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**The Secret of True Power**  
**Acts 4:23-31**

Most of us understand that it is through pain that we grow, we get to experience and appreciate things with a perspective we hadn't realized before. Hiking up to the top of Mt. St. Helens is 7 hours of pain but at the top is an incredible view and a great ride down. Pumping iron in the gym is a whole lot of pain as the muscles scream in rebellion for mercy. But the pain must come to produce the strength that we desire. Running up dead mans hill on the third mile at 6:30 in the morning with the cold rain coming down is a whole lot of pain. You start asking yourself, what am I doing here? Every muscle in my body is screaming at me to stop. But we want the endurance, strength and energy we know that a half hour pain will bring us the rest of the day. We study hard and slug through the pain of school because we want the reward of a good grade, that leads to a good college or scholarships and landing a good job. We understand that at times we must push hard to finish a project at work...but we understand that sometimes that's what it takes to enjoy the benefits of a job well done. We know the maxim No pain, No gain. In fact we live it out in many areas of our life...

So why then...if we know that strength, endurance, growth, comes through pain, opposition, suffering, tearing down from within and without. Why Have we so completely swallowed the idea that our spiritual life will be that much different? Have we been so force fed a message of self-help easy believism turn to God and life will be string of green lights and all the socks will match up from the laundry of life? For some reason we have come to expect that if god is really up then His job is to keep our lives mostly pain free, hurt free, crisis free and persecution free and some of us wouldn't even mind if God kept our lives fat free.

But, the God I have studied in the Bible and come to understand in my own life is a God who loves me far too deeply, and knows me far too well that he would simply exist to so that I could have a nicer home, or win a few more baseball games, or find a parking spot in downtown Portland. God is not a Divine genie that simply caters to our comfort. No, he knows what a weak man that kind of action would produce. God is far more interested in forging character and strength and endurance into us than tucking us into the beds of life-long comfort. God has a plan and is willing to do what it takes to accomplish His plan in us and in the people around us. That may well involve pain, suffering, offense and persecution. God may even allow the frustrating people in your life to do their worst against you in order to forge in you and I the godly character that we desperately need. God has a Sovereign plan and will do what it takes to strengthen us. And when we have climbed the mountain, ran up the hills, pumped the iron of trials...we will look back and say, thanks God, I like the spiritual muscles that you have forged into me for now I can run through those things like I never would have been able to 5 years ago. Now I can handle those difficult things I would never have dreamed of trying to life before.

Maybe some of you this morning have experience some heat this past week? At home, work? Relative? Have you been given that cold-shoulder? Ignored? Passed over for a promotion at work? Have you been the brunt of a sarcastic comment? Mistreated at home? Ridiculed for your faith? As a result of the mistreatment, were you ever tempted to get back at them? Tempted for getting in just a little dig, a little revenge? It is tempting to take things into our own hands, to get back...or at least pray that God would get them back. But what is the kind of response that brings that strength and character? Character doesn't come from running away and hiding. It certainly doesn't come from giving up or becoming silent in the face of persecution.

We can learn from the early church about how to respond well when we face stiff opposition, persecution, threats. What is the kind of response will bring strength and breed a heart of prayer filled faith? What is the power that will bring endurance in the face of trials?

Turn with me your Bibles to Acts the 4<sup>th</sup> chapter. This chapter records the first instance of persecution of the early church. Its' only a beginning and though it comes in various forms, it has not stopped since. Peter and John have by the power of the risen Savior healed a man that had been lame since birth for 40 years. The excitement of this undeniable miracle draws thousands into the temple courtyard to hear Peter explain the power that healed was not from Him but it was from God in His son Jesus Christ whom they crucified and put to death. The Jewish leaders saw how thousands were voting against their decision to reject Jesus. They watched as thousands were responding in faith to this one Jesus from Nazareth. They felt their power slipping out of their grip so they responded in a power move and tossed Peter and John into the Antonia prison. The next morning they interrogated, intimidated and threatened them into silence trying to snuff out this news, this undeniable miracle, this surging faith and belief in Jesus of Nazareth...then they sent them away commanding them never again to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. Peter responded well "what do you want us to do guys? Listen to you or listen to God? Go ahead make the choice. READ Acts 4:23-31.

