

Gamma

Acts 4

Study 5 Peter defends the gospel

Q 1 vv.23-31. What are the marks the prayer which brings down such power into the disciples?

First, there is a connection of their heart weaknesses with the attributes of God. There is a great deal of time spent reflecting on and praising God for his greatness and power. They especially concentrate on his “*Sovereignty*” and control of all things (v.24). In other words, they do not simply ask for boldness (v.29), but they actually heal themselves of their fear by meditating on the attribute of God most antithetical to their fear. This is an extremely important insight. It means we are not just to ask God to take away our worry, but we should meditate and “pray in” his wisdom. We should not just ask God for more confidence, but we should meditate and “pray in” his grace and love. We should not just ask God for more self-control, but we should meditate and “pray in” his holiness. We are to heal our hearts by praying his specific attributes into ourselves.

Second, there is a connection of their ministry situation (“*threats*” v.29, cf. v.18), with promises and statements in the Scripture. They go to Psalm 2 and remember David’s words that the world leaders will be hostile to the Messiah (vv.25-26). They then think of what Herod and Pilate did and what the disciples themselves are facing now at the hands of civil rulers (v.26). But then, in v.28, they realize that “*they [the rulers] did what your power and will had decided beforehand would happen.*” This realization is an enormous source of power. The connection of their current situation with the Bible and with the sovereignty of God shows them that the murder of Jesus Christ did not display human power but divine power! Through their process of prayer, they realize that the same court that killed Christ has now released them, because everything is totally under

God's control. They have nothing to worry about — whether they are killed or protected. Either way, God is going to love and honor and use them, and they are going to triumph with him. You can see as they pray, the boldness and power growing.

Third, therefore, we see that there is no request for protection! They do not ask that their lives and families and wealth be protected. (Now this does not mean that those are improper petitions. It just means they were not primary — they are not the real problem.) They make just two requests. First, they ask for boldness (v.38) to articulate the gospel message. Second, they ask for God to continue to show evidence that their message is his word (v.39). So all they ask for is to continue their ministry. They ask not for miracles of vengeance on the rulers — but for continued miracles of mercy, people healed and converted.

So here are some of the marks of this prayer. 1) It is corporate — they prayed “*together*” v.23. 2) It was more absorbed in praise and worship to God for who he is, than in our human requests and needs. 3) It was full of Scripture, using the promises and declarations of the Word to guide their prayer. 4) It was a process. They came to realizations and new unity as they prayed. God worked with them during the time of prayer. 5) It sought the presence and glory of God, not just a change in circumstances.

Q. 2 . Summarize. What do we learn about witness and ministry from this entire passage? Examine your hearts and our church in light of it.

The following are only a few insights we can glean:

- A. a) Persecution is expected if we are doing our jobs. (v.1-3)
- B. b) Conversions and growth is expected if we are doing our jobs (v.4)
- C. c) Civil disobedience may be necessary if we are doing our jobs (v.19). This is by no means common. But Peter here clearly says that, if Christians are commanded to do something that God has forbidden, or forbidden to do something that God has commanded, we are to obey God and not civil authorities.

- D. d) Experience and knowledge of Christ is an inner dynamic for our witness (v.20). We should not be witnessing out of duty and drudgery, but because of what we have seen and heard.
- E.e) Christian leaders must be extremely well trained in the Word, and must be extremely strong and godly in character (vv.8-12), but they do not necessarily have to have what the world considers strong credentials and pedigrees (v.13-14). We should choose our leaders by recognizing God's anointing of them, not the human establishment's attitude toward them.
- F.For vital witnesses we need continual, repeated "Pentecosts", in which we seek God's presence corporately and find it afresh (vv.23-31).
- G. g) We should spend far more time in adoration and awe and worship of God. It is through the worship that the disciples received the main thing they need — joyful confidence (v.23-31). They did not pray for protection, but for the reality of God's power. So we learn: we do not so much need a change in our circumstances as a change in our hearts.

Q. 3 What are some of the impediments to our bold witness as these first century Christians did.

Q. 4 How can we take concrete steps to overcome these impediments and push on with the task of witnessing for Christ in our community

Spend the rest of the time as a group praying like these early Christians did for the HS to fill with boldness. List out names of potential friends to bring the gospel to

GAINING CONFIDENCE

Ice Breaker: What is the key ingredient in gaining confidence in lifestyle evangelism?

I. **Let's review** what we've learned through our study in Acts and our projects that should help us develop confidence in being our King's representatives:

A. The Power of the Holy Spirit – Read Romans 8:6 & 11

1. What are several examples we've seen in Acts that have demonstrated "the power of the Holy Spirit" being unleashed in ordinary men?
2. What would keep you from experiencing this confidence? How can we get the truths about the Holy Spirit in Scripture to help us gain confidence seeking to represent Christ to others in both word and deed?

B. The Power of the Gospel – Read I Corin. 1:17,181. What are several examples of the Gospel's power we've seen in

Acts?

2. What would keep us from taking steps to witness if we believe A & B? How can we get these truths to motivate us into action?

C. Sharing a Testimony – We shared with one another words, phrases and sentences describing our spiritual journeys to faith in Jesus Christ, using the simple outline of **before, how & after**. Has anyone done this lately? (1 or 2 share)

D. The Content of the Gospel

1. What example of *an outline* of the Gospel have we seen in our Acts study? Have you shared an outline of the Gospel lately? (1 or 2 share)
2. A *summary* of the Gospel is for the early stages of conversion, giving the basic idea of the gospel, defining sin and grace, and exposing faith barriers. Have you tried using one of the examples? (1 or 2 share)

II. Gaining confidence in lifestyle evangelism will come with practice. As you are a “doer of the Word and not a hearer only,” you will find yourself gaining confidence. Obedience to the light you’ve been given on a subject will always result in strengthened faith and confidence in God working *through you* with the Holy Spirit’s power.

A. Pray for an opportunity to share your testimony (or part of it), an outline of the Gospel (using a booklet or the Scriptures), or a summary of the Gospel (like: Do-Done, Sin-Salvation, Slavery-Freedom, Law-Love, Problem-Solution).

B. Take the initiative to do this. The Spirit empowers obedience. *Expect* God to answer your prayer and honor your obedience and the desire to see others know Christ. The fire will fall on the altar of a pure, obedient, faith-filled, praying heart!