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Acts 4:23-31

Outward Church: Knowing God

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I want to read you a quote from one pastor's **last sermon**. He said...

Well, I don't know what will happen now. We've got some difficult days ahead. But it really doesn't matter with me now. Because I've been to the mountaintop. And I don't mind. Like anybody, I would like to live a long life. Longevity has its place. But I'm not concerned about that now. I just want to do God's will. And He has allowed me to go up to the mountain. And I've looked over, and I've seen the Promised Land. I may not get there with you, but I want you to know tonight, that we as a people will get to the Promised Land. So I'm happy tonight. I'm not worried about anything. I'm not fearing anything. Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord.¹

Those words are from Martin Luther King Jr's last sermon. He was reflecting on a bomb threat he'd received earlier that day.² The next day he was assassinated. King was called by God to a certain task, to give himself to the cause of the poor, the oppressed, and people of color. This was the **mission** and it cost him everything.

If someone threatened your life wouldn't you be afraid? I would be, but he wasn't. Why? Because, "Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord." King understood what you and I need to know if we're going to serve God in any capacity, if we're going to tell others about him, if we're going to be bold for Jesus, and that's this...

Our doing for God must come from a deep knowing of God.

MLK knew Jesus and that empowered his doing for Jesus. It gave him courage and boldness in the face of stiff opposition to keep going and to keep moving. The same is true for you and me. Our doing for God must come from a deep knowing of God. **Peter** and **John** are two men *whose doing for God comes out of a deep knowing of God*. They **encounter threats** and **opposition** but it **doesn't phase them**. Yes Jesus calls them to go and **make disciples** in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8) but they do so with a **deep knowledge of who God is**.

The **day before** the story from **today's text** when they were walking into the temple Peter and John encountered a man **born crippled**. He'd been that way for **40 years** and God laid it on their hearts to call upon his power and **heal** him. They did and he got up and started shouting about what God had just done (Acts 3:1-9). The **crowds** come running and Peter preaches a sermon that leads **5,000** men to faith in Jesus Christ. But this makes the **political** and **religious leaders in charge angry**. The **temple guard** throws them in jail but the next day they're forced to release them because the people in Jerusalem love them (Acts 4:16). They command Peter and John to **stop preaching Jesus** but they **refuse** and are **let go**.

If I were them I think I would have gone home and had a **good long cry**. I would have **complained loudly** and **hid in my house** and **stayed off social media** because I didn't want to hear what people were saying.

Peter and John don't do this. Instead they go find the **other Christian believers** and tell them everything that happened (v23). When those Christian believers hear what happened they don't go running and hide away. Instead they have a **prayer meeting** where **all together** they **pray to God** for **boldness to keep sharing**. If we look **closely** at what they pray we'll see that *our doing for God must come from a deep knowing of God*.

This was something we read and reflected on for my Doctorate of Ministry (D.Min) classes last week. I have to admit I am **convicted**. My *doing for God* **often** comes **before** my *being with God* ([Scazzero](#)).³ I tick off multiple to-dos with little thought of God and without inviting him into my day. That's **idolatry**. I want to **confess** it and I want **God** to **change** me. The book Ten Most Common Mistakes Made by Church Starts says lists the first mistake, "Neglecting the Great Commandment in Pursuit of the Great Commission." In other words, making disciples for Jesus before loving Jesus himself. I don't want to do that **anymore**, and if there's any part of you that knows you've been "doing for God" more than seeking a **relationship with God** I invite you to **repent** with me and **ask God to change you too**. *Our doing for God must come from a deep knowing of God*. So what do we need to know of God?

We need to know God's sovereignty and creative power. (v24)

When faced with **opposition** and **persecution** the believers don't pray to an **abstract idea** of **God floating** up in the sky. They pray to the "**Sovereign Lord**." In the Greek this is the word "**despotes**," which is where we get our **English** word "**despot**."⁴ Today, despot means **tyrant**. Despot makes us think of **Stalin, Hitler, and Mao**. In the **Bible** this word has **no negative connotations** and speaks of someone who has the **right to command authority**, and in God's case, **absolute authority**.⁵

In our **parenting community group** this week the session was called "**You're in Charge**." The author of *Shepherding a Child's Heart*, Tedd Tripp, told us parents aren't in charge of our children because we're **bigger** or **older** than them. We're in charge because God has given us that authority. Some parents use God's authority like tyrants and others use it to tenderly love and lead their children. But **whose** in charge of us? God is. That gives us **joy** because he's good. When the going get's **tough**, we know whose **really in charge**.

