

# Life-Shaking Prayer

Acts 4:23-31

## Acts 4:23-31 (ESV)

Peter, John, and the other believers gathered together and prayed a prayer that literally shook the Church.

Have you ever experienced a church-quake in response to your prayers? Why do you suppose God did this for the early church? Perhaps it was God's way of saying, "I have heard you and I will gladly give you what you have asked for."

I think most of us probably know that powerful prayer isn't necessarily about saying all the right words. Prayer becomes powerful when it is in harmony with the will of God.

Peter and John did not come up with some NEW prayer (*i.e. The Prayer of Jabez*).

God looks on the heart and knows when His people are serious about doing things His way.

They simply called on God, asking Him to do what He had already promised to do: give them boldness to speak His word, and stretch out His hand to heal and perform miracles.

I believe God was very pleased by the early Christians response to opposition. It is almost as if He jumped up from His throne and said, "Yes! They get it! They understand what I desire for them to do, and they know they need power from heaven in order to do it! Yes!!!"

Maybe that is what caused the Rocking of the Church, who knows?

Here is the main idea I want to communicate today:

*God will shake our lives and our Church in a good way, when we ask Him for courage and power to do His will.*

Now, what does a life-shaking, church-shaking prayer look like?

We can identify certain components from our text that are basic to hearing from God.

## **I. LIFE-SHAKING PRAYER RECOGNIZES THAT GOD IS IN CONTROL (V.24B)**

*"Sovereign Lord, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them"*

This phrase is typical of a Jewish prayer.

Similar words are found throughout the Old Testament, recognizing God as Creator and Ruler of everything...

Since God has the sovereign right and power to rule over all He has made, then none of His creation can stand against His will for even a moment. God has all authority over all of mankind.

So, then you might ask why so many people get away with opposing God's will?

It is not God's will for innocent people to suffer or be murdered; yet it happens all over the world.

It is not God's will for people to take advantage of one another, but many do.

It is not God's will for people to die from cancer, disease, or other illnesses, but sometimes they do.

Sometimes we have trouble understanding that God has everything under control and that His will is being fulfilled when we see all the un-godly problems around us.

In fact, some people come to the conclusion that either God doesn't care or if He does care, He cannot do anything about our problems. This certainly was not the perspective of the believers in the 1st century church in Jerusalem. They prayed, *"Lord, You made us all and You are actively working to accomplish Your will on this earth. Nobody can stop You, let alone these religious leaders of the temple."*

God is our Creator and has power over everything in heaven, on earth, and everywhere in between. Furthermore, He has chosen that we have a part in seeing His will done. In fact, when Jesus was teaching His disciples to pray, He told them to say; *"Your kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven."*

You see, seeking God's will is something we say and more so it is something we do.

How does God's kingdom come?

It comes by people recognizing the rule of God in their lives and following His direction.

Even though God is King of the universe, His kingdom only comes when people invite Him to rule in their lives. The disciples and first Christians had certainly done this already. So now by recognizing God as Creator and Sovereign Lord, they are declaring that the God who rules their lives also has power over everybody else, even those who try to oppose them.

God is always in control!

That leads me to the 2nd point:

## II. LIFE-SHAKING PRAYER UNDERSTANDS THAT GOD WORKS THROUGH OPPOSITION

### (V.25-29A)

Peter and John had just been face to face with the same enemies Jesus faced. However, they understood that there will always be those who oppose God and His will.

#### **(v.26)**

*“The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers were gathered together, against the Lord and against his Anointed”*

This is a quote from Psalm 2. It starts out like this: *“Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain?”* Just as King David had written hundreds of years earlier, so the apostles echo the question: *“Why do people think they can fight against God?”*

We know that Pharaoh tried it, and it cost Him his life and kingdom.

Now, fresh in the minds of the disciples are the names of current leaders who are trying to oppose God and his people.

#### **(v.27-28)**

*“for truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel,*

The high priest and some of the other corrupt religious leaders of Israel worked hand in hand with Gentiles to do away with Jesus. They even thought they had succeeded. Jesus had been executed on a Roman cross and His body had been placed in a tomb. End of story – so they thought.

#### **(v.28)** reveals the twist that shows how vain it was to try to oppose God

*“to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place.”*

They thought they were clever and successful, and in control of the situation. Yet all-knowing God used their selfish and hateful intentions to pay for the sins of the world. God already had a plan, and they unknowingly helped Him carry it out.

Please understand that when we face opposition and hard times, we can rest assured that God has everything under control. There is nothing that can come our way that escapes God’s notice or His intentions.

That does not mean that we passively accept everything that happens to us as God’s will. We need to pray and ask God to show us His will for our lives so we know what He is up to and be in like mind and heart with what He is doing.

If God allows something to come our way, He may be teaching us to call on Him for help, using His authority to overcome opposition. Other times, He may want us to simply endure what is happening, trusting Him for the outcome.

God regularly works through opposition!

His kingdom will come and what He wants to happen will happen, regardless of the enemy's efforts to oppose Him.

It is very helpful for us to know that God is always in control. However, since we are human, we all deal with fear and discouragement sometimes. Sometimes the enemy will try to scare us, but God wants to give us courage and boldness.

