

Peter and John had been brought before the ruling council and scribes because of their message of Jesus being the risen Messiah. Thousands had heard the message because the Lord, through Peter, had just healed a 40-year-old man who was crippled from birth (4:22). Peter proclaimed to the rulers that there is no other name under heaven beside that of Jesus, given among men, whereby we must be saved (4:12). Their boldness shocked and angered the leaders, but with the healed man standing there clinging to Peter, there was nothing they could do but threaten them. When the rulers commanded them to stop preaching and teaching in Jesus' name, Peter told them they had to proclaim what they had seen and heard (4:19-21). The rulers threatened them further and then let them go.

*<sup>23</sup> When they were released, they went to their friends and reported what the chief priests and the elders had said to them.* Acts 4:23 We don't know who these friends were. I think they must have included the other disciples and some of those who were helping to lead this new movement of Jews who believe Jesus is the promised Messiah and that He died and rose so they could be forgiven of their sins. We have a lot of acquaintances. We probably know most of the names of those with whom we worship. But there are naturally some we are closer to, those who we feel free to share our hearts with and who share their hearts with us (Proverbs 8:24). When trials come into our lives, we should turn to the Lord. One way to do that is to go to your trusted friends in Christ and go to the Lord together. Peter and John had to share the news of the threats because it affected all of them. They did what we should do. They took it to the Lord in prayer (Philippians 4:6).

They were following the examples set before them in the accounts in the Old Testament. Remember when Sennacherib, king of Assyria threatened to take Jerusalem and claimed that God sent him to do it. He had conquered the surrounding nations and had come to take Jerusalem. Hezekiah spread out before the Lord in the temple Sennacherib's written threat and mockery of Israel's God (Isaiah 37:16-20). The prophet Isaiah sent a message to the king saying his prayer was heard and God would take care of the threat, and He did. Prayer saved Jerusalem.

Jesus warned the disciples that there would be threats and persecution. He said, "If they persecute me, they will also persecute you." (John 15:20) He told them to not fear the ones who kill the body but cannot touch the soul, but rather to fear God who can throw both body and soul into hell (Matthew 10:28). To be fearless is not an easy thing. Even Jesus prayed that if it was possible to let the cup pass from Him. But we are to follow His example of obedience to God by taking up our cross and following Him (Matthew 10:38).

*<sup>24</sup> And when they heard it, they lifted their voices together to God and said, "Sovereign Lord, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them, Acts 4:24* Notice the unity in their prayer. It almost sounds as if they all said the same

**Commented [PW1]: Acts 4:22 (ESV)**

<sup>22</sup> For the man on whom this sign of healing was performed was more than forty years old.

**Commented [PW2]: Acts 4:12 (ESV)**

<sup>12</sup> And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."

**Commented [PW3]: Acts 4:19-21 (ESV)**

<sup>19</sup> But Peter and John answered them, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge,

<sup>20</sup> for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard."

<sup>21</sup> And when they had further threatened them, they let them go, finding no way to punish them, because of the people, for all were praising God for what had happened.

**Commented [PW4]: Proverbs 18:24 (ESV)**

<sup>24</sup> A man of many companions may come to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.

**Commented [PW5]: Philippians 4:6 (ESV)**

<sup>6</sup> do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.

**Commented [PW6]: Isaiah 37:16-20 (ESV)**

<sup>16</sup> "O LORD of hosts, God of Israel, enthroned above the cherubim, you are the God, you alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth; you have made heaven and earth.

<sup>17</sup> Incline your ear, O LORD, and hear; open your eyes, O LORD, and see; and hear all the words of Sennacherib, which he has sent to mock the living God.

<sup>18</sup> Truly, O LORD, the kings of Assyria have laid waste all the nations and their lands,

<sup>19</sup> and have cast their gods into the fire. For they were no gods, but the work of men's hands, wood and stone. Therefore they were destroyed.

<sup>20</sup> So now, O LORD our God, save us from his hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that you alone are the LORD."

**Commented [PW7]: John 15:20 (ESV)**

<sup>20</sup> Remember the word that I said to you: 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours.

**Commented [PW8]: Matthew 10:28 (ESV)**

<sup>28</sup> And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.

