

Acts 4:23-31

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 24 April 2016

Preacher: Nathan Raynor

[0 : 00] Our text for this morning is going to be verses 23 through 31, but before we get into that, let me set the scene for you a bit and talk a little about the last two weeks and what we've discussed together in chapter 4.

In chapter 3, you'll note that Peter and John are going up to the temple at the hour of prayer. They encounter a lame man who's been lame since birth. We find out later in chapter 4 that he's more than 40 years old.

For a significant amount of time, he sat at this gate and he's begged. He's begged for alms, for his daily sustenance. And they come by him and Peter looks at him and he's healed.

This sets a great stage up. God ordains this, that they're able now in the temple to preach. A great crowd has gathered. We find out in chapter 4 that the number of the church is now 5,000 men.

So many more, many more responses of faith to Peter's preaching. So many responding favorably, but some not so much.

[1 : 07] We see at the beginning of chapter 4, their arrest. We saw that they were imprisoned overnight and that they then stood a trial before the Sanhedrin, which were the ruling Jews of the day.

It's the first picture of Christian persecution. This is the first time that a member of the church has been arrested and imprisoned because of the gospel.

And I spoke to you over the past two weeks of the normalcy of Christian persecution. The fact that it should be the regular experience of the Christian.

Christian persecution.

Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. We have taken persecution and we have narrowed it down to a particular type of persecution.

[2 : 39] And that is the persecution of the body. It's what we witness here. The imprisonment, arrest and imprisonment of Peter and John.

And we have made persecution a far-off thing. A maybe one day thing. If we live in another place or if suddenly the political environment in our country changes, maybe then we'll deal with persecution.

But it's very difficult to get around what Paul writes in 2 Timothy 3.12. And so there are varying kinds of persecution. Certainly the persecution of the body.

It is something to be considered around the world as believers are beheaded for their faith in Christ. And imprisoned and tortured. The church has a great history of physical persecution.

But there is also a persecution of the ego. And I'm not trying to equate the two. And I'm not trying to suggest that ours would be the same as others.

[3 : 44] But what I'm simply trying to say to you is that it ought not be a thing that we don't experience. Some form of objection to the gospel of Jesus Christ boldly proclaimed in this world.

The more we, as the people of God, push against the system of this world, the more this world will push back. I would love to think that as we boldly go forth and proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ, that everyone we proclaim it to will accept it with open arms.

The scripture consistently tells us this will not be the case. Many will, but many will not. Don't let American religious freedom numb you to this reality.

If you preach the good news of Jesus Christ boldly, you may lose your reputation, your status, some position, possibly your job.

People may think you strange or narrow-minded, judgmental. People may not like you. They may not want to have you around because you talk about sin.

[5 : 00] And you present to them God's holy standard. And with great love, you ask them to repent, turn from their sin, and turn to God.

They may not want to hear that message. The problem of us not experiencing this type of persecution is not because of where we live.

It's because of a lack of boldness on our part. And I am not suggesting that we go out and we seek out this type of thing. But what I am saying is that we need to be boldly proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ.

And then not surprised when the persecution comes. And so, because persecution of one kind to another, if you live here in the States or someday God takes you across this world, it will happen, it should be the normative experience, we begin to prepare for it by considering from our text seven ways to honor God in the midst of persecution.

But I hope you're hearing that this shouldn't be a far-off thing for you. That this is a thing you need to be hearing for this week. That if you are a follower of Jesus Christ, you will go and be about the work of Jesus Christ in the world.

[6 : 19] He came to seek and to save the lost. He came to give His life as a ransom for many. And just as the Father sent Him into the world, in the same way He sends us into the world to proclaim the good news and to call people to respond in faith to that good news.

So this has bearing for this week. This has bearing for today. And I hope you hear it as such. In the past two weeks, we've considered the first four of these seven ways to honor God in the midst of persecution.

The first week, the first three. Last week, an additional one. Let me recap those quickly for you and then we'll look at our text. The first was to be expendable, which is implicitly taught in the text, right? You have Peter and John. Peter, the great ear lopper, as Jesus was arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane, like rebelling against, now willfully accepting, right?

His seizure and His imprisonment, willing to lay His life down. That was the possible eventual outcome of being arrested by these men and standing trial before them.

[7 : 29] These are the men that were intrinsically involved in seeing Christ put to death. So being expendable, verse 4, chapter 4, but many of those who had heard the word believed, and the number of the men came to about 5,000, willing to boldly proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ.

In Solomon's portico, the very place where Jesus gave the good shepherd dialogue, right? The lamb that was led to slaughter. This is where they're standing and He's preaching.

