

**Text: Acts 4:23-31**

**Title: “Unstoppable Prayer”**

Welcome to 2015 here at Travis Avenue Baptist Church. It’s going to be a great year. At the end of our worship today you’ll hear more about the start-up of our Wednesday night programming for all ages, preschoolers through adults. We have a great new study in I Corinthians led by Dr. Mark Taylor who has just published a commentary on that book of the Bible. As I pray this morning I want to give thanks for God’s abundant provision and your great generosity. Our budget offering goal for December was just a little under \$600,000. As of December 31 we had received over \$640,000, and that total will actually grow as we received gifts by mail and through online giving. God is faithful; let’s give Him thanks.

**ILLUSTRATION** – Imagine this scenario. Our City Council passes an ordinance that preaching on certain controversial topics is considered hate speech. And because our church is unapologetically committed to the Word of God, I and some of our ministers are arrested. Criminal charges are filed, and a trial date is set. The authorities threaten that if we don’t comply the doors to our buildings will be chained shut so that we cannot meet. What would be our churches immediate response to that? Would we be scared into compliance worried that we might lose members or money? Would we hire an attorney? Would we mount a protest march in downtown Fort Worth? Would we appeal to the state and federal Supreme Court on the basis of the separation of church and state? What would we do?

Open your Bibles to Acts 4 where we see this very thing happening to the early church; and we see what they did. Remember that a crippled man had been healed through power of Jesus. This caused a stir, a crowd gathered and the apostles, Peter and John, preached that the only way to be saved was through faith in the resurrected Lord Jesus Christ. So the temple guards seized Peter and John and threw them into jail. The next day there was a hearing and the apostles were commanded to stop preaching this business about Jesus.

Now, you can arrest preachers, but you can’t arrest the Gospel. And they replied, “We must obey God rather than men. We can’t help proclaiming what we have seen and heard about Jesus.

The apostles were released and they returned to where the church regularly gathered. Did they hire an attorney? Did they appeal to Caesar? Did they conduct a protest march through the streets of Jerusalem? No, they took a different approach. When Peter and John were released having been sternly warned not to preach the Gospel here’s what happened: **READ ACTS 4:23-24.**

Church, we’re in spiritual warfare and our mightiest weapon today was their mightiest weapon 2000 years ago ... prayer.

**Acts 4:24a - When they heard this, they raised their voices together in prayer to God.**

I want the Spirit of God and the Word of God to encourage us this morning as we launch into a new year where we will focus on two great objectives: REVIVAL PRAYING and GOSPEL SATURATION. Jesus has given us individually and collectively as a church a mission to proclaim the life-transforming Gospel to our city and to the nations. And empowered by the Spirit we can

make a difference in our city and in our world, just like the early church did here on the pages of Acts. Notice in our text the...

## **1. THREATENING CIRCUMSTANCES**

Acts 4:24 says, “When they heard this...” When they heard what? When they heard about how the apostles had been commanded and threatened that they were to stop preaching Jesus. As long as we are faithful there will always be threatening circumstances. We shouldn’t be surprised when adversity comes our way. Listen, the work of the Spirit of Christ through the Church of Christ will always be met with opposition. We’ll see it all the way through Acts and throughout church history. Satan hates God and he hates the people of God. He also hates non-believers so he will do everything he can to keep them from hearing the Gospel that can save them.

Listen, threatening circumstances will come to each of us sooner or later. Jesus promised that in this world we will experience trouble, affliction and persecution. The Bible tells us we’re not to be surprised when fiery trials come our way. Neither are we to fret and worry. God will use these circumstances for our good and His glory if they lead us to the next thing...

## **2. DESPERATE PRAYER**

Acts 4:24 says, “When they heard this they raised their voices ... in prayer.” What is your first instinct when you are faced with threatening circumstances, like a cancer diagnosis, or a job loss, or rebellious teenager? Is it worry, or fear, or anxiety or anger? Do you look for comfort in something sinful? When faced with threatening circumstances, people of faith and devotion to Jesus raise their voices in prayer.

This is the pattern and the source of our power as believers and as a church. We see it in the Acts church.

**Acts 1:14 - They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers.**

**Acts 2:42 - They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.**

It was this prayer life that produced the power that amazed the authorities in Jerusalem. In Acts 4 it says that these authorities were amazed at the courage of these men ... that they were not trained religious experts ... but they took note of the fact that they had been with Jesus. Their communion with Jesus is what fueled their lives with such power in the Holy Spirit. Their desperate prayer is what gave them the power to saturate and shake their city with the Gospel.

