

Power in Persecution

by Martyn-Lloyd Jones

The church must return to the apostolic pattern of prayer and worship in response to persecution, remembering who God is and approaching Him with reverence and humility.

Duration: 47:01

Scripture: Acts 4:23-32

Topics: "Persecution"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker addresses a desperate situation that the church is facing. He emphasizes that the church should not have rushed into the situation but should have used diplomacy and gradually introduced their message. The speaker contrasts the church's approach with the psychology system, highlighting the church's lack of fear and reliance on God's power. He encourages the church not to be afraid of those who oppose them, as God has the ability to shake anything that stands against Him.

Transcript

I should like to call your attention this morning to that incident in the life of the early church, the account of which was read to us by Dr. Fitch in the fourth chapter of the book of the Acts of the Apostles. And I would like to emphasize particularly the twenty-third and the first portion of the twenty-fourth verses. And being let go, they went unto 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, and then follows the account of the prayer of the church. Now, while I say that I'm anxious to emphasize that particular statement, it is essential that I should deal, in a sense, with the entire passage, because, as you noticed and observed, it is the account, as I say, of one great incident. It's the account of the first persecution that was suffered and endured by the infant Christian church.

The occasion was one which, I take it, is familiar to most of you. Peter and John, going up one afternoon into the temple to pray, saw a layman seated at the beautiful gate of the temple. And he asked the alms of them.

But Peter, in that famous phrase, turned to him and said, Silver and gold have I none, but such as I have, give I thee. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk. And the man immediately sprang to his feet and went into the temple, walking and leaping and praising God.

Now, this naturally led to a very great stir and commotion, and the people gathered together from all directions. And they were very attentive to the preaching and the teaching of the apostles. This, in turn, of course, alarmed the authorities, particularly the religious authorities.

So they arrested the apostles and arraigned them before their council and examined them. But as the account tells us, they could find no real charge to bring against them. So they decided that they would let them go for the time being.

And so they turned to the apostles and told them that they were to be let free on this occasion, but on one condition. And that was that they should never again preach nor teach in the name of this Jesus. They warned them, they straightly charged them, we are told, that they mustn't do anything more in the name of this Jesus.

Otherwise, the consequences to them would not only be trial, but also death. In other words, these Jewish authorities were concerned with nothing less than the extermination of Christianity. So they let them go with this solemn and serious and alarming warning.

And there we are now looking at the two apostles, Peter and John, standing on the pavement, as it were, outside the law court, with this tremendous threat upon them. What are they going to do? What can they do in such circumstances? Now, it's to that I wish to call your attention this morning. And I need scarcely say as I do so that my reason for directing your attention to it is that it seems to me to provide us with a very perfect parallel of the whole state and condition of the Christian church at this present moment.

Here we have in Peter and John, as it were, the church of God today, and set against these tremendous powers. And I would emphasize that they are intent upon nothing less than upon the very extermination of the Christian cause. The problem confronting Peter and John was not that of just maintaining the cause or of improving it somewhat.

I say that these men were intent upon the destruction of Christianity, the extermination of Christ and his teaching and his people. And I believe that that is the position at the present time. Our problem is not merely that of maintaining the cause.

I believe that in many senses we are fighting for the very life of the Christian faith and the Christian church at the present time. There are forces in the world which hate Christ and his people and which are concerned, I say, with nothing less than the final extermination of Christ and his cause and his people. And the question therefore for us is, what do we do in such a situation? Well, my message this morning is a very simple one.

It is just this. We have nothing to do, it seems to me, but to return to the apostolic pattern. This is a wonderful book, this book of the Acts of the Apostles.

It is a book of history. It is a book which actually records what happened to the early church. But in a very wonderful way it is also a kind of summary of the whole history of the Christian church.

There is nothing that has ever happened to the church, but that in a sense you will find it somewhere in this book in embryo, in suggestion. And here, I say, we look at the church facing and experiencing her first cruel persecution. What are we to do? We have nothing to do but to go back and to imitate and to emulate the example of these first great servants of God who were raised up in the Christian church.

What did they do? Well, let's look at the story. Will you forgive me, I wonder, if I remind you for a few brief moments of what they didn't do. And I believe, my friends, that that's very important at the present time.

