

WELCOME

- ▶ Open your Bibles to Acts 4
- ▶ Whether you're in the parking lot, or if you're parked on your couch...we're glad you're with us this morning.
- ▶ If you are not yet a Christian...

We currently three weeks into the final installment of our Kingdom Trilogy.

- ▶ Started with Kingdom Kids, we just finished Kingdom Family, now we are in Kingdom Come.
- ▶ If you're a Star Wars fan this is *Return of the Jedi*
- ▶ Except it's NOT the Return of the Jedi...It's the *Return of Jesus*.
- ▶ To quote another famous trilogy...it's the *Return of the King*. And the return of His Kingdom.

Each week, as we examine the snapshots and stories and themes found in the book of Acts, we've been asking these questions:

- ▶ First: What *would* Ventura County look like if Jesus were King?
- ▶ Second: What *should* the church look like since Jesus is King?
 - ▶ What should our lives look like since Jesus is King?

This morning we're going to address the question: What would our prayer look like if Jesus were King?

- ▶ This morning we will be looking at Acts 4:23-31.
- ▶ I'll be reading and teaching from the New International Version...

ACTS 4:23-31(NIV)

²³ On their release, Peter and John went back to their own people and reported all that the chief priests and the elders had said to them. ²⁴ When they heard this, they raised their voices together in prayer to God. "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. 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. ²⁹ Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. ³⁰ Stretch out your hand to heal and perform signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus.'" ³¹ 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.

PRAY

Before the triumph of Apollo 11, the mission control team had to endure the crisis of Apollo 1...a mission that never made it off the ground.

- ▶ I recently watched a documentary about the flight control team that monitored and assisted every moment of every lunar mission from launch to landing and back again.
- ▶ During Apollo 1, Pressure from government officials and rushed production of the Saturn V rocket led to a tragic launchpad fire that took the lives of 3 astronauts.
- ▶ After the horrific incident, a meeting was called with every engineer and director...
- ▶ Each person was told to go back to their office and write the words "tough" and "competent" on the chalkboard.
- ▶ They were needed to remember that even though they were shaken, they were strong enough to withstand this tragedy and that they were competent enough to make sure that it never happened again.
- ▶ They needed confidence in crisis.
- ▶ Those words remained on every chalkboard throughout the duration of the Apollo program.
- ▶ In the film, NASA Director Chris Kraft said that had it not been for the Apollo 1 disaster, man would have never set foot upon the moon.
- ▶ Why?

Because crisis reveals character.

- ▶ How we respond in times of crisis reveals where our priorities truly lie.
- ▶ Crisis unveils what really matters to us. It draws our attention to what is most important.

In our text before us, we have a picture of how the Church responds in moments of crisis...

- ▶ Up until this point, things have been going pretty well for this fledgling church movement...
- ▶ I like to think of Acts as a well-made documentary that captures the spiritual revolution of Christianity as it explodes across the Roman Empire in the first century.
- ▶ It's the story of how a few spirit-filled men and women bravely changed the course of history by daring to bring a new message of hope into a world full of hostility.
- ▶ These men and women are called the church and their message is called the Gospel, the Good News of redemption and salvation found in the person and the work of Jesus Christ.
- ▶ Acts is a story of struggle, of bravery, of forgiveness, sacrifice, imprisonment, power, hope, life, disruption...*there is so much depth to this book.*

Kingdom Come: Prayer

- ▶ WHAT'S CRAZY: This story is not over.
- ▶ This narrative of the church and the Gospel is still being played out—from Judea and Samaria all the way to Ventura and Oxnard and Camarillo, and Ojai.
- ▶ From the first century to the twenty-first century, the story of the church goes on.
- ▶ It continues with you. With me. With us.

In Acts 1 Jesus (in His final words to the disciples) promises that the Holy Spirit would empower the church to bear witness to His life, ministry, death, and resurrection.

- ▶ In other words, God's Kingdom Reality would be carried out through God's Kingdom Family (the church)

And then in Acts 2, we see that promise come to fruition...

- ▶ The Holy Spirit falls upon the church at Pentecost, and then supernatural stuff starts happening!
- ▶ There's powerful preaching!
- ▶ People are getting healed!
- ▶ The church was starting to develop radical rhythms of community, fellowship, generosity!
- ▶ There's insane (like, INSANE) church growth!
 - ▶ Acts 2:41 – "3,000 people were added to their number"
 - ▶ Can we just stop and think about that for a second?
 - ▶ Can you imagine if 3,000 MORE people showed up to church next week?

By Acts 3, the spiritual revolution of Christianity is starting to spread like wildfire throughout Israel. The trajectory is looking good...

