



Persecution and Prayer

Acts 4:23-31

1. Persecution Drives Us to Prayer (verses 23-24).
2. Prayer Guides Us in Persecution (verses 24-28).
3. Prayer Emboldens Us for Persecution (29-31).

Most of us don't often think about the country of Sri Lanka. It's a small island nation in the Indian Ocean, less than 20 miles off the south-eastern coast of India. We don't think about it because chances are, we don't know anybody there. Further, its political events have no consequence to us in the United States.

In recent decades, the people of Sri Lanka have suffered greatly. They fought a civil war in the nation for more than 25 years. The war began in 1983 and finally ended in 2009. It was one of the longest running civil wars in Asia's history. By comparison, the civil war in our country lasted but 4 years. We still feel its devastation today.

Can you imagine a civil war for 25 years? Can you imagine the suffering of the people? With estimates of up to 100,000 people killed during the course of the war in a country whose population is around 20 million people, that's a significant amount of carnage in the country. Can you imagine the economic effects of this? Can you imagine the devastation to the infrastructure of the nation? And the poverty that it brings? Furthermore, during these times, "The Sri Lankan government forces have also been accused of human rights abuses, ... including arbitrary detentions, and forced disappearances."^[1] It doesn't take much imagination how much the suffering of this sort brought upon the people of Sri Lanka.

This war didn't come out of nowhere. Tensions and outbursts had been brewing for decades before the war broke out. Sri Lanka gained their independence from Britain in 1948. There has always been an ethnic struggle on the island. Today, about 80% of the people in Sri Lanka are Sinhalese. While about 10% are Tamils. There has been massive discrimination against the minority group. Schooling options are limited. They are discriminated against when trying to secure a job. This has caused massive economic oppression and massive resentment from the minority. Since 1948, the minority culture has risen up in revolt continually since 1948. But in 1983, the rising revolts came to a head, bring on decades of war in the island.

I share all of this to give us perspective. Our country is facing some trying times. Not on a scale of what they are facing in Sri Lanka, but certainly more that we are used to. Ten days ago, there was an assault upon our nation's Capitol, which left five people dead. Over a hundred people have been arrested and charged with federal crimes since that day. A few days ago, on Wednesday, our president was impeached for the second time. Regardless of your political views, this is not good. Furthermore, our country is divided. We have racial tensions in our country. We are living in trying times. Not quite like Sri Lanka has experienced. But along the same lines, political division and racial division.

In our trouble, there is no better text for us to look at this morning than our next passage in the book of Acts, Acts 4:23-31. So, if you haven't opened your Bibles, I invite you to do so now to Acts, chapter 4.

As you are doing so, let me tell you about Ajith Fernando. He was the national director of Youth for Christ in Sri Lanka for 35 years. He has given his heart to the people of Sri Lanka who have faced such difficult times for decades. He was in Sri Lanka, in 1983 when the uprising reached its climax, when tensions were at their highest and civil war was imminent. After the worst riot the country ever experienced, the first message that he preached came right from our text: Acts 4:23-31. Of this text, Fernando wrote in 1998 (still during the crisis in Sri Lanka), "In the past few years this passage more than any other text in the Bible has sustained me and given me the courage to persevere."^[2] So, with the crisis in our country today, we are in the right place. This text will ground us in the sovereignty of God. This text will prepare us for hardship.

Now, before I read, I want to catch you up on the context. Acts, chapter 3 tells the story of a lame beggar man, who was forty years old and had never walked until he encountered Peter. He asked Peter for money. But Peter gave him something better. Peter said, "I have no silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk!" (Acts 3:6). The lame man rose up and walked and leapt about and praised God (Acts 3:8). When the people saw it, they "were filled with wonder and amazement" (Acts 3:10). This gave Peter an opportunity to preach the gospel to those who witnessed the miracle. His sermon is recorded in chapter 3.

The crux of the sermon begins in verse 14, ...

Acts 3:14-15

But you denied the Holy and Righteous One, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, and you killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead. To this we are witnesses.

