

6/1/15

Acts 4:23-31

A Good Governing God

*When they were released, they went to their friends and reported what the chief priests and the elders had said to them. **24** 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, **25** 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?
26 The kings of the earth set themselves,
and the rulers were gathered together,
against the Lord and against his Anointed'—*

***27** for truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, **28** to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place. **29** And now, Lord, look upon their threats and grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness, **30** while you stretch out your hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of your holy servant Jesus." **31** And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness.*

There are times in life when even the strongest Christian gets knocked off balance. Some of you – some of the strongest of you -- have felt it.

The Charlotte Observer probably said it best describing the Eddings tragedy: "It started as a weekend of joy that led to a tragedy and it kept getting worse."

Last Friday, Gentry Eddings – a Worship Pastor at Forest Hills-- was headed home after doing his sister's wedding. His pregnant wife and Dobbs, his 2-year-old little boy, were with him. A large commercial truck didn't stop. Dobbs is dead. His wife is injured and after an emergency C-section, the baby was delivered, then died. David Chadwick said of the Eddingses: "They both possess a deep faith, but it will be challenged in the days and weeks to come like no other time."

Can any of you here make any sense of that? Would you even try?

Thursday, Bradley Price, Pastor of Kingsway church in Concord, fell off the roof of a playhouse he was building for his grandkids. He broke his vertebrae, 6 ribs and had a

heart attack and is now clinging to life. This is a man of God who preaches the Gospel. Anybody want to try to explain that?

You see, when the "pat answers" run out and the formalities are cut off, when the clichés evaporate, all you have left is the triune God and He is enough.

The early church, persecuted for their beliefs, harassed for their ministry and threatened for preaching Jesus, found out He is enough. And so weary, hurt person... depressed, wronged person, I have no hyped Hollywood Gospel to give you. I can only point you to our good God, a God who never wastes anything. In the text, the Disciples will be praising and take great comfort in knowing that pain is not random and God genuinely is good.

Looking at this passage-- and specifically this prayer-- we find out:

God's Faithful People Have Always Hurt and That Hurt Is Never Wasted

A primary benefit to suffering, pain and persecution is that it results in great solidarity in God's people. Notice what Luke says in v. 23 when they (Peter & John) were released. They went to their friends... and in v. 24 a prayer starts. "They lifted their voice together to God." To God – they went to God. Why? Why when it hurts do you go to God? Answers are in the prayer. Why?

We Believe In a Powerful God

The prayer starts out in v. 24. Sovereign Lord – We've heard the word "sovereign" before many times from this pulpit, but the Greek word that is behind the word "sovereign" is different. It the word *Despotes* and it's an uncommon word for God. It is used only 5 times in the entire New Testament. It is the idea of God as the absolute master. Look: nothing happens without His knowledge and He can use all things for His purpose and His glory. And whatever *your* testimony is, it's not complete until you see how God has used the brokenness of sin and the bankruptcy of your efforts to bring you to the cross, how God pursued you and cornered you and even inflicted pain on you until you would see the horrific beauty of Christ on the cross in your place. God's faithful people have always hurt – but hurt is never wasted. We believe in a powerful God.

We Believe in a Creating God

In v. 24, they pray to the Sovereign Lord "who made the Heavens and Earth and the Sea and everything in them," that this is all God's, every bit of it: every molecule, every person, animal, country, every star in Heaven and fish in the sea. With Creation comes prerogative. He does what He wants with whom He wants whenever He wants. And His wants are always good, right and true. IF He is creator, He is also re-creator. He created you in His own image. Sin has soiled that image to the degree of separating you from God. Your life and lusts and habits and laziness are proof you need *re*-creating. Jesus called it being "born again." It's what Jesus told Nicodemus in John 3:3: "Truly, truly I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the Kingdom of God." And you

being born again to a living hope is what all of this has been about. Being a Christian is not "behavior management." It is complete life transformation and a picture of God's mercy that the one who created you is the one who *re-creates* you. Peter says in the opening of his letter in 1 Peter 1:3: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ according to his great mercy. He has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." And this morning, this powerful, creating God comes ready to receive all who will believe. Powerful, Creating.

We Believe in a Revealing God

God did not create us and then leave us to grope in the darkness trying to figure it all out. He speaks to us in His word. With Peter's description of how God speaks in v. 25 "Through the mouth of our Father, David said by the Holy Spirit," then he quotes Psalm 2: "God has shown himself to you." There is what we call "general revelation" – the world around you, birds that sing, thunder that rolls and mountains that inspire. The classic passage for general revelation is Romans 1:20: "For his invisible attributes namely his eternal power and divine nature have been clearly perceived ever since the creation of the world in the things that have been made." The design demands that there is a designer. The creation screams that there is a creator. General Revelation.

There is also "specific revelation" – His word. The Bible – Old and New Testaments – doesn't tell us everything about God. It tells us all He wants us to know, and His Word – 66 books – contain His revealed will, and that revealed will in the Old and New Testaments bring one dominating theme: "God is Holy, Man is Sinner, Salvation is found in Jesus."

Five simple phrases help you remember the dominating theme of the Bible: We are saved

- by God's Grace Alone,
- through Faith Alone,
- in Christ Alone,
- according to the Scripture Alone
- to the Glory of God Alone.

The question then is put into your court, your life. God has revealed himself in the creation around you and in the word set before you, the Holy Spirit that convicts you and the Christ that will save you. The question is now put to you: Will you receive this pursuing love of our powerful, creating God who has revealed himself in Christ? Powerful, Creating, Revealing.

We Believe in a Governing God

When I say governing, I don't mean a distant God who set up the rules and then backed away leaving us to our own devices. I mean a God who is intricately involved in the affairs of men. From v. 27-28, *27 for truly in this city there were gathered together*

*against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, **28** to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place. This comforts me. We can never drift beyond His intervening, over-ruling care. In Psalm 75:7 we read: "God execute judgement putting down one- lifting up another." In Daniel 2:20-21: "Blessed be the name of God forever and ever, to whom belong wisdom and might. He changes times and seasons. He removes kings and sets up Kings. He gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to those who have understanding."*

John MacArthur says, "The Bible presents God as the supreme historian who wrote all human history before it even began." In verses 27-28 Herod, Pilate and the Gentiles did their worst to stop Christ and they only succeeded in fulfilling God's plan.

There is nothing that happens without His knowledge and our good gracious God can use all things for His purpose and His Glory.

God's faithful people have always hurt. That hurt is never wasted. It is redeemed in the person of Jesus Christ who took all of our sin and pain and resentment and confusion and pride and stubbornness. He took that onto His shoulders and nailed it to the cross. It's at the cross where your life starts to make sense. Come and give your life to God by faith in what Christ has done at the cross.

(Pastor prays)