- Verse **25** calls **King David God's servant**. If you know King David's story, it wasn't easy. Yes, he defeated Goliath but later in life his son tries to kill him. Yet God was still in charge.
- Verses **27** and **30** call **Jesus God's holy servant**. Jesus is God's servant who feeds the 5,000 but also dies on a cross. God is in charge, using it for good.
- And in verse **29** **those praying** call **Peter** and **John** and **themselves** God's **servants**. Those praying are suffering persecution and some will die for Christ (Acts 8:1). God's still in charge, working good.

When the going get's tough we need to know that God is the one really in charge. They pray, "Sovereign Lord... you made the **heavens** and the **sea**, and everything in them."⁶ **Louie Giglio** preached a sermon on the size of our earth in comparison to our sun and the biggest stars in the universe. He says, "If Earth were the size of a **golf ball**, the Sun would be **fifteen feet in diameter**."⁷ You can fit almost a **million earths** inside the **sun**. But there's a **red supergiant star** called **Betelgeuse** that if it were located in the same place as the sun its surface would **engulf** the **orbit** of **Mars**.⁸ It takes about **three days** to get from earth to the **moon**. It takes **7-8 months** to get to **mars**. Imagine if that were all a star. That's Betelgeuse and our God made it.

When we know God's sovereignty and creative power, it puts everything in **perspective**. Even on my best most **productive day**, I'm **nothing** in **comparison to God**. And even on my **worst day** of **suffering** and **hardship**, **God is more than enough**. It's not simply a **knowing about** it's a true **knowing from the heart**. *Our doing for God must come from a deep knowing of God*.

We need to know God's anointed one overcomes. (v25-27)

As they pray they call to mind the truths of **Psalm 2**, a **Messianic Psalm** about God's **anointed one**. "Anointed one" is "**Messiah**" in **Hebrew** and "**Christ**" in **Greek**. Quoting David the believers pray:

“Why do the nations rage
and the peoples plot in vain?
The kings of the earth rise up
and the rulers band together
against the Lord
and against his anointed one. (NIV)

If we were to turn to **Psalm 2** we would find a Psalm that **declares** how big God is and how he **laughs** at his earthly enemies (Psalm 2:4). The **nations** and the **kings of the earth** try to stop God’s anointed one, the Messiah, but **they fail**. The early Christians are **identified** the kings of the earth as **Herod** and **Pontius Pilate** and the **Gentiles** and people of **Israel** who who **conspired** against **Jesus**, God’s anointed.

Although the kings of the earth do their best to **stop Jesus**, even putting him to **death** on the **cross**, they **fail**. Jesus rises from the grave and God calls all the kings of the earth to **serve him** or **face destruction** (Psalm 2:10-12). And yet Psalm 2 ends with an **offer of hope**, “Blessed are all who take refuge in him.” This presents us with a **choice**. We can either **oppose king Jesus** and face **ruin** or find our **refuge** in him through **repentance** and **faith**. Jesus **didn’t** come to **condemn** the world but that the world might be **saved through him** (John 3:17). They trusted Jesus. Will you? *Our doing for God must come from a deep knowing of God. We need to know God’s anointed overcomes.*

Think about your own life for a moment. Is there anything that just feels **too big for God** to handle? If Jesus can handle the **cross** he can handle your **situation**, no matter how difficult. God has laid out **unstoppable plans** through Christ Jesus. This brings us to our **next knowing**...

We need to know God turns evil into his good plans. (v28)

Speaking of Herod and Pilate and the Gentiles and Jews the believers pray in verse 28, “They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen.” (NIV) The ESV talks of God **predestining what takes place**. “**Predestination**” is not a word we use very often. It means “**God is in charge**” of **everything that happens**. **Nothing** takes him by **surprise**. He **ordains** it all. That means he says, “This will be” — what we see as **good** or **bad** God has decided would take place.

