

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH, 1-22-12 AM NOTES
"KINGDOM CHALLENGE 2012: PLANK TWO"
ACTS 4:23-35
#3 in Series, "Kingdom Challenge 2012, Expanding the Base"

"Mary, Queen of Scots once said, 'I fear the prayers of John Knox more than I fear all the armies on the face of the earth.' That was probably the last time anyone feared the prayers of the church...The world does not fear the church—it barely tolerates it. Generally, the world perceives the church as no longer a player in world affairs, only an observer, a 'yes-man' for the pagan leaders of Western culture, a culture that has long since abandoned Christian presuppositions as a serious voice in shaping the values of modern society. The church is a quaint relic of the past that lends a certain charm to the neighborhood, a holdover from bygone days, big but harmless, like a beached whale."
—Ron Dunn

"Three hundred years after the beginning of Christ's public ministry, the church had brought the Roman Empire to its knees in worship of the Redeemer."
—Harold Lindsell

Acts 4:19-20 (NKJV) "19 But Peter and John answered and said to them, 'Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more than to God, you judge. 20 For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.'"

I. The Pattern of This Prayer (vv. 23-30)

A. The Prayer Was Corporate (vv. 23-24a)

Luke 24:49 (NKJV) "Behold, I send the Promise of My Father upon you; but tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high."

Acts 1:14a (NKJV) "These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication..."

Acts 2:42 (NKJV) "And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers."

Acts 12:5 (NKJV) "Peter was therefore kept in prison, but constant prayer was offered to God for him by the church."

Acts 13:2 (NKJV) "As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, 'Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.'"

B. The Prayer Was God Centered (vv. 24-28)

Acts 4:28 (AMP) "To carry out all that Your hand and Your will *and* purpose had predestined (predetermined) should occur."

Matthew 6:9 (NKJV) "In this manner, therefore, pray: Our Father in heaven, Hallowed be Your name."

C. The Prayer Called for the Supernatural (vv. 29-30)

"Prayer is primarily a wartime walkie-talkie for the mission of the church as it advances against the powers of darkness and unbelief. It is not surprising when prayer malfunctions when we try to make it a domestic intercom to call upstairs for more comforts in the den."
—John Piper

"The emphasis is on the hand of God at work in the life of the church, not the hand of man at work for God."

—Warren Weirsbe

II. The Product of This Prayer (vv. 31-35)

A. They Were Shaken (v. 31a)

Genesis 28:16 (NKJV) "Then Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, 'Surely the Lord is in this place, and I did not know *it*.'"

B. They Were Spirit-Filled (v. 31b)

C. They Were Sharing (vv. 32-35)

III. Practical Application

A. Make the Wednesday night intercessory prayer time the central prayer event of the week

B. Equip 300 people to pray a minimum of one hour a week in their home or in the prayer room for the staff, missionaries, ministries, and the non-confidential requests from the Sunday connection cards

C. Take time in the Sunday morning services for congregationally-involved prayer

D. Strengthen the quarterly corporate prayer meetings to involve 800 people from all of the First Baptist campuses and missions

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH, 1-22-12 AM
“KINGDOM CHALLENGE 2012: PLANK TWO”
ACTS 4:23-35

#3 in Series, “Kingdom Challenge 2012, Expanding the Base”

Plank Two: Focus on prayer to empower the leaders, the endeavors, and the ministries of the church.