So hold your life, your reputation, your position, your job loosely for the sake of others. Be expendable.

Second, be filled with the Spirit. Verse 8, as Peter stands before the Sanhedrin, we see that He was filled with the Spirit. And I fear that summary statements on this matter cause a lot of confusion.

So at this point, I'm just going to say, please go back and listen to part 2 of Acts 2, 1-12. If you want to know more about this, if you haven't been here, let me encourage you to that. We will talk more about what it means to be filled with the Spirit as we work through the book of Acts.

[8 : 47] But number 1, be expendable. Number 2, be filled with the Spirit. Number 3, be bold. Here is Peter standing before the Sanhedrin and he presses forward instead of shrinking back.

And it's so difficult for me to think myself in his shoes and to wonder what I might do. I hope by the power of the Spirit I would do what he did. He presses in.

Boy, they ask him a question. Under whose authority or by whose name do you do this? And it's as if he says, well, since you asked. And he launches into this third sermon he preaches as recorded by Luke.

He doesn't remove any offense of the Gospel from his preaching, but he rather boldly indicts them. These are the men. These are the builders who have rejected the cornerstone, he says, who have put to death the Christ.

In verse 12 of chapter 4, he says, there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.

[9 : 57] He's saying to these men, this is the Messiah. This is the anointed one of God. This is the one you've been waiting for. And you killed him. If you don't hang all of your hope of salvation in the personal work of Jesus Christ, you will be destroyed.

It's a narrow path. To be expendable, be filled with the Spirit, be bold, and last week, be obedient. I added to that, be obedient at all costs, despite the cost.

We obey God before we obey men. So in summary, we could say, be humbly and boldly obedient by the power of the Spirit.

Be humbly and boldly obedient by the power of the Spirit. Let me give to you an example from history of humble, bold obedience in the missionary John G. Patton.

One of my favorite missionaries lived in the 19th century, just barely into the 20th century. He was a missionary from Glasgow, Scotland, to a group of islands that were then known as the New Hebrides.

[11:17] The Hebrides are a group of islands off the coast of Scotland, so they called it New Hebrides if you want to look it up on a map. It's in the South Pacific. It's now called Vanuatu. If you care to see where he served in the 19th century.

And these islands were known for their cannibalism. The very first missionaries to go to Vanuatu in 1839, John Williams and James Harris were clubbed to death and eaten on the shore in the sight of the ship that had dropped them off.

They stood on the ship and watched this happen. The first two missionaries there. And John G. Patton, moved by God, decides to go.

And from his journal, let me read to you one of the objections to him going. He wrote, Amongst many who sought to deter me, one was a dear old Christian gentleman whose crowning argument always was, the cannibals.

You will be eaten by cannibals. At last I replied, Mr. Dixon, you are advanced in years now and your own prospect is soon to be laid in the grave, there to be eaten by worms.

[12:32] I confess to you that if I can but live and die serving and honoring the Lord Jesus, it will make no difference to me whether I am eaten by cannibals or by worms. And in the great day, my resurrection body will arise as fair as yours in the likeness of our risen Redeemer.

Then he records, the old gentleman, raising his hands in a deprecating attitude, left the room exclaiming, After that, I have nothing more to say. The boldness on his part and his account goes on to talk about how these cannibals would come to kill him and he would get in arguments with the chief with a machete in his hand.

He'd hold him by the wrist and he would lecture him on how evil the thing he was trying to do was and the man would finally feel some conviction for the evil of it and they'd flee back off into the jungle.

A great deal of boldness, holding his life loosely for the sake of others. And so this week, we will address the final three ways to honor God in the midst of persecution.

So Acts 4, 23-31. Beloved, this is God's Word to us. It was written for His glory and our good.

[13:47] We would all do well to listen to it in order to believe its promises and obey its commands. When they were released, they went to their friends and reported what the chief priests and the elders had said to them.

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, who through the mouth of our Father David, your servant, said by the Holy Spirit, why did the Gentiles rage and the people's plot in vain?

The kings of the earth set themselves and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord and against His anointed. For truly in this city they 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, to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place.

And now, Lord, look upon their threats and grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness while you stretch out your hand to heal and signs and wonders are performed through the name of your holy servant Jesus.

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. And so the fifth way to honor God in the midst of persecution is to be committed to fellowship.

[15:23] Be committed to fellowship. Verse 23 and the first part of 24, notice that the very first thing that they did was go to their friends and report what the chief priests and the elders had said to them.

I find it so fascinating that they've gone through now this epic trial, spent a night in prison, and the very first thing that they do is they go to their friends.

