



8 | ACTS 4:23-37

EARTH SHAKING PRAYER

We need to know the presence of God in a way that shakes us to the core

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Will you not revive us again, that your people may rejoice in you?
7 Show us your steadfast love, O Lord, and grant us your salvation.

—Psalm 85:6-7

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Introduction

We continue our series in the book of Acts called “Life on Life Discipleship.” Our title this morning is: “Earth Shaking Prayer”.

True prayer is the most beautiful expression in the universe. It is to say man is powerless and God is omnipotent. It is to recognize our true state. Man has no self-sustaining power in and of himself. It is in the Lord that we “live and move and have our being” (Acts 17:28). We should have no confidence in ourselves, but only in the Lord. If anything is done, he must do it. If we adopt this attitude of total dependence on the Lord, we will indeed be a praying people.

God has done great things in the hearts of our people through our “week of prayer” recently. We are seeing some personal revival and even some satanic attack. Let us not grow weary, but instead anticipate what God wants to do in us. Prayer is asking God to reveal himself to us and to others.

Total dependence on God does not mean we are fatalists. We are not passive do-nothings waiting around for God to do something. No. God calls us to cooperate with him in the movement and orchestration of salvation. We are to get out on the raging waters and walk by faith. We are all part of his great symphony. We carry out his plans. He is the director, and we are the orchestra. We ask for him to carry out what he has promised, and he answers. God will answer when we pray! He may even bring an earthquake as he did in Acts 4:23-32. We believe in the power of prayer!

Acts 4:23-32 | When they [*Peter and John*] were released, they went to their friends and reported what the chief priests and the elders had said to them. ²⁴And 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, ²⁵who 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? ²⁶The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers were gathered together, against the Lord and against his Anointed’ — ²⁷for 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, ²⁸to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place. ²⁹And now, Lord, look upon their threats and grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness, ³⁰while you stretch out your hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of your holy servant Jesus.” ³¹And 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. ³²Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common.

We need to pray in a way that we meet God in a life changing way. We need to have those “wrestle with God” moments, like Jacob, and he was never the same.

Key Thought: We need to know the presence of God in a way that shakes us to the core! If that happens, we will be changed, and God will change the world.

The prayer we read in Acts 4 not only shook the people that prayed, it shook the entire Roman empire. Within the first six months of the church, people estimate that between 50 to 200 thousand people were born again. How did it happen? What was the fuel that ran that engine? It was simple, total surrender to God in prayer.

1. THE CONFIDENCE OF PRAYER (4:23-28)

I want you to see that **it was trouble that brought the church to prayer**. The gospel of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ was being opposed. Christians were being threatened. And this was the catalyst for this great prayer meeting. Someone has said:

Christians are like tea: their real strength comes out when they're in hot water.

Now that's true. The church of the Lord Jesus Christ today ought to always be praying because we are always in the hot water of warfare.

I look around and I see **militant, marching secular humanism**. I see an emotional, superficial false Christianity that is spreading like wildfire. I see the communist menace that once circled the globe making its home in the deepest places of power in America. I look inside of this beloved nation of ours and I see moral corruption and utter degradation in the movies, media and television. **I see the slaughter of the unborn innocent babies**. I see a drug epidemic, alcoholism, and sexual perversion. I see a mockery of marriage among homosexuals. I see gender blenders in our public schools, turning our children against God. I see a people that do not know God; millions and billions of people—who have heard the name of Jesus, but either **reject him or remake** him into their own image. And I am convinced that **only prayer can hold back the floodtide** of sin and deliver millions who are living in sin's dark night. **Only divinely empowered prayer can send revival.**

Now it is not just any prayer that we need, but it is prayer with **power**.

- It is not the **rhetoric** of our prayer—how eloquent our prayers are;
- it is not the **sound** of our prayer—how beautiful our prayers are;
- it is not the **logic** of our prayer—how intellectual our prayers are;
- it is not the **method** of our prayer—how carefully detailed our prayers are;
- but it is the **power** of our prayer that counts.

We are only God to experience the power of God if we meet with God himself. He's got to shake us. Power with God begins with total trust and faith. That faith brings a recognition of our own powerlessness. And it comes when we recognize God's power and walk in it. When these disciples prayed like that, the place was shaken. There was divine power that literally shook the place. God said amen to their prayers with an earthquake.

CONFIDENCE IN GOD AS CREATOR OF ALL THINGS

Acts 4:23-24 | When they were released, they went to their friends and reported what the chief priests and the elders had said to

them.²⁴ 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.”