...But in Acts 4, the crisis comes.

- ▶ The power of Pentecost was met with the threat of persecution.
- ▶ The Sadducees (the spiritual rulers of Jerusalem) catch wind of what's happening and arrest Peter and John mid-sermon.
- ▶ They're brought before the ruling council and they are threatened for preaching about Jesus in public.
- ▶ We don't see from Luke's account explicitly what those threats were but they were likely very serious.
- ▶ The ruling authorities had the power to take your stuff, your freedom, your loved ones and even your life should they so decide.
- ▶ In fact, two of the rulers present also figured prominently in the trial and crucifixion of Jesus.
- ▶ This was a serious threat to the very existence of the church.

All of a sudden, a church movement that was experiencing great momentum and favor found itself in a moment of great crisis and fear...

- ▶ The believers were badly shaken!
- ▶ How would they respond to this imminent threat? What would the church do?

They prayed.

- ▶ There are four distinct elements of *how* the church prayed that I want to bring to our attention this morning.
- ▶ I firmly believe that these truths can radically shape the way that we approach prayer, both as individuals and as a community of believers.

1. The church prayed immediately.

- ▶ (v23) *On their release, Peter and John went back to their own people...and they raised their voice together in prayer.*
- ▶ What we see here in the early church is an immediate prayer response to the crisis at hand.
- ▶ The passage doesn't say that they got the church leadership together and formed a council to assess the threat against the church in order form a measured and appropriate response.
- ▶ It doesn't say that they came up with a really awesome hashtag and they all flocked to social media to make it go viral.
- ▶ It doesn't say that they made signs and stormed the streets of Jerusalem in protest.
- ▶ It doesn't say that the church leveraged their social or political influence to strongarm change in the roman government (they didn't have any to start with).

The passage simply says that when confronted with an unprecedented crisis, the Church prayed.

- ▶ When faced with threat of punishment (even capital punishment)...
- ▶ When shaken with fear over what would happen...
- ▶ When things were starting to spin out fo control...
- ▶ When the world around them was shaking...
- ▶ ...the Church responded *immediately* in prayer.

Under the pressure of persecution, the church prioritized prayer.

- ▶ They didn't pray once all the other options had been exhausted.
 - ▶ *"Well, everything else failed, so I guess we should probably try prayer..."*
- ▶ Their prayer wasn't a last-gasp, hail-mary effort of desperation. It was a first-breath, cry of dependence upon the living God.

- ▶ When the church was shaken by the circumstances around them (and they had every reason to be shaken), prayer was what mattered most.

And they didn't merely pray out of necessity...

- ▶ The church prayed out of intuition. They didn't have to think twice about it.
- ▶ They were like, *"We have a crisis. We are shaken. We need to pray."*
- ▶ Their prayer was immediate because it was instinctive.
- ▶ And why was it instinctive? Practices.
- ▶ Remember what we looked at last week in Acts 2?
- ▶ **42 They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.**
- ▶ The early church had a regular rhythm of prayer, and this enabled them to radically respond in prayer during a time of crisis.
- ▶ IN OTHER WORDS: What they did before the crisis shaped how they responded in the crisis.

In this, we must understand that prayer is not a magic spell that we conjure up when we need it. Prayer is a muscle that we train and develop over the course of our spiritual lives.

- ▶ In times of blessing and times of brokenness...
- ▶ In seasons of prosperity and seasons of scarcity...
- ▶ In moments of comfort and crisis...
- ▶ The Christian is a practitioner of prayer.
- ▶ Like an athlete trains their physical being to respond in competition, the Christian trains their spiritual being to respond under pressure.
- ▶ Every athlete will tell you that it is the habit of physical conditioning and strategic planning that enable them to perform when the pressure is at its peak.
- ▶ And so it is with prayer.

How do you strengthen your prayer life? The same way you strengthen your body. Use it!

- ▶ The best way to grow in prayer is to pray!
- ▶ I know that sounds so obvious, but it's something that so many of us struggle with! (I certainly do)
- ▶ Like any kind of exercise, the first step is always the hardest. But it's often the most important!
- ▶ If you feel like your prayer muscles are weak, I would encourage you to come to our prayer and worship gatherings on Tuesday Nights (6:30)...
- ▶ It's like a prayer gym! A place where we pump spiritual iron as we exercise the practice of prayer every single week...

- ▶ We literally do the thing that the church did here in Acts! We gather to praise God and intercede for our church and our community.

Of the 500-ish people that attend our church, about 20 show up every week to pray.

