

Chapter 10

Maintaining Prayer

“... they lifted up their voice to God with one accord, ...” – Acts 4:24

To continue this series of messages, being the church that people need is not as easy as most people think. In Acts 4:23-33, it says *“And being let go,”* referring to Peter and John, *“they went to their own company, and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said unto them. And when they heard that, they lifted up their voice to God with one accord, and said, Lord, thou art God, which hast made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all that in them is: Who by the mouth of thy servant David hast said, Why did the heathen rage, and the people imagine vain things? The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord, and against his Christ. For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together, For to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done. And now, Lord, behold their threatenings: and grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy word, By stretching forth thine hand to heal; and that signs and wonders may be done by the name of thy holy child Jesus. And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness.”*

By way of background to these verses, Acts 3:1-8 tell of the healing of the lame man who sat at the temple gate, which filled the people of Jerusalem with amazement and wonder. Many of them gathered at the temple. When Peter saw the people gather at the temple, he preached to them, as related in Acts 3:12-26.

The message that Peter preached grieved and angered the religious elite, and they arrested Peter and John, shown in the early verses of chapter 4. They held them until the next day and then they brought them before the Sanhedrin. We see that Peter proceeded to preach to the Sanhedrin in Acts 4:5-12. The Sanhedrin then commanded Peter and John to immediately stop preaching Jesus Christ and then let them go.

Being let go, as we read in our text, they went to their own company, which was the church and told the people that were assembled or congregated together what had happened as it says in Acts 4:23. The response of the church, upon hearing Peter and John had been threatened and that they must stop preaching Jesus Christ, was to band together in prayer. In verse 24, *“and when they had heard that, they lifted up their voice to God with one accord.”* They did not hire a lawyer, organize a rally to picket the council, or a protest march against religious discrimination. They did not throw up their hands in despair, becoming or downtrodden. They lifted up their voice to God. That sets an example, a pattern for the churches of the Lord. There is encouragement there for the churches of the Lord. If a church is ever going to continue to be the church that people need, they must be a praying church. They must maintain prayer. That's what we want to cover in this message, a maintaining of prayer.

Paul exhorted the church of Colossi in Colossians 4:2, saying, *“Continue in prayer; ...”*. That is, keep on praying, proceed on, persist on, in prayer, do not stop praying.

Notice the fact that the church of Jerusalem was a praying church, which sets an example and a pattern for you and I. Again, in Acts 4:24, *“And when they heard that, they lifted up their voice to God with one accord, ...”* They weren't singing, they were praying because verse 31 says, *“And when they had prayed, the place was shaken ...”* As soon as they heard that Peter and John had been threatened, the church had been threatened, because Peter and John were members of that church, they lifted up their voice to God. That was their impulse. That was not the last resort. Prayer should not be the last resort. Prayer should be what we do by impulse. When we hear something it ought be our impulse to pray. To many, I'm afraid, prayer is just the last resort. This wasn't the case. When they had heard the report of Peter and John, it was their instinct, it was their inclination to pray. When they heard the report of Peter and John, they did that

which was normal for them to do. They prayed. This was the normal thing for this church to do. They did that which they were accustomed to do, they did that which they had always done, they prayed. This is what they had done.

Acts 1:9-11 tells of the ascension of Christ back into heaven. Acts 2;1, you have the day of Pentecost. There are ten days between the ascension and the day Pentecost. So what was the church doing in that 10 day span? They were praying. Acts 1:12-13, after Christ is ascended, *“Then returned they unto Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is from Jerusalem a sabbath day’s journey. And when they were come in, they went up into an upper room, ...”* So there they are in the upper room and he mentions some of those that were present. Then in verse 14, *“These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren.”* When we read Acts 4:24, where they heard the report of Peter and John, they lifted up their voice to God. This is what they were accustomed to doing. They prayed.