Peter's application was clear:

Acts 3:19-20

Repent therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out, that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus,

This sermon was only the beginning. Peter and John continued teaching in the temple about Jesus the rest of the evening. This irked the religious leaders, especially because they were “proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead” (Acts 4:2). The religious leaders arrested them and placed them in jail for the night (Acts 4:3). The next day they brought them in for questioning (Acts 4:5). When asked about the power behind the miracle, Peter gave the testimony that it was by the name of Jesus that the man was healed. Peter added, “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” (Acts 4:12).

At this point, the counsel dismissed everyone and discussed what it is that they might do. They were in a quandary. The miracle was undeniable. They didn’t like the preaching of these uneducated, common men. But they saw their boldness and recognized that they had been with Jesus (verse 13). They didn’t know what to do. So they “charged them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus” (Acts 4:18). Then, they let them go. Essentially, they gave them a slap on the wrist. And now, we pick it up in verse 23, ...

Acts 4:23-31

When they were released, they went to their friends and reported what the chief priests and the elders had said to them. 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, 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?
The kings of the earth set themselves,
and the rulers were gathered together,
against the Lord and against his Anointed’—

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

My message this morning is entitled, “Persecution and Prayer,” because that’s what we see in our text. The “persecution” is the context. The “prayer” is the action. These two things are related, as we see in our first point.

1. Persecution Drives Us to Prayer (verses 23-24)

That’s what we see here. We see the first wave of persecution come upon the church. After their release, they go instantly to prayer. They understood how it all could have been so much worse. They could have been found guilty, and taken to Pilate. Remember, Pilate was still in power. He had turned over Jesus to be crucified only a few months earlier. Instead, they were released. When they reported what happened, the church turned to prayer.

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. And when they heard it, they lifted their voices together to God and [they prayed].

This is the natural response of the people of God. You see it over and over and over again in the Bible, particularly in the Psalms. David (who wrote many Psalms) often experienced persecution from others. His enemies are coming up against him. When this happens, he turns to God in prayer. Consider the following examples (they aren’t hard to find).

In Psalm 3, David cries out to the LORD.

Psalm 3:1-2

O LORD, how many are my foes!
Many are rising up against me;
many are saying of my soul,
there is no salvation for him in God.

David describes how his enemies are coming against him. They are mocking him, telling him that it is useless for him to trust in the LORD. And so, David prays.

Psalm 3:7-8

Arise, O LORD!
Save me, O my God!
For you strike all my enemies on the cheek;
you break the teeth of the wicked.
Salvation belongs to the LORD!
your blessing be upon your people!

Another example comes in Psalm 7.

Psalm 7:1-2

O LORD my God, in you do I take refuge;
Save me from all my pursuers and deliver me,
lest like a lion they tear my soul apart,
rending it in pieces, with none to deliver.

David has people pursuing him to destroy him. David is fearful that they might tear him apart, like a lion coming upon his prey. And so, he prays, "Save me!" Or, how about Psalm 13?

Psalm 13:2-4

... How long shall my enemy be exalted over me?
Consider and answer me, O LORD my God'
light up my eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death,
lest my enemy say, "I have prevailed over him."
lest my foes rejoice because I am shaken.

David has his enemies, who are prevailing. But David is praying. These are but a few of dozens and dozens of examples that could be pulled from the Psalms. The same pattern is seen in Moses. When the people of Egypt pursued them in the wilderness, Moses turned to the LORD. When the people of Israel rose up against him, Moses turned to the LORD.

The same is true of the prophets. When Jeremiah was in trouble, he turned to the LORD. When Elijah was in trouble, he turned to the LORD. When Habakkuk was in trouble, he turned to the LORD. Over and over and over again, you see this pattern in the Scriptures. God's people are persecuted. It causes them to turn to prayer. It's how it always is.

This is my first point, "Persecution Drives Us to Prayer." Now, in our day and age, we don't face much persecution. In fact, we hardly face any persecution. Yet, the principle remains. Just replace "Persecution" with "Problems." You could easily entitle my first point, "Problems Drive Us to Prayer." When problems are too big for us, we turn to the Lord!

You know that this is about. When someone is diagnosed with cancer, the cry goes out for prayer. When someone is in a car accident, the cry goes out for prayer. When some child goes missing, the cry goes out for prayer. When some disaster strikes, like an earthquake or flood, the cry goes out for prayer.

