

Life: When opposition strikes

November 12, 2015

The Bible Studies for Life lesson for Nov. 29 focuses on Acts 4:23-31.

The setting

The events in Acts 4:23-31 began in Acts 3:1. Peter and John were on their way to the temple when a lame man asked for alms. Since they had no money, Peter simply told the man in the name of Jesus to stand up. And he did!

What a commotion that caused. Certainly, those who traveled often to the temple would have known this man and seen him asking for alms on a regular basis. They knew he could not stand, let alone walk. Seeing this man suddenly walking around would have drawn a good deal of attention. Those who noticed included the overseers of the temple, the priests, Sadducees and the captain of the temple guard. For them, commotion and temple never should be combined. It seems they expected God not to show up in worship, and didn't accept anyone who claimed to have had such a divine experience.

Since it was late in the day, Peter and John were detained for the night in the temple jail. The next day, the two disciples faced Annas, Caiaphas and other religious leaders. In other words, Peter and John were in the hands of the very people who executed Jesus. They were in a serious situation.

When asked to give an account as to what happened, Peter and John took the opportunity to tell how Jesus healed the man—the same Jesus who they had crucified and now was raised from the dead. They further declared only in the name of Jesus can anyone be saved.

The Jewish leaders did not like what they heard, but they believed Peter

and John had performed a miraculous sign gaining them popularity among the people of Jerusalem. They could do nothing more to the two disciples other than to tell them to speak no more in the name of Jesus. Peter simply replied he would obey God over any human attempt to silence them about Jesus.

Place your confidence in the sovereign God Acts (4:23-28)

Peter and John were released from their captivity at the temple and made their way back to the other disciples and related what they experienced.

Upon hearing their report, the believers gave a prayer of praise to God. They acknowledged him as the maker of the universe and as the one who spoke through David in Scripture. Specifically, they recounted the teaching from Psalm 2:1-2 which states the leaders of the world would oppose the messiah. They saw a fulfillment of this passage in what happened to Peter and John. They proceeded to acknowledge how Herod and Pilate each plotted to execute Jesus, all done under God's sovereignty.

The disciples began praising God in general. He created everything. They moved onto acknowledging how God's Spirit spoke through David in Scripture, and the specific Scripture mentioned addressed their current situation. Then, they recalled how God worked in the recent events surrounding Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection. They celebrated God for all he was doing.

Believers place their confidence in God by virtue of the fact they are believers. Too many believers have only a general idea about their confidence in God. This generalized confidence may be revealed in generalized prayers. Such prayers may reveal an area for growth in a believer's faith.

Where is your confidence in God? Your prayers will reveal how you trust God and how much you trust him. The early church fully trusted God and

could succinctly state the ways in which they trusted him. They knew the reasons for trusting God, and they could point to specific acts that proved God's trustworthiness. What do you trust God to do in your life today?

Ask God for boldness (Acts 4:29-31)

The prayer continued with a time of petition. The church recognized the reality of the threat against their evangelistic work and asked for the ability to speak God's word with boldness. To further their evangelism, they asked God to heal and perform signs and wonders through the name of Jesus. The entire prayer was outward-focused.

God responded to the prayer quickly. The place where they were meeting was shaken, and everyone was filled or renewed with the Holy Spirit. Then, they were able to speak God's word with boldness. The answer to the prayer was immediate and lasting.

The call to follow Jesus requires obedience, bold obedience. There will be times when opposition arises, so obedience must be bold in order to stand firm. This passage suggests two ways God strengthens his followers.

First, the Lord is sovereign (Acts 4:24). He knows everything that is happening. Whatever hardships believers face have gone through God's sifter. He knows how to help in any and every circumstance to bring about stronger disciples.

Next, God fosters fellowship among believers. Peter and John did not face their opposition alone. Other disciples were praying for them, and when they were reunited with one another, they celebrated their deliverance by the hand of God.

A Christian who regularly participates in a local church is better able to withstand opposition to their obedience to God. The local community of faith prays with one another, encourages one another, educates one

another and worships together.