

Sermon Series: **POWERfull: the work of the Spirit through us**

Sermon Title: **POWERfull Proclamation**

By: **Neil Silverberg**

Introduction

We are in a series entitled **POWERfull: the work of the Spirit through us**. We are looking at the Holy Spirit as the source of our power. There is a popular phrase often attributed to St. Francis: *"Preach the Gospel and if necessary use words."* It reminds us that if we are to be effective in evangelism our words and deeds need to match. But in recent years it has been used to justify not sharing the Gospel at all. What many people say today is: *"I'll just live my life before people and the Lord will use the way I live to draw them.* But rarely, if ever, do people ask us why our life is different. Jim Peterson in his classic book *Evangelism as a Lifestyle* says that real Gospel witness requires two things: *affirmation* and *proclamation*.

Affirmation means that we are affirming the Gospel through our lifestyle (we must adorn the Gospel through our lifestyle). Sometimes, when we are building relationships with those who are not saved, we want to be nice and kind and winsome and loving, especially with people we are around a lot such as fellow-workers, relatives, etc. But at some point Peterson reminds us we must *proclaim* the message if people are to be saved. It takes *words* for someone to be saved (faith comes by hearing). Peter told the Jerusalem apostles that an angel told Cornelius to *"send to Joppa for Peter who will share words with you by which you and your entire household will be saved."* In the book of Romans, Paul says this: *"How shall they hear without a preacher."*

Anybody serious about evangelism knows that affirmation is a lot easier than proclamation. *That's why our greatest need when it comes to evangelism is for boldness to proclaim the Gospel.* Most of us are a lot like the apostles before Pentecost. Before Pentecost, they were all fearful and ran to protect their own hides (These are the same men that swore, "I will never deny you"). Peter denied three times that he even knew Him before a servant girl. But if that was what they were before Pentecost, the difference afterwards couldn't be clearer. These timid, scared, fearful men turned into bold witnesses for the Lord Jesus, each of whom eventually laid their lives down for the faith. What happened? Did they sum up some hidden resources of courage that they always had and suddenly became bold? No; it was the ministry of the Spirit which had come as Jesus promised, who made them bold witnesses of the resurrection.

There is no clearer passage in this regard than the one before us. The man lame from birth had just been healed at the Gate Beautiful. The apostles begin preaching Jesus to the crowds that have witnessed the miracle. The temple captain and the Saducees are grieved because they are preaching in Jesus the resurrection from the dead. They have them arrested and they are brought before the high priest and his company and asked by what power or name they have done this. Peter, filled with the Spirit, proclaims the resurrection of Jesus with incredible boldness (remember this is the man who just a few weeks ago denied Jesus in front of a servant girl). In fact, this is where the story is really funny. The high priest and his company has just done away with Jesus by having him crucified. Now, they are seeing the boldness of Peter and John and scratching their heads (these guys remind us of someone).

They killed Jesus and now there's two of Him! *The thing that reminded them of Jesus was their boldness in proclamation.* The high priest counsels with his officials (they don't have a clue what to do with these men). They warn them not to speak in this man's name again. The apostles boldly respond by saying *"Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge, for we cannot but speak of what we have*

seen and heard." Immediately, Peter and John return to the brothers and sisters and give a report of what happened. The first thing they do (not the last thing but the first thing) is to go to prayer. It is as we look at their prayer that I believe we will find an answer to the question, *'What is the source of their boldness?'*

The Source of the Apostles' Boldness

This prayer reveals three things: (1) their knowledge God has sovereignly accomplished his plan in Jesus; (2) they prayed kingdom prayers; (3) they were totally reliant on the Spirit for their boldness.

I. They Were Totally Focused On God's Sovereign Plan Being Fulfilled in Jesus (vs. 24-28).

Notice the focus of their prayer. Before they ask for anything they worship the Sovereign Lord who is in control of everything. They base that on two things: first, He is Sovereign as Lord of creation. *"Sovereign Lord, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them."* God's sovereignty is rooted in the fact that he is the Creator of all. *The reason evolution exists is that Satan has worked overtime to do away with the idea that God is Creator.* If God is Creator, then he is Sovereign over everything. Satan contests that sovereignty and therefore fights tooth and nail against the doctrine of Creation. *The ultimate place where this community sees God's sovereignty at work though is in the fulfillment of his plan in Jesus of Nazareth.* In fact, they see this plan as the ultimate purpose of God down through the ages. That's because they are keenly aware of history because of their knowledge of Scripture.

They knew that all of Scripture was now being fulfilled in Jesus. This is especially true of the way they viewed their favorite Psalm, Ps. 2. *"Why did the Gentiles rage, and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers were gathered together, against the Lord and against his Anointed."* All of these predictions have been fulfilled in Jesus and his death, burial, resurrection and ascension. This was a source of great boldness to them. *The Gospel is not a proclamation of what might happen in the future but a declaration of what has happened in Jesus.*

Contrary to popular opinion, the message is NOT *"God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life."* When sinners hear this, they agree (*"that's great, I have a wonderful plan for my life as well"*). Rather, the message is, *"God, the Sovereign One, came to this planet by becoming a human being whose name was Jesus. That Man died, was buried, rose from the dead and ascended to the right hand of Majesty on high from which he now sovereignly rules over all."* It wasn't an offer but a declaration which says *"He is now rightful Lord and you are in rebellion to his Lordship, so repent!"*

Change your mind about who is running the universe and your life! Sometimes we tell people, *"You have to make Jesus Lord."* You don't have to make Jesus Lord—God made Him Lord! The Gospel is a declaration Jesus of Nazareth is now ruling the universe. He is currently in the process of putting down all of his enemies. One day every created being will bow down to Him and surrender to his Lordship. The Church is comprised of those who have done so willingly before everyone else is forced to.