Let me share a quote that I believe is generally true, but it deeply grieves me. “Mary, Queen of Scots once said, ‘I fear the prayers of John Knox more than I fear all the armies on the face of the earth.’ That was probably the last time anyone feared the prayers of the church... The world does not fear the church – it barely tolerates it. Generally, the world perceives the church as no longer a player in world affairs, only an observer, a ‘yes-man’ for the pagan leaders of Western culture, a culture that has long since abandoned Christian presuppositions as a serious voice in shaping the values of modern society. The church is a quaint relic of the past that lends a certain charm to the neighborhood, a holdover from bygone days, big but harmless, like a beached whale” [Ron Dunn, *Don’t Just Stand There, Pray Something*, Pages 215-216]. Let me contrast that painful depiction of the church today with another quote concerning the early church. “Three hundred years after the beginning of Christ’s public ministry, the church had brought the Roman Empire to its knees in worship of the Redeemer” [Harold Lindsell, *The New Paganism*, Page x]. I want to find out what that early church did. When you read through the book of Acts, you discover quickly that the key to their effectiveness was not a program, strong leadership, or even hard work; the key was prayer. There are more than 30 references to prayer in Acts, but here is something I did not discover until just a few years ago: almost all of those references are to corporate prayer – the church praying together. That is the key to this church that “...brought the Roman Empire to its knees in worship of the Redeemer”. Today, the church has little individual prayer among the members and has almost completely abandoned corporate prayer. Generally, the church now trusts in programs, gimmicks, and charismatic personalities that can make people feel good. Think about it: the church in the book of Acts prayed for days, preached a few minutes and 3,000 were saved. Today we pray a few minutes (maybe) and preach or carry out some program for days and days and see minimal if any lasting fruit.

Here is the presupposition of this second plank of Kingdom Challenge 2012: If our leaders, our endeavors and our ministries are to please God and bear fruit, then they must be permeated and undergirded by prayer. I am praying that God would make His church, this church a “House of Prayer” where prayer is looked upon as being as normal and as essential as breathing. Oh that this church would be known in heaven and in hell for our heart for prayer.

Let me set the context for the passage that we are going to look at today as an example of the type of prayer we are longing to characterize our church. The apostles had just had a head on collision with the Jewish leaders – the Sanhedrin. The Lord through Peter and John had healed a lame man (chapter 3). When a crowd gathered, Peter had preached Jesus to them. Infuriated, the Jewish leaders came and threw Peter and John into jail. The next day they brought them before the Sanhedrin and severely threatened them and forbade them to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. Peter and John responded in **Acts 4:19-20 (NKJV)** “¹⁹ But Peter and John answered and said to them, ‘Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more than to God, you judge. ²⁰ For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.’” When they were threatened further, they were released. They knew that the church was praying for them. Peter and John walked into the prayer meeting freed men. Wouldn’t you like to have been in that meeting? But when Peter and John came, they reported all the threats made against the believers. How would that infant church respond? Would they cower in fear and stop their proclamation of the gospel? Would they decide to back off and play it safe? No, they just resumed the prayer meeting. From their prayer, I want us to learn a lesson about powerful praying and also see the biblical basis of the second plank of Kingdom Challenge 2012.

I. The Pattern of This Prayer (V23-30)

A. The Prayer Was Corporate (V23-24a)

The word “corporate” is from the Latin word for body. It is the word we get “corpse” from. Corporate prayer is when the body of Christ comes together to pray. It is in contrast to individual prayer. Certainly individual prayer is not only important, it is vital. However, corporate prayer is also vital. The reason the church is powerless in the world system today is because we have neglected personal prayer (some studies show that the average church member prays less than 20 minutes a week) and almost totally abandoned corporate prayer. I don’t really understand it, but there is a dynamic that takes place when people pray together. I have experienced faith and hope in corporate prayer to a level I have never experienced it in private or “closet” prayer. Three of the action plans for this second plank of Kingdom Challenge 2012 have to do with corporate prayer.

When I began to really examine prayer in the book of Acts, I found that the church was born out of a corporate prayer meeting. In Acts 1:14 we see 120 disciples of Christ in an upper room waiting as Jesus had instructed them in **Luke 24:49 (NKJV)** “Behold, I send the Promise of My Father upon you; but tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high.” **Acts 1:14 (NKJV)** “These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication...” When the Holy Spirit came and the church was born, we see the people gathering together and praying – **Acts 2:42 (NKJV)** “And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.” When a crisis came to the church, they prayed. Peter was arrested and was going to be executed, we read in **Acts 12:5 (NKJV)** “Peter was therefore kept in prison, but constant prayer was offered to God for him by the church.” When the church was praying about whom to send out on mission, they prayed as a body in **Acts 13:2 (NKJV)** “As they ministered to the Lord [which involved praying] and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, ‘Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.’”