Then we come to Acts 6:6 and the appointment of deacons. *“Whom they set before the apostles: and when they had prayed, they laid their hands on them.”* In Acts 12, Herod began to persecute the church. He killed James, he arrested Peter and intended on killing Peter the next day. But, the church gathered together in the house of Mary, not to discuss a plan of action, but to pray. In Acts 12:12, *“And when he had considered the thing, he came to the house of Mary the mother of John, whose surname was Mark; where many were gathered together praying.”* You see it was the habit of this church to turn their eyes from what man was doing, from their problems and circumstances and turn their eyes to God. That is what they were accustomed to do. That was their impulse. When they heard that something was wrong, the impulse was, “We’ve got to pray.” Whatever their circumstances were, their impulse and their instinct was, “We’ve got to pray.” Prayer was a priority to them, it was a way of life to them. They prayed.

The Lord's churches today have many advantages over the early church we read of in the book of Acts. Some of those advantages really might be disadvantages. We have more money. We certainly have more and nicer buildings. We definitely have more liberty, more Bibles, more resources, and more conveniences. Those are not the things that will make us the church that people need. Among all the things that we've mentioned up to this point, if we're going to be the church that people need, in spite of our resources, money, and liberty, we need to be a people of prayer. It needs to be natural, our impulse, our instinct to turn our eyes away from man and circumstances, and to turn our eyes to God and pray. That's the only way we can be the church that people need.

We live in the last days, in perilous times, and sin is rampant. It seems to me that churches ought to be praying more than they've ever prayed before. Yet, it seems like they pray less. We not only have to be a people of prayer, but that has to be our impulse, that has to be what we do. It's not our last resort, it is what we are inclined to do.

There must be a maintaining of a proper manner of prayer. Someone might ask or think, "Well what's so important about prayer?" It's a way that God has determined to communicate with Him. Prayer is also how He has chosen to hear His people. It is how we present our petitions to God. The Bible teaches in Hebrews 4:16, prayer is how we come to God, "*Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.*" Prayer is a way of approach to God.

Individual praying is very important of course, and every single member of the Lord's church has a responsibility to pray for one another every single day. If you don't do that, you're failing in your responsibility. It doesn't matter how much money you might give, how gifted you might be, those things do not make up for praying for one another and praying for the church. In this message, we're focusing on the church collectively praying. Notice

some things about this church's prayer, in Acts 4. They were unified in their praying. In verse 24, "*And when they,*" that's plural, "*lifted up their*", that's plural, "*voice*", that's singular. Many people praying, but it was one voice. There was unity in their praying. They were praying for the same thing. They had the same burden, the same concerns, and they lifted up their voice. It is added they did so with one accord. That is, there was agreement, there was harmony in their prayer.

In Acts 12:5, concerning the prayer meeting that went on in the house of Mary, that prayer was made of the church collectively. We also find there in verse 12, "*many were gathered together*". That is, jointly, in cooperation, in partnership, side by side, they joined together, doing what? *Praying*. They banded together in prayer. There was harmony, of felt need and they prayed. They were in harmony of feeling and desire and they were committed to praying. A church can not pray in harmony if they are not in harmony. The church must be in harmony, unity, agreement, so that they can pray together.

There ought to be special times when a church bands together, when a church commits, "We're going to pray." This church in the book of Acts had this. They were praying. No one was doing anything else. This is what they were doing. They were praying. They were not merely together, they were together praying. If we're going to be the church that people need, we must not only be a people of prayer, we must be a people that bands together to pray. We must be a people that assemble and congregate together to pray.

There was also an awareness of God and His presence. You can't really pray unless you are aware of the presence of God. It says here that they lifted up their voice to God. They were aware of His presence. They were not merely looking at their present circumstances, they were looking to God. They believed with God there was no problem too great, there was no need beyond the resources of God. They believed that God was able, so they prayed. Do we believe that in this day and age? Do we believe that God

is able? That God is able to fix any problem, He's able to fix any situation? If so, then we ought to pray. Then we ought to lift up our voice to the One who is able.

