

The Competing Powers of Fear and Faith

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[0 : 00] The passage today is from Acts 4, verses 1 to 31. And as they were speaking to the people, the priests and the captain of the temple and the Sadducees came upon them, greatly annoyed because they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead.

And they arrested them and put them in custody until the next day, for it was already evening. But many of those who had heard the word believed, and the number of the men came to about five thousand.

On the next day, the rulers and the elders and the scribes gathered together in Jerusalem, with Annas the high priest, and Caiaphas, and John and Alexander, and all who were of the high priestly family.

And when they had set them in the midst, they inquired, By what power, or by what name, did you do this? Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, Rulers of the people and elders, if we are being examined today concerning a good deed done to a crippled man, by what means this man has been healed, let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead, by him this man is standing before you well.

This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men, by which we must be saved.

[1 : 34] Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they were astonished, and they recognized that they had been with Jesus.

But seeing the man who was healed standing beside them, they had nothing to say in opposition. But when they had commanded them to leave the council, they conferred with one another, saying, What shall we do with these men?

For that a notable sign has been performed through them is evident to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it. But in order that it may spread no further among the people, let us warn them to speak no more to anyone in this name.

So they called them and charged them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John answered them, 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.

And when they had further threatened them, they let them go, finding no way to punish them, because of the people, who were all praising God for what had happened. For the man on whom this sign of healing was performed was more than forty years old.

[2 : 48] When they were released, they went to their friends and reported what the chief priests and the elders had said to them. And when they heard it, they lifted their voices together to God and said, Sovereign Lord, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them, who, through the mouth of our father David, your servant, said by the Holy Spirit, 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. For truly in this city they were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, to do whatever your hand and your plan has predestined to take place.

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.

And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together were shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness. This is the word of the Lord.

All right, thank you. Thanks, Hannah. Let's pray together, and then we're going to look at this passage. Father, your word is so wonderful.

[4 : 18] It's thousands of years old, and yet it speaks to us even today. It speaks to our circumstances. It speaks to our hearts. Lord, as we look at your word, we pray that you will speak to us. We are more interested in you speaking than the opinions of man.

And so, God, I pray, help us to see what you want us to see in your word. Help us to do here what you want us to do. Help us to be the people that you want us to be. Lord, we pray these things in your wonderful and your gracious name.

Amen. As we come to this passage today, I want us just to, I want to ask us a question up front, and that is, how do you respond to fear?

How do you respond to fear? How do you respond when what is maybe most important to you, maybe your family, your life, your job, maybe your reputation, the thing that makes you feel secure in life, when that, when the thing that's most important to you is threatened, is under threat, is the potential of being taken away from you.

Friends, how do you react when someone challenges you or accuses you of something, when someone wants to take something precious away from you? Friends, how do we respond when somebody's actions threaten our security, our life, maybe our family members?

[5 : 42] I think we can all recognize that in times such as these, when we feel threatened or afraid, often the deepest, most real part of ourselves is revealed.

There's a guy called Eric with me for many years. Eric Reid said, over many years I've learned this lesson. A person's spiritual maturity is not truly visible until they don't get their way.

Then you see the real person. And it's true, right? It's very easy to kind of play the part and go through the actions and have the smiley face. But when things don't go our way, when things that are precious to us are threatened or potentially taken away, what's most real to us, what's deep inside of us comes alive, comes out.

Well, we're working through the book of Acts and up until this point the story has been very wonderful and encouraging, right? In Acts chapter 2 the Holy Spirit is poured out on the church and they are filled with the Spirit in a remarkable way.

The gospel goes out and many people respond and come to saving faith. An amazing, amazing community is formed. A community of generosity and selflessness and giving is formed.

[6 : 55] And signs and wonders are being done. Miracles are happening. And everything seems to be going well. But the Christian life isn't always this rosy. And here on chapter 4 we see the first instances of trouble coming their way.

