

A BOLD PRAYER IS MORE THAN LOUD NOISE!

Today's Text: Acts 4: 23- 31

Extracts:

And being let go, [Peter and John] went to their own companions and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said to them. So when they heard that, *they raised their voice to God with one accord* and said: “Lord, You are God, who made heaven and earth and the sea, and all that is in them....Now, Lord, look on their threats, and *grant to Your servants that with all boldness they may speak Your word, by stretching out Your hand to heal, and that signs and wonders may be done through the name of Your holy Servant Jesus.*” And *when they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word of God with boldness* [Acts 4: 23-24, 29-31].

Eugene Kim owns a property adjacent to the Mount Bethel Baptist Church in Ridgewood, New Jersey, USA.¹ He moved into his home in 2003. In December 2009, he filed a complaint at the Bergen County State Superior Court against the church, alleging that its services (involving musical instruments and amplified voices) were “so loud that they [were] interfering with his family’s use and enjoyment” of their property. While appreciating other people’s rights to worship in a manner consistent with their traditions and values, his family’s peace and health were allegedly threatened by the loud services from that church for extended periods.

Loud noises from places of worship can be common features worldwide, especially where worship centres are located or held near heavily populated areas. Where environmental laws are effectively enforced, churches sound-proof their premises to restrict noise to within their walls. However, some worshippers do get carried away with loud prayers! They seem to equate loud prayers with bold prayers but is that necessarily so?

In this week’s Bible story, the disciples “raised their voice with one accord” to pray for boldness to continue to proclaim the message of Jesus. That suggests that their prayer was loud. But was it the raised voice that made their prayer bold or what they were praying for? Let us find out from this interesting study.

¹ Story based on Michael Sedon, “Complaint claims services are ‘loud,’” http://www.northjersey.com/news/92481219_Complaint_claims_services_are_loud.html ;Thursday, April 29, 2010.

1. Background: Yes, the disciples' prayer was loud and bold!

When I was a child growing up in rural Nigeria, there was a teacher who rented one of the rooms in our family house close to the mission school where he taught. We used to know when he woke up and when he slept because he prayed quite loudly to the hearing of everyone in our small community. We also knew what he prayed for. For example, he used to pray for God to preserve his job even though he was an *apolo* teacher (i.e., one without any teaching certification or qualification). But at the end of the year, he was sacked and replaced with a certified teacher. We missed him because he used to serve as our alarm clock!

In His teaching on prayer, Jesus said, When you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place; and *your Father who sees in secret will Himself reward you openly*" [Matt. 6: 6]. That model applies when you are praying alone. In a church or public worship, however, people are bound to raise their voices. Clearly, there has to be noise, loud noise. The question is the decibel level! But is it the level that prompted the man in our opening story to take a nearby church to court or the audacity of the prayers that he heard there from?

You need to go to places of worship these days and you will know what I mean. People speaking in tongues are trying to drown out those praying in their dialects. Meanwhile, some background music is crowding every other noise out as the pianist or organist gets carried away- more by search for attention or relevance than anything else! Is God deaf or are we trying to make Him nervous? Compare that with the worship assembly after the post-exile children of Israel had completed rebuilding the wall of Jerusalem. There were over fifty thousand people [Neh. 7: 66-67]. You can imagine the noise that followed when they shouted "Amen, Amen!" after they had heard the word of God read to them and they lifted up their hands and worshipped God [Neh. 8: 5-6]. It could only have been deafening! But, "*all the people gathered together as one man*" [v. 1], suggesting harmony and orderliness.

Clearly then, a bold prayer is much more than a loud noise. This week's Bible story will assist us to understand the matter more clearly as follows:

a) *What preceded the prayer*

Peter and John had been arrested by the Jewish religious leaders for disturbing public peace, preaching about Jesus Christ and the resurrection of the dead. They had been put in custody overnight, and the following morning, they had been made to face the Sanhedrin, the Jewish council of religious and political leaders [Acts 4: 1-4]. In the trial, Peter spoke with boldness about Jesus and the faith of His disciples. That boldness, we are told, came from the fact that Peter

was filled with the Holy Spirit, and his listeners knew that both Peter and John had been with Jesus [vv. 8, 13]. When the council members tried to gag them by intimidation and severe threat, the two disciples stood their ground, maintaining that they would rather fear God than man [vv. 18-20]. In the end, they were set free.