They were released v.23 and they went to their companions and told all about what had happen, how God had given them such great boldness while standing toe to toe with the most powerful men in the country, the Sanhedrin. I think right up front there are a couple of things we can learn from their immediate response.

First; They went to their Christian brothers and sisters in the face of threats and suffering. We need to have a Christian family that we can come to and pray for each other and with each other in the face of crisis.

Do you have a couple of brothers? Do you have a couple of sisters right here in our church you know you can call at any time day or night and know they won't get mad at you for waking them up but will stop and pray with you when you are hurting, attached or in trouble? The early church believed in the power of prayer and they prayed for each other.

The second thing I see here is how they came and shared with the rest of the body of believers how God had worked powerfully in what looks like an impossible situation. My faith gets strengthened and encouraged when I hear of how God has worked powerfully in someone else's life. When I hear about God doing great things among us I am reminded that He is powerful and can work in my situation. The early church prayed with and for each other and they also shared how God has worked...so want to give some of you the opportunity this morning to share with us. What is God doing? How have you seen Him work in a difficult situation? Encourage us. Has anybody here experienced the joy of freedom? Has any body here experienced the release from something that looked like an impossible situation? Has anybody here felt like the Spirit poured into you a boldness to stand up for Jesus and speak His truth in the face of an intimidating situation? Has the Spirit given anyone a boldness to witness for Jesus and share your faith? (ASK to SHARE)

After they shared how God had worked in powerful ways, they spontaneously lifted up their voices and prayed to God. It's interesting that they spent the first few verses telling God who He is. Now God doesn't really need to be told who He is, but there is something that we need to tell God who He is. It's good for us to affirm the character of God. As Christians we need to be reminded of who He is, because our view of God will affect how we live. We need to be reminded of His power, of His sovereignty and confess that He is a God who can and will answer our prayers. As we affirm that God is the one who has created all the universe, the earth, the sea, the world and all that is in it, then we know

that those frustrating people in our lives, those people that upset us and ridicule us and anger us are also part of God's property. Just like Peter and John remembered that the kings and rulers and elders and priests and Sanhedrin were under the plan of God. And so after hearing how God had worked in a powerful way, they prayed affirming how great God is and reminded each other of His character traits. I'd like us to pray and as we do I want several of you to just shout out something about who God is that we as a church body need to be reminded of. (PRAY)

As they pray the early church here in v.24 begins by quoting scripture. That's not a bad way to pray. Read the word and as something comes to mind pray about it. It appears that they have been reading in the Psalms that week and as they read they too are looking at how the Word of God might apply to their situation. When we read the word of God it becomes alive. We are able to speak more wisdom, it meets us where life is. I am amazed at how what I am reading in devotions will be just what I need or just what I need to encourage someone with. But here's an application point. We aren't going to get the benefit of that unless we are in the word. They had connected God's word to their life because they had spent time getting the word into them. We need to get into the word of God in order for the word to get into our lives. There are Bible on tapes and cd that are pretty good if you are a big reader. Take it in big chunks or small chunks. Just get it in on a regular basis. We don't put gas in our car and we know what happens. Every time you fill up your gas tank this week I want you to ask yourself this question. Have I filled up my spiritual tank yet this week? Have I gotten some of God's word into my life?

They were quoting from Psalm 2. This psalm describes the revolt of the nations against the Christ. The Psalm originally grew out of a time when a new king in Israel was crowned, perhaps David or Solomon. But ultimately its message points to the king of kings, Jesus when He returned to claim His rightful throne and set up His kingdom on earth.

Whenever a new king was crowned, the vassals were required to come and submit to Him; but some refused to bow down and give the kiss of acceptance. The refused to submit to the king. In Psalm 2 we read that God only laughs at such a revolt for knows they could never stand against his king. The early believers here in Acts 4 read this passage and applied it to their own situation. Hey they said that is just like what is happening right now to us. They saw the adversaries as Herod, Romans and Jews. They saw how these enemies had ganged up against Jesus Christ and crucified him. And yet, God simply raised Him up from the dead and enthroned him in heaven on high and gave him the name above all other names. It was all part of God's plan, so no need to fear.

