

Sermon Title: "Prayer that will Rock the Church"

Scripture: Acts 4:31-33

Introduction: Earthquakes have always been a source of fear and fascination for me. I'm sure you heard about the devastating earthquake just one month ago in central Italy that registered 6.3 on the Richter scale and killed nearly 300 people. I remember the first time, as a boy that I experienced an earthquake. It wasn't a major quake, it was only over 4 points on the Richter scale, but it was an unforgettable and unsettling experience. How many of you have been in a quake? If you are from California, you could give us some detailed testimony. When you realize it is happening, your senses sharpen, muscles tighten, adrenaline is flowin' – your whole body and mind is on alert. Earthquakes have a way of getting your attention. Well I want us to go back and visit the epicenter of a powerful earthquake of a different kind here in the pages of God's word. So turn with me to Acts 4:31-33. Prayer.

I have been a pastor for 20 years before coming to FRC, and the longer I serve the Lord, the more convinced I become of this truth: If the church is going to make a difference for God in the 21st century, we've got to go back learn from the church in the 1st century. We need to get back to the book of Acts. That is where we find the model, the pattern, the paradigm. By the time you get to chapter 4, the church in Jerusalem has grown from 120 to over 20,000 in a matter of weeks. Wouldn't it be great if God would do it again? Wouldn't it be wonderful if He did it in our churches in America?

Well how can our churches experience the kind of victory Jesus spoke about? Again, we need to follow the principles laid out in the book of Acts, and one of those principles is that of powerful prayer. And not just any kind of prayer, but prayer that has a discerning perspective, prayer that has divine purpose, and prayer that results in dynamic power. So I want to talk to you about the kind of prayer that will rock the church., and indeed, will rock the world!

Setting: If you go back and pick up the story, Peter and John had been used of God to heal a lame man in the Temple (3:1-7). And when the people saw this lame man walking and leaping and praising God, the people were amazed and gathered around Peter and John. And Peter preached Jesus to the people and 5,000 men were added to the church (4:4)! Meanwhile, the priests and the Sadducees had the Temple guards grab Peter and John and throw them into prison. When they brought Peter and John before the Sanhedrin the next day, the Bible says (v 8-13). Well then they got together and said (v 16-18). Now remember, this was a powerful group. These were the very men who engineered the crucifixion of Christ. But Peter and John said (v 19-20). Peter said: "We cannot stop speaking about the things we've seen and heard!"

Well after Peter and John were released, they went straight back to the church and told them about how they had been threatened (v 23). And v 24 says that *immediately*, they lifted their voices to God in prayer. The NT church was a praying church, and that's why it was a powerful church. I want to challenge you, and ask you in turn to challenge the people you influence in the body of Christ, with these questions: Do you pray? Does your prayer time equal your television time? Who is in control of your life? Hollywood or the Holy Spirit? Let me ask you: If everyone in the church prayed like you, would the devil's legions come over the walls and the light of the Gospel go out? The reason why we don't see God's power is because we don't pray

like they prayed.

And Dr. Luke records the results of what happened in v 31-33: The place where they were meeting was shaken! They were filled with the Holy Spirit! They were of one heart and one soul! And with great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. Wouldn't you like for that to be said about our churches? It could be, if we would follow the principles of in this prayer. So I want you to see three things about their prayer, prayer that was so powerful that God said "Amen" by rocking the church house.

I. THE PERSPECTIVE OF THIS PRAYER

First, I want you notice the perspective of their prayer. The perspective of their prayer. If you want to pray with power, if you want God to make His presence known, if you want Him to rock the church house, you must pray with the proper perspective. Notice in v 24-28. Here was their perspective: They saw God as Sovereign and they saw themselves as servants.

A. Perspective of God: Sovereign:

1. Almighty Creator: First, they saw God as the Almighty Creator. They had the proper perspective. They said: "You know the High Priest and 70 members of the Sanhedrin have power. But Lord, you are the Creator, you made them, and you have Almighty Power."

Do you realize that we serve the God who created heaven and earth? He weighs the mountains in a scale and the hills in as balance; He holds the seven seas in the palms of His hands; He rides the upon the wings of the storm! He is the God who divided the sea for Moses. He is the God who brought down the walls of Jericho. He is the God who delivered Goliath into the hands of David, and the Hebrew children from that fiery furnace. He is the God who came in human flesh in the person of Jesus Christ, who commanded the winds and the waves, who cast out demons, and who raised the dead. And He is the God will execute judgment at the end of the age. He is a God of might and majesty. He is a God of power and great glory. He is the living God and beside Him there is no other!

So the church prayed: "Lord, the people who have threatened us are creatures, but, God, you are the Creator! So Lord we're not worried because you made it all!" Oh listen, they looked beyond the visible to the invisible, and they looked beyond the power of their opposition to the power of their God!