This week's story begins at the point where the two apostles rejoined their colleagues and narrated their ordeal in the hands of the Jewish leaders [vv. 22-23]. *They were already spiritually emboldened before they prayed with boldness. Their faith was already strong* and those that know their God shall be strong and do great exploits [Dan. 11: 32].

b) *They raised their voice, not their voices!*

After narrating their story to their colleagues, we are told that “they **raised their voice** to God with one accord” [v. 24]. “Their voice,” not “their voices.” My understanding of that phrase is that it was the person who led the prayer that raised his voice but everyone else lent attention, interest and intensity. Since they all were already in Spirit, they found it easy to communicate their feelings as a community of believers.

Their prayer was specific and to the point, namely [vv. 25-30]:

- They acknowledged the supremacy of God in heaven and on earth;
- It was God who had spoken through His prophets, notably David, of human futility in plotting against God and His Christ [Ps. 2: 1-2];
- Human futility led to the crucifixion and death of Jesus but God frustrated it by the resurrection of Jesus who had emboldened His followers to heal and show signs and wonders by His name.;
- God should, therefore, frustrate the threats of the Jewish and Roman leaders by giving boldness to the followers of Jesus to speak the word of God, in spite of mounting opposition.

In sum, *they prayed for more boldness to do God's work*. They asked for boldness to fight against threats of persecution and death for their faith. In the words of Jesus, whoever confesses Him before men, He will also confess before His Father in heaven [Matt. 10: 32]. How do you think Jesus felt, as He sat at the right hand of His Father in heaven, when He heard that kind of bold prayer? Did He not promise His followers, “Whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son” [Jn 14: 13]?

c) *Their prayer was instantly answered with a sign*

The prayer of the disciples was answered right away. Soon after they had prayed, “the place where they were assembled together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and **they spoke the word of God with boldness**” [Acts 4: 31]. **They prayed with boldness. They prayed for boldness and they received boldness!**

From the foregoing, we can conclude that **the disciples’ prayer was not bold because it was loud. It was bold because it was faith-based, Spirit-led and result-filled.** Those who come to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him [Heb. 11: 6]. How can we replicate such in our own prayers?

2. How to make your prayers bold

Praying is like trying to communicate effectively with God. Some of us do it better than others. But, since God looks at the heart, not physical appearances [1 Sam. 16:7], how can we be sure that we are hitting home runs? A good way to know is to first identify where you currently are on the scale of praying boldly. Here are some situations that most of us face:

a) *You may currently be talking loud but saying nothing!*

There is no way you can avoid praying aloud if you are in a congregation or a service. The only problem is your state of mind or what prayer you are actually saying. For example, some people may merely be pouring out by rote prayers as written in their service bulletin for the day, such as the Lord’s Prayer or the Psalms or the ‘Hail Mary.’ Some people may be half-asleep or deep in thoughts about some pressing issues at home or at work to concentrate on what they are miming in their prayers. In such circumstances, you are talking loud but saying nothing! Such prayers cannot be regarded as bold.

In the Parable of the Pharisee and the Publican [Lk 18: 9-14], the Pharisee would be a good illustration of a person praying aloud but saying nothing. He came into the temple to pray. He stood and prayed, saying, “God, I thank You that I am not like other men-extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.” That was noise-making!