- ▶ That's less than 5%.
- ▶ Look, I get it. There's a lot of reasons why people can't make it to a prayer meeting...
- ▶ Many of us have small kids. Some of us are single parents. Some of us live farther away. Some of our community groups meet on Tuesday night. Covid is still around...all that stuff is real.
- ▶ I'm not saying that if you don't come to prayer every Tuesday night, there's something wrong (although it would be awesome if more people showed up).
- ▶ What I am saying is that if we call ourselves Christians and we are *not praying*..then something is definitely wrong.
 - ▶ If our default response is to post on social media instead of pray to God...then something is wrong.
 - ▶ If we are more keen to hear the voice of pundits than we are the voice of God...then something is wrong.
 - ▶ If we are so busy with career or friendships or family that we've left no space to be still before God in prayer...then something is wrong.

What this passage reveals is that as Christians we must make prayer a priority.

- ▶ Priorities produce habits, habits produce rhythms, and rhythms produce instinct.
- ▶ But *when* we pray is just the beginning...

Second, 2. The church prayed honestly.

- ▶ ²³ They reported *all* that the chief priests and the elders had said to them...
- ▶ If immediately is *when* we pray, then honestly is *how* we pray.
- ▶ Notice that peter and John make no attempt to sugarcoat what had happened. They didn't try to package things in an easily digestible way...
- ▶ They were real and vulnerable about the threats that faced the church.
- ▶ And the church responded in prayer.

Praying to God is a lot like a needy child coming to their parent...

- ▶ When my daughter is shaken (hurt or afraid of something)
- ▶ She doesn't send me an email or text..."Dad, I'm sorry to bother you, I don't want to inconvenience you...but maybe if you just had a couple minutes you could help me"...NO!
- ▶ Here's how my daughter gets my attention when she is shaken...DADA!
 - ▶ Most of the time: DADA! Help! DADA Owie! DADA! BooBoo!

- She doesn't try to hide her tears or fears from me...
- All that she needs to do for me to respond is to cry out in her time of need...

And that is exactly what we see the church do in verse 24!

- **24 When they heard this, they raised their voices together in prayer to God...**
- The word Luke uses for voices = *phone*
- It's meant to invoke the idea of the sound that a musical instrument makes, specifically a horn.
- We can assume that this was not a quiet or timid prayer. It was a loud, real, vulnerable, and honest prayer.

Jesus once told a tale of two prayers.

- One man, a Pharisee, offers a prayer dripping with superficial rhetoric...
- While another man, a Publican (tax collector), beats his chest and cries out to God for mercy.
- Jesus said that God answered the raw prayer of the publican instead of the rhetorical prayer of the Pharisee.

This parable reveals that God is far more concerned about the authenticity of our prayers than the articulation of our prayers.

- God isn't your ninth-grade English teacher!
- God doesn't listen to our prayers and go "Wow, Brian. That was such a well-constructed and eloquent prayer. Great thesis statement...really nailed the conclusion...nice use of similes. Great alliteration. A+ work."
- God doesn't treat our prayers this way. He delights in the real, honest, and vulnerable prayers of His children.
- Some of the BEST prayers in the Bible are the ones that are wrought with emotion! (Psalms)

I think that for many of us honesty is what's standing between us and a radical life of prayer...

- So many of us think that we need to sound a certain way before God...
- A lot of us feel like need to clean ourselves up or put on our Sunday best before we talk to God...that somehow we are too messed up or too broken to for God to listen to us let alone speak to us.
- For some of us it feels almost impossible be real and raw and open before the Lord.
- Maybe that's you today...

You need to hear that God is big enough and strong enough to handle our emotions...

- ▶ He's not scared of your anger...
- ▶ He's not put off by your doubts...
- ▶ He's not awkwardly weirded out by your shame...

After all, God already knows you more intimately than you know yourself.

- ▶ He is intimately acquainted with your emotions.
- ▶ So when you come before him in prayer, bring your anger! Bring your fear! Bring your passion! Bring your joy!
- ▶ He actually *wants it*.
- ▶ If God has to choose between your messy, real emotions or your fake eloquent words, I'm telling you that He is going to take your messy, real emotions every single time.

So when you pray, pray honestly.

- ▶ But is emotion alone what drives our prayers?

3. The church prayed biblically.

- ▶ If immediately is *when* we pray, and honestly is how we pray, then scripture is *what* we pray.
- ▶ Not that every prayer has to be a word-for-word recitation of scripture, but the Bible plays a critical role in forming our prayers.
- ▶ This is what we see demonstrated by the early church!

The church in Acts was well aware of the circumstances that surrounded them. But they were also well aware of the One who was with them.