They were casting themselves upon God. They were leaning upon God. They were also drawing from God. That's what we do when we pray. We not only are petitioning God, but we are drawing from God. In other words, we're being strengthened. There they were, praying.

There was an acknowledgement of God's power. There in Acts 4:24, "*And when they heard that, they lifted up their voice to God with one accord, and said, Lord, thou art God, ...*" Notice where they began their prayer. They did not begin with the threats of the Sanhedrin. They began with God. They began by praising God and declaring the greatness of God. That's where they began and I believe that's important. So often we begin our prayers with whatever our circumstance is at that moment, that's where we begin and that's where we end. You look at prayer all through the word of God and that's not the case. They begin with God. I believe there's a reason for that. Because, when you begin with God, by acknowledging God, by acknowledging the presence of God, the greatness of God, that is what prepares you to really pray. Here's where they began, "Lord thou art God." They didn't begin with the threat of the enemy. They began with the authority of God.; their eyes are upon the authority of God. They realize that God, who created everything, is the God who controls everything. You can read Acts 4:25-28 and see that's what they're acknowledging. They're acknowledging that God is God and in control of everything.

Just think of this church's situation. They've preached, they've been faithful, and now they've been told to stop. What would we do today? What would be the first thing we do if we were told to stop? It should be to pray. But, let's be honest, for many churches, that would not be the first thing. The first thing they would do was to hold a meeting, "We've got to come up with a plan." No, the first

thing is you pray. If the first thing you do is plan, somebody is going to stand up and say, "I know a lawyer, we need to get a hold of him." The next thing you know, you're hiring a lawyer. The first thing we need to do is pray. If God tells the church, "Hire a lawyer," then you hire a lawyer. But, the first thing you do is to pray.

If prayer is not the first thing, and you have a meeting, you plan, and someone says "We need to hire a lawyer", someone else says "I'm tired of this. We're not going to put up with this. We're going to make some picket signs. We're going down to the village hall and we're going to march." What's that going to fix? Their impulse was, they prayed. You know, individually and collectively, our first impulse says much about us. It really does. It speaks volumes about us. The first thing they did was they prayed. They realized that everything was in God's hand. I mean, what hope did they have against the powerful Sanhedrin? What could they do? They did what they could, they prayed. We must be a church of prayer. They lifted up their voice to God. As you read their prayer, their prayer was reverent, their prayer was believing.

They also realized God's sufficiency, for their present situation. Acts 4:29, says "*And now,*" that word now shows the urgency of their prayer, "*Lord, behold their threatenings:*" They didn't pray, "Lord kill the Sanhedrin." All they did was say, "Lord behold their threatenings." Lord, they have threatened us. Lord, we're leaving that with you. You do with that as you see fit. Lord, we're just going to leave it with you. That's what we need to do with the enemies of the Lord's churches. Hand them over to God. Just hand them over to the Lord. Lord here they are, behold what they've done, we're leaving them with you. God will work. There were threatenings, and realizing the greatness of God, they simply spread their case before the Lord. Their well being was being threatened, the work of the Lord, humanly speaking, was being threatened. They just simply took the matter to the Lord. They said Lord here it is. Here's

what they've said, here's what they've done, we're leaving it with you. You see, prayer was the business at hand. If we're going to be the church that people need, we must realize the sufficiency of God so much so, that it is our first impulse to bring all matters to God in prayer.

There was a fervency and urgency in their prayers. We see that in the word “*now*” in verse 29. But what was it that they prayed for? Did they pray, “Lord deliver us from this persecution. Lord we've been treated unfairly, Lord we're being treated unjustly, Lord do something about it, Lord deliver us from that.” That's not how they prayed. They just left that with the Lord they said, Lord behold their threatenings, and that was the end of that. We spend much of our praying telling the Lord all about our circumstances. But, they just left it, Lord behold, here it is.