And it seems to me, beloved, that when we have trouble in this world, we are less likely to gather with believers. Something just doesn't go quite right in our day.

The morning starts out a little rough and we choose to not gather together. Beloved, when things aren't going well in our lives, that's all the more reason to be with the people of God.

And this speaks to the plasticity of our environment. All of us as people have a front stage and a backstage.

[16:36] We hang a great curtain between the two and we have the front stage all neat and all tidied up. And when something spills out of the backstage onto the front stage, we're so quick to run people out of the theater.

Are we not? The very best thing for all of us would be if the curtain would be torn down. That you would truly know me. And what better way to do that than when things aren't going well, we get together.

If you have a fever or you're throwing up, don't come to church on Sunday. Don't meet with your community outreach group.

But if you're in town, otherwise, you should be with the people of God when the people of God gather. Think about the way I would have felt after having spent a night in prison.

This is not a fancy accommodation that they spent. It was likely not much more than a hole in the ground where they spent their time. I think I could have gone for a shower and a nap before I showed up to fellowship with the people of God.

[17:47] But they go immediately. They desired fellowship after leaving the council. And they go to see their friends.

friends. This should not be limited to the apostles. I also don't think it should be expanded to the entire church. There wasn't really a great place for them all to meet together.

It could have been that initial 120 that received the Spirit on the day of Pentecost or some subset of that number. But they were their friends.

It's a single word in the Greek. the NASV renders that phrase their own companions which helps give more meaning to the idea. We could say in the ESV we could add the word own their own friends.

It signifies that they belonged to one another. Here not many days into the birth of the Christian church and because of what Christ had done on their behalf they already saw themselves as belonging to one another.

[18:52] They were a faith family as I love Kyle says so often. They went to their own friends and they shared the news and the first part of verse 24 what did they do when they gathered together?

They prayed. They did spiritual things together. When they heard it they lifted their voices together to God. So persecution draws the church of God together.

And we should be experiencing that beloved. We should be feeling so strange out in the world rejected so often by the world that we come together when we can whenever we can to just not feel crazy.

Other people believe in this Christ. Other people have been changed by Him. We come together to rejoice. Our singing together should be so warming to your heart because you go I'm not losing my mind.

Other people believe this. It creates solidarity amongst God's people. You might not care to meet with God's people because you don't need God's people.

[20:05] Because you don't experience the hatred of God's people in the world. It creates solidarity. We can see an example of that in a very practical way on into chapter 4 verses 32 through 35.

The way in which they come and share their possessions together and meet each other's needs. It creates solidarity. On the front of your bulletin is a Charles Spurgeon quotation.

Some Christians try to go to heaven alone in solitude, but believers are not compared to bears or lions or other animals that wander alone, but those who belong to Christ are sheep in this respect that they love to get together.

Sheep go in flocks and so do God's people. So the fifth way to honor God in the midst of persecution is to be committed to fellowship.

The sixth way is to be thankful. It's to be thankful. Last part of verse 24 through 28. This is the beginning of their prayer.

[21 : 14] They were thankful for the fulfillment of God's eternal plan. Thankful for the fulfillment of God's eternal plan.

The persecution of Peter and John was no surprise to them. And they start out this prayer, Sovereign Lord.

Some of your translations might simply say, O Lord. It's one word, which is why it's translated that way in some translations. ESV tries to give us a little more meaning to what they meant by Lord. Sovereign Lord. It's only used five other places in the entirety of the New Testament. So ESV is weighting it, giving it this larger title, because it denotes an absolute master, sovereign Lord. They were thankful for God's complete control of all things. They go on to say, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them.

[22 : 26] You are creator. You created all things and you sustain all things by your sovereign hand. I don't understand how Christians who don't believe in the sovereignty of God go through difficult times.

It makes absolutely no sense to me whatsoever. God is fully in control of everything and nothing escapes his grasp.

They have great reason to be thankful, to see his sovereign purposes working out. They understood that what was happening was the fulfillment of what God had said would happen.

And they cite Psalm chapter 2 verses 1 through 2. See the sovereign Lord, verse 25, who through the mouth of our father David, who penned Psalm 2, you, your servant, said by the Holy Spirit. So they recognized that God wrote by the inspiration of the Spirit and the pen of David, Psalm 2, 1 and 2. Why did the Gentiles rage?

[23 : 40] And the people's plot in vain. The kings of the earth set themselves and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord, against His anointed. In Hebrew, Messiah.

In Greek, Christ. Against God and Christ. So they reference canonized Scripture.

They knew to be the Word of God, to see this fulfillment. Now we have a broader canon now, do we not? We have John's writing, which came after the record of what's happening here.