This is why this passage is good for us this morning, because the problem we face in our country today are too large for us. We must pray. This is why Ajith Fernando has found this passage to be so helpful to him. His country is going through major problems! He knows that the problems are much too large for him.

This is indicative of most people. I remember attending a church on the Sunday after 9-11, when the terrorists flew airplanes into the World Trade Center. The place was packed! All of us in our nation knew that our nation was facing perilous times. So, Christians and non-Christians alike turned to God (at least temporarily).

Turning to God when trouble comes is especially indicative of believers in Jesus Christ. When trouble comes upon us, we turn to the Lord, because we know that the problems are bigger than us. We know that we need help that is beyond us! The good news is this: we have such a help! The LORD is our help. He hears our prayers. So, I would encourage you to turn to the Lord in your troubles.

Later in Acts, we will see this. In Acts 12, Peter again will find himself in prison under the threat of death. Herod had just ordered the death of James (Acts 12:2), which brought approval from Herod by the Jews. We find the church at that moment, organizing a prayer meeting at Mary's house. I love the way that Luke describes the event: "So Peter was kept in prison, but earnest prayer for him was made to God by the church" (Acts 12:5). They made "earnest prayer" because they had "earnest problems." Perhaps this helps to explain why we, as a church, don't often experience "earnest prayer." Because we don't have "earnest problems." We aren't facing persecution in our day. (Oh, ... maybe a little?).

Your prayer life may be an indication of the suffering in your life. If you are lacking in your prayer life, it just may be due to the relative lack of problems in your life. All may be well with you. But do not be deceived. Problems will come in your life. When they do, turn to the Lord. Better yet, turn to the Lord before the problems come, lest your cries to him fall on deaf ears.

Well, let's look at their prayer. It comes in verse 24-30. We have seen how "(1) Persecution Drives Us to Prayer." We see now that ...

2. Prayer Guides Us in Persecution (verses 24-28).

Acts 4:24

And when they heard it, they lifted their voices together to God and [prayed]

Notice first of all, how corporate the prayer is in Acts 4. There is a place for praying alone. Jesus said, "When you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret" (Matthew 6:6). This, certainly, is where the majority of our prayer takes place. But there is also a place for corporate prayer, that is, praying together with others.

That's what we see here in verse 24, "they lifted their voices together to God." We don't know exactly what took place. "Their voices" means that all were involved. Yet, we read here in their prayer that they all said the same thing. It's not that they had it memorized (or written out to say it in union). I like what J. A. Alexander said, "one person prayed and 'the whole company gave audible assent' to what was said." [\[3\]](#)

In other words, as people prayed, the congregation gave their “Amen!” to the prayer. I would encourage the practice here at Rock Valley Bible Church. When others are praying, give your “audible assent.” Let them know that you agree and are praying with them.

But this goes back to having a group to pray with. Do you have such a group? I had a conversation with a retired pastor this week. He retired last February (11 months ago) and moved here to Rockford because his son lives here and the houses are cheap. I asked about his transition to retirement. He said that one of the difficult things is that he arrived here in town just one month before COVID-19 hit. So, it has been difficult for him to really get involved in the lives of others because we are so isolated now. He said that he doesn't really have this group of people to pray with here in Rockford. Surely it will come. It's just that now, he feels a bit alone. Do you have such a group to pray with? I would encourage you to find one like they had in the early church.

Well, what did they pray? They began with ...

1. The Sovereignty of God

Acts 4:24

“Sovereign Lord, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them, ...”

This is really, where all prayer should begin. With the reality that the Lord is governing our universe. Isn't this why we pray in the first place? We pray because we are not sufficient in ourselves to solve our problems. We pray because we need the help of someone greater than ourselves! We should begin our prayers by reminding ourselves of the power of the one to whom we pray. Isn't this what Jesus meant, when he said, “Pray like this: ‘Our Father in heaven, hallowed be thy name.’”

In other words, “God, who reigns in heaven! May your name be holy and revered! because, you ‘made the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them. And what you created, you rule and reign.’” This reminder tells us that there is nothing too difficult to the Lord, because there is nothing outside the control of our sovereign God! (We will see later how this fact was central to their prayer.)

