



Whatever honeymoon there may have been in the early church, it becomes increasingly clear that the honeymoon is over. While many are coming to faith in Christ, many more are hardening in their opposition to the apostles and their message. The tension mounts as the risen Lord performs the same kind of signs and wonders through the apostles that he performed while he was preaching and teaching among them. It is one thing to argue the finer points of Scripture, it is another thing altogether to argue with the palpable power and presence of the living Christ.

Even the chief priests and the elders had to admit, “Everyone living in Jerusalem knows they have performed a notable sign, and we cannot deny it (v. 17).”

The chief priests and the elders do the only thing they can do. They put Peter and John on notice. “They called them in ...and commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus (v. 18).” Peter and John do the only thing they could do, they put the chief priests and the elders on notice. “We cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard (v. 20).”

So the stage is set for a conflict that will carry us through the book of Acts, and into all of history. Following Christ will not always be easy.

The disciples may have comforted themselves with the words of Jesus in the moments before the cross, “I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world (John 16:33).”

As long as we live in these bodies we will experience the tension between the peace we find in Christ, and the trouble we encounter in the world. The way the disciples respond to the threats of the chief priests and elders is instructive of how we should respond to the inevitable difficulties of living as God’s people in this world.

THEY DREW COMFORT FROM ON ANOTHER (v. 23)

From the moment the church was born, the people of God found their identity in the person of Christ and the body of Christ. A new community was formed, and it was in that community that Peter and John turned in the face of the chief priest's threats.

²³ On their release, Peter and John went back to their own people and reported all that the chief priests and the elders had said to them.

1. What role does the body of Christ play in the lives of believers?
2. How does biblical community enable us to face trials in a way that honors God?

THEY REMINDED THEMSELVES OF WHO GOD IS (vv. 24-28)

The disciples ground their prayer in character of God. They remind themselves that he is the God of creation, the God of prophecy, and the God who had recently accomplished his purposes in the death and resurrection of Christ.

²⁴ When they heard this, they raised their voices together in prayer to God. "Sovereign Lord," they said, "you made the heavens and the earth and the sea, and everything in them."

²⁵ You spoke by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of your servant, our father David: "Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain?"

²⁶ The kings of the earth rise up and the rulers band together against the Lord and against his anointed one.'

²⁷ Indeed Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed. ²⁸ They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen.

1. Why is it important that we pause to consider who God is before we present our requests to him?
2. What truths did the disciples consider about God that would have been of particular comfort to them in the face of the opposition that they were facing from the chief priests and elders?
3. How can we draw comfort from the same truths?
4. What are some additional truths we should consider as when times are hard?

THEY PRAY A REMARKABLY MATURE PRAYER (vv. 29-30)

Instead of praying for comfort, the disciples pray that God would take note of their circumstances and give them the strength to represent him well in the face of suffering.

²⁹ Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. ³⁰ Stretch out your hand to heal and perform signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus."

1. What are some things we most often pray for when times get hard?
2. What is remarkable about the disciples' prayer?
3. What are some things we can learn from this prayer?
4. What are some of the ways God can show up in our trials?

THEY EXPERIENCE GOD'S POWER AND PRESENCE (v. 31)

Since their prayers were in line with the purposes of God, God graciously answers their prayers, not only by granting the strength and courage they had prayed for, but by affirming his presence in a miraculous way—"the place where they were meeting was shaken."

³¹ After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly.

1. How does God answer the disciples' prayer?
2. Seldom do we hear as immediately and powerful from God as the disciples did in this situation. Why do you think this is the case?
3. Why do you think God chose to respond so powerfully in this particular situation?
4. How should we respond when we do not experience earth shattering responses to our prayer?