I believe one of the first things the church has to learn today is what not to do. Look at these two men, Peter and John. There they are outside.

What are they going to do? What can be done in this desperate situation? Well, it's very interesting to observe that they didn't turn to one another and say something like this. Well, no, here we are. We are in terrible trouble.

And, of course, we are in trouble because we were a little bit too precipitant. We rushed into it. We didn't take time.

We bombarded the people. We should have used a little diplomacy. We should have got at it a little bit more quietly.

We should have gradually insinuated our message. And then we wouldn't have caused this upheaval. We've been much too brusque about it all.

We've been too violent. Let's lie low for a while. Let the commotion die down.

And then, when everything's all right again, let's start once more. But go at it with a little more diplomacy this time. And then, no doubt, we shall succeed.

Oh, there's not a suggestion of that here. You don't find things like that in the New Testament, in the book of the Acts of the Apostles. There's no worldly wisdom here.

No, no, they didn't do that. Neither do I find the one turning to the other and saying something like this. Well, now, it's quite clear to me that we rarely have roused these people in this opposition because of our preaching of the resurrection.

That was what they preached. They preached Jesus and the resurrection. And the Sadducees didn't believe in resurrection.

The authorities didn't like that message. I don't find one of these men turning to the other and saying, Well, now, the mistake we've made is to give such prominence to this resurrection. They don't like that.

It's offensive to them. We must start again. And this time we must preach a message which is innocuous.

No resurrection, no miracles. We mustn't say things that people don't like. Then we won't rouse their opposition.

Everybody will like us and everybody will praise us. And the Church will succeed. It's an insult to the memory of the Apostles to suggest that such a thought even never entered into their minds at all.

No, no. But that's what we've done. The Church has been clever in this century.

She said the modern scientific man doesn't believe in miracles. Well, don't talk about miracles. He doesn't believe in the literal physical resurrection.

Say nothing about it. But, you know, they didn't do things like that in the days of the Acts of the Apostles. And they've never done things like that in days of reformation and of revival, in the eras of the power of the Christian Church.

No, no. Neither do we find them turning to one another and saying, Well, we've tried and we've obviously done it in the wrong way. We'd better start again and we'd better call in some advice from the world.

Let's ask the businessmen how they succeed. What kind of propaganda can we use? What methods can we imply that will be successful and that will appeal to the people? Again, I say, there is no such suggestion here anywhere. No, no.

They didn't do anything like that. What did they do? Well, here is what they did. And being let go, they went into their own company and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said unto them.

Now, this is the most important point. You notice that when the two apostles were set at liberty, they went to their own company, which means that they went to the Church. They went to all the Christians who were gathering together.

I mean by that that they didn't call a meeting of the apostolate. They didn't call a meeting only of the other apostles and of a conference of apostles to decide what to do. No, no.

They went to their own company. They went back to the Church. They went to the ordinary Church members and they reported all that the chief priests and the elders had done unto them.

My dear friends, this is a tremendously important thing, it seems to me. Haven't you detected a tendency today for people to think that the Church consists only of a number of Church dignitaries who travel round the world from conference to conference and that the problem of the Church and of the world today is only a problem for just a handful of people and all the attention that is given and the rest feel, well, we are nobody's, we are just ordinary Church members. This has nothing at all to do with us.

It's a problem for these great leaders and ecclesiastics. I'm not here to say anything derogatory of such men, but I am here to say that that isn't how they behaved in the days of the Acts of the Apostles. They went to their own company.

They reported it to all the members of the Church. Why? Well, for this good reason. You never know in the Christian Church whom God is going to use.

You never know where God is going to send forth his power. You've never heard of a revival starting in a cathedral. You've never heard of a great movement of the Spirit of God coming from some great dignitaries.

My dear friends, it's amongst the common people that things happen. Read the stories of the great revivals in the history of the Church and you'll generally find God has laid his hand upon some unknown man. Nobody had ever heard of him, and he lived in some little hamlet, not in a great city, but in some unknown little village or hamlet, and God suddenly lays hold of him, fills him with power, and uses him to rouse a moribund Church.

