



Bible studies for disciples who make disciples

Loudonville Community Church

Volume 1 - Number 7
The week of November 15, 2015

Overcoming Fear

Acts 4:1-31

THIS WEEK'S CORE STATEMENT

Desperate Prayer - It is through prayer that we come to know God more deeply and discover His will for our lives.

Martin Luther (1483-1546) is best known as the father of the protestant Reformation. He was an Augustinian monk and also served as a professor of biblical literature. Although Luther is best known as a theologian, he was also a man of deep faith. The following selections provide us with some of his insights on the practice of prayer.

Luther on *Praying in Faith*: "Prayer is a special exercise of faith. Faith makes the prayer acceptable because it believes that either the prayer will be answered, or that something better will be given instead. This is why James says, 'Let him who asks of God not waver in faith, for if he wavers, let him not think that he shall receive anything from the Lord.' This is a clear statement which says directly: he who does not trust will receive nothing, neither that which he asks nor anything better."

Luther on *Laying the Need – Not Prescribing the Answer*: "The one who prays correctly never doubts that the prayer will be answered, even if the very thing for which one prays is not given. For we are to lay our need before God in prayer but not prescribe to God a measure, manner, time, or place. We must leave that to God, for he may wish to give it to us in another, perhaps better, way than we think is best. Frequently we do not know what to pray as St. Paul says in Romans 8, and we know that God's ways are above all that we can ever understand as he says in Ephesians 3. Therefore, we should have no doubt that our prayer is acceptable and heard, and we must leave to God the measure, manner, time, and place, for surely God will do what is right."

Luther on *What a Great Gift We Have in Prayer*: "No one can believe how powerful prayer is and what it can effect, except those who have learned it by experience. It is important when we have a need to go to God in prayer. I know, whenever I have prayed earnestly, that I have been heard and have obtained more than I prayed for. God sometimes delays, but He always comes. It is amazing that a poor human creature is able to speak with God's high Majesty in heaven and not be afraid. When we pray, the heart and conscience must not pull away from God because of our sins and our unworthiness, or stand in doubt, or be scared away. It was for this reason that the ancients defined prayer as an *Ancensus mentis ad Deum*, 'a climbing up of the heart unto God.'"

Let us follow Luther's advice to pray in faith and fearlessly lay our requests before God!

This Week's Complementary Passage

Mark 11:22-25 (ESV)

²² And Jesus answered them, "Have faith in God. ²³ Truly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, 'Be taken up and thrown into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says will come to pass, it will be done for him. ²⁴ Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours. ²⁵ And whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses."

appointed

baptized

Caesar

enemy/demons/Satan

eternal life

fathers & children [in one color
different from Moses]

Gentiles

gospel

grace

Holy Spirit

in the name of Jesus Christ

Jesus

Jews

Law (of Moses)

men of the council

Moses [in different color from
fathers & children]

prayer

repent (repentance)

resurrection (raised up)

salvation

suffering

the Way

the promise of the Father

witnesses

word of God

This Week's Text for Study - Acts 4:1-31 (ESV)

STEP ONE . . .

READING what the passage says
(Read it at least three times)

¹ And as they were speaking to the people, the priests and the captain of the temple and the Sadducees came upon them, ² greatly annoyed because they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead. ³ And they arrested them and put them in custody until the next day, for it was already evening. ⁴ But many of those who had heard the word believed, and the number of the men came to about five thousand.

⁵ On the next day their rulers and elders and scribes gathered together in Jerusalem, ⁶ with Annas the high priest and Caiaphas and John and Alexander, and all who were of the high-priestly family. ⁷ And when they had set them in the midst, they inquired, "By what power or by what name did you do this?"

⁸ Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, "Rulers of the people and elders, ⁹ if we are being examined today concerning a good deed done to a crippled man, by what means this man has been healed, ¹⁰ let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead—by him this man is standing before you well. ¹¹ This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone.

¹² And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."

¹³ Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they were astonished. And they recognized that they had been with Jesus. ¹⁴ But seeing the man who was healed standing beside them, they had nothing to say in opposition. ¹⁵ But when they had commanded them to leave the council, they conferred with one another, ¹⁶ saying, "What shall we do with these men? For that a notable sign has been performed through them is evident to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it. ¹⁷ But in order that it may spread no further among the people, let us warn them to speak no more to anyone in this name."

¹⁸ So they called them and charged them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. ¹⁹ But Peter and John answered them, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge, ²⁰ for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard."

²¹ And when they had further threatened them, they let them go, finding no way to punish them, because of the people, for all were praising God for what had happened.

²² For the man on whom this sign of healing was performed was more than forty years old.

²³ 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, ²⁵ 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?

²⁶ The kings of the earth set themselves,
and the rulers were gathered together,
against the Lord
and against his Anointed'—

²⁷ for 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, ²⁸ to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place. ²⁹ And now, Lord, look upon their threats and grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness, ³⁰ while you stretch out your hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of your holy servant Jesus."

³¹ 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.

STEP FOUR . . .

UNDERSTANDING what the passage means

This commentary is intended to enhance your own study of the text.