The early church believed in the sovereignty of God and His perfect plan. They saw how God could work in powerful ways of creation and also work even using evil rulers to accomplish His plan. No matte what the enemy tries to pull, God can work it out for our ultimate good. He has the incredible ability to take all the heat seeking missiles that are fired at us by our oppressors and somehow turn them around so they are aimed right back at them and explode in their faces. And all the while the crisis and danger and opposition serves to build faith and godly character into our lives. They knew that the greatest concentration of power in Jerusalem that day was not in the courts of the Sanhedrin, but it was in the power of the prayers of the people of faith.

The early church knew well that God was Sovereign and in control and they affirm it right here. But that didn't mean they stopped praying or witnessing. They didn't forget their responsibility and mission that Jesus had sent them out on in Acts 1:8 "Go into al the world and be my witnesses." Just because God has it all in control doesn't mean we can sit on our hands and merely watch. That is not God's plan. He wants to use us, otherwise He would blip us up to heaven and get us out of his way. Augustine spoke of this balance between God's sovereignty and our responsibility when he said, "pray as though everything depends on God

and work as though everything depends on you.” There is great power in prayer and nothing reaches beyond the reach of our prayer except that which lies outside the will of God. RA Torrey once said “Pray for great things, expect great things, work for great things, but above all...pray” That is the kind of faith anticipating God to do powerful things that this early church was all about.

And so after affirming God as the powerful creative God. After affirming that God can easily do a steal and reverse slam dunk against the enemy, when he tries to wipe out the Messiah king, God instead raises Him up and provides the most incredible source of freedom and power and salvation in Jesus. NOW...they bring their requests to God in prayer. V.29 Don't forget us Lord...we are still in some hot water. The authorities are threatening us with bodily harm if we continue to do what you have called us to do, if we continue to speak your name. Just keep that in mind God because we are weak and will we still be tempted to hide and not seek out men and women for you. We are going to be tempted to be intimidated by that guy at work, but that relative this weekend. God give us strength to stand up and boldly proclaim your truth.

It's interesting that the author of Acts, Luke, records no direct pleas for protection. They ask only for boldness and to be able to see God's mighty hand at work. How might these same attitudes affect our own prayer life when in crisis? They didn't pray to get their enemies kicked out of office or to change and better their own situation. They didn't pray God “get us out of here” and while your at it “torch the Sanhedrin.” Rather they prayed that God would empower them to make the best use of their situation and accomplish what He has already determined. They did not ask for escape, they asked for power and God gave it to them. Too often we just want relief from the pains of life and circumstances. We want the hurt to stop and go away and are not as interested in what God might be wanting to teach us and build into us.

We see God as the Divine penicillin to cure all of our ails. But these folks here in the early church assumed difficult times would always be present and prayed that God would give them the boldness and strength as they needed. Philips Brooks “Do not pray to have easy lives...pray to be stronger men and women. Do not pray for tasks equal to your powers, pray for power equal to the tasks.” That’s the way they prayed in the early church and that is the way we ought to pray today.

These people are not hiding and running for cover. They are asking for God for more of the same thing that got them into hot water in the first place. They prayed for boldness to witness and speak His name in the face of intimidating situations. They prayed asking God for boldness. They prayed asking god to move in powerful ways and extend his hand to heal and perform powerful signs in the name of Jesus. They anticipated God to move in powerful ways. Do you have that same tip-toe anticipation when you approach God in prayer? In your homes and in our church? When we can clearly see that God’s mighty hand is moving in power and healing and bringing freedom to the captives it emboldens us to confidently speak about Jesus.

God show up v.31 and the place was shaken. Everyone of those people walked out of that room knowing without a doubt that God had showed up and flexed His arm in a powerful way. To be shaken is to move from a place of firmness to a place of weakness. When you have been shaken you have been moved in such a way that you are entirely different person walking out then you were walking in. Seeing the power of God so impresses people that it will shake us to our very core of what we once held dear and based our lives upon. All that world reveres and wars to own. Yet its knowing you Jesus knowing you there is no greater thing. You’re my all you’re the best you’re my joy my righteousness and I love you Lord.

These people are not running for cover and hiding. They ask for God’s boldness. So are you facing a threatening situation this memorial

day weekend? Maybe its something next week where you need an extra measure of boldness. Can you see yourself as one of God's people in that situation? With that particular person? How would you act? What would you say as you are empowered by the Holy Spriti? Perhaps a word? Perhaps a silent response to antagonism? A witness? Taking a stand?