Because here we see the first opposition against the church. And what we see in this passage is two groups of people who both are threatened by the other group.

They both feel threatened. One is perceived, one is real. And yet here in this passage we see two different ways of people responding to the threat that is in front of them. Friends, how do you respond to feeling threatened and afraid?

Here we're going to see two different ways by two different groups. And so this passage that Hannah read to us is the fallout from what happened last week. Don't worry about that Oscar. Last week Alan preached Acts chapter 3 and what we saw there is two disciples Peter and John are on their way to the temple to pray at the regular hour of prayer and they walk past a man who is crippled and he's begging.

[8 : 00] He says, please give me some money and they say, we don't have silver and gold but what we do have is Jesus Christ. And they pray for him and miraculously his legs are strengthened and he starts to walk.

He's healed. And suddenly this man that's never walked in his life before is leaping and dancing and celebrating and a crowd starts to form around Peter and John and their new friend.

And the crowd forms and a stir arises and Peter stands up and he says, listen, this miracle is great but this isn't the real miracle. The real miracle is that Jesus Christ was dead but is now alive again.

And the reason God did this is because God sent Jesus to save us from our rebellion. To save us from our sin. That's the real miracle. You want miracles? Miracles are great but the amazing miracle, Jesus Christ has risen from the dead.

He's alive. He said, you can come to know him and be saved. And that's where we got to at the end of last week. Now in this passage we're going to see what happens as a result of that instance.

[9 : 06] And today we're going to see three things in this passage. As always, we're going to see the crippling power of fear and insecurity, the compelling power of faith and confidence, and then thirdly, how we grow in this faith and confidence.

Okay, so let's dive in and take a look. Firstly, the crippling power of fear and insecurity. So here, Peter has just finished giving this amazing sermon. He's described what's happening to the crowds. He's impressed upon them in the fact that Jesus is the Messiah who came to rescue and save us from our sin. And look what happens. Look at chapter 4, verse 1. It says, As they were speaking to the people, the priests and the captain of the temple, that means the captain of the police, and the Sadducees came upon them greatly annoyed because they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead.

And they arrested them, put them in custody until the next day for it was already evening. I wonder what Peter and John thought at this, right? Remember, they are in Jerusalem, the very city that just a few weeks and months earlier, Jesus was arrested one night, put in custody overnight, put on trial the next day, and then ended up on a Roman cross.

And so here they are arrested at night and trial awaiting them the next day. And throughout the night they must be thinking, is our fate going to be the same as Jesus of Nazareth? Are we going to end up on a cross?

[10 : 34] And look at verse 6, Luke just happens to tell us who is overseeing this arrest. It's Caiaphas, the high priest, and his father-in-law, Annas, who John tells us were the same two people that oversaw the arrest and the trial and the crucifixion of Jesus.

Now, why would the religious leaders arrest Peter and John? I mean, what have they done wrong? All they've done is they've helped a crippled man to get strong and they've done a sign and a wonder, what's wrong with that?

Well, look at what Luke tells us. He says, as they were speaking, the priests and the captain and the Sadducees came upon them greatly annoyed because they were teaching the people and proclaiming Jesus the resurrection from the dead.

What causes their annoyance? Well, it's not just that they're telling people about Jesus. It's about the fact that they're proclaiming the resurrection. That Jesus of Nazareth died but didn't stay dead. He rose again. And what that means? And what does it mean? Well, it means that Jesus is the divine king. He's the messianic king, the one who rules on the throne of not just Israel but all creation.

[11 : 48] He is the king of the entire universe. The fact that he died and rose again means that Jesus is not just a good man, a moral man, a religious teacher, a rabbi.

He is the messianic king, the divine king that he said he was, that he proclaimed to be. And that means that everyone, everywhere, needs to bow down and surrender to him as Lord.

Where is Jesus now? Well, he's not in the grave. He's on the throne. The throne of the entire universe. And everyone needs to bow down to him as king and as Lord.