2) Absolute Sovereign: Second, they not only saw God as the Almighty Creator, but as the Absolute Sovereign Lord. See God didn't just create the universe, wind it up, throw it out, and let it spin. He is very much involved. He's calling the shots in the affairs of men. That's what the Founding Fathers referred to when they spoke of Divine Providence. Look again at v 25-28. They prayed from psalm 2. And they're saying: "Lord, this is the direct fulfillment of that prophecy. You said that the nations would rage, that the peoples would plot, that the kings and rulers of the earth would rise up against you and your Son. Lord, it happened exactly as you said it would. They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen." They

were saying: "Lord you're not only the Almighty Creator, but you are the Absolute Sovereign!" In fact, the way they addressed God demonstrates their perspective. Notice in v 24--"Sovereign Lord." Now in the Greek its just one word: despota, from which we get our word "despot" or "dictator." Now obviously, our Lord is a benevolent dictator, Amen? Everything He does, He does out of His heart of love. But make no mistake, He is Sovereign.

So here's what the church did. They gathered to pray in the midst of this clear and present danger, and they looked back to the darkest day of their lives. They remembered the day when all of their hopes and dreams were nailed to that cross. And they thought: "All is lost." But then they saw Jesus Christ defeat death and walk out of that tomb alive just as He promised, they watched Him ascend with the clouds into heaven to the right hand of the Father just as He promised, and they experienced the coming of the Spirit with power just as Jesus promised. And they knew that everything was proceeding according to the plans and purposes of the Sovereign God. It was exactly, precisely what God had mapped out before the foundation of the world.

Corrie Ten Boom, suffered thru Hitler's concentration camps, lost several of her family members, and yet was a shining testimony for Jesus Christ? And she once said: "There is no panic in heaven, only plans." Pastor Adrian Rogers used to say that "The Holy Trinity never meets in emergency session." In fact, when John was given the revelation of Jesus Christ, he saw heaven, and the first thing that impressed him was that God was seated on His throne (Rev. 4-5). Nothing is out of His control. Our God has everything well in hand, Amen? And that perspective will make a difference in how you handle problems, it'll help you learn to glance at your problems, and gaze on your Great God, who is the Almighty Creator and Absolute Sovereign! You'll pray a prayer that will rock the church, when you pray to that kind of God.

B. Perspective of Themselves: Servants: But notice not only their perspective of God, but the perspective they had of themselves (v 29). Underscore that word servant. That word literally means bond-slave. "Lord grant to your slaves, your bond slaves that we might speak your word with boldness." Now I submit to you that the reason why many of our prayers are unanswered is that we don't have this perspective. I drive a lot and every now and then I'll see that old bumper sticker that says: "God is my co-pilot." No, He's not. When I was just starting out as a pastor, I heard a business man say: "I'm going to start a business and I've asked God to be my partner." And he went bankrupt.... Listen, God doesn't want to be your partner or your co-pilot. Friend, He is your L-O-R-D, Lord! He's You are His bond-slave and He is your Absolute Sovereign--He calls the shots, He makes the decisions. He says: "Go!" And you go. He says "Come!" and you come.

As Paul said (Phil. 2:5-7a): "Have this mind in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God as something to be grasped, but made Himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant"--a bond-slave--same word. You want God to answer your prayer? Do you want to see God bring real revival and true awakening. Do you want to see Him move with power and great glory? Then get the right perspective of God and of yourself. Submit yourself to Him as the Sovereign Lord! And there is no better way to do that than get on our knees, to get on our faces before the Lord.

II. THE PURPOSE OF THIS PRAYER

Now the second thing I want you to see is not only the perspective of their prayer, but I want you to see the purpose of their prayer. Because if you pray with the wrong purpose, there will be no power. Look at their purpose in v 29-30--Servants reporting for duty, and they prayed with a threefold purpose.

A. Speak God's Word: First, they prayed that God would enable them to Speak His word. Look again at v 29. Is that the desire of your heart? To obey the Great Commission and spread the Good News of Jesus Christ? "Lord, give us more boldness to speak your word!" If we want to see real change in Maine, and real change in America, we need to be winsome witnesses to the grace of God in the person of Christ.

Question: What got them into trouble in the first place? Speaking the word of God. Question: What are they praying for? More of the same. They're praying for more boldness, more courage, more bravery. They say: "Lord, we got into trouble for preaching your word, now Lord, just give us boldness to do it some more!" Amen? "We want to speak your word!" Listen, Jesus Christ didn't come to get you out of trouble. He came to get into trouble with you! He said: "I didn't come to bring peace but a sword." And that's true of those who followed Him, think about Paul. Everywhere he went, it was either riot or revival. And as you read the book of Acts, these disciples stayed in trouble because they prayed with purpose: "Lord give us boldness! Give us courage to speak your word!"