Then, what was it that they prayed? Acts 4:29, says, “*And now, Lord, behold their threatenings: and grant*” that's grace, anytime God grants anybody anything that's grace, “*unto thy servants*”, they've taken the position of the servants, they are the servants of God, “*that with all boldness they may speak thy word.*” Lord behold their threatenings. They're threatening was, “You stop preaching Jesus.” “Lord, you behold their threatenings, we're leaving that matter with you. Now, Lord we're praying that you'll give us the grace, strength, courage, that you'll give us the and conviction to just keep on preaching the word of God”

They're praying that God would enable them to do what God had called them to do. That's how we ought to pray. Lord, here's our circumstances. We leave all of those circumstances with you. Now Lord, give us the grace to do and to be what you would have us to do and what you'd have us to be. That's what they prayed. They did not pray for deliverance. They did not pray for more favorable circumstances. They simply took the position of needy servants realizing their responsibility to Him. They said, “Lord cause us, by thy grace, to do what you've called us to

do. God cause us, by thy grace, to be what you've called us to be.”

If the government comes in and says, “You all have one week to stop doing what you're doing or else”, what are we going to do? Pray. Pray! What are we going to pray about? “Lord give us the grace to do what you have called us to do. Give us the grace to be what you've called us to be.” We can tell the Lord about the circumstances, “Lord they threatened us, we have one week”. Leave that with God. Behold their threatenings, but Lord we need to be what you want us to be, we need to do what you want us to do. This is how we need to be praying. We live in terrible times. We live in times where people are compromising on every hand. What we need to simply pray is, “Lord give us the grace to do what you would have us to do. Give us the grace to be what you'd have us to be.”

Churches can go through very difficult times. Churches, just like an individual life, have seasons. Sometimes everything is going smoothly. At other times people are dying, and other times people are sick. There are times there are sin problems. We go through seasons. Through it all, our impulse ought to be to lift up our voice, one voice, to God in prayer saying, “Lord give us the grace, people are dying, people are sick, people are in sin, but Lord we just pray and we leave all that with you. Lord, we pray that you give us the grace to just keep on going and keep on doing what you would have us to do.”

We get sidetracked sometimes in our praying. This church at Jerusalem realized what was the priority. That was to continue to do what God had called them to do. If we're going to be the church that people need, in this day of error, when error is becoming more and more appealing, and even becoming appealing to some church members, when sin is becoming more and more appealing to the world, but not only to the world, to some church members, the church needs with one voice to pray. “God help us to be what people need. God help us to keep on standing for the truth.” You see it's

not for you and I to come up with the solutions, God already has the solutions. We just need strength, we just need grace.

Then we have the results of them praying together. There was a manifestation of the spirit of God. Acts 4:31, says *“And when they had prayed, the place was shaken ...”* I believe that's literal. I believe that God was so present that the pillars in that building began to shake, they could feel the presence of God. That's praying! When you have the visible presence of God, that's praying. That will give you encouragement. That will give you the conviction to go on. *“And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled ...”* They were gathered there to pray, they were congregated, they were convening, and the place was shaken. There was a visible presence of the Lord. We need the visible presence of the Lord today. We need the vivid realization of the presence of God. We need a vivid realization that God is here. There's no sense in having church if God isn't here. We need a vivid realization that God is here. They had that after they prayed.

There was also power. Remember they prayed, “Lord grant us that we might preach thy word with boldness.” I believe their prayer was answered. There was power to live for the Lord and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost. That was God granting them the power to preach with boldness. Then they continued to do what they were called to do and spoke the word of God with boldness. They were able to carry on. What we need today is not more modernization, more resources. That's not what we need. We need the power of God. It comes through this kind of praying.

Notice Acts 4:32. They have prayed together. I believe this increased their love for one another. It wasn't that they didn't love each other before, but they loved each other more. They became even more and more unified in heart and soul. *“And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but*

they had all things common.” They prayed together and their love for one another grew. Their concern for one another grew. There's something about praying together that draws people together. That's what happened here. All the planning and scheming of man will not draw people together, because we all have different plans, and we all have different opinions. But I'll tell you what will draw them together is for them to lift up their voice to God and pray.