There answer to their prayers for boldness and that God would stretch out His healing had was that what came was an outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Our church needs that same outpouring of the Spirit. Even the best of churches need this not because we are so messed up but because of the hardness of the world. We need him lets pray.

Acts 4:23-31 Prayer for Boldness; The secret of true power.

v.23 And when they had been released,  
they went to their own companions (it wasn't just the apostles who were praying this prayer. Normal Christian friends...people like you and I)  
and reported all that the chief priests  
and elders said to them.

(Peter and John and the healed lame guy all had a great story of God's powerful working in the face of what looks to them like an impossible situation.)

God's people are encouraged when we hear of the great things that God is doing amongst us...so what is He doing??? Encourage us. Has anybody here experienced the joy of freedom? Having been released from something that looked like an impossible situation? Has anybody here felt filled with the Holy Spirit in such a way that they spoke up for Jesus in the face of an intimidating situation? Boldness in their witness for Christ? Concerned more about God's reputation than your own? Has anyone this week had the privilege to explain in love that there is no other way to God, salvation in no other name except Jesus and that it is

only through Jesus that we can be saved? (time for body to share with each other)

Faced with persecution, they acknowledge God's Creative power. How does reflecting on God's character in times of trial bring you benefit? Jesus death was not simply the plan and devise of the enemy, but was God's ultimate plan all along. How does this encourage us when we face trials and temptations?

The greatest concentration of power in Jerusalem that day was not in the courts of the Sanhedrin, but it was in the power of the prayers of the people of faith.

They came with an urgency, an expectancy. There was a very real threat, risky

Its interesting that they spend these verses to tell god who he is. Now God does not need to be told who he is. But Christians need to know who he is and confess that this the kind of God who can and will answer their prayers.

If God is creator of all things, then these elders and priests are his property as well and he can do anything he pleases with them.

v.24 And when they heard this,  
they lifted up their voices to God  
... with one accord (together, unity. Division in  
the church is a deadly cancer and robs it of spiritual  
power)

and said: "O Lord, It is you who didst make the heaven  
and the earth  
and the sea  
and all that is in them.

(you are a powerful creative God. Whom have I to fear if my father is Lord of heaven and earth???)

who by the Holy Spirit,  
through the mouth of our father David (affirming divine inspiration of  
Scripture through human agents)

thy servant

didst say,

**"Why did the gentiles rage?** (anger directed against? The Lord and Christ)

**Why the peoples of the earth devise futile things?**

(Scheme with purpose to obtain things that do not produce any results, ends in vain, easily pours out and doesn't hold water. Kena empty, balloon) God causes even the evil actions of ruiers to backfire. All that



(They can see how the scripture speaks to their life situation. Hey that is just like what just happened to us this morning. When we read the scripture it becomes alive and it applies to meet us and lend encouragement and challenge in our time of need. But in order gain the value of the word of God we have to be getting the word of God in us. They had connected the word to life because they knew the word or had been reading it that morning.

\*Get into Gods word in order for the word to get into your life.

Point. The people in authority seem like they have so much power and control but really regardless of how much they rage against you or the Lord...God is in control. He only allows them to carry out what will accomplish what He wants to happen.

So is God the author of evil? No. James 1. Why does God allow bad things to happen? Why does he allow evil people in positions of authority? Does God predestine people to evil? God only allows what will further His purposes.

The essence of sin is telling God, "I will not have you to be my Lord or my God. Go ahead and be God for somebody else but not for me. I want to be my own god and lord." Psalm 2 "break their chains and fetters." God's response to the rebels. Psalm 2:4 God laughs. The only place where it mentions God laughing. It's a laugh of ridiculous irony. Do you really think you can step outside of my power and control? God doesn't ask their opinion. God is God.

"For truly in this city

there were gathered together against

Thy Holy servant Jesus

Whom thou didst anoint

Both Herod

And Pontius Pilate,

Along with the Gentiles

And the people of Israel

To do whatever Thy hand

And Thy purpose

Predestined to occur.

(So after affirming God's sovereign power demonstrated clearly by His creation in a positive example and demonstrating God's ability to work His plan allowing pagan rulers to do their evil on Jesus and yet God does an incredible steal and reverse slam dunk on the evil one as Satan's all out attempt to snuff out the Lord comes smashing back in his face and become the greatest source of freedom and salvation in Jesus resurrection.) Now...they bring their request before this powerful God.