Well, after beginning with the sovereignty of God, the early church continues on to ...

2. The Scriptures

Acts 4:25-26

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

This is a quote from Psalm 2, in which David pictures the political turmoil that is all around him. You have Gentiles raging! You have people plotting! You have kings and rulers using all of their earthly authority to resist the Lord and his Anointed.

We have here the first two verses of Psalm 2. Let me continue in what Psalm 2 says in verse 3. This is what the kings and rulers and people are saying about the Lord and his Anointed:

Psalm 2:3

“Let us burst their bonds apart
and cast away their cords from us.”

In other words, they are trying to rid themselves of their accountability to the Lord. This is always how it has been in this world. Children rebel against parents. People rebel against their governmental authorities. In the case of those in ultimate power, they rage against the Lord. This is because we all want to be our own kings. In verse 3 they are expressing their desire to get out from the bondage of the Lord's constraints in their lives. Continuing on in Psalm 2, we see exactly how successful they are.

Psalm 2:4

He who sits in the heavens laughs;
the Lord holds them in derision.

As much as people try to resist the Lord, they have no chance. It's like the little boy trying to beat the heavyweight champ, like Mohamed Ali or Mike Tyson. It's like the little girl trying to beat Michael Jordan one-on-one. No, it's not like any of those examples. It's more like an ant taking on an elephant! No, it's more than that. In fact, all comparisons and similes trying to illustrate what it is like when nations rage against the Lord will fail. Because, as Isaiah says, ...

Isaiah 40:15, 17

Behold, the nations are like a drop from a bucket,
and are accounted as the dust on the scales. ...
All the nations are as nothing before him,
they are accounted by him as less than nothing and emptiness.

That's why God laughs (Psalm 2:4). He laughs because it is futile to thwart the plan of the LORD. Psalm 2 continues, ...

Psalm 2:5-6

Then he will speak to them in his wrath,
and terrify them in his fury, saying,
“As for me, I have set my King
on Zion, my holy hill.”

Psalms 2 is all about God's installation of the Messiah on the throne. He will do it. He will get it done. That's why the early church went to this passage. They saw its fulfillment in their day. What David prophesied of in the future, these people in Jerusalem saw carried out in their time in verses 27 and 28.

This begins the next section of their prayer. The prayer began with (1) the Sovereignty of God. It continued to (2) the Scriptures. Next, it addressed, ...

3. The Situation

Acts 4:27-28

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, to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place.

I love how precise these verses are. Psalm 2 spoke of the raging rulers and kings. It spoke of the Gentiles and the peoples. Verse 27 identifies them, one by one. Herod was a king. Pontius Pilate was a ruler. The Romans were the Gentiles. Annas and Caiaphas led the people of Israel in their rebellion against Jesus, the anointed one.

Though the nations raged, God still accomplished his plan. His plan (Psalm 2:6), was to set his King upon Zion. That's exactly what he did! He established Jesus as king and ruler of the ends of the earth. And there will come a day when he takes possession of it! Listen to Psalm 2:8-9.

Psalm 2:8-9

Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage,
and the ends of the earth your possession.
You shall break them with a rod of iron
and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel.”

This is the posture of Jesus. He is waiting until the day when “his enemies are made a footstool for his feet” (Acts 2:35; Psalm 110:1). In that day, he will take full control of this universe. This is why we need to bow to “kiss the Son” (Psalm 2:12) and “take refuge in him” (Psalm 2:12).

A crucified Messiah was God's plan all along. This was God's “predestined” plan (verse 28). God predestined all of the events surrounding the crucifixion. He predestined that Jesus would be betrayed by Judas. Jesus said, “The Scripture will be fulfilled, ‘He who ate my bread has lifted his heel against me’” (John 13:18; Psalm 41:9). God predestined that Jesus would be abandoned by his disciples. Jesus said, “You will all fall away because of me this night. For it is written, ‘I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered’” (Matthew 26:31; Zechariah 13:7). God predestined that the rulers of Israel would reject their Messiah. God predestined that Herod and Pontius Pilate would hand him over for crucifixion. Jesus said, “See, we are going up to Jerusalem. And the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn him to death and deliver him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified, and he will be raised on the third day” (Matthew 20:18-19). All of this didn't just “happen.” It was according to God's “plan.” It was all in accordance with God's “predestined plan.”