We hear a prayer that sees God as the Creator of all things. He is the sovereign, omnipotent God. He is the Almighty God. Now this Jewish high court has told them not to preach or teach in the name of Jesus. But **they were not taken back with fear, but with divine comfort under the “shadow of the Almighty.”** They recognized that God is the Creator and the rulers who oppose Christ are the created. And they prayed, basically, “Lord, because you are the Sovereign Creator of heaven and earth, we don’t have to be intimidated by them, because **all of the forces of the universe are at your fingertips.**” God had a plan for all their pain and persecution. Corrie Ten Boom said it this way:

There is no panic in heaven, only plans.¹ —*Corrie Ten Boom*

The Holy Trinity never meets in an emergency session. Dear saint, it’s necessary that when we’re opposed, and when trouble comes, we go back and put things into perspective, look beyond the visible to the invisible, and look beyond the creature to the Creator, to bring whatever difficult situation you are facing into focus so that you can pray with confidence.

CONFIDENCE IN GOD AS CONTROLLER OF ALL THINGS

Now they saw God, in verse 24, as the Creator of all things; and so it follows, as night follows day, that they saw God as the Controller of all things. If he is Creator God, then he has perfect control of every detail of every event that occurs. In fact, they begin quoting Scripture about God’s control, Psalm 2 to be exact. They go on in their prayer speaking of our Creator God. They said that God spoke through the mouth of David in Psalm 2.

Acts 4:25-28 | 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? ²⁶The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers were gathered together, against the Lord and against his Anointed’ — ²⁷for 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, ²⁸to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place.

Now these disciples were facing a difficult situation. But then they looked back to the darkest day that they had ever known, when all of their hopes, aspirations, and dreams were nailed to a hellish Roman cross; when the Son of God was ganged up on by the high court, by Herod, by Pontius Pilate, and when all of these people nailed the Son of God to the cross. But they said this: **“Nothing has gotten out of control, because according to the Scriptures, God is in absolute control.”** They quoted from Psalm 2 and they understood that David had said seven hundred years before Jesus Christ was born in Psalm 2 that this was exactly, precisely, what was going to happen. I want you to pay close attention in verse 28. Those rulers who crucified Christ gathered together “to do whatever God’s hand and God’s plan had predestined to take place.”

¹ Adrian Rogers, “How to Put Power in Your Prayer,” in *Adrian Rogers Sermon Archive* (Signal Hill, CA: Rogers Family Trust, 2017), Ac 4:23–33.

God showed these people is that he controls all things. Nothing was out of the control of Almighty God. God not only foresaw it all, but he predestined all things, even to do good things through the actions of bad men, to carry out his plan of redemption. Sometimes we get all bent out of shape when the worst of things happens. We think, “Somehow the devil has taken over, and things are not going to turn out as the Bible says they are going to turn out.” But, dear saint, that’s impossible. The Word of God is unbreakable. God will guide all events to completion for your good and his glory. He is in absolute control of all events, so do not be afraid.

CONFIDENCE IN GOD AS CONQUEROR OF ALL THINGS

If God is the Creator and Controller of all things, then it follows that he is the Conqueror of all things—because if you read Psalm 2, it tells about how earth’s rulers would crucify the Lord Jesus Christ, and then in Psalm 2 it says:

As for me, I have set my King on Zion, my holy hill. —Psalm 2:6

Christ through his crucifixion would conquer sin, death, hell, and the devil. God set his Son as King of kings on his holy hill in Jerusalem. He ascended from that hill, the Mount of Olives, and he sat down at the right hand of God. Psalm 2 tells us that Jesus is on the throne, that sin cannot win, that faith cannot fail, and that our Lord Jesus is the conquering Son of God, the second Person of the Trinity.

We know the last chapter as well, and Jesus wins. The devil will one day be cast into a Lake of Fire, which burns with fire and brimstone day and night forever (Rev 20:10). Jesus is King of kings and Lord of lords, and he will reign forever and ever (Rev 19:6, 16). Christ has conquered! Christ has won!

2. THE COMMITMENT OF PRAYER (4:29-30)

Prayer is a sign of our total commitment and dependence on God. We are God’s servants.

Acts 4:29 | And now, Lord, look upon their threats and grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness.

Underscore, please, the word *servants*. That speaks of the commitment of mighty prayer. That word is a translation of a Greek word that literally means “bond slaves.” Now, saints, the reason that many of our prayers are not answered is that we have **not made that commitment to the Lord.**

Every now and then I’ll come behind a car, and it will have a bumper sticker on it that says, “God is my co-pilot.” No, he’s not. Some businessman says, “Well, I’m going to open a business, and I want God as my partner.” He doesn’t want to be your partner; dear saint, he is your Lord. He is not your partner. He is not your co-pilot. You are his slave, and he is your sovereign Lord. **The only way God wants to partner with you is not you giving him your plans, but God giving you his plans.** You’ve got to commit yourself completely to your Sovereign Lord.