II. They Prayed Kingdom Prayers (vs. 29-30).

Notice the content of their prayer. They have just been threatened not to share the Gospel again. Notice their response. They prayed what can only be described as a "kingdom prayer". Notice what they didn't pray. They didn't pray for their own protection or welfare. There is not even a hint of personal concern. Rather they say this: *"And now, Lord, look upon their threats and grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness,*

while you stretch out your hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of your holy servant Jesus."

Their primary focus is not themselves but about the kingdom and its advancement! They have only one concern—*boldness to proclaim the Word!* They also are asking for God to confirm the Word with signs and wonders. I want to ask you something; *Compare our prayers to this kingdom praying.* The difference should be obvious. Our prayers, if we are honest, more resemble whining than praying. Where did they learn to pray this way? They learned from the Lord Himself. He outlined what true prayer looks like in his classic prayer we call the "Lord's Prayer". Notice how he told us to pray: *Our Father, Who Art in Heaven. Hallowed be your Name. Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.*" This entire prayer is concerned with God's name, God's kingdom, God's will *first*. That's what I mean by the term "*kingdom*" praying. It's not that God is unconcerned with our needs for shortly He will instruct us to pray, "give us this day our daily bread." He does invite us to bring us our needs. But first, we are to be concerned with God and his purpose in the earth. Of course, you can't pray this way if you're not living this way.

Jesus gave us our mandate of how we are to live and pray: "*Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness and everything else will be added to you.*" If you are a believer, you have been dynamited into a kingdom where everything is about the King and his desires, not yours and mine. I once heard someone say that when we pray we reveal more than about what we believe than anywhere else (our theology is revealed in prayer). So just examine your prayers for a moment. How much of them revolve around our own needs rather than advancing God's kingdom. Do I ask for what they asked for: boldness to preach the Gospel, power to affirm the Gospel, the Gospel being advanced in the earth? Do I know anything about kingdom praying?

I am inspired and deeply convicted when I examine their prayers. And at the heart of this prayer is their awareness that they needed "**boldness**" to get the message out. They're being threatened and when you are threatened you have a tendency to want to pull back and cool it. These people say, "*And now, Lord, look upon their threats and grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness.*" No less a person than the apostle Paul felt his need for boldness (surely, if anyone didn't need boldness it was Paul).

Look at what he tells the Ephesian church: "*praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints, and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth **boldly** to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it **boldly**, as I ought to speak*" (Eph 6:18-20) Paul would not classify himself as bold in himself or else he wouldn't be asking for boldness. So if today you say, "I am not bold but timid" congratulations—you are in good company. That leads us to point three: the result of their prayer:

III. The Power of the Holy Spirit (vs. 29-30)

Remember what Jesus had said. The apostles were gathered and asked Him if this was the time he would restore the kingdom to Israel. Look at Jesus' response: "*It is not for you to know times and seasons which the Father has put in his own power*" (not for you to know times and seasons). Why then does the entire Church world seek to know times and seasons? "*But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you and you shall be witnesses to me.*" The word power here is: *dunamis which is the power, ability, efficiency* (given by the Spirit). They asked for insight understanding prophecy and God gave them ability for mission. I believe after all these guys had denied the Lord they knew how bereft and powerless they were to confront their generation with the Gospel.

Jesus knew that and sent them another Helper, a Powerful Advocate to plead their case. But I want you to notice something. Jesus told them the *reason* they were receiving power. This is important because unless we

know what power is for, we may abuse it. Do you want power in your life? Why? Power is not an end in itself. Jesus, in his teaching, made it clear *why* He would give power:

-He would bring to their remembrance all that Jesus taught (Jn. 14:26).

-He will cause them to bear witness (Jn. 15:26).

-Will convict the world of sin, righteousness and judgment (16:8).

These texts taken together reveal the main reason Jesus promised power—to **effectively proclaim Jesus to their generation**. *If we want power to simply spruce up our meetings so we're not bored instead of wanting power to confront our generation with the Gospel, we are wrong!* They were empowered for a reason (*and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the Word with boldness*). They were filled for a reason—to speak the Word boldly!

#####

The questions below are for House Church Group Discussion.

- 1) Why is proclamation of the Gospel necessary in evangelism?
- 2) Why is boldness our greatest need in evangelism?
- 3) How does the prayer prayed in Acts 4: 23-30 reveal how they were focused on God's sovereign plan being fulfilled in Jesus?
- 4) How does their prayer reveal that their prayers were "kingdom" prayers?
- 5) Where did they learn to pray like that?
- 6) Why did they feel the need for boldness?
- 7) What does it mean they were "filled with the Holy Spirit"? Weren't they already filled?