Commentary on Acts 4:1-31

4:1 - The priests. Jews from the tribe of Levi, who served as local teachers of the Law; temple servants; and priests who officiated at the Temple, especially involved in the sacrificial procedures.

The captain of the temple. Occupied a position of power next to the High Priest; controlled the temple police.

Sadducees. The rich, political leaders of the Sanhedrin.

4:2 - greatly annoyed. The Apostles were proclaiming Jesus' resurrection. The Sadducees rejected any concept of a resurrection.

4:3 - until the next day. Jewish law forbade a trial to be held after twilight.

4:4 - the number of men came to be about five thousand. This number may not include women and children. Often the father's presence would stand for the whole family.

4:7 - By what power or by what name. An insinuation that the healing was done by magical power; they could not deny the miracle so they attempted to impugn the method or source of the power.

4:8 - filled with the Holy Spirit. The Spirit was the source of wisdom and boldness for the Apostles. Also, Peter was "filled" again (cf. 2:4; 4:8, 31), indicating such filling was a repeatable experience.

4:9 - has been healed. The lame man experienced the complete health and restoration of his legs.

4:10 - whom God raised. The resurrection is confirmation of the truth of Jesus' life and teachings about God and also the Father's full acceptance of His substitutionary death.

4:11 - cornerstone. A building metaphor meaning a 'foundation stone,' the first stone placed, which was secure and set the angles for the rest of the building; it could also refer to the final stone put in place, 'capstone,' which holds the walls together; or it could refer to the "key stone," which is in the center of the doorway arch and holds the weight of the entire wall.

4:13 - having been with Jesus. The Jewish leaders recognized the boldness and power of Peter and John. They recalled having seen these same qualities in Jesus.

4:19 - you must judge. The rulers condemned themselves by their own words, motives, and actions.

4:24 - they lifted their voices together. Unity of heart and mind characterized the early church; it is noteworthy that there is spiritual power and focused action in this atmosphere of unity of purpose.

Lord. Greek term *despota*, from which we get the English word despot. It speaks of someone with complete authority!

4:25 - rage. Literally means, 'to snort through one's nose;' implies supreme pride and arrogance.

4:28 - your hand and your plan had predestined to take place." God is sovereign; He is in total control of all things, including human history. God's plan of redemption is being worked out in time, based not only on God's sovereignty and foreknowledge, but also on His unchanging character of love, mercy, and undeserved grace. God chooses to change us so that others may see the change and respond by faith to God in Christ. Predestination is not a personal privilege, but a covenantal responsibility! We are saved to serve!

4:31 - all filled with the Holy Spirit. All were filled and this filling was for the bold proclamation of the gospel.

STEP FIVE . . .

SUMMARIZING the message

The healing of the lame man and Peter's subsequent sermon made a powerful and compelling impression on the people, but it also aroused the fury and opposition of Jewish rulers who ordered the arrest of the two apostles. Having made the arrest late in the evening a decision was made to postpone trial until the next day. Many of those who observed the miracle and heard Peter's sermon believed on Jesus and attached themselves to the growing church body. When asked to disclose the power which enabled them to perform the miracle, Peter, through the empowerment of God's Spirit, boldly proposes Jesus resurrected as the source.

Peter's courageous witness arose from an assurance that Jesus is alive, active and working through His disciples. The religious leaders blinded by hate failed to understand that the apostles were still companions of Jesus through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Neither formal education nor elite social status equips one to boldly proclaim the good news of Jesus in the public square. A genuine, consistent and ever-deepening relationship with Jesus allows one to display Peter's boldness.

Peter and John's response ("for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard") provides us with the guiding principle when facing religious persecution. As commissioned disciples we are duty-bound to give witness of the grace and love of Christ. When human government discourages or prohibits the fulfillment of this commission, Christ-followers must disobey. Obedience to God supersedes obeying civil authorities.

When facing persecution, desperate prayer arising out of a strong, biblical understanding of God's sovereignty guides and fuels our faith. Sometimes prayer is our last resort. When we have exhausted all other resources, we pray. Notice the early church's immediate and spontaneous prayer in the face of increasing threats and harassment.

STEP SIX . . .

EXPLORING the passage through discussion

1. Verse 2 informs us that the religious leaders were “greatly annoyed” (Greek “vexed”) with Peter and John. Several reasons are the cause for this reaction. What are those reasons?
2. Why were the religious leaders astonished at the boldness of Peter and John? What was the reaction of the rulers to the teaching of Jesus prior to His ascension (see John 7:15)?
3. Verses 16 and 17 provide a fascinating insight into the human heart. Why were the leaders able to acknowledge the powerful display of God’s power yet seek to silence and thwart the work of those who served as channels of that power?
4. In verse 19, Peter and John responded with the statement, “whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge.” What assumption are Peter and John making in this statement regarding the relationship the rulers have with God?
5. How do you think you would respond if in a similar situation? Share a time when you were forced to choose between obeying God rather than obeying a human ruler.
6. This story reveals that Peter and John possessed an unstoppable resolve of bearing witness to Jesus as the only Messiah in whom salvation is available. What about their experience or belief in Jesus fostered this unstoppable resolve?
7. “Sovereign Lord” in verse 24 comes from the Greek term *despota* referring to a slave owner whose authority and power could not be challenged. Warnings, prohibitions and threats are to interpreted in light of Jesus’ sovereign rule. How does understanding God’s sovereignty impact our faith in the face of difficulty or pressure?
8. Why is prayer the only Christ-honoring response when facing persecution, threats or pressure not to speak the Gospel?