B. Stretch Out God's Hand: But they not only prayed that God would enable them to speak His word, but to stretch out His hand (v 30). Now Jesus is in heaven, and yet they're praying: "Lord, stretch out your hand!" What hand did He have? He had their hands. They were saying: "Lord, not only do we want our mouth to be your mouth. But let our hand be your hand." And that prayer was answered in 5:12--The KJV says: "And by the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people." They said: "Lord stretch out your hand," then the Bible says that it was "by the hands of the apostles" that God worked these wonders. Listen, even though the Lord Jesus has gone to heaven, He still has a body on earth, and that body is His church! We are His hands, his heart, His feet, His lips. And friend, He wants to display His deity as He inhabits your humanity. Are you available to Him? Are you in the habit of praying, "Lord, these hands are your hands. Whatever you want to do thru me, I'm available." Is that your commitment?

I heard about a Cathedral in Europe that was bombed during WWII, and in that Cathedral there used to stand a magnificent statue of Jesus Christ with His arms outstretched--and the inscription read: "Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Well there were some Americans who wanted to rebuild the Cathedral, and reconstruct that statue. They searched thru the rubble, found the parts, and proceeded to reassemble the statue. But when they came to the hands, they couldn't find anything intact, they had been destroyed. But somebody had an idea, and he wrote another inscription beneath that statue with those arms without hands stretched out: "He has no hands, but our hands." That is so true. Now here's their prayer, "Lord we want to speak your word! Lord, we want to stretch out your hand!" Here's the third thing they prayed: "Lord we want to synchronize with your will!" We want your mouth to be our mouth, your hand to be our hand, and your heart to be our heart.

C. Synchronize with God's Will: Look at v 30 again. The name of Jesus. What does that mean, to pray in the name of Jesus? Does that mean that we go to God with our shopping list, and after we've read it, we say: "In the name of Jesus." Thinking that its some kind of magic formula that will get our prayers answered. No. God is not some glorified grandpa indulging us and doting on us, God is not a sanctified Santa Claus doling out gifts to gratify our every whim. God is the Almighty Creator and Sovereign Lord! And as His servants, we need to get His mind on the matter. We need to heart from His heart. We need to line up with his plans and purposes.

Praying in the name of Jesus means we pray: "Lord, on the basis of our relationship with you through the blood sacrifice of your Son, and in accordance with your will, and under your authority, and in your power, and for your honor and for your glory we are praying these things. And by the Father doing this, we want Jesus to be exalted. We want Jesus to be worshiped! We want Jesus to be glorified!" That was their purpose--They were praying that somehow God would enable them to stay in sync with His will and bring glory to Jesus!

Listen, the kind of prayer that rocks the church is the purposeful prayer: "Lord, I want to speak your word, Lord I want to stretch out your hand, Lord, I want to sync with your will!" That's the kind of prayer God was pleased to answer that day. But we don't pray that way, do we? We ask God to do little favors for us and we really never experience the presence and power of God in our prayer life. I've been challenged to examine my own prayers this week, and I would challenge you to do the same because I'm convinced that we need to raise the level of our praying! We need to get it out of the realm of our selfish desires and raise it to the level of His sovereign will!

III THE POWER OF THIS PRAYER

Alright, we've talked about the perspective of their prayer, and out of that perspective, they prayed with a purpose. Now quickly, here's the third thing. Not only the perspective and the purpose, but the power of this prayer or better yet the power of God's answer to this prayer. Several wonderful things happened (v 31-33):

A. They were Filled: In v 31, they were filled with the Spirit. They had prayed: "Lord give me courage to speak your word! Lord, give me compassion to stretch out your hand! And Oh God give me a craving to sync with your sovereign will!" They prayed with the purpose. Now can you understand why they were filled with the Holy Spirit? Notice the disciples had been filled with the Spirit on the day of Pentecost, Peter was filled with the Spirit every time he preached, and now they are filled with the Spirit again. Folks that tells me that we can't operate on yesterday's experience. There must be a fresh filling! We need power for today! So don't tell me what the Lord did in your life 3 years ago or 3 months or 3 weeks ago. I want to know right now, today: Are you being filled with the Spirit? You pray this kind of a prayer and you will be. They were filled with the Spirit.

B. The were Unified (v 32): They became one in heart and soul. One of the greatest marks that we belong to the Lord is our unity. Psalm 133:1 says: "How good and perfect it is when brothers dwell together in unity." It is like the oil poured on Aaron's head and dew on Mt. Hermon, in

other words that is Hebrew for: "Unity is a beautiful thing!" Jesus said: "By this will all men know that you are my disciples, if you have love one for another" (John 13:35). Love produces unity...not uniformity, not sameness, but unity on the core issues of the faith. On the night before His death, the Lord Jesus prayed to the Father: "...that they may be one even as we are one. I in them, and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me..." (John 17:22-23). And here is the fulfillment of that prayer.