Often, we come to prayer meetings, and **our prayers are focused on temporal things.** That ought not be. Look at the requests these early disciples had. The first was that they would be bold to express God’s Word.

TO EXPRESS GOD'S WORD

Acts 4:29 | And now, Lord, look upon their threats and grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness.

They prayed that they might **speaking God's Word with boldness**. Is that the desire of your heart: to spread the gospel of Jesus Christ, to obey the Great Commission? Grant, Lord, that we can **“speak your word with all boldness.”**

Now I remind you, it was the expression of God's Word and it was the preaching of God's Word that got them into trouble to begin with. **They didn't say, “Lord, move us to more favorable circumstances.”** They didn't say, “Lord, keep us safe.” Do you know what they prayed? They prayed, “Lord, give us more of what got us into trouble in the first place.” Now, you think about that: “Lord, we're in trouble for preaching your Word. Now, God, give us boldness to preach it some more.” Amen? “We want to express your Word.” Dear saints, **Jesus Christ did not come to get you out of trouble; he came to get into trouble with you.** And that is exciting. These disciples, if you read the book of Acts, they just stayed in trouble. They said, “Lord, give us boldness.” When you preach Christ, you are going against the current of this world. You ought not be concerned if you are being persecuted. You should be very concerned if you are not being persecuted. **If you are not being persecuted, it might mean you are being silent about God's Word.** Are you living a comfortable life? Is that your goal? If you live godly in Christ Jesus, you will suffer persecution (2 Tim 3:12). **If you are not being persecuted, you might be sinning by omission.** It's not just evil to do things God tells you not to do. It's also evil to refuse or neglect the things God has told you to do. Preach the name of Jesus everywhere you go. That's a command. To not do so is a sin. So, they prayed for boldness to lift up the name of Jesus. That's a good prayer! “Oh, Lord, please let your people at Living Hope be bold witnesses for you. Amen!”

TO EXTEND GOD'S HAND

Acts 4:30 | While you stretch out your hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of your holy servant Jesus.

How was Jesus going to stretch forth his hand? After all, Jesus had ascended to heaven and is ruling and reigning at the right hand of the Father. How was our exalted Lord going to stretch forth his hand? The answer is simple: Jesus uses our hands. He calls all his people to be “Jesus with skin on.” We are his Body, his Temple. We pray that we will be Jesus with skin on. The apostles did “signs and wonders are performed through the name of... Jesus.” **If Jesus is in heaven, then the disciples' hands were to become Jesus' hands.** What they were saying is, “Lord, take our hands and do through our hands what you would do if you were here in the flesh.” Do signs. Do wonders. Reveal Jesus. Let us love like Jesus. Let us serve like Jesus. Let the presence of Jesus be known to all who are in our lives. We are going to be touched and empowered to do Jesus' work in this earth through prayer! We need to pray, “Lord, stretch forth your hand through me. Touch someone's life through me.”

I read about a cathedral in Europe that was bombed in World War II. Some of the Americans were there and they wanted to rebuild the cathedral, and so they did. In that cathedral was a magnificent statue of Christ with his arms outstretched, and underneath it the scripture, “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Mt 11:28). The statue had been broken to pieces. They searched through the rubble. They found

all of the parts of that statue of Christ and they assembled them back together. But when they came to the hands, they could not find the hands. The hands had been destroyed, and they couldn't find them. They didn't know what to do, until somebody had an idea, and he wrote beneath that statue with those arms without hands stretched out, "He has no hands but our hands." That is so true.²

TO EXALT GOD'S SON

Acts 4:30 | While you stretch out your hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of your holy servant Jesus.

The apostles prayed for miracles to be performed to exalt the name of Jesus. **A miracle is God intersecting into our lives in a supernatural way.** They wanted to demonstrate that the name of Jesus is powerful, supernatural, miraculous. That's how we all ought to live, so that Jesus' name is exalted! People ought to see Jesus living and moving in and through us. His humility. His love. His gentleness. His kindness. His truth. And he gets all the glory.

