

WEEKEND Edition 18/19 June 2022 "Power Pray!" (Acts 4:23-31)

Good weekend to you my 'Walking with Jesus' friends,

Regardless of your religious orientation PRAYER is a common experience everywhere in the world, right? Whether on your face in a Muslim Mosque, holding a rosary in a Catholic Cathedral, burning incense in a Hindu Temple or before a Buddha statue, head bowed and hands raised in a Christian Church or alone on a hilltop, a desolate beach or even underwater, **PRAYER is something a person does with PURPOSE!** So, what is your purpose and what is your expectation when you pray...however, whenever and wherever you pray, my friends? What did you learn as a child watching other people pray? And finally, *what's the most powerful prayer experience you've ever had?*

I've had the privilege of visiting several parts of the world and one of my intentions, everywhere I go, is to visit places of prayer and watch to see what happens there. What is the difference between the appearance of people as they enter that prayer place and when they are leaving? Does it appear they have actually had an encounter with God or whoever they were seeking, or was it simply a ritual with no meaning and no genuine expectations?

Yesterday I left you walking OUT of a powerful, confrontational, tribunal meeting where 2 fishermen disciples of Jesus, Peter and John, had been hauled in for questioning by the 70 member Jewish Sanhedrin, the most powerful religious leaders of their day, the High Priest and many other priests and teachers. Peter and John were called to account for reportedly healing a man who had been crippled from birth.

It wasn't a rumor. Everyone recognized the man jumping in front of them as the man who, for more than 40 years, had been a beggar at one of the gates leading into the Temple area in Jerusalem. *But HOW was this man healed?* That was the big question. *Peter insisted he was healed when he placed his faith in the name and person of the resurrected Jesus Christ.* The religious leaders scoffed at this preposterous idea, but they couldn't deny what they were seeing. So, their only recourse was to release Peter and John with a warning to stop talking about Jesus and stop repeating to the people what they had heard Jesus teach.

That left Peter and John in a quandary. They had been good Jewish men all their lives. These were the most respected of all Jewish leaders. In the past Peter and John and all good Jews would always obey without question, whatever these leaders said or wrote. But today their bold, courageous response to these wise and respected religious authorities was: ***"Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God's sight to obey you rather than God. For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard!"*** (Acts 4:20) Right here, right now, I need to ask us all a very important question: are we living that statement? *Are you living your life obeying human beings, especially if they are saying things that are contrary to God's truth, or are you living your life fully aligned with God's truth and for His honor...regardless of what people say?* Now think about that!

Stunned, these pompous, prideful authorities stood there with their mouths hanging open as they watched Peter and John, with their heads held high, walk out from this courtroom, back into the Jerusalem streets and they headed right for where they knew their friends and fellow followers of Jesus were gathered, praying for them! May I ask, when you are in either great pain, or great need or great rejoicing is gathering with your friends to pray one of the first things you seek? *If so, WHY? If not, why NOT?*

Let's join the reunion, it's powerful! The record says: **"On their release, Peter and John went back to their own people and reported all the chief priests and elders had said to them. When the people heard this, they raised their voices together in prayer to God..."** (Acts 4:23,24) And when you read what they prayed, you'll see it is wonderful words of praise and thanks to God for His sovereignty, His supremacy, His promises, and His faithfulness. May I ask... what do you say to God when you pray? Are they words you memorized as a child or read from a book? *Or is your prayer a genuine, honest, sincere conversation with the God who made you and with whom you are developing a significant, respectful, deeply personal relationship?*

As they prayed, Peter and John and these friends also thanked God for something remarkable. Look at Acts 4:27 **"Indeed Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city, to conspire against Your holy servant Jesus, whom You appointed. They did what Your power and will had decided beforehand should happen."** (Acts 4:27,28) Now my friends, this is the third time, in only a few days, that these followers of Jesus have declared *that the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus was according to God's plan established a very long time BEFORE Jesus came to earth on His mission to provide salvation to humanity!* That's important. Jesus was not crucified because a mob was out of control, nor because Pilate was fearful of a rebellion, nor because Jewish religious leaders refused to recognize Him as Messiah. **Jesus was crucified because it was the only way God's forgiveness can be offered to you and me and every sinful person in the world! That's the Gospel!** And that's how much God loves every human being... **"For God so loved the world that He sent His only Son, that whoever believes in Jesus shall not perish but shall have eternal life."** (John 3:16)

Their prayer continued...**"Now Lord, consider their threats and enable Your servants to speak Your word with great boldness. Stretch out Your hand to heal and perform miraculous signs and wonders through the name of Your holy servant Jesus."** (Acts 4:29,30) Do you notice the people begged God for more **BOLDNESS**, more **COURAGE** to **SPEAK** the truth of Jesus in the face of the anger and rejection of those leaders *who wanted the name and memory of Jesus erased from Jerusalem!* When was the last time you asked God for courage and boldness to stand up for God's truth as the morality of your society, your city continues to erode into wickedness? What's going on around you that is calling you to stand up boldly for what God says is right and pure and truthful?

Do you see the people also asked God to pour out His mighty power in miracles and unexplainable '**signs and wonders**' that would amaze people and draw them to trust in Jesus? When was the last time you asked God for such things, not because you had a specific need, *but ONLY so Jesus could be glorified?* Now here's an important question... do you pray with any expectations? Psalm 5 says: **"Give ear to my words, O LORD, consider my sighing. Listen to my cry for help, my King and my God, for to you I pray. In the morning, O LORD, I lay my requests before you and I wait in expectation..."** (Ps. 5:1-3) Do you do that? And what does God do in response when you pray like that, my friends?

Look around the room as these friends and followers of Jesus are praying. Peter, John, probably most if not all the other apostles, Mary Magdalene, Mary Jesus' mother and many others, are earnestly crying out to God with great expectations that He will empower them in the face of great opposition in Jerusalem. Wait... do you feel something? Is it an earthquake? The record says: **"After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly."** (Acts 4:31) Do you remember when the Holy Spirit first came upon these friends of Jesus on the day of Pentecost there was a powerful wind which shook the house, then tongues of fire which came upon them, then a filling of the Holy Spirit and they spoke languages they didn't know but languages known by pilgrims from faraway places who had come to Jerusalem for Pentecost?

Now here again there is a miraculous earthquake, at least this one house shook. *And a fresh filling of the Holy Spirit which empowered them to speak God's truths BOLDLY, just as they had requested!* Do you see their Pentecost experience was the initial coming of the Holy Spirit, but this is a re-empowerment, a re-anointing of the Spirit for a specific purpose... that they would do as Peter and John had done, speak and act for God's glory with fearless boldness and courage in the face of persecution?

What they didn't know, but what we'll see next week, is that a terrible persecution against followers of Jesus was about to break out in Jerusalem in an attempt to silence these followers of Jesus by any means. *This fresh anointing of the Holy Spirit empowered them and prepared them for what God knew was coming... persecution!* So, as we step into this weekend... are you empowered by God for what HE knows is coming your way? I invite you to take some time this weekend and do as they did... meet with God, seeking His work in you to prepare you for what HE knows is coming in your future!! And here's a song to help you in this type of praying, my friends...

Today's Scripture is Acts 4:23-31.