My message, therefore, is this. The condition of the Church and of the world today is a problem for every one of us. It isn't only a problem for preachers.

It isn't only a problem for Church dignitaries. It's your problem, my friend. Are you concerned about the state of the Church? It's my privilege here this morning to do in my little way what these apostles did.

I bring the report back to you. You see the state of the Church. You see her dwindling influence.

You see the lack of spiritual power. You see the state of the world. It's your problem.

They went into their own company. Are you concerned about these things? Do you pray about these things? Do you pray that God may intervene? Is this a burden to you? Well, the apostles, I say, took this matter back to their own company and laid it all open before them. And then what happened? Well, here is the significant thing.

And when they heard that, they lifted up their voice to God with one accord and said. Now, there's the response of the infant Church, the early Church. Again, permit me to indulge in just one negative.

Notice what they didn't do. Here come the two apostles. They tell them all about what had happened in the Council, how they'd been straightly charged and threatened, how these men were intent upon the destruction of the Christian cause.

They say the position is desperate. Indeed, it's hopeless. And what was the response of the Church? What a contrast they present to the Church of today.

You see, I don't find this, that having heard the report of the apostles, a man gets up and says, I want to make a proposal. I have a proposition. And my proposition is that we set up a committee or a commission to investigate the situation.

I think we must have a commission to examine the problem. We are in a great difficulty here. We must set up a committee at once to investigate the problem and the difficulty and to see what can be done.

Somebody got up and seconded, and then the committee began to sit, and the report will come in in a year's time. It will be sent down to presbyteries and synods and various other bodies, and then at long last we'll consider the situation. That's what we are doing.

And as we set up our committees and commissions, the condition deteriorates from year to year. The Church becomes more lifeless, and the world becomes more godless and is hurtling itself to hell. No, no, that's not the way.

Listen. When they heard that, they lifted up their voice to God with one accord and said. They prayed.

And why did they pray? Well, there was nothing else to do. What was the point of considering the situation? What was the point of examining the problem? Here they are, just a handful of little ordinary people, ignorant, unlettered, as they were described, with no great names, no money, no influence, no power, nothing at all, just insignificant people. And against them the authorities, the powers, the dignitaries, everything that has might and authority was set against them.

And here they are in their complete weakness and helplessness. These people had sufficient spiritual common sense to see that nothing that they could do would be of the slightest value. There was only one hope, and that was to turn to the everlasting and eternal God.

So without a moment's delay or hesitation, they turned to God, and they began to pray. Ah, yes, sir, somebody, how easy and how simple it is to say that. That's the trouble with you preachers, sir, somebody.

Whatever the problem, you say, let's pray about it. I agree entirely. There's no term that is used so glibly, so lightly, so thoughtlessly as the term let us pray.

How easy it is to talk about prayer, but how difficult it is to pray. I wonder whether we've ever really prayed. What do we really know about prayer? Well, my dear friends, I want to show you here how the early church prayed.

And this is always the way to pray. This is the way the church must pray today. This is the way any individual in this congregation who may be facing some impossible problem must learn how to pray.

Are you at the end of your tether? Are you at your wit's end? Are you desperate? Do you feel you don't know what to do? And there's only one thing left to turn to God. All right, my friend, but do you know how to pray? Well, listen, this is the way to pray. Notice the prayer of the early church.

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? And on they go quoting the second psalm. Aren't you surprised at that prayer? Let me remind you of the position.

Nothing could be more desperate than the position of the early church at this point. There they are, I say, with nothing, no resources, and everything set against them. And these authorities are set upon their extermination.

The position was as desperate as a situation can ever be. And yet you notice the prayer of these men. No impression of excitement or hurry or flurry.

They don't give the impression that they were frantic or desperate. They don't rush into the presence of God and say, Oh God, do something at once. We are on the verge of extermination.

No, no. They start as if they were on holidays. They start as if they had ample leisure and ample time.

They say, Lord, thou art God which has made heaven and earth and the sea and all that in them is. And then they go on to quote the second psalm. Not a bit of excitement.

No hurry at all. They are not frantic in any respect. They seem to have ample leisure and time to talk in tranquility to God.

What an extraordinary thing. I wonder how many of us would have prayed like that if we'd been with these people. I'm afraid that so many of us would have prayed in a very different manner.