We see also that the beauty of Christ was upon them. In Acts 4:33 it says, *“And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great grace was upon them all.”* You could see the beauty of Christ in their lives. We need to be a praying church. If we're going to be the church that people need, we must commit to pray.

It thrills me when a lost person will say, “Have the church pray for me.” That thrills me. That shows they're paying attention to something. We need to commit to praying that we would have a more keen awareness of God in our midst. We need to pray that God would move mightily in our midst. So much so, that the complacent would be stirred to do something, that the unexcited would be excited, that the unmoved would be moved. We need to pray. It's easy to get angry. It's a lot more difficult to pray. Anybody can get mad at what somebody did, but it takes a spiritual person to pray. We need to be a praying church.

I believe if we pray like this first church did, we will see God's power in our lives. We need to pray that God would change lives. “Lord here they are, we leave them with you.” I learned a long time ago I can't fix anybody. I can't fix myself. Just leave the matter with the Lord. Pray that chains would be broken. You realize that every single church service there are many people that come in here dragging their chains. They're in bondage. “Oh God break their chains. Break whatever chains that might be holding us.”

Commit to praying for children. Commit to praying for the little ones that God would save their souls, that God would protect them from sin and error and the wolves. Pray.

Oh it's easy to blame. Anybody can blame. But pray. Pray for moms and dads. It gets harder by the day to raise children. Moms and dads need prayer, moms and dads need to be praying together. Pray for teens and young adults, pray for one another, pray for marriages, pray for homes. We need to commit to praying. Praying that the truth will be preached. "Lord that the truth would always be preached from our pulpit, and Lord that you'd give us the grace to always to stand for what is right, to always to stand for the truth. Lord give us courage, Lord give us steadfastness, Lord give us some stick-to-it-ness." We need to commit to praying. Commit to praying that God would grant us the ability and the burden and the power to do what we ought to do, and to be what we ought to be.

We need to be praying for missionaries. We need to be praying for the Lord's churches. We need to be a people of prayer and most importantly that must be our impulse. That must be just what we do. We pray, we band together and we pray.

I don't know what it's going to take to get some of God's people to pray. It's hard to say what it will take, but that needs to be our impulse. That's true individually. You hear that someone is sick, your impulse ought to be Lord help them. Your impulse ought to be to pray for them. You hear that someone is wayward. Your impulse, your immediate impulse ought to be to pray for them. Not, "Oh how could they do that?" Pray for them. "Did you hear what so and so said?" Your immediate impulse ought to be to pray. We need to be a people who have the impulse, the inclination, to pray. A praying church is the kind of church that people need, because we all need prayer. Everybody needs prayer. If we're going to be what people need we need to be a praying church.

We need to take praying very seriously. As we see the day approaching, so much the more ought we to be praying. In these times, the day is approaching where people are more interested in recreation, more interested in their

own self interest than they are banding together with God's people to pray. God help us to be a people of prayer.

“Well you don't understand, I don't like praying out loud.” No one said you had to. Band together in prayer. What should we be doing when someone else is praying? What should you be doing when we call on somebody to pray? We call on a brother to pray. What should we all be doing while that brother is praying? We ought to be praying. That's what we ought to all be doing all the time.

All through the preaching we ought to be praying. All through the service we ought to be praying. When a brother is leading singing we ought to be praying. We ought to be singing, we ought to be praying. Always be praying. When we go home from services we ought to pray.

If Someone makes you angry, if someone hurts your feelings, pray for them. I guarantee you if you continue to pray for somebody you can not stay angry with them. It's not possible. Try it. I mean you continually pray for them every single day. You can't remain angry. You are going to let go of one of the two. You're either going to let go of the anger or stop praying. If somebody upsets you, pray. It needs to be our impulse. God help us to be a praying church.