This ought to be great comfort for all of you. The current tumultuous events in the life of our nation recent is not outside of God's control. Indeed, they are exactly what he “predestined” to take place. It's no accident that Donald Trump was our president the last four years. It is no accident that Joe Biden will be our president over the next four years. COVID-19 is no accident. The siege on our Capitol is no accident. This gives us great comfort for days ahead, knowing that history is His-story. God has written it out. We get to live it.

Now, at this moment, I want to point out that some will object philosophically to what this all means that God has “predestined” events on the earth. The biggest objection comes in the area of responsibility. “If God predestines, then we cannot be accountable for our actions.” I would say, “Don't buy the argument.” Because, right here in Acts 4, though the early church talked of God's “predestined plan,” they never held Herod or Pontius Pilate or the Jews or the Gentiles as guiltless. In fact, they were guilty of their actions. Remember Acts 2:36? Peter told them, “Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.” They were cut to the heart, because they were guilty. Further, it took the shedding of the blood of Christ to forgive them. This very shedding that came about as a result of God's “predestined plan.”

You can get into your philosophical conundrums all you like. But let me warn you, you will never ultimately understand. We cannot understand the ways of God. They are shrouded in the mysteries of God. We simply know that God is sovereign over all things. Further, he holds us responsible for our actions. How he does this is beyond us. So, in your philosophical wrestling with these matters, don't deny the sovereignty of God over all things, and don't deny that man is responsible for his actions. If you do either, you are contradicting the Scriptures.

Finally (in verse 29), the church gets to their ...

4. The Supplication.

It's where they make their requests. This pattern of prayer is good for us to follow. Too often, when we pray, we jump right into our requests. We just start asking God for things, rather than reminding ourselves who God is and what God has said. So, I would encourage you in your prayers to follow this pattern in Acts 4. Begin by acknowledging the (1) **Sovereignty** of God. Then, bring to mind a portion of the (2)

Scriptures. Then speak to God of your (3) **Situation** that is leading you to prayer. And then, and only then, make your (4) **Supplications**.

This pattern is similar to the pattern of the Lord's prayer (Matthew 6:9-13). Jesus instructs us to concern ourselves first with the sovereignty of God (hallowed be Thy name). This is followed by some theological affirmations about the Scriptural promise of the kingdom of God (Thy kingdom come). It brings us to our situation and the need for God's will in our lives. Finally, it ends with a few supplications (for bread and forgiveness). The early church simply followed the pattern that Jesus established. Walking down this path will have bearing upon what you pray for.

Now, if you were in the early church, what would you pray for? What would your requests be? My prayer would go something like this, "God, we are thankful that the rulers have let Peter and John go free. We pray that they might continue to do so. We don't want trouble. We want to speak about Jesus, openly, and freely, without opposition."

But that's not their prayer. Look what they asked for, ...

Acts 4:29-30

And now, Lord, look upon their threats and grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness, while you stretch out your hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of your holy servant Jesus."

They asked two things of the Lord. Look upon their threats. Grant us boldness, while you act. In other words, ...

3. Prayer Emboldens Us for Persecution (29-31).

Their boldness brought on their persecution. Now they are praying for more boldness, which will certainly bring on more persecution. They weren't praying for the persecution to go away. They were praying for boldness in (and through) the persecution.

Their first request was for acknowledgment. They wanted God to acknowledge and notice with their threats.

Acts 4:29

And now, Lord, look upon their threats.

All that they were asking of God was acknowledgement. This was not a prayer for judgment. This was not a prayer for vengeance or destruction. They are not calling fire down from heaven upon the Sanhedrin as the disciples wanted to do during the days of Jesus (Luke 9:54). No, none of that. This was simply a prayer for God to be aware. "Lord, you know about their threats. You know about the hearts behind their threats. You know all about that. You know that we must obey God rather than men." We are simply requesting that your will be done.

The second request is for boldness.

