

Resources for Churches...

Responding to the Coronavirus

Praying with Power



The Acts of the Sent Ones - Acts 4: 23-31

Peter and John have been freed from jail and tell the believers everything that has happened. No doubt they said more than is reported to us here, but it is interesting to note what they said and what they didn't. I have been in church gatherings when recent events have been shared and the emphasis has been on the harshness of the experience, or the injustice of what has happened, or the fear for the future. And the response of at least some of the church has been 'Phew. That was a close shave. We'd better not do that again.' But here we have none of that. Their boldness was strengthened, not dampened. Their faith was encouraged, not discouraged. They had seen God at work and were full of praise for it (v21).

Their immediate response was to pray together. Their prayer could have been for God to take the danger away, for the threat to their lives to be removed and that there would be no more suffering or persecution. But no. Their focus was on God and his purposes and when they get to the point of praying for themselves, it is in the light of these. We waver and worry when we allow our circumstances to seem bigger than God. When we focus on how far greater God is than anything - past, present, future, locally, nationally, globally and throughout the universe, then we are able to see our particular situation in a different perspective. Sometimes we can find difficulty in putting that into words, and that is where quoting scripture comes in. Just as we noticed on the Day of Pentecost Peter being able to bring to mind relevant verses which illuminated and made sense of the events of that day, so here again we find him doing the same. Similar words can be found in places such as Exodus 20:11 and Nehemiah 9:6, and then he quotes Psalm 2:1-2 with its reminders of Jesus' own suffering at the hands of those in authority.

In the light of this reality, Peter prays not for protection but for boldness; not for their circumstances to change but for courage in them. They were not to hide away but to go out; not to keep silent but to speak up (v20); not to keep themselves to themselves but to reach out and enable God to work powerfully through them. His prayer is for God's Spirit to enable them to continue the ministry of Jesus - their speaking his word and doing what he did: healing people, setting them free and other acts displaying his power. And for them to do it not tentatively or half-heartedly, but courageously and obviously. His prayers were immediately answered - everyone was filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke boldly.

1. Think about your current circumstances and recent experiences. What has been your response, and have you been able to see God at work through them? Ask God to show you more of how he has been at work. Draw strength and courage from that.
2. Our prayers are always enlarged by praying in the light of who God is. Allowing the Holy Spirit to bring to mind words from the Bible as we pray enables us to do this so much more profoundly than we are able to do by ourselves. Different scriptures hold special significance for us at different times, depending on our circumstances. Spend some time thinking about which verses of scripture are a particular encouragement for your prayers in the things you are facing; words which enable you to pray from a position of faith and trust, not fear. Write them down so you have them to draw on in the next few months.
3. Now think about your circumstances - in what way do you feel under threat or fearful? What makes you want to hide away rather than being out and about confidently talking about Jesus and the help he can be at this time, and doing the things he did? Now pray, using the words of one of your chosen bible verses, allowing the perspective of God's greatness that they give and the faith they inspire to enable you to pray expectantly for boldness and for a fresh filling of God's Spirit.
4. Consider what difference it will make to how you live this week that God has called you to continue the ministry of Jesus where you are.
5. We are not in this alone. Ask a friend or group of friends to pray for you and pray for them also so that the whole church to which you belong will be filled in the same way as these first Christians were.