked God to protect my house from the storm but he did not. My house was severely damaged”. The editor’s reply was a masterpiece: “Madam, I do not know much about prayer either, but it seems to me that God was busy taking care of his regular contacts”.

3. THE CONSEQUENCE OF POWERFUL PRAYER

‘After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly. All the believers were one in heart and mind. No-one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had. With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and much grace was upon them all.’

Acts, 4:31-33, NIV

'God's answer was to shake the place where they were meeting and to fill the people once again with the Spirit of God. This gave them the boldness they needed to continue to serve God in spite of official opposition. This was not 'ANOTHER PENTECOST' because there cannot be a Second Pentecost. It was a new filling of the Spirit to equip the believers to serve the Lord and minister to the people. This new fullness of the Spirit also created a deeper unity among the people and a greater desire to sacrifice and share. They enjoyed 'GREAT POWER' and 'GREAT GRACE' which ought to be the marks of a 'GREAT CHURCH.'

Warren W Wiersbe

THE SPIRIT IS RECEIVED

'THEY WERE ALL FILLED WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT AND SPOKE THE WORD OF GOD BOLDLY'

We cannot operate on yesterday's experience.

These believers had already been baptised and filled with the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, and now they were filled with the Holy Spirit again. There must be a fresh filling of God's Holy Spirit and there must be this filling each and every day in answer to prayer.

We cannot divorce the fullness of the Spirit from the witness of the servant.

They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and they spoke the Word of God with boldness and courage. God will not fill us with his Holy Spirit to make us feel good, or to soothe us. His purpose is to empower us. The Spirit of God is not interested in filling us to make us great Bible scholars or students. The Spirit of God is not interested in filling us to make us live victorious lives. The Spirit of God is not interested in filling us to help us live a life of peace. However, if we want to express God's word and extend God's hand, he is...

UNITY IS ACHIEVED

'ALL THE BELIEVERS WERE ONE IN HEART AND MIND'

More than anything else, prayer unites the Church.

We are not wired together with more or better organisation. We are not frozen together by formalism. We are not rusted together by tradition. We are fused and melted together when we not only learn to pray together, but we actually do prayer together.

True Christian togetherness means that the Jesus in me is the Jesus that is in you.

That is the only way we can ever achieve the goal of being one in heart and soul – when that heart and soul is Jesus.

THE GOSPEL IS BELIEVED

'WITH GREAT POWER THE APOSTLES CONTINUED TO TESTIFY TO THE RESURRECTION OF THE LORD JESUS, AND MUCH GRACE WAS UPON THEM ALL'

There are three 'great' things that run through the Book of Acts.

Two of them are here (one is in **Acts, 5**) – great power, great grace, and great fear.

"THE NEED OF THE HOUR IS PRAYER WITH POWER"