That means we’re not responsible for our sins, right? If God ordains everything than they’re his fault! It’s like we’re playing **Monopoly** and you just drew a “**get out of jail free**” card. But Peter says that’s not true.

Acts 2:23 (NIV) This man was handed over to you by God’s deliberate plan and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross.

Even though it was **God’s plan** for **Jesus to die** on the cross those Peter were preaching too **were still responsible**. For us that means that even though God is sovereign **we’re also accountable** for our sin. We **stand** before God **condemned** for our sin **unless Jesus stands in our place**.

Would you rather have a God who is **not** in charge of all things and so when bad things happen they’re **out of his control**? Or would you rather have a God who is **in charge** and can work through **even the worst of moments** by **incorporating** them into his **bigger redemptive plan** for all of creation? I’d rather have the God who is in charge, even if he **lets bad things happen**, knowing that he will use them **for good** some way.

Peter and John have **peace** here because they know their God works through **human evil** to **bring good** (Gen 50:20). *Our doing for God must come from a deep knowing of God.* When **bad things happen** and we face **hardship** and **suffering**, we won’t immediately fall away because we **recognize** God is at work. *We need to know God turns evil into his good plans. Our doing for God must come from a deep knowing of God.*

We need to know God hears our prayers and works through them. (v29-31)

When **Peter** and **John** and the **believers** pray they don't pray for **what we might pray for** in this situation. They don't pray for **safety** or **security** or to **get home** and **eat dinner** with their **family**. They pray for **boldness** to **keep sharing the gospel** and that God would **confirm their** message with **signs** and **wonders** through the **name of Jesus** (v29-30). That's **convicting**.

I want to ask a **question**. What if the **way we're praying** is actually **keeping us** from **knowing God deeply**? Let me **rephrase** that. What if praying for **safety** and **security** **prevents** us from **knowing God's faithfulness** in the **midst** of **trial**? What if **not praying for boldness** means we **don't get to experience God's power** as we **witness** to others? **Prayer** is a **good thing**, but what if it could be **better**?

They're not afraid to **pray big**. They pray for God to perform **signs** and **wonders** through them (miracles!). If we look at the **spread** of **Christianity** around the world we hear of signs and wonders **accompanying** the **spread** of the **gospel**. Let's pray for God to perform signs and wonders here in **Westford** to help people come to faith. This community is **tough**. We could use some **supernatural signs** to break through. See what happens when they pray:

Acts 4:31 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. (NIV)

When God came down on Sinai the "**whole mountain trembled violently**" (Exod 19:18). Now the **room** where they pray shakes with God's **power** and **presence**. The Holy Spirit comes to fill them up with his power. It's **out of a deep knowing** of **who God is** and **calling to him** and being **filled by him** that Peter and John and the believers keep doing for God. *We stay on mission for God by staying in relationship with God.*

Our doing for God must come from a deep knowing of God.

If your **doing for God** doesn't come from a **deep knowing of him**, do you **want to change**? I do, but I need God to change me. I can't. If that's you too would you bow your head with me and pray that *God would come and change us so that our doing for God comes out of a deep knowing of him*? Let's pray.

Pastor Jonathan Romig preached this message at Cornerstone Congregational Church. You can download a PDF copy of this sermon above, which includes endnotes and references, or share it through Apple podcasts or Google Play Music. Read the story of our church here.

¹ Fea, John. *Believe Me*. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.. Kindle Edition.

² Wikipedia contributors. (2020, February 25). Martin Luther King Jr.. In *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*. Retrieved 19:17, February 27, 2020, from https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Martin_Luther_King_Jr.&oldid=942629079

³ Emotionally Healthy Leader by Peter Scazzero. Page 25.

⁴ Arnold, Clinton E.. *Acts* (Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary) (p. 33). Zondervan Academic. Kindle Edition.

⁵ See Baker Commentary on Acts and Mounce's Expository Dictionary for "Master."

⁶ NIV.

⁷ Seth Miller. Published June 30, 2013. Accessed February 27, 2020. <http://sethavidmiller.com/2013/06/30/if-the-earth-were-the-size-of-a-golf-ball/>

⁸ Wikipedia contributors. (2020, February 27). Betelgeuse. In *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*. Retrieved 20:56, February 27, 2020, from <https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Betelgeuse&oldid=942922407>