

Sermon Transcript Fourth Sunday of Easter 4-25-2021

Grace, mercy, and peace be unto you all from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

The text for this message this morning is taken from Acts Chapter 4, reading verses 23 to 33, selected verses.

"On their release, Peter and John went back to their own people and reported what 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 heavens, the earth, 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 rulers gather together against the Lord and against His anointed one." 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." This is our text.

I'm sure we all know by now that the unbelievers of our generation have been successful, and frankly are even becoming more successful in stifling the Gospel in many places, in many ways. You probably have heard that these modern pagans are successful in some places actually restricting what ministers can say in the pulpit. An example is the heavy-handed restrictions the government leaders have placed on Christians for simply gathering together, either inside or outside the church.

For some years, religious restrictions were lifted on members of the military. However, once again, we have seen our government enforce more extreme restrictions on military personnel. Marine Lance Corporal Monifa Sterling, a Christian who was recently court-martialed, was demoted and discharged simply for refusing to remove her favorite Bible verse from her desk. Another example is Oscar Rodriguez, Jr., a decorated Air Force veteran, was forcefully dragged out of a retirement ceremony for even just mentioning the Word of God. These are just two examples of many that I found in the public record.

Further, similar instances are coming to light in the civilian workplace. I won't even get into that this morning, but it is becoming difficult. What would your reaction be if somebody told you that you can no longer speak or teach in the name of Jesus Christ, or somebody told you that you can't carry your Bible out into public? Isn't that a scary thought? It certainly is.

However, let us return to Peter and John and learn from them to discover what they did in just such a case. The Bible says that they were forbidden to teach in the name of Jesus, but what did they do? They went to God in prayer, and then they spoke with boldness. They received His blessing, and from them, we learn God's people speak God's Word, regardless of laws against it. In Acts, we learn that Peter and John, again from Peter and John, that they had been imprisoned following the healing of a lame man at the temple gate. The subsequent sermon by Peter brought swift accusations from the leaders in the church and community that they were out there just stirring up the people.

After their brief imprisonment and release, Scripture says they went to their friends and reported what the chief priests and leaders had said to them. Peter and John had exciting news to report. They couldn't hold it back and keep it under a bushel, oh no, as the little children's gospel song used to go. They had been forbidden to do the one thing they were called to do, to tell the Good News that the long-awaited Messiah had come. When they were no longer to be permitted to speak the Word of God, they turned to God.

You see, it's another lesson for us: That's what God's people do. They begin their prayer with a Word of adoration, recognizing God for the Triune God that He is, and for what He had done. They remember the words of the Lord's servant David. Rather than seeking revenge, they think of God and of His creative power. They confess and proclaim the care that God has expressed for His people. Indeed, God allowed heathen rage and evil deeds against Jesus to accomplish His purposes in order to save His people. He is the sovereign Lord, and the apostles make their petition to Him, as it says in our text, to "enable Your servants to speak Your Word with great boldness."

See, in their prayer, they asked for what they considered important. What is important? The power to proclaim God's Word. In a moment of trouble, they went to Him who is the source of power and strength. Their petition went a step further; they asked God to continue His healing power, which He had so visibly demonstrated in the healing of the man at the temple gate.

Oh, my friends, what lessons for us to learn. We are reminded to turn to God in times of trouble. He is still the sovereign Lord, Creator of all things in heaven and earth. And as it says in Hebrews, He still upholds the universe by the power of His Word. In Exodus 19, Chapter 19, verse 4, we are told by God Himself, "You yourselves have seen what I did in Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to Myself." He bore His people Israel as on eagles' wings. So, as He carries us, His people today, He still proclaims, "Fear not, for I am with you. Do not be dismayed. I am your God. I will strengthen you; I will help you. I will uphold you with my victorious right hand."

Too bad we forget so easily and so quickly in this world today. Too often, we're silent. We give in. Many times, we hear of people giving up. But once again, we learn the lesson: Go to God in prayer, just as Peter and John did.

The news is even better. God is more than a kind, providential keeper. He is the forgiving God who, through His Son, has reconciled himself to each one of us. By our sins, we are completely alienated from Him, without hope. Without Jesus, we have no hope. Yet even while we were in our sinful state, He loved us so much that He sent His Son to live and die and rise again for us, each one of us individually. He loves us so much that He makes it possible for us who believe in Him to really know Him personally, to know this God who cares about each and every one of us, who forgives and gives His Holy Spirit to us, so we can even rejoice in every opportunity that comes along to speak about this wonderful God who loves us, speak to each other, and speak to others that we meet.

Right after the prayer of the disciples, something amazing happened. Our text says that when they had prayed, "the place in which they were gathered was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the Word of God with boldness." Two things are to be noted. First of all, God gave them a visible sign of

His presence and power. The building in which they were praying shook, Scripture says. It's as simple as that. They had been forbidden to proclaim the Good News of God's love. They had prayed for the power to proclaim that Word boldly, and God answered them by giving them the assurance of His presence, but more, God answered their prayer. He filled them with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the Word, again as it says in the Scripture, with boldness.

The point, again, my friends, is simply that the apostles were moved to proclaim the Word. God's people, we are moved every day by God's Holy Spirit, because we are God's people, we belong to Him, and we know that we are witnesses to His love and mercy in Christ Jesus. Even when Satan works hard to keep us silent, we learn from Peter and John to speak up boldly, never be afraid to talk about Jesus. And the result? We read in the verse following our text, grace and mercy was upon them all.

You see, God promises blessings upon those who are connected to Him through His Word. Instead of experiencing further negative treatment at the hand of the leaders, the apostles and believers tasted the goodness of God. But the heart of the message remains for us, yet today, the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ from the dead. You know, without the resurrection, we would have no message. Our faith would be in vain. We would yet be living in sin. As the apostles had the message, so do we: Jesus lives. And that's the same old Good News that we have to proclaim, every time we meet someone, and we can speak about Jesus.

And God has more surprises in store for us as we feed more and more upon the rich treasures of His Word. That's why we come to church every Sunday, to hear the pastor tell us about His Word. Even if you've heard it since you were a child, you still grow in faith each time you hear it again.

What awesome grace we can expect to receive from His boundless storehouse of love and power that He gives us, to live for Him, to live with Him, and speak of Him to others with boldness. We are God's people, so let us speak God's Word to each other and to all people, in Word and deed. And like the apostles, we too will see great blessings in our lives and the lives of those around us. In the name of our risen Savior Jesus, who gives us the power to speak boldly. Amen.