

When we read the word of God, we must not allow the divisions of chapters and verses to throw us off in our interpretation. From the beginning of chapter three, to the end of our passage this evening, Luke is telling one story of the movement of the Holy Spirit. It begins when Peter and John go to the temple at the afternoon time of prayer, where they have an encounter with a man who had been born a cripple. He was over forty years old, known by the people of Jerusalem, and in Jesus name, he was healed in the power of the Holy Spirit.

The miracle, provided by God, opened the door of opportunity for Peter to preach the gospel twice. He delivered the first sermon to the eyewitnesses of the miracle, which upset the officials of the Temple. The religious leaders threw Peter and John in jail, over night, and then brought the men before the Sanhedrin Council the next morning. This gave Peter another opportunity to preach the gospel, this time to the religious and political leaders in Jerusalem.

All three of the sermons recorded in chapters two through four convey the same message. Jesus was the Christ, but the people had Him killed. He was three days and nights in the tomb, but God raised Him from the dead. Because Jesus is the promised Messiah, He is both Savior and Lord, and forgiveness of sins, and the promised Holy Spirit, is given to all who trust Him as Savior, and Lord.

At the conclusion of our passage last time, Peter and John were let go. In our passage this evening we read of their return to the people of the church, and a prayer that the believers lifted to the Lord in faith. Let's discover together what may be learned as we read Acts 4:23-31.

The bible reveals that the first thing Peter and John did, when they were released, was to go back to the other believers and share with them what had happened. By the time of their release, the whole church would have already heard about the miracle, and the Apostle's arrest, so I am sure that they wanted to hear the whole story. Peter and John were anxious to share their testimony with the church as to how the Holy Spirit empowered them and, God delivered them from the religious leaders.

While the bible does not tell us, I imagine the church was praying for the Apostles while they were in jail. Peter and John probably spent some time on their knees during their incarceration, and it was natural for them to give a witness, to how God delivered them, and emboldened them, to share the gospel with the most powerful, opponents of Jesus, and the gospel message. When the people heard this, they raised their voices in prayer.

The content of their prayer, as it has been recorded through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, proceeds in three movements. In verse 24, they recognized the Sovereignty of the Lord. In verses 25 through 28, they recognize that it is a part of God's plan that their would be opposition to the gospel, and beginning in verse 29, they ask for boldness when they speak God's word.

When I pray, I do not always acknowledge the sovereignty of God directly, but I do most of the time. However, God's sovereignty is always in the back of my mind because it is a part of my faith. It is an important element in our prayer life because we give God the glory that He is due. When we acknowledge Him in our worship, and we speak of His sovereignty from the depths of our soul, while we pray, His power and authority are confirmed in us. That reassurance helps us to face the challenges that we will have to endure.

In their prayer, the early church recognized God's sovereignty in two ways. He is the creator of the earth, the sea, and everything in them, and secondly, God's sovereignty is seen in the divine inspiration of scripture. It is essential for Christians today to continuously hold up God as the Sovereign Creator of the universe, as well as to defend the Bible as the divinely inspired

word of God. The lost world today seeks to explain creation without the need of a creator God. We have the big bang theory, and the theory of evolution, which the masses accept without question, because it alleviates their need to recognize and submit to a sovereign creator God.

To most of the people of the lost world, the bible has no authority over their lives. It's just some old religious book, so out of step with the times, that it could not possibly hold any relevance in their lives. But, the born again believer knows better. The bible contains the divinely inspired word of God. It is the truth, the absolute truth, without any mixture of error. It is the standard by which we measure all proclaimed truth. It is the source of our knowledge, and the wisdom that comes from God. With the aid of the Holy Spirit, we have discernment about right and wrong, and when, and how, we are to take our stand against the devil's schemes, so that we can hold out the hope that is in the gospel.

We see the inspiration of scripture, and the necessity for opposition to sharing our faith, spelled out in verses 25-28. Within their prayer the early Christians quoted Psalm 2:1-2, and acknowledge how the scriptures were being fulfilled in their day. The nations, the peoples, the kings, and the rulers mentioned in verses 25 and 26, perfectly correspond to Herod, Pontius Pilate, the Gentiles, and the people of Israel in verse 27.

They recognized God's word being fulfilled in their lifetime, and circumstances. It is really no different than what we do today, when we hold the bible in one hand, and a newspaper in the other, and see God's word being fulfilled right before our eyes. Israel is back in the land. The spirit of antichrist is being felt in every corner of the world. Our nation and our world is headed for the righteous judgment of God, and because of our faith in God, and our knowledge of scriptures, we are able to see prophecy being fulfilled. We see the sovereignty of God, and the reliability of Scripture, so that it builds an urgency in our hearts to speak the truth, to the lost world, while there is still time.

At the core of the concern in this prayer is that the people conspired against God's holy servant, the Lord Jesus Christ. Notice however, that it was by God's sovereign will and power that Christ would be opposed. Everything that happened, and everything that is happening now, God purposed beforehand, that it should happen just this way.

