

Acts 4: 23-31 NIV

“Which way palms turned this Sunday?”

“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.

“²⁴When 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. ²⁵You 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? ²⁶The kings of the earth rise up and the rulers band together against the Lord and against his anointed one.” ²⁷Indeed 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. ²⁸They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen. ²⁹Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. ³⁰Stretch out your hand to heal and perform signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus.’

³¹After 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.”

If you heard or read the news this A.M., it was mostly bad, wasn't it?

When you think it can't get any worse, you hear three reports more dismal than the first.

We have good news today; we don't to rehash any bad news.

Today's text reveals news of a mystery few people ever solve.

Here's what it discloses.



The difference between most good news and bad news relates to your life-purpose.

Suppose you lost your house, your vehicles, TV, computer, iPhone, bank accounts and property—everything except what you're wearing.

If you lost all, could you find life's meaning?

Some neighbors could afford a good life.

Both had sizable incomes and lived in a modern, well-supplied home.

They had two special children; the elder about 17; the younger about 14.

The parents loved-cherished them.

The 17-year-old had the mental capacity of a three-year-old; the 14-year-old, of a five-year-old.

The kids often came to our yard and visited us.



The two were cheerful, but had little future.

Those teenagers had no chance of succeeding in business, education, or any profession.

No possibility that they would ever gain what their parents had.

Neither child could look forward to a career.

Norma and I admired the way the parents loved and took care of them.

The younger child suffered kidney failure.

The mother donated a kidney to spare the child’s life, but the child died in about year.

A year or two after, the elder child died.

A short time later, I talked with the father.

Caring for and loving those kids gave purpose to his life.

His reason for living was gone.

He wondered what he had to live for.

What gives meaning to your life?

Does something lasting and dependable give you purpose?

You may have read *The Robe*, by Lloyd C. Douglas.

As a university student, Douglas lived in a boarding house. Downstairs lived an elderly,

retired music teacher. The old gentleman was infirm and unable to leave his apartment.

Douglas said that every morning the two of them would go through the same ritual. Douglas would descend the stairs, open the old man’s door

and ask, “Well, what’s the good news?”

The old man would pick up his tuning fork, tap on the side of his wheelchair and say,

“That’s middle C. It was middle C yesterday, it will be middle C tomorrow. It will be middle C a thousand years from now. The tenor upstairs sings flat, the piano across the hall is out of tune. But that my friend, is middle C.”



Something exists that will always be there, that you can always depend on--even after the worst of life’s disasters.

Today’s text tells of people who depended on that source with amazing results.

Those folks overcame difficult circumstances.

Acts 4 helps us discover their secret.

Peter and John just left the “courthouse,” where authorities had falsely accused and warned them.

“²³On 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.”

“Supreme court” officials unfairly ordered them never to speak in Jesus’ name again.

Would you be bitter or afraid?

Would you try to find a good attorney?

What did the Apostles and early Christians do?

“When they heard this, they raised their voices together in prayer to God...”

We know we should pray.

The question is: “What should we pray?”

Differences between a society’s values and God’s Word have always vexed His people.

Governments frequently act in ways contrary to God’s Word.

Most people simply go along thinking:

“That’s the way things are now; God’s Word is ‘old-fashioned’ anyhow.”

Then when their society disintegrates into lawlessness, they wonder where God is.

God’s people go to His Word for guidance.

Our text gives a vital example of how to do that.



God made everything you see in space and on the earth and even what you don’t see.

God controls every part of the Universe.

He allows some people to become powerful but none lasts long.

Chairman Mao, Joseph Stalin, and Franklin Roosevelt exercised control a few decades.

Right now what’s left of their bodies is decaying.

So will the bodies and brains of those who presently create terror or “security.”

As gravity always wins and we get “furniture disease,” “when our chest drops into our drawers, God and His will ultimately prevail.

All go to their graves, but in the end, rise to face Him, our Creator, the Lord of the Universe.

The next part of the prayer leads us to a vital perspective.

“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? 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.”

As they did when they executed Jesus, in every age of history, powerful people resist God’s Word and His control.

Many of those, who only five days before hailed Jesus with palm branches as he rode the donkey into Jerusalem, joined the mob wanting to kill him.

Now comes the surprise about the mob’s actions:

“They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen.”

Though the leaders thought they won when they killed Jesus, God had foreordained that Jesus should suffer.

God’s will gives us an insightful edge.

When evil leaders crucified Jesus, they fulfilled what Old Testament prophecy had predicted.

“Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness.”

The same evil leaders who killed Jesus now threatened Jesus’ followers.



The prayer in our Acts 4 text gives us vital perception and insight for tough times

Those threats tested believers’ faithfulness to God.

Tough times occur as tests for Christians.

In order to test us, God allows us to undergo unfair treatment and difficult situations.

If agents of ungodliness threaten and harass us, what will we do?

Will we react in bitterness, fear, and anger, or will we seek to follow Jesus and depend on God’s Word and Spirit?

The Lord tested the Israelites.

“Remember how the LORD your God led you all the way in the wilderness these forty years, to humble and test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands.”¹

The Lord tests us now.

We may think that we are informed sophisticated 21st century people who know what we’re doing.

When we assume God’s word is old-fashioned, we err as Israel did:

“We should not commit sexual immorality, as some of them did—and in one day twenty-three thousand of them died. We should not test Christ, as some of them did—and were killed by snakes.

“And do not grumble, as some of them did—and were killed by the destroying angel. These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the culmination

¹ Deuteronomy 8:2 NIV

of the ages has come. **So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall!**²

Acts 4 tells us of people who kept God's Word. We don't need a preacher or priest or rabbi to connect us with our Creator:

- **Jesus gave everyone access to God.**

“For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all people. This has now been witnessed to at the proper time...And for this purpose I was appointed a herald and an apostle—I am telling the truth, I am not lying—and a true and faithful teacher of the Gentiles. Therefore I want the men everywhere to pray, lifting up holy hands without anger or disputing” (1 Timothy 2:5-8 NIV).

- **God still tests our obedience and love for Him:**

“God disciplines us for our good, in order that we may share in his holiness. No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.

“Make every effort to live in peace with everyone and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord. See to it that no one falls short of the grace of

God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many,” (Hebrews 12: 10, 11, 14, 15 NIV).

- **The Lord expects us to monitor our own behavior and thinking, and correct ourselves:** “Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you—unless, of course, you fail the test?” **2 Corinthians 13: 5 NIV.**



- **We follow the example of those early Christians:** “Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness.”
- **Not that God would help them find a good attorney.**
 - They didn't ask God to remove the threat.
- **They didn't ask God to reduce their stress or to make them comfortable.**
 - They wanted boldness to declare Jesus' resurrection.

They lifted holy hands to God.

Which way are your palms turned today?

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² 1 Corinthians 10:8-12 NIV