The pattern of prayer in the church of Acts is that it was corporate.

B. The Prayer Was God Centered (V24-28)

This is probably the most important thing that you are going to hear about prayer in this message. Powerful prayer is always centered on God. One of the greatest mistakes we make in personal and in corporate prayer is to jump right into our requests and needs before we focus on God and His attributes and His will. When we begin by focusing on our needs, we magnify our needs and minimize God and His will and His power. When they began by focusing on God it brought their problems with the Sanhedrin down to size! The Sanhedrin was powerful, but God is all powerful; the Sanhedrin could make threats, but they could not do one single thing that God did not allow them to do. There is a calmness in their prayer because they are trusting completely in the sovereignty of God. They focus first on His power in creation. He made everything that is. The Greek word for *Lord* in verse 24 is not the most common one. It means the one with absolute authority. The Sanhedrin had authority, but the Lord has authority over every earthly authority.

After focusing on creation and God’s ultimate authority, they began praying Scripture. The quote in verses 25-26 is from Psalm 2:1-2. They took comfort that all they had seen and experienced over the last few weeks was planned and even prophesied by God. They had observed the nations rage and the people plot and they had watched the rulers gathered against the Messiah. They took comfort in the fact that the cross was not an accident, but had been planned and determined by God from eternity past. **Acts 4:28 (AMP)** “To carry out all that Your hand and Your will *and* purpose had predestined (predetermined) should occur.” Reject any view of the cross that has man acting and God reacting. Jesus had never been more in control than He was on the cross. The cross was in the plan of God before man ever sinned in the garden. It was not an accident; it was inevitable.

This approach to starting prayer with focusing on the person of God is prevalent in Biblical prayers. We see it in the prayers of Jehoshaphat in 2 Chronicles 20:4-7 when he was faced with a vastly superior force that threatened to wipe out Jerusalem. We see it in the prayers of Nehemiah, and in the prayers of Daniel. Even in the model prayer, how did it begin? **Matthew 6:9 (NKJV)** “In this manner, therefore, pray: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name.”

C. The Prayer Called for the Supernatural (V29-30)

Nowhere do they pray to escape persecution or uncomfortable circumstances. They care only for the glory of God and the agenda of God. Our prayers are often so self-centered and wimpy. Analyze your prayers; do they focus on your comfort and deliverance from painful, uncomfortable circumstances or do they focus on the glory and agenda of God? What did they pray for? They prayed for supernatural boldness and supernatural power to accomplish God's supernatural agenda. Oh how the prosperity "gospel" people have totally missed it!! The early church prayed not for prosperity, for wealth, for possessions, for comfort – they prayed for boldness to speak God's Word for which most of them were eventually imprisoned, tortured or killed. Really, they were asking God for more of what had gotten them in trouble in the first place! Our prayers are often insipid and powerless because we hijack prayer for self-centered purposes. We use prayer as a means to make our life smooth, trial free and pain free. I have quoted this so many times, but it is so powerful that I want to quote it again. It is my favorite quote outside the Scriptures about prayer. John Piper in his book "Let the Nations Be Glad" said: "Prayer is primarily a wartime walkie-talkie for the mission of the church as it advances against the powers of darkness and unbelief. It is not surprising when prayer malfunctions when we try to make it a domestic intercom to call upstairs for more comforts in the den" [page 41]. In addition to boldness, they prayed for supernatural power in verse 30. Before the completion of the New Testament canon, God often authenticated the authority of his messengers through signs and wonders. I am not saying that He can no longer do signs or wonders, but the authentication of our message today is when it agrees with the authoritative completed Scriptures. They were not asking for miracles to draw big crowds, but to glorify God by seeing people come into the kingdom. I like Warren Weirsbe's summary of verse 30: "The emphasis is on the hand of God at work in the life of the church, not the hand of man at work for God" [Weirsbe Commentary, Page 419]. Today, we pray for the supernatural power of God to be manifest in the conviction of sin and the opening of spiritually blind eyes that lost people could savingly believe the gospel.