Don't forget we're still getting threatened down here. They were deadly serious. We are going to be tempted to hide and not seek. We are going to be tempted to fear men and not reverence you. Strengthen us to speak Thy word boldly.

v.29 And now Lord,

Take note of their threats,  
And grant that Thy bond-servants may speak Thy word  
With all confidence.  
while Thou dost extend Thy hand to heal  
and signs and wonders take place  
through the **name** of Thy Holy servant Jesus.

Luke records no direct pleas for protection. They ask only for boldness and to be able to see God's mighty hand at work. Why didn't they make any? How might these same attitudes affect our own prayer life when in crisis? They didn't pray to get their enemies kicked out of office or to change and better their own situation. Rather they prayed that God would empower them to make the best use of their situation and accomplish what He has already determined. This is not fatalism but affirming in faith that God has a perfect plan that he will accomplish down through history. They did not ask for escape, they asked for power and God gave it to them. Too often we want relief from the pains of life and circumstances. We see God as the Divine penicillin to cure all of our ails. But these folks assumed difficult times would always be present and prayed that God would give them the boldness and strength as they needed. They didn't pray God "get us out of here" and while your at it "torch the Sanhedrin."

Philips Brooks "Do not pray to have easy lives...pray to be stronger men and women. Do not pray for tasks equal to your powers, pray for power equal to the tasks." That's the way they prayed in the early church and that is the way we ought to pray today.

(Keep our eyes open to your powerful hand to heal (lame)  
When we can clearly see God's mighty hand move in power and healing it emboldens us to confidently speak about Jesus.

v.31 And when they had prayed

the place where they had gathered together was shaken  
and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, (sovereign filling verb form?  
In distinction from Ephesians 5 that puts responsibility on Christian for the filling. Aorist passive third person plural vs. imperative present passive in Ephesians 5:18)  
and they began to speak the word of God with Boldness.

(The place was shaken..they walked out knowing God had showed up and flexed His arm in a powerful way. Difficult to even stand up. Shaken. Reminds me of an earthquake. Powerful quake puts everyone on their knees under their desk. Everybody is talking about it for weeks. All the natural things we count on for being the same and we count on for stability and security are rocked. It's different and undeniable. To shaken is to move from firmness to weakness. You have been shaken moved in such a way that you are a difference person walking out then the one that walked in that room. Seeing the power of God so impresses people it shakes them to the core of what they once held dear, based their life upon. ("knowing you Jesus, knowing you.")

- 1) God is sovereign. He is in control of your situation.
- 2) 2) God's plan includes facing opposition against Messiah. John 15:18 "If the world hates you, you know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world the world would love its own, but because you are not of the world but I chose you out of the world therefore the world hates you."
- 3) So they ask God to embolden them to witness and preach His word
- 4) Their prayer anticipated God to work and do some great things in their midst.

Swindall p77 Illustration of pioneers who are strengthen of character by the difficult things they encountered on the trail. Opposition and presecution was a key factor in producing pioneer qualities in the first chrhistians.

Threatened but not weakened. Peter and John needed the support of their brothers in Christ. They needed their Christian family. To seek that support out in times of crisis or persecution is no sign of weakness. The team builds us up and we build up the team.

Have you been given the cold-shoulder? Ignored? Passed over for a promotion at work? Brunt of a sarcastic comment? As a result of the mistreatment, have you felt like retaliating? Getting revenge?

These people are not hiding and running for cover. They ask God for more of the same thing that got them into hot water in the first place. They ask God for boldness to witness and speak His name. So where do you need the gift of boldness this next week? Can you picture yourself as one of God's people in that situation? With that person? How would you act? What would you say? Perhaps a word? An act? A witness? Maybe its taking a stand for what you believe at home. Or at work or among those friends of yours that you seem to desperately need their approval. Stepping out in bold faith may well cost you something. But he is no fool who gives up what he cannot keep to gain

what he cannot lose. Pray to God that he would give you the boldness to do what he is calling you to do.

The answer to their prayers for boldness and that God would stretch out His healing hand was that came was an outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Our church need that same outpouring of the spirit. Even the best of churches need this. We need this not because our church is so messed up and bad...its not... we have a great church. We need the spirit because of the hardness of the world is so great.