THE MISSION OF LOUDONVILLE COMMUNITY CHURCH

We are committed to reaching and teaching people to become devoted followers of Jesus Christ, connecting them to one another and sending them to serve their families, communities and world.

10 CORE BELIEFS OF A DISCIPLE

Authority of the Bible *2 Timothy 3:16-17*

We believe the Bible to be the inspired, the only infallible, authoritative Word of God.

The Godhead *2 Corinthians 13:14*

We believe that there is one God, eternally existent in three persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

The Deity and Sinlessness of Christ *Colossians 2:9*

We believe in the deity of our Lord Jesus Christ, in His virgin birth, in His sinless life.

The Sufficient Atonement of Christ *2 Corinthians 5:19-21*

We believe in His vicarious and atoning death through His shed blood.

The Resurrection and Return of Christ *Acts 1:3, 9-11*

We believe in His bodily resurrection, in His ascension to the right hand of the Father, and in His personal return in power and glory.

Salvation By Grace *Ephesians 2:8-9*

We believe that for the salvation of lost and sinful man, regeneration by the Holy Spirit is absolutely essential and that a person comes into a right relationship with God by His grace, through faith in Jesus Christ.

The Ministry of the Holy Spirit *John 14:16*

We believe in the present ministry of the Holy Spirit by whose indwelling the Christian is enabled to live a godly life.

Unity in Christ *Ephesians 2:14-17*

We believe in the spiritual unity of all believers in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Eternity *Revelation 21:22-27*

We believe in the resurrection of both the saved and the lost; they that are saved unto the resurrection of life and they that are lost unto the resurrection of damnation.

Stewardship *1 Timothy 6:17-19*

We believe that everything we have or own belongs to God.

10 CORE PRACTICES OF A DISCIPLE

Undiluted Worship *Matthew 22:37-40*

Loving the Lord God with all of our physical, intellectual, emotional and spiritual vigor and, my neighbor as myself.

Constant Abiding *John 15:1-11*

Abiding in Christ in order to be faithful and bear fruit.

Bible Study *Hebrews 4:12*

Reading the Bible to know God, the truth, and to find direction for daily life.

Desperate Prayer *Psalms 66:16-20*

Praying to God to know Him, laying requests before Him and, finding direction for daily life.

Biblical Community *Acts 2:44-47*

Fellowshipping with other Christians to accomplish God's purposes in my life, other people's lives and, in the world.

Spiritual Gifts *Romans 12:4-6*

Using my spiritual gifts to accomplish God's purposes.

Total Forgiveness *Ephesians 4:30*

Practicing forgiving others as God has forgiven me in Christ.

Tangible Compassion *Matthew 25:31-46*

Showing compassion to those in need and so minister to Jesus Himself.

Generous Giving *2 Corinthians 8:7*

Giving away my money to fulfill God's purposes.

God Space *Ephesians 6:19-20*

Increasing the quantity and quality of our gospel conversations.

10 CORE VIRTUES OF A DISCIPLE

Love - a sincere affection for others *1 John 4:10-12*

Love is acting in someone else's interest no matter who they may be, no matter how you feel, and no matter what it costs.

Joy - a delight unaffected by circumstances *John 15:11*

An inner delight in God that is sustained in spite of the changing seasons of life.

Peace - an abiding sense of harmony *Philippians 4:6-7*

Relationships are free from friction. Positively, it describes harmonious relations with others in the church.

Patience - a willingness to stick with things *Proverbs 3:3-4*

Being willing to live with a difficult situation for a long time—even if things are slow to change or never change.

Kindness - a sense of compassion in the heart *Job 6:14*

An inner disposition that puts others at ease and out of which kind actions flow.

Goodness - a goodness that flows outwardly *1 Thess. 5:15*

Choosing to do the right things in my relationships with others.

Faithfulness - an unwavering loyalty *Psalm 26:3*

Being the kind of people who keep our word to one another.

Gentleness/Humility - an attitude of humility without any entitlement; a lack of self-awareness *Philippians 4:5; 2:3-4*

Gentleness is power and strength under God's control.

Humility is considering others above myself, if I consider myself at all.

Self-Control - an ability to direct your energy wisely

Titus 2:11-13

The strength to restrain our desires, emotions, and actions has to come from within rather than from some outside source.

Hope - a certainty of what is to come *Hebrews 6:19-20*

Coping with the hardships of life and with death because of hope in Christ.

Each week this Bible Study will feature either a core belief, practice or virtue vital for growing disciples.

Loudonville Community Church
374 Loudon Road, Loudonville, NY 12211

www.lcchurch.org