Such a grand of scale sovereignty is beyond our ability to comprehend. From before creation, God already had a plan in place for its destruction. The outpouring of God's wrath upon the earth is just as certain as if it had already happened. The questions that naturally arise from the awareness of the absolute sovereignty of God include: "Why does a loving God allow suffering in the world?" "If God is sovereign, why does He hold me accountable for my sin?" If God is sovereign over all things, do I even really have a choice?"

These are legitimate questions that might come from people who have no faith, or knowledge of God's word. God created us, male, and female, in His own image. Being made in God's image means that he created us with the capacity to know Him, and to have an intimate relationship with Him. God's purpose in creation was to rise up a people for Himself who would recognize Him in faith, and love Him of his or her own free will. Free will requires a conscious choice, thus evil has to co-exist with good. The means of the choice for everyone pivots on the cross of Jesus Christ.

Every time we share the gospel message, our listeners are faced with a choice. Confess and repent of your sins and trust Jesus as Savior and Lord, or oppose God's grace and remain lost in your sins. Receive Christ in faith and inherit eternal life, or reject Christ and receive the penalty for sin that we all deserve. In the end, which may be coming soon, there will be only two groups of people, those who are saved, and those who are lost, those who will live for eternity as

the children of God, and those who will be forever separated from God, and cast into a place called hell.

A person cannot question God's sovereignty by proclaiming that a loving God would not send a person to hell. The truth is that our loving God sent His only begotten Son, to sacrifice Himself, assuming in His flesh the cost of the penalty of our sins, to deliver us from the hell that we deserve. In faith our sins are buried with Christ, and we are spiritually raised with Christ to a new life, and eternal life. If a person, in this life, chooses to reject Christ, by their own free will, they condemn themselves to be separated from Christ for eternity.

My soul longs that no one would have to suffer that fate. But what can you and I do to help them, and to save them. If we follow the lead of the saints of the early church, we will pray that God will enable His servants to speak His word with great boldness. In light of the opposition to the gospel of Jesus Christ in the world, we need boldness to speak the truth. We are to be the salt of the earth, and the light of the world. We have to take our stand on biblical truth, no matter how strongly the world may oppose us. If the church does not stand up for the truth, and share the hope that is ours, through faith in Jesus Christ, who in the world will?

We need boldness in our witness. We need boldness in our stands, but we must take our stand in a way that expresses the love and grace of God, that comes through faith in Jesus Christ. We need Jesus. We need God's help to work in our circumstances, and in the circumstances of the people we are trying to reach. We need God's hand, for we are powerless in our own strength to accomplish God's purposes. In our prayers we ask God to stretch out His hand and perform miraculous signs and wonders, so people will be able to see that God is real, and that He is worthy of all glory, honor, and praise. The source of God's power for the church comes when we ask in the name of Jesus. It was in the name of Jesus that the crippled man was healed, and it is in the name of Jesus that we find boldness to be a part of what God is doing in the world to create a people for Himself.

The bible says that after they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. I believe the church at large today needs to be shaken. Pastors and teachers must be shaken so that we, and they, present the principles of the word of God in a way that is relevant to people's lives today. The church needs to cast out the philosophies of this sinful world, and oppose the godless determinations of man, and take our stand upon the word of God. We need to be shaken out of our complacency. We need to be shaken out of our sin. We need to be shaken out of our slumber, and realize that God has called us to be bold in our witness, regardless of the opposition we might have to face.

After God shook the place where they were meeting, they were all filled with the Holy Spirit. The church today needs to be filled with the Holy Spirit. You and I need to be filled with the Holy Spirit. We need the power of God in us, and to allow His power to flow through us. We need discernment that only the Holy Spirit, in connection with the word of God, can give us. We need every gift that God will give us through His Holy Spirit, and then in His power, we must speak the word of God boldly.

Is there any part of the word of God that you are ashamed of? Is there any part of it that is not the absolute truth? When God shakes us, when God fills us with His Holy Spirit, there is only one proper response. We share the word of God, and we share the gospel of Jesus Christ with boldness, no matter what opposition we have to face. The Holy Spirit will give us the words to speak when the time comes. He will keep us from saying the wrong things, or from giving people more information than they are able to handle at that time. Training is good, because it

helps to build confidence, but you don't have to be trained to take your stand, or to share your faith. You only have to be filled with the Holy Spirit.

The gospel tells us that Jesus was the Son of God, and God in the flesh. He came for the purpose of sacrificing Himself for the forgiveness of my sins and yours. After His death He was buried in a tomb, but after three days and three nights, He arose from the grave. He showed Himself to hundreds of people over a period of forty days. We have their eyewitness testimonies of the resurrection recorded in the pages of the New Testament. He ascended into heaven and He is coming again, perhaps soon, so there may be little time left.

The Bible promises that if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved, and everyone who calls upon the Lord shall be saved. If you have not already done so, confess and repent of your sins, right now. Ask in faith for Jesus to come into your heart as Savior and Lord. Start telling people about the miracle that God does in your life, then take your stand along with the rest of us in the power of the Holy Spirit.