The apostles weren't in ministry to "brand" their own names or to make a name for their church. They did miracles to exalt the name of Jesus. Someone's name stands for the character of the person. When it is done, it will be obvious that Jesus Christ is doing it, and Jesus Christ will get the glory, and Jesus Christ will get the praise. They were committed to prayer so they could have the power to continue to **lift up the person of Christ in the midst of terrible persecution.** Remember what Jesus said:

And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself. —*John 12:32*

Jesus said that we are to pray in his name (Jn 14:13–14; 15:16; 16:23–24, 26). That is what they're talking about. Praying in the name of Jesus is not just something at the end of your prayer, tacking on a little phrase, "In Jesus' name, amen." It means, "Jesus, with your authority, and in your power, and for your glory, Lord, do this. We want you, Lord Jesus, to be exalted." The power of all prayer is that its purpose and motive is to exalt the name of Jesus Christ.

God's people had very powerful, Bible-based prayer requests: to express God's Word, to extend God's hand, and to exalt God's Son. If you pray that way, God will answer!

3. THE CONSEQUENCES OF PRAYER (4:31-37)

When you pray with no confidence in yourself and all your trust is in God, you will get an answer.

Call to me and I will answer you, and will tell you great and hidden things that you have not known. —*Jeremiah 33:3*

And what an answer these persecuted believers got! The earth began to heave. The place began to shake. **The Lord had heard, and the signs of Pentecost continued.** **There**

² Adrian Rogers, "How to Put Power in Your Prayer," in *Adrian Rogers Sermon Archive* (Signal Hill, CA: Rogers Family Trust, 2017), Ac 4:23–33.

was no more the sound of a rushing mighty wind, no tongues of fire. But the place began to quake and shake and heave.

THE EARTH HEAVES

Acts 4:31a | And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken.

The answer to their prayer was instantaneous. The Holy Spirit was present in power, and the whole meeting place shook. **The shaking of that house was symbolic of the shaking now taking place in the house of Israel.** The whole nation trembled on the brink of a major transformation. The Old Covenant was being uncovered to reveal the New Covenant. All the old systems, ceremonies, and power structures in Israel are being shaken to the very foundations by the proclamation of the name of Jesus.³ **No longer were God's people experiencing symbol and ceremony, but they were experiencing the real, living presence of God himself.**

They were stepping into the Holy of holies by the blood of Christ. There's now no condemnation. There's no wrath to fear any longer! Many were rushing to God's new house, the church as a result. So powerful is God's entrance that the place is shaking with an earthquake. The prayer of Isaiah 64 is answered.

Oh that you would rend the heavens and come down, that the mountains might quake at your presence—³When you did awesome things that we did not look for, you came down, the mountains quaked at your presence. —*Isaiah 64:1, 3*

When God attends a prayer meeting, something ought to happen! If there is not a quaking in the ground, there ought to at least be a quaking in your heart. When we pray like this, wanting the Lord's presence more than we need air or water, we will see him come down.

THE SPIRIT IS RECEIVED

Acts 4:31b | And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness.

Now they had already been filled with the Holy Spirit in Acts 2, but now they are filled with the Holy Spirit again. And that teaches us a lesson: that we cannot operate on yesterday's experience. There must be a fresh filling of God's Holy Spirit. And there must be this time when day after day in powerful prayer we are filled with the Spirit. Yesterday's power is not sufficient for this hour.

And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit. —*Ephesians 5:19*

The idea is to "be being constantly filled" with the Holy Spirit. We need filling and refilling and refilling. And the filling is not merely to capacity, but more like a thimble trying to contain an ocean.

There is also another lesson here. We read:

³ John Phillips, *Exploring Acts: An Expository Commentary*, The John Phillips Commentary Series (Kregel Publications; WORDsearch Corp., 2009), Ac 4:31a.

Acts 4:31b | And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness.

Remember they prayed earlier that they would “continue to speak God’s word with all boldness”? Well here is their answer. A big part of that answer is the filling of the Holy Spirit. When the Spirit fills, the mouth speaks with boldness. **We cannot separate the fullness of the Spirit from our bold witness for Christ.** If you are a bond slave of Jesus, you want the whole world to know him. The Spirit is going to fill you so that you will lift Jesus up. The Holy Spirit of God will fill you when you’re committed to be a witness for Jesus with holy boldness.

UNITY IS ACHIEVED

Acts 4:32 | Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common.

When the church prayed together, they became fused together. They became one. Prayer, more than anything else, unites the church.

- We are not to be wired together by human **organization**.
- We are not to be frozen together by cold **formalism**.
- We are not to be rusted together by man-made **tradition**.
- We are fused and melted together by **prayer** and experiencing God’s **presence**.

When the church prays, that Spirit is received, and that unity is achieved.

Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity.
—*Psalm 133:1*

How is this unity achieved? Through prayer—as we pray and seek the face of God. And, by the way, if you have ever had a **prayer partner, or been in a prayer group**, then you will know that those people that you’ve prayed with have become **friends for life** because of the divine unity God grants through prayer.