II. The Product of This Prayer (V31-35)

When the body of Christ prayed together in faith, some amazing things happened.

A. They Were Shaken (V31a)

It is as if God said "Amen" to their prayer with an earthquake! I believe that there was a literal shaking, but the shaking demonstrated God's manifest presence among them. This was God affirming that He heard and was answering their prayer. We know that God is omnipresent, but sometimes He sovereignly chooses to manifest His presence among His people. Here He did it by shaking the place where they were praying. Jacob said in **Genesis 28:16 (NKJV)** "Surely the Lord is in this place, and I did not know *it*." That could be the theme of many prayer meetings and worship services I've been it. God here chose to manifest His presence. I believe that when the body of Christ is praying in unity, focused on God and His agenda and His glory, we will sense His presence and people who come into this place will sense it. I've never experienced a literal shaking, but I have definitely experienced His manifest presence and I long for it every Sunday in this place.

B. They Were Spirit Filled (V31b)

Notice that they didn't even pray for the filling of the Holy Spirit. They get serious about God's glory and God's agenda and God fills them because He knows that people who are consumed with glorifying Him will honor Him and He entrusts the filling of the Spirit to them. There is certainly nothing wrong with praying for the filling of the Holy Spirit. Today, the problem is that all too often people are not asking for the filling of the Spirit so that they will be empowered to serve him, obey Him, and speak His word with boldness. They desire it to feel good and have great experiences – "the thrill of the fill" as Ron Dunn calls it. The filling of the Holy Spirit is not about getting an experience; it is about giving the Spirit of God total control and seeing Him give boldness and power to proclaim His word and stay on the agenda that He has given us even if we face persecution, rejection, and ridicule. The word "boldness" has three shades of meaning. First, it means courage to speak. I have seen God give this to some of the most timid people! Second, it has the idea of speaking with clarity. It is the ability to make clear and plain the

message of the gospel. Third, it means confidence in what we speak. We are bold because we know that the Holy Spirit is driving home and affirming what we are speaking. We are confident that God's Word will not return void even when we see no visible results.

C. They Were Sharing (V32-35)

The key phrase is in the last part of **Acts 4:33b (NKJV)** "...and great grace was upon them all." How did this great grace move them? There was unity (V32 "one heart and one soul"). When God's people pray together, there will be an unforced unity brought about by the filling of the Holy Spirit. Not only was there unity, there was unforced generosity. There were thousands of people in Jerusalem who were from out of town for Pentecost and many who came to Christ were among these travelers. They needed to be disciplined before being sent back home and that meant the local believers needed to meet their needs. God's great grace caused them to see that it all belonged to God and they were obedient to give sacrificially to meet the genuine needs of other believers. A church that prays will never suffer need for fulfilling God's agenda. **Acts 4:34a (ESV)** "There was not a needy person among them..."

III. Practical Application

Allow me to share some of the action plans to accomplish this plank of the Kingdom Challenge. There will probably be more as the year goes along.

- A. Make the Wednesday night intercessory prayer time the central prayer event of the week
- B. Equip 300 people to pray a minimum of one hour a week in their home or in the prayer room for the staff, missionaries, ministries, and the non-confidential requests from the Sunday connection cards.
- C. Take time in the Sunday morning services for congregationally involved prayer.
- D. Strengthen the quarterly corporate prayer meetings to involve 800 people from all of the First Baptist Campuses and missions.

CONCLUSION

A couple of weeks ago in our Wednesday night intercessory prayer time we prayed for what the saints of many years ago called "a spirit of prayer". Here is what they meant by that. It was a prayer for God to give such a burden to His people to pray and seek His face that they could not resist praying. Prayer is God's chosen means to His sovereign ends. When we pray, we are cooperating with God in the accomplishment of His chosen ends – His work on earth. May God give us a spirit of prayer. (2860)