Acts 4:29

... grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness,

I love how this is phrased. The core request is this: "Let us speak your word boldly." But they were already speaking the word of God with boldness (Acts 4:13). So, they asked that God would strengthen them "to continue to speak" boldly. Further, they weren't simply asking for little boldness. Rather, they were asking for "all boldness." You won't be bold later if you aren't bold now. Can you pray this? Can you pray for continued boldness?

I know that there are many people who want to be missionaries. They have this romantic notion that compels them to go to Sri Lanka and preach about Christ and spread the word of God in a foreign land. And yet, here at home, they are not talking about Jesus at all. If they don't speak to others about Jesus at home, they will not do so on a foreign land. Now, the idea here in verse 29 is that they wanted to "continue" to speak with boldness. I would encourage you to pray that prayer by being bold now.

I saw a very funny example of that two weeks ago. As I told you last week, we were gone in Arizona, but a good friend of our children, Jake, had his wisdom teeth taken out. My kids took care of him through the process of dropping him off and picking him up. Perhaps you have seen what people are doing nowadays with their friends who undergo anesthesia. The video was quite humorous. He was super-concerned about the instructions that the nurse left with them. He asked about it over and over again, "Did you get the instructions? Did you get the instructions?"

One of the things that Jake said in the car with gauze in his mouth and a bit of blood drooling down his face was this: "I shared the gospel! I shared the gospel with the girl. I told her to come and believe in Jesus. I told her to trust in Jesus." One of our children, then who was caring for Jake asked him, "What did she say?" He said, "That's nice." Then there was a lull in the conversation.

If you are bold with the gospel while under anesthesia, it doesn't just happen. It means that you have been bold before. And if you know Jake, you know that he has definitely been bold in his witness for Jesus. He was bold with his high school football team and with his friends. Now in college, he has been bold with the students he serves as an R. A. of a dorm.

We ought to be bold today, so that when we are under anesthesia, we will be bold with the gospel. This is the idea of "continuing" to speak the word of God with all boldness.

Then, we see the topic of miracles addressed in verse 30. It's not praying for miracle. It's simply assuming that the miracles will take place, which they did in the first century church. Here is what they prayed, ...

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."

These people had seen and experience miracles. They saw the miracle of Pentecost. They saw the miracle of this lame man being healed completely. They, then, were trusting that God would work miracles in their lives, so that they have an opportunity to preach. As we saw last week, it's not the miracles that will persuade any to believe. Rather, these miracles will come and give them opportunities to preach.

Indeed, we see the miraculous hand of God at work through the apostles. "Now many signs and wonders were regularly done among the people by the hands of the apostles" (Acts 5:12).

The miracles were happening regularly. We are talking about miracles of undeniable sorts, like lame people walking, or blind people seeing, or dead people being raised from the dead. These are the sorts of miracles that happened in Bible times. These are the sorts of miracles that the disciples assumed would take place. These miracles, then, gave opportunities for them to be bold with the gospel.

Then, we see the answer to their prayer answered in verse 31.

Acts 4:31

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.

I don't know exactly what this means. I guess it means some sort of confirmation from God through his shaking of the place. Now, this isn't always how God works. He doesn't always shake the ground in answer to prayer. With Elijah, it was a still, small voice (1 Kings 19:11-13). Many times we don't even know that God answered our prayer until years later. But here in Acts, we see God responding quickly.

We see that they were then filled with the Holy Spirit. This is different than Pentecost. Pentecost empowered them to speak in languages unknown to them. This is a filling for empowerment to speak with boldness. We saw Peter filled with the Holy Spirit in Acts 4:8, after which he was empowered to preach boldly to the Sanhedrin. And that's exactly what we see here. They are filled with the Holy Spirit and they continued to speak with boldness.

Their boldness brought on persecution. The persecution they faced led them to prayer. They requested that God would empower them to continue in their boldness that their kingdom might go forth. I would simply encourage you along the same lines. Pray for boldness. Be bold.

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on January 17, 2021 by Steve Brandon.

For more information see www.rockvalleybiblechurch.org.

[1] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sri_Lankan_Civil_War.

[2] Ajith Fernando, NIV Application Commentary, p. 173.

[3] J. A. Alexander, quoted by Ajith Fernando, p. 168.