There was an incredible unity in that first church in Acts, and that's what God wants for every church, and that's what God wants among His churches – more unity. And that's why the devil would rather start a fuss among God's people than do anything else. Now we won't be unified around our denomination or around a specific version of the Bible or around a certain style of music... if we are unified, it will be around the Lord Jesus Christ, and that comes about thru the power of prayer and the presence of the Holy Spirit. What would it be like to have all God's people stand as one, speak as one, and act as one?! Prayer helps produce that. I mean it is hard to pray with somebody and get honest with each other and with the Lord without coming to the place of unity. When they prayed, there was a unity!

C. They were emboldened: They were filled with the Spirit, they were unified, then it says they preached Jesus with boldness (v 33)! See God's Spirit doesn't fill you just so you can feel good; He fills you so you can bear witness to Jesus. He gives us power for a purpose. Acts 1:8: "You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you and you will be my witnesses." Are you surrendered to that purpose? Is your church surrendered to that purpose? The early church prayed for boldness to witness, and the Bible says that when the Spirit filled them, that with great power, they continued to bear witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus." Great power. Prayer and power go together. Power not from promotions and programs, not from gimmicks and gadgets, not from bingo and bake sales, but power thru NT prayer. Friend, there is power in His name, there is power in His blood, there is power in His Gospel, and there is power in His church! And my prayer is that God would turn that power loose in our churches so that souls would be saved, lives would be changed, and this nation would be renewed to righteousness for the glory of God!

With great power they continued to bear witness. Now a witness is someone who has had an encounter with the Living Lord. Remember what struck the Sanhedrin about Peter and John (v 13)--they took note that these men had been with Jesus! They had been with Jesus! The reason why there's so little witnessing going on today is because so few spend time with the Lord. Friend, if you spend time with God in prayer, it'll show. Like Moses, you'll come out of that encounter with your face aglow with the glory of God, and there'll be no hiding it. When the Holy Spirit fills you, it will make you say with Jeremiah, it was like a fire shut up in my bones and I could not stay quiet!"

People tell me: "Well I just can't witness for Jesus because I'm shy." Give me a break. When you will allow the Holy Spirit to reign and rule in your life, they'll have to hold you back with a rope from turning the world upside down. And that's my prayer not only for myself, but for you and this church--that you would discover the real Jesus, that the power of His presence would invade your life, and that He would transform your timidity until you are a Lion for God! Until you are unashamed and unstoppable! They spoke the word of God boldly.

When they finished, God said "Amen" to their prayer with an earthquake. WOW! God rocked the house where they met! How many you would like to go to prayer meeting and see the church building start to shake after you pray? It would be exciting wouldn't it? Now why did God shake that place? I believe God was giving a physical sign of a greater spiritual reality.

When Jesus died, Matt. 27:51 tells us that the earth quaked and the rocks were split. When Jesus died on that cross, God said "Amen" with an earthquake because it was an event that would shake the world! When He was raised, Matt. 28:2 says that there was a violent earthquake, and God said "Amen" to the resurrection of His Dear Son with an earthquake, because it was an event that would shake the world! The earthquake of redemption, the earthquake of resurrection, and here in v 31 we find the earthquake of revival. For when they prayed, they were filled with the Holy Spirit of God, and God said "Amen" with an earthquake.

You say: "Pastor, do you think He'd do it again?" Literally and physically, He could but probably not, but spiritually and in reality, you'd better believe it. He wants to do it again, right here, with this church. Wouldn't you like to see that happen? Wouldn't you like to have people say about this church what they said about the early church, that those who have turned the world upside down have come here also? Well it has to start with prayer.

Then we find that God not only said "Amen" with an earthquake, but He showed them His favor in an unusually powerful way. And v 33 says: "And great grace was upon them all." Now grace is great anyway you get it, but the Greek text suggests that it was multiplied on that early church. Much grace. Multiplied grace. Great grace. God was showing unusual favor on that church. And God will show the same favor to our church, if we are willing to accept the challenge to pray as they prayed--until the presence and power of God descends on us and shakes us in this place, until He shakes his state, until the shock waves reverberate out to the nation and the world around us, and until He shakes the very gates of hell off the hinges! And may God make it so in my life, your life, and in His church, and in this nation. And all of God's men said: Amen!

Prayer: Father, I pray that everyone here this morning would have a supernatural encounter with the Living Lord. Fill your church with your presence right now Father. Make the church in America a praying church, a powerful church, a witnessing church. May we follow these principles in the book of Acts so that we can be a great church for your glory!

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