The prophet Isaiah said to his people, “The Lord’s hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; nor His ears heavy, that it cannot hear. But your iniquities have separated you from God” [Is. 59: 1-2]. What

is the state of your relationship with God? Who are you trying to impress when you pray? What fruits of prayers do you show from your loud prayers, laced with Scriptural references and advanced speaking in tongues? ***Those who talk loud but say nothing cannot be said to be praying boldly. Without faith and fear of the Lord, prayers are mere smoke and hot air!***

- b) *You may already be quite comfortable praying silently and achieving much!*

Some people pray silently, whether in the secret of their rooms or in the church. A prayer must be said [Lk 11:2], that is, verbalized; or it will be meditation [Ps. 19: 14]. Remember that you are communicating with God who is Spirit, not with man. God hears in secret and rewards in the open [Matt. 6: 6]. Therefore, that you are praying silently does not mean you are not praying boldly. Is your prayer faith-based, Spirit-led and result-packed? Then, you are praying boldly.

Take the case of Hannah who was barren. Every year, she came with her husband, Elkanah, to worship and offer sacrifices to the Lord of hosts in Shiloh. Her husband's other wife, Peninnah, provoked her and made her life miserable on account of her barrenness. So, "year by year, when she went up to the house of the Lord, [Peninnah] provoked her: therefore, she wept and did not eat" [1 Sam. 1: 1-7]. Then, one year, she decided to do something about it. Eli the priest was sitting by the doorpost of the tabernacle of the Lord while Hannah was praying. We are told, "***Hannah spoke in her heart; only her lips moved but her voice was not heard. Therefore, Eli thought that she was drunk***" [vv. 8-13]. Examine those words carefully. Only God knew what she asked for- a son that she would give back for God's service. She prayed so boldly and "violently" that the priest thought that she was drunk! Did she not have her prayer answered? She became the proud mother of Samuel, the famous prophet. After she had fulfilled her vow by giving Samuel to God to serve in His house at Shiloh, God blessed her with three sons and two daughters [1 Sam. 2: 20-21]!

The Psalmist says, "Weeping may endure for a night. But joy comes in the morning" [Ps. 30: 5]. Unless you share a bed with somebody, who else but God alone knows what you passed through or what prayers you said while weeping last night? They are bold as long they are effective. They are effective because they are faith-based, Spirit-led and result-filled.

- c) *But sometimes, the violent take it by force!*

Circumstances may force you to be loud and violent in your prayers. For example, you may be facing an emergency when medical or other forms of human help may not be readily available. It is like a drowning person who cannot swim. You are not going to wait for the coast guard before trying to save yourself. You can yell - as loud as you can because your life depends on it!

Take the case of King Jehoshaphat of Judah who faced imminent massive military invasion from Ammon, Moab and Mount Seir. He feared and immediately set himself to seek the Lord. He declared a fast throughout his kingdom and gathered Judah together before the temple in Jerusalem. He prayed loudly and violently, reminding God that they were descendants of Abraham His friend forever! At the end of a very moving and powerful prayer, Jehoshaphat said, “We have no power against this great multitude that is coming against us; nor do we know what to do, but our eyes are upon You” [2 Chron. 20:1-12]. Immediately, the Spirit of the Lord came upon Jahaziel, one of the people in that assembly, and through him, God assured the king that the battle was the Lord’s. In the end, Jehoshaphat went to war, led by praise singers instead of armoured tanks, and won a resounding victory without throwing a weapon [vv. 14-30]! His prayer was loud and bold. It was faith-based, Spirit-led and result-filled.

3. Conclusion: Boldness is in the outcome, not in the method

We learn from the foregoing that *the boldness of a prayer is measured by its outcome more than in the method that you have used. The outcome is itself determined by the strength of your existing relationship with Jesus and His Father.* The disciples in the early church faced enormous persecution. They needed to be bold to face terrible odds. With faith in Jesus and miracles through His name, they came boldly before the Jewish and Roman rulers and prevailed. In our study, they prayed boldly for more boldness to face such odds and the earth shook, as God’s sign to them that He had answered their prayers. Did Jesus not call the disciples His friends [Jn 15: 14-15]?

Go and review your prayer-life. Do you have strong faith in God by Christ Jesus? Are you Spirit-led, that is, do you fear God and not man? Do you have testimonies or a record of answered prayers? If you answer ‘yes’ to those questions, then, you are already praying boldly.

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