If we want our church to stay unified, then indeed we must **practice this kind of prayer where we all know we have met God**. Whenever a prayer meeting is called, it ought to be highly attended. **You ought to have a feeling of sorrow if you can’t make the prayer meeting**. There ought to be a hunger like you haven’t had lunch or dinner, and you are starving for prayer. That’s how the church is revived, and the world is changed.

Illustration

When I was in college, I had the honor of praying with men every night who understood this. From 10 to 10:30pm each evening we groaned for revival. When the 10:30 bell rang, we were so sad that it had to end, and we couldn’t wait for it to start again the next night. It wasn’t because we couldn’t wait to be with each other mainly. It was because God met us in a special way. That ought to be our attitude toward corporate prayer. We may not be there yet saints, but you can only get there if you want it.

Now something else happens when we pray. The Gospel is believed! When the Spirit is received, when unity is achieved, then the gospel is believed.

THE GOSPEL IS BELIEVED

Acts 4:33 | And with great power the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all.

This is the kind of fellowship that attracts lost people. We want to be the kind of fellowship that the Spirit is attracting people of every family, culture, language and country.

Far from silencing the apostles, the action of the Sanhedrin put the power of God on display. You put a tea bag in hot water, and you find out what's inside. You cannot hurt the church, because the more you persecute Christians, the more Christ is displayed. The more Christ is lifted up. The more the resurrection is preached, and great grace pours out!

Persecution drove the early church to their knees, and the Holy Spirit drove them to their feet. Grace and power flowed through them. No enemy or council could intimidate them; no fear could paralyze them. And it was the resurrection they preached.⁴ **When we pray, we don't have to "white knuckle" our evangelism.** Grace is upon us. It is the grace of God working in the heart that saves a lost sinner. They can have their intellect exercised all day long. No one was ever saved by losing an argument. People are saved when the grace of God first humbles them, and then gives them hope in the death and resurrection of Jesus.

THE CHURCH SUCCEEDS

Acts 4:34-37 | There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold³⁵ and laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need.³⁶ Thus Joseph, who was also called by the apostles Barnabas (which means son of encouragement), a Levite, a native of Cyprus,³⁷ sold a field that belonged to him and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet.

We meet a man named Barnabas, which means "son of encouragement." He's the kind of brother who walks beside you and just constantly encourages you. He's a man of great faith. He's the brother who lovingly picks you up when you are down. I want to be that brother.

When you pray together, **you become family.** Like Barnabas, you show *real agape sacrifice*. Barnabas was willing to make a real sacrifice to help the spread of the Gospel. Barnabas and others didn't mind selling and bringing proceeds to the apostles. It wasn't communism. They met house to house. They kept owning land a property. The Bible teaches we should voluntarily sacrifice for each other. That's a beautiful mark of a church's success.

When you pray together, you **want to comfort and encourage the Body of Christ.** You don't mind giving away things that are earthly. Barnabas is singled as an example even though others in the church also were generous to the Jerusalem church. Why? I think it's because he truly loved the church and wanted to encourage his brothers and sisters. His birth name is Joseph, but his fellow-believers gave him the nickname of Barnabas which means "son of encouragement."⁵ Prayer will do that. When someone is filled with the Spirit, you will become a person of comfort and encouragement for the Body. When we pray, we all become those

⁴ John Phillips, *Exploring Acts: An Expository Commentary*, The John Phillips Commentary Series (Kregel Publications; WORDsearch Corp., 2009), Ac 4:33.

⁵ Peter Williams, *Acts: Church on the Move: An Expositional Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles*, Exploring the Bible Commentary (Leominster: DayOne, 2004), 50.

sons and daughters of encouragement. We take someone by the hand and teach them to pray. We don't just wish them well, but, like Barnabas, we walk side by side with them, in prayer, in Gospel living.

Conclusion

You might say, "What does this message on prayer have to do with my life?" I'll tell you what it has to do with your life. The time will come—if it has not already come—when **God is going to teach you to pray by bringing us through trouble**. Now are you going to pray for boldness or are you going to simply pray for the trouble to go away?

We need to pray in a way that **we meet God in a life changing way**. We need to have those "wrestle with God" moments, like Jacob, and he was never the same. We need to know the presence of God in a way that shakes us to the core!

One more thing: The point of this study means that your life, your home, your family, this church, this community, America, and our world, will never see the power of God as they ought until God's people learn how to pray with power. **The need of the hour is prayer with power**. Will you commit to regular, earnest, corporate prayer?