

A Mission for Christ Requires Teamwork! Acts 4:23-31

Tryon FBC, July 13, Commissioning the Mission Team

Commonly we think of PRAYER as our chief source of comfort and encouragement. Prayer is the primary means by which we give God praise and invite God into our world and our hearts. We know God will not burst in on us unwanted, so we gently invite The Lord into our experiences. Elijah, in his most turbulent times, sought God in the powerful winds, the earthquakes, a raging fire, only to finally hear God speak in a still and quiet voice.

If we only look for God in the gentlest ways, we miss some of the power of it all. This story in Acts tells some of the drama at work when we engage in preaching and telling the truths of God. Peter and John had troubled the calm temple life and the leaders when they preached. They were arrested because they just stirred the people up. When they were released with a stern warning, the other Christians deeply felt the crisis and called for prayer.

Most of us pray in crisis for the kind of help that might get us out of a tight spot, but not these folks! Tired and haggard as they were, they prayed for more of the very stuff that had gotten them into trouble in the first instance. Clear about the facts, they prayed, "*Give your servants BOLDNESS to speak thy word, while you heal and continue with signs and wonders.....*"

What a rebuke to the church in our day! While we ask for help in retreating from the storms of life, these people didn't just want to stay home petting God's little lambs. They wanted to be shepherds to all the sheep, venturing out where the lost sheep were, offering the same joy in the truth that they had found! "*And when they had prayed, the place was shaken!*" (v. 31) A prayer for fearless courage always starts an earthquake.

There are risks in prayer. For these disciples there would be no immunity from the hazards of hostility. Prayer would keep them on the road to trouble. Prayer is communion with God, but earthquakes may happen when people's lives are getting straightened out!

Do we think of communion with God in those terms? More than a sweet haven of rest? There are risks in prayer, risks that drive many people away from this hard work that Gordon Cosby called "spiritual combat." 1. **One such risk** is that we may see ourselves as we really are, as God sees us. We like to pray like stepping up to a telescope, asking to see all the great wonders ahead in store. More often we are given a microscope to look deeply into who we have become. Like prodigals, we risk having to come to grips with ourselves before we can come back into the blessings that are always waiting when we return to the Father!

Second, we risk becoming like Jesus when we pray. This might be the biggest earthquake, that prayer is a doorway into His Presence. And the longer we stay there, the greater will be our likeness to the one whom we are addressing. This is no small threat for those who live in a world that wounds love and crucifies it. Being unselfish in a world that rewards pushy, driven self seekers with wealth and prominence and power, being for God when a world promises to take advantage of this as weakness, spending time on something from your convictions when you really don't have it to give....all these make all of us reconsider and turn away at times.

"Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John..they marveled; and they took knowledge of them that they had been with Jesus."(v. 13)

3.**Another risk** is that God just may answer your prayers when you pray to be used of Him. These who prayed for boldness to

Speak the truths of God that signs and wonders might be done through the name of Jesus, they could tell us something about that, too! Homes would be shaken like that, if we prayed like that! Churches would be severely jolted out of sleepiness and apathy, if we prayed like that! The hardened souls of difficult people, the stony places of injustice and evil would break open, if we prayed like that again!

Is it possible that we have been playing what we call in sports, a *"defensive game?"* I know you will agree with me that it is time for us to seize our opportunity to be on mission with these teenagers and with our Lord. It is time for us to PRAY with them for their opportunities to make a difference in the lives of the children with whom they will share their lives this week.

Let us pray for power, and for courage, for certainly the world needs young men and women who will take the risks associated of sharing the gospel of God's love, and it also needs those who will take the risk of prayer. The church requires members who will bear witness to the difference this gospel makes, who will show the signs and wonders of their own lives lived in the light of the love of Jesus Christ, who will demonstrate the power of faith in Christ over against the cheap philosophies of reckless permissiveness and the indulgences of our age, who will joyfully show the gospel of justice and brotherhood in the face of powerful forces of exploitation.

But there is risk in it! These youth and adults will make sacrifices, in fact they already have. They will have to give up some very cherished attitudes. This message, when it finds its mark can be a force for changing lives, for making a new earth, but it will be costly. Jesus questioned in a familiar parable, *"What man among you, who when he builds a house, does not first sit down and count the cost?"* (Luke 14:28)

Our prayers are indeed like a quiet pool where we drop our needs and burdens, our cares and requests like stones one at a time: but it is also a battlefield. Prayer is taking a sleepy face and turning it toward the morning sunshine: but it is also buckling on a sword and shield for the day. Prayer is a place to run for sanctuary from temptations: but it is also a bugle call to meet them.

Our prayer of faith can make it possible for these youth and adults to stand up to anything this world can do to them. Our prayer is also to thrust them into dangerous places where nobody cares or believes anybody else cares. Our prayer is the way we can be a team with them and the secret to building a new world. Are you willing to risk it, or to risk them? Then let us join them on this mission, dangerous as it may be. It may start an earthquake, but let's pray!

Dear Lord, because we have worshiped You with our PRAISE, our TITHES and OFFERINGS, our HEARING, SINGING and SPEAKING Your word, please help all of us to know you better. Help us to love you with all our hearts, and to serve you faithfully and joyfully, knowing that though you may lead us down paths of righteousness for Thy namesake, You will never abandon us!

Through Christ we pray, Amen