What we do always is this, isn't it, when we turn to God in a frantic prayer. We rush into the presence of God and we start with ourselves and our problem and we ask God to do something. And then we are surprised that our prayers are not answered.

My dear friends, our prayers are not answered because far too often they are an insult to God and not prayer at all. This is the way to pray. The great lesson, the first great lesson we learn from the early church

is this.

That whenever you and I turn to God in prayer, the first thing we have to do is to remember who God is. You don't start with yourself. You don't start with your problem.

I don't care what it is. I don't care how desperate it is. Whatever your position, don't start with yourself.

Don't start with your problem. Start with God. Remember who you're addressing.

Remember who it is into his presence you are entering. My dear friend, whatever the position about you and myself, God is always to be worshipped, to be praised and to be adored. Lord, thou art God.

Before you come to any kind of petition, bow down before him. Approach him with reverence and godly fear. Pour out your adoration and your worship and your praise because God is God.

Whatever your position or mine may chance to be. That is why they did it, I say, because it is the right thing to do always. And yet how we tend to fail at this point.

Do we always remember to praise God and to worship him and to adore him? Let me put it in the form of a simple illustration. So that we will never again rush into the presence of God and blurt out our problem and our difficulty. Imagine a man who'd got a grievance.

He's suffered under this grievance for many weeks and months and years. He's done his utmost to get redress but he can't succeed. But he's determined that he's going to have his rights.

And so after much effort and using much influence, he says, I'm going to appeal to the Queen. I shan't be satisfied until I put my case before the Queen herself. And at long last, he succeeds in obtaining an entrance into Buckingham Palace.

And there he is, standing in a corridor with one of the court officials. And the official says to him, well now, just the other side of those doors there, you will find Her Majesty the Queen. Thank you, says the man.

And he rushes forward, slams open the doors, rushes into the presence of the Queen and says, at last I've got my opportunity. I've been suffering this injustice for years. It's all wrong.

Can't you do something about it? What would you say of such a man? You'd say, what an uncouth fellow. What a way to enter into the presence of the Queen. Whatever his grievance and his problem, that's not the way to behave.

The man must go in politely, do his obeisance, show due respect. And he must wait until he's given leave to speak. He must show that he realizes the character of the person whom he's interviewing and whom he's about to address.

That's the way to behave. Everybody do that in the case of the Queen or some great human personage. But what do we do in the case of God? Well, in the case of God, we rush in and we blurt out our questions and problems.

And we demand things of God. And we've never worshipped Him. We've never bowed in His presence.

We've never adored Him. We've never praised His name. That's why our prayers are not answered.

No, no, this is the way to pray. You start with worship and praise and adoration. And then you notice that in doing that they remind God of His own greatness and His own power.

Lord, they say, Thou art God who has made heaven and earth and the sea and all that in them is. You see, this is the right thing to do, but it's also a very wise thing to do. There's a great deal of talk about psychology at the present time.

All right. But if you want to know what psychology really is and really good psychology, look at a thing like this. Look at the wisdom of these men.

Here they are in their desperate position. And that's how they start. Lord, Thou art God which has made heaven and earth and the sea and all that in them is.

Whereas the psychology says, somebody will tell you where the psychology is. Look at it like this. Here are these men in their utter helplessness.

And these great powers set against them intent upon their destruction and extermination. It was alarming. It was terrifying.

Yes, until they uttered these words. But the moment they uttered these words, they lost every fear they'd ever felt concerning these men. Looked at directly, these men are alarming.

They're terrifying in their power. But when you turn to the one who has created the heavens and the earth and the sea and all that in them is, the grand architect of the whole universe, the artificer of the whole cosmos, the sustainer of everything, they become nothing and nobody. What a wise thing it is when we turn to God in prayer just to remind ourselves of who God is and what God is and what God's power is.

You see, if you don't do that, you're talking to yourself and you're indulging in a bit of auto-suggestion. So you're worshipping him. Do that which is right.

He deserves it. And then as you do so, you'll remember who he is and his illimitable might and power. And you'll lose your every fear.

And so these men prayed. But then they went on to do another thing. They went on to remind God of his greatness and his power.