That leads to the 3rd point.

### III. Life-Shaking Prayer Seeks Courage from Above (v.29)

If you received a personal threat from the mafia or cartel, you would probably be frightened. Some scholars and historians have compared the high priest Annas, Caiaphas, and others in the 1st century circle of religious power players to today's mafia or cartels.

Peter and John had every rational reason to take these threats very seriously. After all, these same people had just been responsible for orchestrating Jesus' death. It really wouldn't be that difficult for the high priests to use their power and influence to end the lives of the followers of Jesus as well.

Now, because the disciples had witnessed the risen Christ, and had seen Him ascend into heaven, their awe of Jesus was greater than their fear of those who had put Him to death.

Nevertheless, we find them praying and asking God for courage.

I don't know about you, but I usually only ask God for something because I need it. We find them asking God for courage, probably because they were dealing with some understandable fear.

In (v.29) they pray, *"And now, Lord, look upon their threats and grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness"*

Why did they pray for boldness? Obviously because they did not have it. They knew they needed boldness in order to effectively do God's will despite fierce opposition.

When you lack courage to do God's will (especially in relation to sharing the gospel), you need to know where your help comes from. We do not have to pretend to be brave when we're actually not. It is okay to say, *"Lord, I'm scared. Please give me courage to do what You want me to do."*

God is delighted to answer such an honest prayer.

When Jesus gave His disciples the Great Commission to go into all the world and make disciples of people from all nations, He promised He would be with them wherever they went.

His promise to us is also that He will never leave us or forsake us.

He will give us the courage we need to face today's opposition and to speak His truth and love to people who need to hear it. Along with courage, they also prayed that God would keep working miracles and healing people.

That's my fourth point.

#### **IV. Life-Shaking Prayer Truly Believes God for the Miraculous (v.30)**

They prayed, "*while you stretch out your hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of your holy servant Jesus.*"

Why were miracles and healing so important to these early believers?

I wonder what they would have said, if you would have asked one of the apostles to complete this sentence: *We need healing because....*

I think of several ways to complete that sentence.

We need healing because we don't like to be sick.

We need healing because God's people should be healthy or because God wants what is best for His children.

However, I suspect that the early church would have answered much differently. I believe they would have said, "*We need healing and miracles because they will help people believe the gospel!*"

#### **Mark 16:20 (NKJV)**

*And they went out and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them and confirming the word through the accompanying signs. Amen.*

If we just want miracles and healing to make us feel better and for personal blessings, we probably won't see them nearly as often as the early church did.

However, if we are reaching out to friends and neighbors, telling them about Jesus, and then praying for a miracle in their lives, then I believe God will come through.

Why? Because He wants to show His power and love to them.

He wants them to learn to trust and accept Him.

If they know God is able to heal their bodies, or do other signs and wonders, then they will know He is powerful enough to forgive them and help them in other areas of life.

That is the essence of our final point today:

## V. Life-Shaking Prayer Results in Effective Evangelism (v.31)

And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness.

There is a reason God has placed us here in this community as part of His church body.

This church has a mission!

Our mission is to make disciples, reaching every person we possible can with the good news of Jesus.

There are many ways to do this, but if we try to do it without praying for God's help, then we will not be effective!

*Honestly, if we believe there is only one way to be forgiven, through faith in Jesus, and if we believe the only alternative to God's forgiveness is eternal damnation and separation from Him, then we will make it our priority to share the good news of Jesus sacrifice with everyone we can.*

Just like the early Church, we will make it our priority to pray and ask God to help us do what He has called us to do.

This is the kind of prayer God wants to answer! God is waiting for us to report for duty. When we do, He will make sure we have everything we need to carry out the mission.

We need to start praying some life-shaking church rocking prayers! Why? Because prayer remind us that God is in control of all things.

Prayer understands that opposition does not stop God's plan, but that He works through it and accomplishes all in spite of it. Prayer gives us the boldness to carry out God's will, any time and any place.

We need more life-shaking prayer because it believes God for healing and miracles, which will help convince people that Jesus is the only answer.

Life-shaking prayer will help us share the gospel boldly and effectively.

Now prayer should take place in our private lives, but there is something special about believers praying together and interceding for each other like the early church did.

This may or may not take place in a church prayer meeting. It can happen anywhere 2 or 3 are gathered who call on the name of Jesus.

In the book of James, we read that the Christians he wrote to were lacking what they really needed because they were not asking God for it. Apparently, they were asking for things, but not according to God's will for their lives.

What do our prayers look like? Individually and corporately?

Have you been praying for boldness so that you can share God's message of love with others effectively?

Do you pray for the effectiveness of this Church?

Please hear my heart when I say this: If you are not really interested in doing what God has asked us to do, then perhaps He is not really interested in doing what you ask Him to do for you.

We cannot say we love God and ignore the fact that our single most important task in this life is to share His love with others. We are called to know God individually and to make Him known to others.

Let's ask God to shake our lives and our church and help us by the power of the HS to complete His will in Jesus Name.

If you don't know God, He is inviting you to begin a relationship with Him. I hope you will today consider His offer of unconditional love and let Him shake up your life.