**Commented [PW9]: Matthew 10:38 (ESV)**

<sup>38</sup> And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me.

words, but I think it is just speaking of the unity of their prayers. First they acknowledged that the One to whom they are calling out is sovereign over all creation, the Creator of everything (Revelation 6:10; Psalm 146:6). That is to declare that everything is in His hands. He has power over it all. It is the same idea as the beginning of the Lord's prayer, "Our Father in heaven." (Matthew 6:9) We should be comforted by reminding ourselves that He oversees all and can deal with any threat to His children. If He allows us to suffer, it serves a purpose. The author of Hebrews wrote that God declared, <sup>5b</sup> "I will never leave you nor forsake you."<sup>6</sup> So we can confidently say, "The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?" Hebrews 13:5b-6

Their prayer continued with a quotation from the Psalms. <sup>25</sup> *who through the mouth of our father David, your servant, said by the Holy Spirit, "Why did the Gentiles rage, and the peoples plot in vain?"* <sup>26</sup> *The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers were gathered together, against the Lord and against his Anointed*— Acts 4:25-26<sup>4</sup> The quotation was from Psalm 2. We've seen before that after the resurrection Jesus taught the disciples to apply the psalms to Him. This psalm seemed to speak exactly to their situation. What a comfort to pray the Word, to know that God knew from long ago what we would face, and that our struggle is not unique, but has been faced by many who came before us. But if you don't regularly read or memorize the psalms, how can they come up in your prayers? The Lord can override our slothfulness and supernaturally remind us of the wording of a passage, and He often does, but how much better to have it hidden in your heart.

Some of the ladies of the church have been consistently memorizing verses that have inspired them. How about it men? I've challenged my grandchildren with a set of memory verses with a reward at the end because I've experienced how the Word in your heart can help guide you through life (Psalm 119:11), and be a part of your prayer life.

The Psalm 2 passage is about people raging and plotting, setting themselves against God's Anointed. Early readers would think it was regarding the anointed who was the king of Israel, but later in the psalm it refers to the Anointed as the Son of God (2 Samuel 7:14; Acts 13:33; Hebrews 1:5). The Psalm is predicting the rage of the world against Jesus and asks why they would do such a vain thing. We've seen how this is a spiritual battle. Jesus offers forgiveness for all (Romans 3:22). His followers obey the laws of the land (Romans 13:1), are loving and kind (Galatians 5:22), so what is the source of this rage against Him and His followers? It is a spiritual war. It is the self-will and the self-reliance of man against the One who alone can tell us what is right and what is wrong (John 15:21).

The psalm says this plotting is in vain. That should comfort our hearts. They cannot win for God is sovereign. All power comes from Him. The psalm goes on to say that God will laugh at their rage and schemes to stop His Anointed One (Psalm 2:4). They may kill our bodies but the church only grows stronger when they do. China threw all the missionaries out and the world thought Christianity had died there. When it opened

**Commented [PW10]: Revelation 6:10 (ESV)**

<sup>10</sup> They cried out with a loud voice, "O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?"

Sovereign Lord (*despota*) is used in the LXX 13 times in the O.T. and in several passages in the N.T. Greek – see Luke 2:9 It is used of Christ in 2 Pt 2:1 and Jude 4.

**Commented [PW11]: Psalm 146:6 (ESV)**

<sup>6</sup> who made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, who keeps faith forever;

**Commented [PW12]: Matthew 6:9 (ESV)**

<sup>9</sup> Pray then like this: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.

**Commented [PW13]: An exact quotation of Psalm 2:1-2 from the LXX**

**Commented [PW14]: Psalm 119:11 (ESV)**

<sup>11</sup> I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you.

**Commented [PW15]: 2 Samuel 7:14 (ESV)**

<sup>14</sup> I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son. When he commits iniquity, I will discipline him with the rod of men, with the stripes of the sons of men,

**Commented [PW16]: Acts 13:33 (ESV)**

<sup>33</sup> this he has fulfilled to us their children by raising Jesus, as also it is written in the second Psalm, "'You are my Son, today I have begotten you.'

**Commented [PW17]: Hebrews 1:5 (ESV)**

<sup>5</sup> For to which of the angels did God ever say, "You are my Son, today I have begotten you"? Or again, "I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son"?

**Commented [PW18]: Romans 3:22 (ESV)**

<sup>22</sup> the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction:

**Commented [PW19]: Romans 13:1 (ESV)**

<sup>1</sup> Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God.

**Commented [PW20]: Galatians 5:22 (ESV)**

<sup>22</sup> But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,

**Commented [PW21]: John 15:21 (ESV)**

<sup>21</sup> But all these things they will do to you on account of my name, because they do not know him who sent me.