Look at the last verse of Peter's sermon, chapter 3. He says this, God, having raised Jesus up, sent him to you first to bless you.

How? By turning every one of you from your rebellion, from your wickedness. In the book of Acts, whenever the apostles are teaching about Jesus, what do they proclaim?

[12 : 49] The fact that he died and he rose again, that he's resurrected from the grave. Why? Because that guarantees as proof that Jesus is who he said he is. He is heaven and earth's true king.

And this greatly gets under the skin of the religious leaders. They are greatly annoyed. The word there means to be agitated, to be disturbed. It's like, your peace has been disturbed.

And now the religious leaders are agitated. Something has got under their skin. Why? Because the message of Jesus as king is a threat to their own power.

Their own authority. Their own influence. And here the religious leaders are watching their power, their authority, slipping through their hands.

And the more they try and grasp, the more it slips like sand on the beach. It's slipping through their hands. And they are deeply afraid. And they feel deeply threatened.

[13:46] Friends, what greatly annoys you? What causes you to be afraid? To feel threatened?

To feel agitated? If we look back over the last week of our lives, when was it that the words of our mouth were harsh and cutting and vindictive?

When did we threaten others in response to feeling threatened ourselves? When were our words defensive and harsh? Why did we speak like that? I was thinking just Thursday night, Oscar led us at prayer meeting and part of the time was a prayer of confession and like Alan led us this morning. And one of the things I had to confess was just that very morning, taking our kids to school and there was delays and, you know, shoes weren't on in time and I was getting agitated. I was getting frustrated because my plan and schedule was being put out of plates, right?

And the words that came out of my mouth weren't the nicest words to my teenage kids. Friends, as I look back over my life, the times that I've been the worst husband, the worst father, the worst son, the worst friend or colleague, the times my words have been the most cutting and sharp are often the times I felt most insecure, most threatened, most afraid.

[15:06] I've told you this story once before. I remember a good friend in Cape Town. He was my friend but also my boss and I remember we were texting each other and he said something and I felt backed in a corner and I sent this message back saying, okay Ryan, if you want to play like that, I will also play hardball.

All right? Probably not the kind of thing you want to say to your boss but feeling pushed in a corner, I was going to come out fighting. Friends, what makes us feel agitated, annoyed, defensive, or aggressive?

And yeah, we see these religious leaders, they are feeling threatened because the message of Jesus is destabilizing their power, their authority and how do they respond?

Well, they threaten back. Look at verse 15 here. Verse 15 says, when they had brought the apostles in for questioning and then says, when they commanded the disciples to leave the council, they conferred with one another saying, what shall we do with these men?

For that a notable sign has been performed through them is evident to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem. We cannot deny it but in order that it may spread no further, let us warn them and to speak no more to anybody in this name.

[16:20] And verse 21, when they had further threatened them, they let them go, finding no way to punish them because of all the people for they were praising God for what had happened. How do they respond to feeling threatened?

They threaten back in return. And one of the things that John Stott points out in his commentary on this passage is that nowhere do the religious leaders attempt to discredit the apostles' message of the resurrection of Jesus.

Nowhere do they say, oh, if Jesus rose, show us the body. Where's the body? Where is he now? They know where do they attempt to discredit the message, even though they knew that message was central to their gospel.

Why? Because it's not the truthfulness of the message that they're worried about, it's what's going to happen to their power, what's happening to them. It's not the truthfulness of the gospel that's threatening them, it's their own insecurity and their fear that's got them riled.

One of the things that I saw in this passage for the very first time this week, I've never seen it before actually, is that the people in this passage that actually hold all of the power, all of the authority, both political power and social power and military power, the people that hold all the power are those that are most afraid.

[17:37] and conversely, those that hold no social power whatsoever, verse 13, Luke describes, they describe these men as common uneducated men, fishermen turned preachers, those who hold no power whatsoever are fearless and bold and courageous.