- ▶ They might have been threatened by the Roman authorities, but they served a higher authority! How did they know this? How were they so confident of this?
- ▶ Because of what they learned about God through scripture.
- ▶ REMEMBER: They had "devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching" of the Word.
- ▶ That had devoted themselves to the practice of hearing and studying scripture.
- ▶ What they had learned *about* God shaped their prayer *to* God.

But scripture did more than just orchestrate their words. It orchestrated their hearts!

- ▶ Look at how they pray.
- ▶ ²⁴ "Sovereign Lord," they said, "you made the heavens and the earth and the sea, and everything in them."
- ▶ This isn't some perfunctory salutation. It was an essential reminder of God's authority, sovereignty, and kingship...He is the God of Creation!

- ▶ *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."*
- ▶ This is a Biblical reminder that God is not surprised by hardship, nor is he silent in hardship. He spoke through King David the things that would concern the opposition of the world to the life and message of Jesus (the Lord's anointed one)...He is the God of Revelation!
- ▶ *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.*
- ▶ This is a reminder of the unstoppable power of the Gospel! The authorities had attempted to silence the Good News by crucifying Jesus, but God used it to bring salvation the world! He is the God of Determination!

The church needed every ounce of these Biblical truths to face the crisis before them.

- ▶ They needed to be moved from fear to courage. From anxiety to authority!
- ▶ They needed boldness! They needed strength!
- ▶ They needed to remember who was in control. They needed to remember His will.

When we pray according to the word of God, we also pray according to the will of God.

- ▶ This is so crucial for us to understand..
- ▶ Because it is so easy for our hearts to fall out of alignment with God's heart.
- ▶ It's so easy for our wants and desires to fall out of rhythm with His will.

A while ago, I found myself in a season where I had grown frustrated with my faith...

- ▶ Specifically, I was frustrated that I wasn't hearing from God...
- ▶ I think a lot of us have been there before...
- ▶ It felt like God was speaking to everyone around me. And it was getting to me.
- ▶ And I remember asking, "God, why won't you just speak to me?"
- ▶ Be careful when you ask God stuff like that...
- ▶ Because He did speak.
- ▶ "Brian, why would you expect to hear what I'm *saying* if you haven't listened to what I've *already* spoken in my Word."
- ▶ Oof. That'll preach.
- ▶ And so I opened my Bible, and started to read God's word more regularly...
- ▶ And it wasn't like God all of a sudden I could hear the audible voice of God...
- ▶ But as I began to engage with scripture, my view of God started to bigger.
- ▶ And so my prayers started to get bigger.
- ▶ My wants and my desires started to line up with God's will...

What I learned is that there is tremendous power when the rhythm of our prayers start to come into sync with the rhythm of God's heart.

- ▶ When *what* we pray for begins to align with what God is doing and what he wants to do in the world.
- ▶ The power of our prayers is not found in the emotion that we pray with. The power of prayer is found in the person that we pray to.
- ▶ And that is why the Bible is so important to the prayer life of the Christian.
 - ▶ To read, study, commit scripture to memory.
- ▶ Because scripture increases our view of God and aligns us to the will of God.
- ▶ The Word of God expands our expectancy.

4. The church prayed expectantly.

- ▶ If immediately is *when* we pray, and if honestly is *how* we pray, and if scripture informs *what* we pray...
- ▶ Expectancy is *why* we pray.

In prayer, our motivation is not that God expects that we to pray to Him; rather it is that we trust that God will listen to us. We do not pray out of obligation. We pray out of anticipation.

- ▶ Earlier I mentioned how my daughter approaches me with honesty and vulnerability.
- ▶ But she also approaches me with expectancy! She's my child! There's relationship there. We have a track record!
- ▶ So when she cries out to me, she trusts that I am listening to her, even if I'm not physically in front of her. She anticipates that I will respond...She's confident that I will respond.
- ▶ And therefore she is not afraid to make her requests known...

The church in Acts prayed because they expected God to listen, they expected God to move, and they anticipated that He would intervene.

- ▶ But what's interesting is *where* they expected God to move and *how* they expected Him to intervene.
- ▶ Look at their request in verse 29:
 - ▶ ***29 Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. 30 Stretch out your hand to heal and perform signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus."***

First, they ask the Lord to "Consider their threats..."

- ▶ Many of us resonate with this part of the prayer...

- ▶ *"God! Consider my situation! Consider my circumstance! Be aware of my struggle, Lord!"*
- ▶ They expected God to listen...
- ▶ And they expected God to move...

But what's fascinating about this particular prayer is that it's not a petition for deliverance *out of* their situation...It is a prayer for boldness and courage *within* their situation!