They didn't have John's writing yet, but let's think about together some broader canon. John 15, 18-20. Jesus says, If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you.

If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own. But because you were not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you, a servant is not greater than his master.

[24 : 46] If they persecute me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours. So they're remembering these things, right? It's yet to be canonized.

They're citing from Psalm 2, 1 and 2, but they're bringing to their remembrance the things that Jesus had spoken to them. So the persecution of Peter and John serves as further confirmation that Jesus is the Christ.

A great deal to rejoice in at this point. So they go on to simply say in verses 27, 28, that there were in fact people in the city gathered against your holy servant Jesus.

Fulfillment of 2, 1 through 2, Psalm 2, 1, 2, through, whom you anointed, your anointed one, your Messiah, the Christ, Herod and Pontius Pilate with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel to do what your hand and your plan had predestined to take place.

Christ was crucified by the preordained purpose of God. Their thanksgiving in the midst of persecution reminds me of the instruction of Paul in Philippians chapter 4, verses 4 through 7.

[26 : 05] So here they are rejoicing, being thankful for the thing that has happened. Verse 4, Philippians 4, rejoice in the Lord always.

Again, I will say rejoice. Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand or He is present. Do not be anxious about anything but in everything by prayer and supplication.

With thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God and the peace of God which surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

They're recognizing the presence of God in fulfilling His promises. and they're thankful for it. So be committed to fellowship.

Be thankful. And finally, the seventh way to honor God in the midst of persecution is to be prayerful. Now, they've already been praying.

[27 : 06] I recognize that previously in our text. I want to pick up in verse 29 through the end through 31 through the end of our text.

be prayerful. Verse 29, And now, Lord, look upon their threats and grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness while you stretch out your hand to heal and signs and wonders are performed through the name of your holy servant, Jesus.

Be prayerful. Certainly be prayerful independently. Closet prayer is an important part of the Christian life, but specifically the exhortation here is to be prayerful corporately.

The example of corporate prayer is found in a multitude of places in the book of Acts. I just want to show you a few. Ready? Chapter 1 verse 14 and chapter 2 verse 42 see the church devoted to prayer.

Today's text, 424, they lifted their voices together to God. Chapter 6 verse 6 the church chooses seven deacons and they pray for them.

[28 : 23] Chapter 12 verse 5 Peter is in prison and earnest prayer is made for him to God by the church. And when he escapes from prison he finds many gathered together and praying.

That's chapter 12 verse 12. Chapter 13 verse 3 after fasting and praying the church in Antioch sends Paul and Barnabas on the first missionary journey.

Chapter 14 verse 23 elders are appointed and committed to the Lord with prayer and fasting.

Chapter 16 verse 25 Paul and Silas are imprisoned and they're praying and singing hymns while in jail.

Chapter 20 verse 36 Paul prays with the Ephesian elders when departing from them. So we're seeing a clearly prescriptive pattern of corporate prayer just in the book of Acts and it's commanded of us elsewhere.

So they're praying together. Be prayerful. And what is it that they request of God? More boldness. And that just astounds me. On the heels of such great boldness they ask for more boldness.

[29 : 43] They know that they need the power of God to fulfill the purposes of God. Grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness.

And interestingly they ask that while God works miracles notice verse 30 while you stretch out your hand to heal and signs and wonders are performed through the name of your holy servant Jesus give us boldness to speak.

Amidst the miracles amidst the things that are going on around us grant us boldness. And you can see that this is a prayer that's within the will of God because in verse 31 it says at the very end of verse 31 they were filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness. They have been commanded by the Sanhedrin to no longer speak in the name of Jesus. And before the Sanhedrin Peter and John collectively have said for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard.

And I think that they know how sheepish their own hearts could be. And so they pray for more boldness and God grants it to them and they act accordingly.

[31 : 02] So we're to be bold proclaimers of the gospel of Jesus Christ. And we're to be prepared and expect that some people will respond unfavorably to that message.

John writes in 1 John 3.13 Do not be surprised for others that the world hates you. So when you are hated for the message of Christ as you go out from this place and you preach it boldly to people who desperately need it remember these seven ways to honor God in the midst of persecution. Be expendable. Be filled with the Spirit. Be bold. Be obedient at all cost. Be committed to fellowship. Be thankful and be prayerful.

And I want to conclude with another quotation from C.T. Studd. He was a late 19th early 20th century contemporary of John G. Patton on the front of your bulletin. Some want to live within the sound of church or chapel bell.

I want to run a rescue shop within a yard of hell. Let's pray together.