And that doesn't make any sense, right? You think the people that hold all the power and the authority, they've got the money, they've got the social power, they've got the military, they should be the ones that are not afraid and they're deeply afraid. And these guys that hold no power whatsoever are bold and courageous.

Why? Why? Friends, one of the things that the Bible tells us again and again is that it's not your circumstances that gives you peace, it's not your circumstances that gives you joy or confidence or

rest, it's something else.

Your circumstances can be falling apart and yet you can live with joy and peace and rest. And conversely, you can have all the power and all the authority and all the money in the world and yet be deeply insecure, deeply afraid, deeply unrested.

Now, friends, what does this tell us? One of the things that the scriptures tell us again and again is that in most circumstances, the thing that causes us the greatest fear, the greatest angst in our heart is the thing that is most precious to us.

[18 : 58] The thing that we attach our value to, the thing we attach our self-worth to, the thing that in a sense, we feel like we cannot live without. The thing that is a good thing that has become almost like God in our hearts.

And the idea of losing this thing causes our hearts such fear and anxiety and angst in our hearts that it causes us to act and behave and to say things that normally we'd never think we're possible to say or do.

And the Bible shows us that what is most precious to us actually has a power over our lives, a crippling power, a destructive power, a power to control our behavior and our relationships.

And what we fear, we give immense power to and power that often is destructive and harmful. And so the crippling power of fear and anxiety in our lives.

But this passage also shows us secondly, the compelling power of faith and conviction. friends, what is our greatest nightmare? Losing the one thing that we believe we cannot live without.

[20 : 06] But here the gospel comes with great good news. Because the gospel tells us that Jesus Christ promises us that the one thing that matters most in the world, the one thing that we need more than anything else in the world, the only thing that can give us real security and real peace and real joy and real hope and boldness and confidence is something that can actually never be taken away from us, can never be devalued, never be spoiled, never be destroyed.

It's something that inflation and tariffs and markets fluctuation and inflation and these things can never touch. And that is who Jesus Christ is, what he's done on the cross by dying and rising again, and who you are if you are in Christ.

Jesus says that who he is and what he's done on the cross and who you are, your true identity, your true security can never be touched or devalued or diminished or subject to inflation or anything else.

The resurrection of Jesus from the dead, despite everything that the authorities try to throw at Jesus, including being nailed to a Roman cross, the resurrection guarantees that what he offers is truly unshakable, unbendable, undestroyable, and therefore rock solid.

And look at how this plays out in the life of these disciples, these apostles. It's this rock solid confidence in the unrivaled supremacy of Jesus that causes Peter and the apostles to speak with such boldness, such confidence.

[21 : 52] Look at what they say in verse 8 here. It says, Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, Rulers of the people and elders, let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, this man whom you crucified, whom God raised up from the dead, by him this man is standing before you well.

And then Peter quotes Psalm 118. He says, This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. And there is salvation in no one else, for no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.

And the leaders get all threatening and intimidating and they threaten them. Look at verse 19. Peter says, Whether it's right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than God, you judge, but we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard.

Friends, just a few weeks, these very people in the council have sent Jesus to the cross. And Peter, with unbelievable boldness and confidence, can look them in the eye and say, you crucified him, but that changes nothing.

And you can crucify us, you can threaten us, you can send us to the Roman cross as well. We cannot but speak of what we've seen and heard and known to be true. And Luke's point here is that it's not the boldness and the authority and the extroverted temperament of these men, it's the conviction that they hold because they know who Jesus is.

[23 : 26] These common uneducated men have discovered the compelling power of faith in Christ. But in this passage, there's something in particular that Luke and the apostles see, and I want us to see it here.

There's something in particular that leads to their boldness and the authority. It's not just their faith in general, it's something in particular that they've come to see in the scriptures that's led them to this confidence.

And to see that, look at the two Old Testament quotes that they quote here. The apostles here quote two Psalms, firstly Psalm 118 and then Psalm chapter 2.