They quote this second psalm. 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, listen, for to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done.

Now that's the most important thing. What are they talking about? Well, they are reminding God of what had happened but a few weeks before when the Lord Jesus Christ had been crucified on that cross on Calvary's Hill. But you notice the way they put it.

They don't merely say that these cruel men had crucified the Son of God. They say, of a truth 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. Here's the spiritual wisdom of the early church.

They look back at the crucifixion but what they see there is this, not simply cruel men crucifying the Son of God. Oh no, no, they see God's eternal purpose. They see God's eternal way of redemption.

Oh yes, it was the hands of men that did it but it was God's purpose that was behind it. In other words, in their prayer they repeat what the apostle Peter had already said in his sermon on the day of Pentecost. This is how Peter puts it in Acts 2.23. Let me start at 22.

Ye men of Israel, hear these words. Jesus of Nazareth, the man approved of God among you, by miracles and wonders and signs which God did by him in the midst of you, as you yourselves also know, him being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, you have taken and by wicked hands have crucified and slain him. You see, there's the understanding of the death of Christ upon the cross.

You have taken and by wicked hands, by the hands of these wicked men, you've actually crucified and slain him. But he was really delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God. You see what they mean therefore in their prayer can be put like this.

God rules and reigns over all. Nothing happens apart from God. Even his enemies are in his hands.

Even his enemies who killed his own son, they were simply carrying out unconsciously his own predeterminate counsel and foreknowledge. There is nothing outside the hands and the control and the power of the everlasting God. These men remind themselves of that.

They say, we are in trouble. My son was in trouble. Thou rulest and reignest over all.

And then the next thing I must emphasize is this. These men had the great wisdom and sense to see that the problem was really not theirs at all, but it was God's problem. That's why, you see, they don't talk about themselves.

You wouldn't imagine that they've got any trouble at all. They say, the kings of the earth stood up and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord, against his Christ, for of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed. In other words, these men were wise enough to see that these Jewish authorities were not interested in them as such at all.

Who were they? They were nobodies. Nobody had ever heard of them. Wouldn't make any difference if they disappeared.

They didn't count, and the authorities are not interested in them because they are the servants and the representatives of Christ and of God himself. And they understand that. They say, it isn't ours.

It's your problem. It's against thy son, against thine anointed, not against us. And you and I, my friends, need to learn this message, this lesson, that church isn't our church.

Let's be less interested in our churches, our denominations. No, no. It's the church of the living God.

And these authorities and powers are not concerned about us, but they're very concerned about God. It's the great cosmic fight between God and the devil, heaven and hell, and the forces of evil are trying to drag down God. We are mere pawns in the game.

These men saw all that. So they hand themselves and their problem back to God. And it is only after they have done all this that they begin to mention themselves.

And now, Lord, they say, behold their threatenings. At last they come to themselves. But until now they've been concerned about God.

That's the way to pray. Take your burden, roll it onto the Lord. Realize it's his problem.

And then you mention yourself. Now, Lord, behold their threatenings. And grant, what do they ask for? Do they ask for a little peace, a little respite, a little ease in the struggle, a little comfort and consolation? No, no, that's not their request at all.

They ask for nothing for themselves. 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 in the name of thy holy child Jesus. They don't ask for any protection. They don't ask for any ease or rest.

They say we only want one thing. Give us the power to preach the thing they're prohibiting us to preach. They're not concerned about themselves.

They're ready to be thrown to the lions in the arena. They're ready to be crucified. It doesn't matter.

What they are concerned about is the name of God, the success of the kingdom. And they pray that they may have boldness and strength and authority and authentication to declare the unsearchable riches of Christ. That's their prayer.

And that is how you and I must pray, my friends. If I were to believe that the future of the Christian church depended upon us and our committees and organizations, I'd go out of the pulpit. No, no, there's only one hope.

It's in God. The cause is His. The church is His.

And He alone can deliver us. We must pray to Him. And that's the way to pray.

Then what happens when you do pray like that? Well, the answer is given here. And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together. Do you believe that? Here's the vital question.