- ▶ **"...enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness."**
- ▶ They expected God to move within *them!*
- ▶ So often we ask God to move in all kinds of different places.
- ▶ *"God move in this city! God move in our youth! God move in this nation!"*
- ▶ And there's nothing wrong with praying those prayers?
- ▶ But how often do we ask God to move in those places *through us?*
- ▶ How often do we ask God to stir up boldness in *us* and empower *us* to proclaim the Good News of the Gospel to those around us?
- ▶ Yes, God does work around us, and sometimes He even works in spite of us, but more often than not, God works through us...
- ▶ ...and this is exactly what the early church prayed for...not to be removed from their circumstance, but to be empowered for their circumstance.
- ▶ They did not ask God to protect their wealth or their stuff or their loved ones or their freedom.
- ▶ They just asked for boldness...that's it.
- ▶ In their request, they are saying "Lord, we want a boldness that is greater than our circumstances...in fact, that's our whole problem! We're looking at our circumstances.
- ▶ We want an unshakeable-ness that lasts, even when the world is shaking around us. We want a faith that nothing can shake.

And then they ask God to intervene...

- ▶ **"³⁰ Stretch out your hand to heal and perform signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus."**
- ▶ Their expectation is not that God would intervene through vengeance, or destruction, or force, or political subversion, (which is what I would have prayed for) but rather through miracles..."signs and wonders"
 - ▶ They asked God to intervene by healing. They asked God to be merciful.
 - ▶ What they're saying is "God you are mighty and powerful, do you what you're going to through us in your name."
 - ▶ Their prayer was, "Lord may your Kingdom come in us and through us."

Our expectancy is that God is going to be who he is, and accomplish what He does for the sake of His kingdom, both in our hearts and our world.

- ▶ Friends, this is also how we ought to pray. This is how Jesus taught us to pray.
- ▶ "Our father, who art in Heaven, hallowed be your name...Your Kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven...for yours is the kingdom and power and the glory forever."

What was the result of their prayer?

- ▶ **³¹ 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.**
- ▶ God's tangible presence filled the room and every single person within it.
- ▶ The room was shaken, and they were filled with boldness. Their prayer was answered.

A church that was profoundly shaken by fear was powerfully shaken by the presence of God.

- ▶ But God's shaking presence did not result in fear or cowardice, it resulted in great courage!
- ▶ Why? Because of the Gospel.
- ▶ They knew that for anyone, by trusting in Jesus, you can approach God boldly!
- ▶ Jesus' perfect life, sacrificial death, and resurrection on your behalf, enables you to stand before God, have a relationship with God, talk to God! With confidence and with boldness!

If you don't know Jesus today then the reality is that you have every reason to be shaken.

- ▶ But the good news of the Gospel is that you don't have to be. Why?
- ▶ Because on the cross, Jesus was shaken by the one thing that could truly destroy you: your sin, your guilt and your shame. He was shaken so that you could be unshaken.
- ▶ All you need to do is put your trust in Him. Put your hope in Him. Believe in Him,
- ▶ That doesn't mean that your world will stop shaking. In fact, the truth is that it will *never* stop shaking.
- ▶ Even scientists will tell you that eventually our entire planet will crumble. It's an inevitability.
- ▶ But the hope of the Gospel is that there is something and someone greater than our crumbling little rock.

Although the Kingdom of Earth might be shaking, we don't have to be shaken.

- ▶ Because there is a different kingdom. An unshakeable kingdom, with an unshakeable King.

And His Kingdom is what our world needs to see...perhaps now more than ever.

- ▶ What does Ventura County need to see? The Kingdom coming.
- ▶ And how does that happen? We pray.
- ▶ We pray like church in Acts.

- ▶ We ask for boldness. We ask for courage. We ask for the unshakeable presence of God to surround us and fill us.

What would it look like if Jesus were king? It would look like prayer. And what would it look like if we prayed?

- ▶ I think that it would look boldness in marriages...and in parenting.
- ▶ I think it would look like the healing of political and cultural and racial divisions...
- ▶ I think it would look like people being encouraged and empowered by the Spirit to share their faith.
- ▶ I think that it would look like the Gospel message invading schools, and workplaces, and coffee shops, and restaurants and surfers point.
- ▶ I think that it would look like the Church radically stepping out to meet the needs of the broken and the homeless and hungry.
- ▶ I think it would look like the spiritual strongholds of depression and anxiety and lonlieness being torn down in Jesus name...
- ▶ I think that it would look like the darkness being driven out of our community.
- ▶ I think it would look like salvation in every workplace, every school, in every neighborhood...
- ▶ I think it would look like the name of Jesus being exalted on every street corner and in every home.

I think that it would look like God's Kingdom come.

PRAY