And look at what Peter says here in verse 11, I read it earlier, Peter says this, this Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you the builders that has become the chief cornerstone.

Peter here is quoting Psalm 118 and Psalm 118 is this amazingly confident Psalm. It's a Psalm about the fact that the person who trusts in the Lord will prevail despite the difficulties and the hardships in life.

[24 : 30] And let me read a couple of verses to us. This is what Psalm 118 says. Out of my distress, I called to the Lord. The Lord answered me and set me free. The Lord is on my side.

I shall not fear. What can man do to me? The Lord is on my side. I shall look and triumph on those who hate me. It is better to take refuge in the Lord than to trust in man.

Better to take refuge in the Lord than trust in even princes. And on and on it goes about my confidence is in God, not man. And then verse 22. The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone.

It's a great picture, isn't it? I don't know. I'm sure many of us know the statue of David, Michelangelo's statue of David in Florence of Italy. Some people might have just to go visit that a few weeks ago.

The statue of David is probably the greatest statue ever sculpted by human hands, right? I mean, it's just mind-blowingly remarkable. But I'm not sure. I'm sure many of you know this.

[25 : 31] The piece of marble that Michelangelo used to sculpture that statue was actually rejected and despised by many master sculptors of his day. And so sculptors like Donatella and other famous master sculptors had all tried to work on this piece of marble and had rejected it, describing it as mediocre and unworkable.

And so after three or four master sculptors had tried to work on this, it was eventually discarded and left in a yard for 25 years as something for kind of amateurs to practice on.

And then one day Michelangelo finds this piece of marble and says, I will try and bring something out of it. And he does. And he carves the greatest sculpture the world has ever seen, right?

It's still standing today hundreds of years later. What an amazing picture of the stone that is rejected and despised and yet something remarkable has come out of it.

And that's the imagery that Peter is quoting out of Psalm 118. He's saying, Jesus is like the stone that you, the authorities, you rejected, you despised him, you thought he's nothing worthwhile, he's a trouble causer, and you try to get rid of him.

[26 : 44] You try to kill him and then throw him in the yard. But this rejected piece of stone has become the cornerstone, the foundation stone upon which God is building his kingdom. This is Jesus.

He's the one that you crucified. You try to get rid of him. You think he's a nothing and a nobody, but nothing, nothing, not the authorities, nothing in this world will stop God's plans and purposes.

For this despised and rejected stone is the foundation upon which God's entire kingdom is going to be built. And then look at what Peter does. He says the same thing in verse 25.

These guys are arrested and they are then released and they go back to their friends and they pray and they quote Psalm 2. And Psalm 2 is this amazing Psalm about the fact that God is a king that he's going to anoint and put on the throne.

But the nations around him don't like this king. They don't want him on the throne. And so they come together and they have a consultation about how they can get rid of this king. Look at what Psalm 2 says. Why did the Gentiles rage and the people plot in vain?

[27 : 49] The kings of the earth set themselves together. The rulers gathered together against the Lord and against his anointed. This king that's going to be on the throne, the other kings gather and say how can we get rid of this king?

Well Psalm 2 goes on to say he who sits in the heavens laughs. He laughs at the futile intent. So I was trying to stop his son being crowned king and Lord of all. The Lord is on the throne.

He holds them in derision. Friends, this is Jesus. And Peter says this is who Jesus is. He's the king. He's despised. He's rejected.

But he's the Lord who will conquer and rule and reign forever. Ever and ever of all opposition. This was their conviction. That these apostles know how the story is going to end.

Yes, you killed Jesus, but it didn't stop him. And these apostles know that nothing, that they can arrest them, they can persecute them, they can terrorize them, they can even take their lives.

[28 : 50] And that won't stop the plans and purposes of God. That the gospel will go out. That Jesus will be exalted. That God is going to bring about a new creation where all evil and wickedness will be banished.