The account tells us that the answer to the prayer was that the very building in which they were met together was shaken. Do we believe that, my friends? Or are we too clever and too learned and too scientific to believe that? Do we say, oh, we know perfectly well that things like that don't happen, and our knowledge of psychology gives us an obvious and a ready explanation? We know from the reading of psychology that primitive peoples are always ready to invoke the miraculous and the supernatural when it's not necessary at all. We can explain things now.

And to us, this is a perfectly simple phenomenon. What really happened, of course, was this, that these men were so terrified and alarmed and shaken that they were shaking and trembling so much they thought the building was shaking. But that isn't what the record tells me.

What the record tells me is that the place was shaken where they were assembled together. The building shook, literally. I find no difficulty in believing this for myself for this reason.

I believe in a God who is almighty, and I believe that with God nothing is impossible. I cannot believe that an almighty God can be hemmed in or tied down by his own laws. He's above them all, and he can act apart from them when he chooses to do so.

He can act immediately instead of immediately. God is the almighty God, and he can shake buildings. There is nothing he cannot do.

I believe that this happened because I believe that God's power is illimitable. But I can give you a very much more ordinary and practical reason for believing this record. And when they had thus prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together.

I shall never forget as long as I live a certain Sunday morning in the month of June in 1944. It was the first Sunday morning of the so-called flying bomb attack upon the city of London in England. The previous Tuesday they'd started sending over these so-called flying bombs from France.

And they had engines which worked until they reached a certain point of the city of London. The engine cut out and down came the bomb. Well, this was the first Sunday we'd had any experience of this particular attack.

And it was my privilege to be conducting public worship as usual in Westminster Chapel that morning at 11 o'clock. And about 11.15 I had just started leading the congregation in public prayer when we heard one of these flying bombs coming in the distance. And it came nearer and nearer and nearer and nearer.

And the noise was indescribable. Suddenly it landed right above us and the engine cut out and down came that bomb. It was the bomb that fell on the guards' chapel in Wellington Barracks, entirely demolishing it and killing the 150 people who were gathered together there in worship and in praise.

But this is what I want to say. That bomb, when it landed on and demolished the guards' chapel and killed the 150 people, it literally shook Westminster Chapel. As the crow flies, it's less than 100 yards from our chapel.

And when that bomb fell, with its horrible crash, the building literally shook. I had to hold on to my pulpit in the rostrum. Some of you may know that building.

It's a very high building, at least twice the height of this, I should say. And there's a great wall on the left-hand side of the pulpit. That wall was literally moved an inch and a half out of position by that bomb.

And the great joists and rafters were all out of position. It cost us a great deal of money to put them back into position. This is my simple argument.

If man is clever enough to make a bomb that can shake a great building like Westminster Chapel, I don't find it a bit difficult to believe that the Almighty God could shake a much smaller room or building in Jerusalem 2,000 years ago. Of course the place was shaken. The building rocked.

I can go further. I can tell you why it was shaken. Do you know why this building was shaken in Jerusalem? Here's the answer.

It was God answering the prayer of His faithful, believing people. And you see, in shaking the building, He was telling them this. He said, My dear good people, I've listened to your prayer.

And I've liked it. I've enjoyed it. You've reminded me of myself and of my power and of my authority, who I am and what I am.

You've reminded me of my greatness. Do you know He said, You're absolutely right. Here's an example of it.

Here's a specimen. Here's a sample of it. So He shook the building.

Don't be afraid of these people, said God. Who are they? I am a God who can shake buildings. I can shake men with equal ease.

I can shake anybody or anything that stands up against me. Don't be alarmed. Don't be terrified.

Don't be awed by these people. Go on with your work. I'll shake them to nothing.

I'm the God who shakes. And that is what He continued to do. It's not surprising that the Apostle Paul, writing later to the Corinthians, uses words like these.

Though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God, to the pulling down of strongholds, casting down imaginations and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ. Ah, there was a strong man, Saul of Tarsus.

He stands up against God and His Christ, but he's shaken until he's lying helpless and hopeless, and submitted and subjected on the road to Damascus. Oh, my friends, we believe in a God who can shake empires, shake the universe, and He's going to, until nothing that can be shaken will be left, and the only thing left will be the kingdom of God, which cannot be shaken. Oh, yes.