**Commented [PW22]: Psalm 2:4 (ESV)**

<sup>4</sup> He who sits in the heavens laughs; the Lord holds them in derision.

back up again we discovered there are about one hundred million Chinese believers. You can't stop God. He gives dreams and visions to those who grew up in Islam. He calls His children out wherever they are. The leading rabbi of the second Jewish revolt evicted his brother from the synagogue because his brother had become a follower of Jesus. The Auca Indians who speared the first missionaries that came to them converted and became church leaders in their village after a God given vision. The first great persecutor of Christians, rabbi Saul, ended up writing half the New Testament! Former cannibals in Indonesia worship Jesus! God is unstoppable! To resist His love is vain rebellion against Him. He wrote the story and nothing can change it. Even wealth and luxury that have such a pull on the carnal nature of man end up leaving us empty and longing for the only One who satisfies to the uttermost (Psalm 16:11).

*27 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,* *28 to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place.* Acts 4:27-28 The leaders of Israel along with the secular powers and both Jews and Gentiles killed the holy servant, Jesus. "Holy Servant" points to the servant songs of Isaiah about the Messiah and His mission. In Isaiah 53 it was predicted, therefore predestined, that the Messiah would bear the sins of the people, be killed along with wicked men, buried in a rich man's tomb, but see life and be satisfied, and become the victor and our great intercessor (Isaiah 53:6, 8-12).

While it seemed that evil was having its way in killing Jesus and now threatening them if they dared to speak about Him, God was having His way in it all. The world has a plan to stop God, but God has a plan to use their vain efforts to advance His kingdom. Now that should give us confidence in anything we face as we serve the Lord. **It is God's plan that prevails. The outcome of everything is predestined.** God already knows the choices we will make (1 Peter 1:1-2). It may look like all is lost, but it never is, for it is the plan of God that will prevail in the end.

Their prayer has begun by focusing on who God is and what He has declared. That is to acknowledge what is real instead of the lies of the enemy. The world says we should shut up and just conform or we will suffer. God says speak out and let the whole world know and I will be with you (Matthew 28:20). The world says you can't succeed. Jesus says He always prevails. The Word of God reminds us what is true and encourages us to place our full trust in God (John 8:32).

*29 And now, Lord, look upon their threats and grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness,* Acts 4:29 Because God knew all this was coming and that He will prevail despite man's best efforts to stop us, grant that we, your servants, will boldly speak the Word. They didn't pray for protection, but just that God would look upon the threats and grant them boldness. We need for God to grant us boldness. We can try to work it up, but when it comes from the Holy Spirit, like it did in Peter's defense, it is so powerful and effective that none can stand against it.

**Commented [PW23]: Psalm 16:11 (ESV)**

<sup>11</sup> You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.

**Commented [PW24]: Isaiah 53:6 (ESV)**

<sup>6</sup> All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

**Commented [PW25]: Isaiah 53:8-12 (ESV)**

<sup>8</sup> By oppression and judgment he was taken away; and as for his generation, who considered that he was cut off out of the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people?

<sup>9</sup> And they made his grave with the wicked and with a rich man in his death, although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth.

<sup>10</sup> Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him; he has put him to grief; when his soul makes an offering for guilt, he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days; the will of the LORD shall prosper in his hand.

<sup>11</sup> Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied; by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities.

<sup>12</sup> Therefore I will divide him a portion with the many, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong, because he poured out his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many, and makes intercession for the transgressors.

**Commented [PW26]: 1 Peter 1:1-2 (ESV)**

<sup>1</sup> Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who are elect exiles of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia,

<sup>2</sup> according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in the sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood: May grace and peace be multiplied to you.

**Commented [PW27]: Matthew 28:20 (ESV)**

<sup>20</sup> teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

**Commented [PW28]: John 8:32 (ESV)**

<sup>32</sup> and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

Isn't this what we need today? There are so many vain arguments against believing in and following Jesus. We need God to grant us boldness to proclaim the truth in love, in a way that the lost can hear it and must deal with it in their own hearts, deciding for or against Jesus.

<sup>30</sup> *while you stretch out your hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of your holy servant Jesus.* Acts 4:30 Whether it is a miraculous healing or a transformed life, people are brought to a point of decision like the crowd that saw the lame man who was healed. When we are faced with the power of God, we are jarred out of thinking this world is all there is. We come face to face with the fact that there is more than can be seen with the eyes and must decide what we will do about it. This was the prayer they prayed in such unity that it was as if it was one voice. Where there is unity and surrender to the will of God and faith in the Word of God, there is the blessing of God (Psalm 133:3).

<sup>31</sup> *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.* Acts 4:31 God gave them a manifestation of His power to help them believe (Psalm 114:7). They must have been in a friend's home praying together, or maybe it was that upper room where the Spirit first descended. I like to picture the events of the Bible as it helps me grab hold of how historical the account is. Can you see them all lifting their hands to heaven crying out to God to help them deal with the threats they are facing, and suddenly the building begins shaking? The praises must have burst forth as they realized it was God answering their prayers in the affirmative.

