

The Boldness of Prayer – Acts 23-31

Today we are continuing our theme of prayer with a look at how the believers prayed focusing particularly on Peter and John and thinking of the boldness of prayer and the effect it had on them and others and how that relates to us today.

The background to our passage today is that Peter had already healed the lame man in the name of Jesus and now he and John were speaking to the people proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead. The priests, the captain of the temple and the Sadducees hearing them speak were greatly disturbed so put them in jail overnight before deciding what to do with them. They could not have foreseen that the message given by Peter and John that day (who are described as unschooled ordinary men) would lead to 5000 more followers of Jesus who believed what they had heard.

Peter and John were brought for questioning and asked by what power or name they healed. We are told that Peter filled with the Holy Spirit said to them “If we are being called to account today for an act of kindness shown to a man who was lame and are being asked how he was healed, then know this, you and all the people of Israel: it is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed. Jesus is the stone you builders rejected, which has become the cornerstone. Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved.” There was no answer that could be given to Peter and John’s response and so they were released back to their own people and commanded not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. The same Peter who had rejected Jesus three times before his death and been reinstated by Jesus following his resurrection was now a man of courage and boldness.

Peter and John’s very next step was to report back to their people all that had happened with the chief priests and elders and then to raise their voices in prayer to God, asking God to consider the threats to them and to help them to speak God’s word with great boldness. Not for them hiding away and thinking they’d had a narrow escape. They asked God for more boldness to stretch out his hand to heal and perform signs and wonders through the holy name of Jesus. Do we have that same boldness within us to ask for those miracles,

those signs and wonders? If God could use these two ordinary unschooled men, why not us?

What was the result of their prayers? We are told that the place where they were meeting was shaken and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly. Why were they so bold, not just them but the other followers too, it was because they knew who Jesus was and trusted him. They knew the power of his name and had taken that bold step to ask for healing for the lame man in his name. We have that same Holy Spirit here with us equipping us to speak boldly about Jesus and to pray boldly in his name.

A well-known preacher once said the following “Well, I don’t know what will happen now. We’ve got some difficult days ahead. But it really doesn’t matter with me now. Because I’ve been to the mountaintop. And I don’t mind. Like anybody, I would like to live a long life. Longevity has its place. But I’m not concerned about that now. I just want to do God’s will. And He has allowed me to go up to the mountain. And I’ve looked over, and I’ve seen the Promised Land. I may not get there with you, but I want you to know tonight, that we as a people will get to the Promised Land. So, I’m happy tonight. I’m not worried about anything. I’m not fearing anything. Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord.”

Those words are from Martin Luther King Jr’s last sermon. He was reflecting on a bomb threat he’d received earlier that day. The next day he was assassinated. King was called by God to give himself to the cause of the poor, the oppressed, and people of colour. This was his mission and it cost him everything. He spoke boldly without fear because he knew God and knew his will for his life and knew that God was with him.

It is unlikely that we will find ourselves in the situation that Martin Luther King Jr did but for each of us boldness in prayer in whatever form it takes may require us to have the same faith in the Lord that he expressed!

A couple of weeks ago my sister Karen moved house after a year of being without a home of her own. Her new home is beautiful with the most amazing views. She had just been to the local shops and was making her way home when she was stopped by two young ladies who asked her if they could ask her a strange question. She replied that they could, and their question was this – “is there anything that we can pray for you?”

She replied that she had just moved to the area, that she was feeling strange, didn’t know anyone and was feeling homesick. They could not have known

what response they would get but they trusted in the Lord in asking that question. They were walking the area and praying and lifted Karen at that precise time as they reached out to her. She asked if there was anything that she could pray for them and their response was this – Yes, please can you pray for boldness for us in prayer. They had stepped out in faith because they knew and trusted the Lord and wanted to be used by him. For many of us the action that those two women took would be just as daunting as that of Martin Luther King Jr.

What may this passage mean for us? We need to read God's word, listen to God as he speaks to us and ask the holy spirit to help equip us to be bold in prayer. Do we think we are bold in prayer; do we believe there is power in the name of Jesus to answer our prayers no matter how difficult it may seem? Do we want to be bold in prayer? Is there someone we know that needs our prayer now and perhaps we have been putting off speaking to them because we may appear foolish, or it may be difficult? Do we need prayer personally, today there is opportunity for prayer for healing it may be for illness, for family, for finances, for relationships or for what is going on in our world at the moment. Our world needs us to pray boldly at this time for countries at war with each other, for wise leaders, for countries suffering the ravages of climate change. Let's hunger to know God's word, offer our prayers to him and listen to what he says to us and pray where he leads us. God knows each one of us, he knows our weaknesses but asks us to be vessels to be used by him. 2 Timothy 2 verses 20-22 speaks about many different types of vessels some gold and silver, some wood and clay all different but that if we cleanse ourselves, we are made useful to the Master. Peter and John are great examples for us to follow of knowing Jesus and stepping out boldly in his name. Is it easy to be bold in prayer, for most of us the answer is probably no – it can be scary particularly not knowing where we may be led but we are not alone.

This year has probably been one of the most difficult I can remember, which is pretty amazing considering we have survived a pandemic! I know that for many of you there have been difficult times too. In Jeremiah 17:7 it says this "But blessed is the one who trusts in the Lord, whose confidence is in him. They will be like a tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream. It does not fear when heat comes; its leaves are always green. It has no worries in a year of drought and never fails to bear fruit." Take heart dear friends, that promise is for each of us in our journey if we trust in the Lord. Peter and John did not know where their boldness would lead them, they had

been in jail, had been warned not to speak of Jesus again and yet they could not be stopped. They knew there was power in the name of Jesus, and nothing was going to stop them proclaiming it to others that they may know that power for themselves. They had seen the lame man healed, been protected from jail, seen their enemies silenced, 5000 people brought to faith and given the power of the Holy Spirit to speak boldly!

In recent months the Lord has been prompting me to pray for Luton Road. If any of you use social media at all then you cannot have failed to notice the negative comments that are made about this particular road and Chatham in general. Part of Luton Road falls within our parish boundaries and I have been left pondering what it must feel like to live in Luton Road and read such comments about where you call home. During the last week for the second time in the space of six months buses have been temporarily stopped from running along the road because they have been hit by bricks and stones thrown at them. I know that I do not have the means to change what is happening there, but Jesus can. What could happen if we all prayed boldly in Jesus' name for lives to be changed, for the people and the road to be raised up? Would you join me in praying expectantly for that road and all who live there that we might see a change in how it is seen and love shown for our neighbours. If you walk that road at any point during your week would you pray?

I finish with the words of one of my favourite songs at the moment that speaks powerfully of the name of Jesus.

What a beautiful name it is the name of Jesus Christ my King. Nothing compares to this what a beautiful name it is the name of Jesus. You didn't want heaven without us, so you brought heaven down. My sin was great your love was greater what could separate us now.

What a wonderful name it is the name of Jesus Christ my King. What a wonderful name it is nothing compares to this the name of Jesus. Death could not hold you, the veil tore before you. You silence the boast of sin and grave. The heavens are roaring, the praise of your glory for you are raised to life again.

You have no rival; you have no equal. Now and forever God you reign. Yours is the kingdom, yours is the glory, yours is the name above all names.

What a powerful name it is, what a powerful name it is, the Name of Jesus Christ my King. What a powerful Name it is, nothing can stand against what a powerful Name it is the Name of Jesus.

In him we have the victory. Heavenly Father would you help us to seek you
with all our heart that we may draw closer to you and have boldness in prayer.
Amen.