When they had thus prayed, the place was shaken, where they were assembled together. And you know, when God hears the prayer of the church, and He sends a revival, there will be a great shaking. Some of us will be shaken.

Shaken out of our complacency. Shaken out of our self-satisfaction. Shaken out of our smugness.

Shaken, perhaps, literally to the floor. It's often happened in revivals. Shaken to a state of utter helplessness, when we can but look up into His face and plead with Him to have mercy and compassion upon us.

When God answers, He shakes. Oh, that such a shaking began. And that we were humbled under the mighty, almighty hand of God.

What else? Well, I mustn't keep you. It's all here. The record tells us that they were all filled with the Holy Ghost.

What does that mean? Oh, I believe I could keep you for hours in trying to answer that question. But I'll tell you in its essence what it does mean. It's this.

When we are filled with the Holy Spirit, it means that we see things clearly. We know. Look at these apostles.

How hesitant and dejected they were after our Lord's crucifixion before the day of Pentecost. Peter denied his Lord. They were all fearful, muddled, misunderstanding.

But the moment they were filled with the Holy Ghost, they had an absolute assurance. They had great boldness and confidence. They knew Him.

They saw Him. They felt His power. They were filled with a great love to Him.

That's what happens when men are filled with the Holy Ghost. They're living witnesses, and they're afraid of nobody. So I read that they speak the word of God with boldness.

When we are filled with the Spirit, oh, we become absolutely certain of the things we believe. We know the love that God hath to us. The Spirit beareth witness with our spirits that we are the children of God, and the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts.

We don't just hold on. We are filled with it, and filled with a holy zeal and a holy boldness, filled with the Holy Spirit. Isn't this the thing the church needs? Not an organizational unity, but this power, this authority, this certainty, this boldness.

This is what happens when the church truly prays. And then I read that the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul. These are days when the great word is ecumenicity.

One world, one church. We must all come together, sink our differences, Roman Catholics included. Anybody who calls himself a Christian over against communism, this is the slogan of the day.

But, my dear friends, how far removed it is from the New Testament. This is the way to get unity. The unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

It's when men are filled with the Spirit they become one. Why? Well, it's quite simple. You see, the trouble with us is that we look at one another, and we become jealous and envious, and we divide and separate.

But when we are all filled with the Spirit, we are all looking at Christ. And we are all so amazed. We are all so carried away by Him and by His love that we don't take our eyes off Him.

We have no time to look at anybody else. When we are all filled with the Spirit, we'll all become one, because we'll all be one in Him and all loving Him and concentrating Him and desiring to live to His praise and to His glory. That's how you get unity, and you'll never get it in any other way.

You can't get unity by organization. Unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. The church needs to be filled with the Spirit.

But they're talking about everything but the Spirit. And it's hopeless, and it leads to further divisions. This is the only way whereby we can ever become one.

And so I read that with great power give the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ filled their minds and hearts and spirits. These little authorities had long since been forgotten.

They were afraid of nothing and of no one. As the children and the servants of God, they knew that all was well. Nothing mattered but that they knew Him and were well-pleasing to Him.

So they rejoiced in His presence and rejoiced in this grace that is shed abroad amongst them, in them and upon them and between them. And they're all one and thrilled with the knowledge that they are the children of God and heirs of eternal bliss. Let the authorities do what they will.

Let them kill them if they like. That makes no difference. They've got an inheritance which is incorruptible and undefiled and that fadeth not away.

An inheritance which is reserved in heaven by God for all who truly believe in Him through His Son, our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Well, my friends, that's the story of the early church facing her first great difficulty and persecution. When will we come back to that? When will we cease to be clever and begin to be spiritual? When will we come to the end of our own utterly inadequate little resources and powers, our influence, our culture, our education, our science, our knowledge, our ability to entertain? When shall we come to the end of it all? And realizing that the cause is God, begin to lift up our hearts unto Him in one accord.

Begin to lift up our voices and pray together unto Him to arise and to scatter His enemies, to make Himself known, to begin to shake, to authenticate His own word and to send forth His great grace upon us all and to fill us with such a knowledge of Him that nothing will matter to us except that we are His and He is ours. Let us pray.

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