They were filled with the Holy Spirit in Acts chapter two (Acts 2:4), and all these gathered for prayer were probably there for that initial outpouring. Now fear has taken a toll on that fullness. They responded as we all should with a prayer of faith and reliance upon the Lord and His power to obey the command to be Jesus' witnesses in all the world (Acts 1:8). They were refilled with the Spirit because they trusted in God and wanted to do His will regardless of the threats of man and any suffering that might follow (Ephesians 5:18).

I think we need the same gift of boldness. Don't you? We don't face a threat of crucifixion or scourging, but simply that of rejection. That little threat holds us back from speaking out when the Spirit leads us and presents an opportunity. We need Holy Spirit boldness, not arrogant rudeness. The Spirit speaks from a heart broken for the lost and with a love that wants them to know the wonderful Lord and Savior who you know. Those are the two necessities, **the reality of a relationship with Jesus** in your own life that is deep and real to you, and **a heart that aches for those who haven't received forgiveness** and the love of God.

If you've asked God to save your soul, to forgive your sins, but you just haven't found that love in your heart to become passionate about your relationship with Him, I would encourage you to start spending a part of every day in the Word and prayer (Ephesians

**Commented [PW29]: Psalm 133:3 (ESV)**

<sup>3</sup> It is like the dew of Hermon, which falls on the mountains of Zion! For there the LORD has commanded the blessing, life forevermore.

**Commented [PW30]: Psalm 114:7 (ESV)**

<sup>7</sup> Tremble, O earth, at the presence of the Lord, at the presence of the God of Jacob,

**Commented [PW31]: Acts 2:4 (ESV)**

<sup>4</sup> And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.

**Commented [PW32]: Acts 1:8 (ESV)**

<sup>8</sup> But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

**Commented [PW33]: Ephesians 5:18 (ESV)**

<sup>18</sup> And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit,

The Greek is present tense – be being filled with the Spirit.

1:17; 3:17-18). Sit down with Jesus as if He was sitting in the chair next to you and ask Him to speak to you through the Word and as you listen in prayer. Ask Him to show you how much you are loved.

Listen to this promise in Hosea and hear it as Jesus speaking to you personally. *<sup>19</sup> And I will betroth you to me forever. I will betroth you to me in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love and in mercy. <sup>20</sup> I will betroth you to me in faithfulness. And you shall know the LORD.* Hosea 2:19-20 Hear it again and again. Savor each word. Justice in this passage means a legally binding agreement. Know this love that never fails, that never turns away or gives up, and you can't help but love Him in return. The more you know how great His love is the more you will love Him (1 John 4:19).

Then we need boldness. In the future, brother Ron is going to have a class for those who would like to have some tools for sharing Christ. He has way more experience than I do and can share with you how God works through Him. We'll need help here on the patio on those days we have an outreach. Will you pray about helping, about sharing the love of Christ? When we pray for our hearts to be broken for those who don't know Jesus, God will answer like He answered the prayer in our passage today (1 John 5:14).

They were praying for boldness to keep sharing despite the threats of physical harm. Surely we can pray that God would give us boldness to share in the face of the insignificant threat of rejection. They didn't want to stop sharing Christ because they were filled with the Holy Spirit who gave them that heart for those who do not yet know Jesus. They wanted to obey the One who had given His life for them and sent them to tell others. If we know the great love of God demonstrated to us in Jesus, we'll want to do the same.

God has ordained that thousands of tourists from around the world would come right by our door. Now it is up to us to respond and get ready to do the good works God prepared in advance for us to do (Ephesians 2:10). Would you start praying about your part, whether it is to serve, to pray, to share, or to help any way that is needed? Start praying now for each person that will stop by and hear God's invitation.

#### Questions

- 1 What took place before our passage?
- 2 What did Peter and John do?
- 3 Why call God "Sovereign Lord"?
- 4 How did the psalm relate to them?
- 5 Why the rage from the world?
- 6 Why don't we need to worry?
- 7 Why didn't they ask for protection?
- 8 What did they ask for?
- 9 What do we need to be a witness?
- 10 How will your respond to Hosea 2:19-20

#### Commented [PW34]: Ephesians 1:17 (ESV)

<sup>17</sup> that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him,

#### Commented [PW35]: Ephesians 3:17-19 (ESV)

<sup>17</sup> so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, <sup>18</sup> may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, <sup>19</sup> and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

#### Commented [PW36]: 1 John 4:19 (ESV)

<sup>19</sup> We love because he first loved us.

#### Commented [PW37]: 1 John 5:14 (ESV)

<sup>14</sup> And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us.

#### Commented [PW38]: Ephesians 2:10 (ESV)

<sup>10</sup> For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.