And those who know him will be saved because they've come to trust in Jesus. And they know how the story ends. And because of that conviction, they have immense power, immense authority to stand up to these leaders and say, throw at us what you will.

We will not back down because you will die and we will live forever and ever and ever. Friends, the compelling power of faith and conviction. And in a sense, the disciples know that what happens to Jesus must happen to them.

That for Jesus, the road to glory is paved with persecution and opposition. The cobblestones on the way to glory are stones of opposition and persecution.

But the disciples know that the same road that Jesus walked is the same road that they're going to have to walk. And since they're not surprised, they say, you did this to Jesus, you can do it to us. But we know where this road ends.

[29 : 56] It ends in glory. Friends, where does your ultimate hope lie? To what have you pinned your hopes, your confidence, your joy, your security, your peace?

Friends, how stable is that hope? Friends, what comes out of us when that hope is threatened? When our security is challenged? When our authority is challenged?

How do we respond when somebody threatens our joy, our peace, our security? Are we like the religious leaders, full of anger, full of threats, full of fear? Or has the compelling power of Jesus Christ in the gospel produced a confidence, a faith, a joy in our hearts?

You know, towards the end of Peter's life, when he's an old man, he writes these two letters to the church. And in his first letter in the New Testament, it's just called the letter of one Peter. But he's an older man now and he writes to these Christians that are really suffering.

They're going through a very, very difficult time. And he writes them and he says, he reminds them that because of the resurrection of Jesus, they have been baptized or immersed into what he calls a living hope.

[31 : 08] Such a great description. It's not a vague hope that's somewhere down there. It's not a dead hope. It's a living hope. I hope that he says, cannot perish, spoil, or fade.

I hope that it's kept rock solid secure in heaven for you. It's like the picture of the Swiss bank vaults, right? Nobody's going to touch them. He says, your hope is like those Swiss bank vaults, but it's kept in heaven.

Nobody's going to touch it. And then he says, now you're going through suffering and your suffering is like a refiner's fire. It's taking your faith and it's refining it like gold in the furnace.

But this suffering, because of your hope in heaven is going to lead to praise and glory and inexpressible joy. Oh my goodness.

Inexpressible joy in the midst of suffering. Where do you find that? Peter says, because of your hope in the resurrection of Jesus. Inexpressible joy, compelling power of faith in the resurrection of Jesus.

[32 : 06] Friends, if you're a follower of Jesus, you have every reason for great confidence, great remarkable peace, even joy, even in the midst of suffering. For the God who called you, who gave you his spirit, who we've come to worship this morning, is not dead, but he's alive.

And he's sovereign over everything and everyone. And he will be victorious in the end, no matter what the world throws at him, no matter what the world throws at you. So, what should we do?

You know, friends, this week, something is going to happen that's going to cause fear and anxiety in each one of our hearts. Each one of us this week are going to face something that's going to make us a heart rate rise, right?

Something is going to cause us to feel slightly threatened. How should we respond? Maybe you get a bad medical report. Maybe something happens at work. Maybe it's the headlines or you get a phone call from a family member.

Something's going to challenge us this week. How do we respond? Well, lastly, how do we grow in faith? In this passage, we see something that Peter and the apostles do that really helps us. [33 : 11] Something very practical that helps us grow in faith. On the surface, it looks like they pray. They turn to God in prayer. And that is a good thing, right? We should all pray. But every Christian knows we should grow in prayer.

Yes, yes, I know. I should pray more. You should pray more. We know that. But in this passage, there's something very particular that the apostles do that if you've taken any of the CCF courses or you're familiar with Paul Tripp's writings or David Powlison, you should notice something that they do here, right?

David Powlison was an amazing, amazing Christian counselor. And one of the things that he says is when the heat of life comes, when life really heats up, when the stuff of life comes to us, there's a question that we all need to ask ourselves.

I mean, there's a couple of questions. One of the questions is why is my heart responding the way it is? Why am I feeling the way I am? But there's one question in particular that's very, very important. And the question is this.

Who is God? And in particular, who is God as it relates to this situation I'm facing, right? I'm feeling unloved. Who is God?

[34 : 22] God is the one who promises his love will never cease, never fail. I'm feeling, I'm feeling, what else do we feel? I'm feeling like uncertain about the future.

Who is God? He's the one who knows all things and omniscient about every single thing, all the features in his hands. When the heat of life gets turned up, we must ask ourselves the question, who is God as it relates to the fear, the anxiety, the worry, the sadness, the joy, the hope.

Who is God as it relates to what I'm going through? Well, look at what the apostles do here in verse 23. Look at how they tell themselves who God is. How they answer this question.

Verse 23 says this, When they were released, they went to their friends and reported what the chief priests and the elders had said to them. And when they heard it, they lifted up their voices to God and said, Sovereign Lord, you who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in it. And then they quote Psalm 2 about the nations raging and God being sovereign over everything. It says, They were filled with the spirit and they continued to speak the word of God with all boldness.

[35 : 58] Two things to know about this prayer. Firstly, nowhere do the prayers, nowhere do the disciples pray for an easy time. Nowhere do they pray and say, God, please just take it away.

Just make it easy. Just make our path smooth and play it sailing. They never ask for an easy time. But secondly, look what they do do. They answer the question, who is God?

And who is he? Look at what they pray. He is the sovereign Lord. That means the one who is in total control of everything, of everyone.

He's control of Pontius Pilate. He was in control of Herod. He is in control of Judas Iscariot. He's control of the authorities now. He's control of the elders and the leaders that are arresting these guys and threatening them and trying to intimidate them.

He is Lord of everyone, including your boss and your colleague and your neighbor and your parents and your children.

[36 : 58] He is Lord of everyone. The sovereign Lord of everything. He's not only Lord of everyone. He's Lord of everything. Everything in all of history. Every atom that moves God is sovereign Lord over every minute thing in the history of the world.

Look at what he says here, including the death of Jesus upon the cross and the glorious resurrection of Jesus from the grave. Friends, who is God? He's the one who's in total control of everyone and everything.

Friends, what is our only hope in life and death? That the risen Christ alone, who lived and died and rose again, is King and Lord over everyone and everything.

See friends, what the apostles do here is they have this deep conviction and they remind themselves of this conviction in prayer that this is who God is.

And because this is who God is, it gives them incredible power to face the difficulties that they are facing, to stare them down, to walk through the trials and the storms with immense courage and confidence and boldness.

[38 : 05] Friends, it's not the naturally bold or the courageous or the extroverted who discover this confidence. It's those who irrespective of their personality type and know who God is and know how

to remind themselves of who God is in prayer and worship and know how to find their confidence in him.

Friends, this week, as we said, you and I are going to face a challenge. No doubt about it. We're all going to be confronted with real fears. How are we going to respond? Are you going to be controlled by the crippling power of fear and anxiety?

Are you going to be enabled by the power of faith and confidence in God? Will we come to Jesus and remind ourselves of the gospel, remind ourselves of who he is and turn to him in prayer and trust that he who died and rose again is with us and that our faith is in him.

Why don't we do that as we come to him now in prayer? Let's pray together. Oh, sovereign Lord, the one who is Lord of all, who made heaven and earth, the sea and everything in it.

You, Lord God, are king over everything and everyone. And God, because you're king, we bow down and we surrender our lives to you. We don't want to be like the religious leaders who buckle and resist your authority.

[39 : 19] We want to receive you as king and Lord. Help us to do that now, I pray. God, help us this week in the midst of trials and challenges and difficulties. Please give us your Holy Spirit. Help us to live full of faith and confidence.

Lord, we need your spirit. We need you. We need the sovereign God. And so I pray, God, give us your spirit and help us to walk in faith and confidence in you, not in ourselves. In your great name we pray.

Amen.