**ILLUSTRATION** – Jonathan Edwards was one of the most influential pastors in U.S. history. Pastoring a church in Massachusetts in the 1700s he recognized that they needed God to send revival. So Edwards wrote a little booklet entitled “An Humble Attempt to Promote Explicit Agreement and Visible Union of God’s People in Extraordinary Prayer for the Revival of Religion and the

Advancement of Christ's Kingdom on Earth." Now that's a book in a title! Edwards called for extraordinary prayer for God to revive His church and expand Christ's Kingdom.

What is extraordinary prayer? Well, simply put, it is beyond what we ordinarily do. It is more than what we are currently doing. It is taking prayer to the next level in our lives and in our church, and that is what I am challenging us to do this year. What would extraordinary prayer look like in your life? You would be amazed at the difference it would make if you committed thirty minutes a day to seeking God in prayer and Bible study. Do you love your sleep more than you love God? Do you believe that if you were to make the effort toward extraordinary prayer that God would bless and reward you for it? What kind of change would it mean for your family?

What would extraordinary prayer look like for our church? Well, we're taking a step in that direction with our Evenings of Prayer and Praise each month and with Morning Watch on Sundays. We'll learn more about it in our OneCry Prayer Summit starting two weeks from today.

But Jonathan Edwards knew that it would take more than just praying ... it would take people praying in agreement and in unity. And that's the next thing we see in our text.

### **3. VISIBLE UNITY**

Acts 4:24 says, "They raised their voices together..." We're told that upon their release they went to "their own people" (v.23). That means that they had Christ-centered relationships and they immediately huddled with those people. They reported what had happened, and a prayer meeting broke out. Do you have that circle of people in your life that you run to for support as you face threatening circumstances? Our community groups are intended to foster this kind of unity in prayer and fellowship.

It's important for us to pray alone, but also to pray together. Jesus said in ...

**Matthew 18:19 - "If (just) two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven.**

There's power in God's people praying with visible unity. Threatening circumstances called for desperate prayer in visible unity fueled by...

### **4. CONFIDENT HOPE**

**Acts 4:24a - They raised their voices together in prayer to God.**

Look at how God-centered their praying is. Before they started making requests they filled their minds with things that they knew were true about God.

**Acts 4:24b - "Sovereign Lord," they said, "you made the heaven and the earth and the sea, and everything in them.**

“Sovereign Lord” means the ruler of unchallengeable power. Earthly authorities have to bow to the ultimate authority in heaven of the Sovereign Lord.

He is the God of creation. “You made the heaven and the earth and the sea, and everything in them.” Everything is in His control. He is a God who reveals Himself.

**Acts 4:25 - You spoke by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of your servant, our father David: (they are praying straight from Scripture from Psalm 2) “Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain?**

**Acts 4:26 - The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against the Lord and against his Anointed One.’**

The enemies of God think they are in control but they are not. God is.

**Acts 4:27 - 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.**

**Acts 4:28 - They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen.**

Listen, when we have this vision of God, no threatening circumstance can discourage us. Our God is Sovereign Lord. Nothing is too hard for Him. Nothing is beyond His reach or His power. And with that vision of God firmly planted in their minds, they can finally get down to asking God for what they need.

**Acts 4:29 - Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness.**

What a great prayer to pray ... enable us to speak your word with great boldness. Notice that they are praying for the very thing that got them into hot water to begin with. They were not praying for comfortable or convenient lives. They were praying for the Lord to grant them the ability to be faithful ... to be bold witnesses. So they are praying for God to enable them to do what they could do. But then they prayed for God to do what only He could do...

**Acts 4:30 - Stretch out your hand to heal and perform miraculous signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus.”**

This kind of praying is unstoppable.

**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.**

The prayer went up. The power came down. The proclamation went forth. God has obligated Himself to move in behalf of people who face their threatening circumstances with desperate prayer, visible unity and confident hope in God.

Last Sunday night in our Evening of Prayer and Praise we spent time thanking God for answered prayer. Back in November we prayed specifically for God to empower our efforts to share the Gospel during the Christmas season. God answered our prayer. We had 161 professions of faith at Christmas Store. In less than a week God gave us the ability to put out 3500 door hangers on homes in this part of the city inviting people to our Christmas Eve Candlelight Service. If you were here you saw something amazing. People were packed in all the way up to the organ pipes. Most of whom were guests, and we had the opportunity to proclaim the Gospel to them. Last Sunday we had a man come through our Welcome Center. He found a door hanger on his front door and came to our Christmas Eve service. God touched him and he realized he needed to be in church. That's just one we know of; we expect there are many others.

Last Sunday afternoon I got a call from a lady who was ecstatic. She and her husband had been going through unbelievable physical and financial problems. She had been in such pain for so long, and her life so dominated by pain medication that she felt drugged all the time. But God delivered her from the pain and the drugs, and miraculously provided for their financial needs. She knew many of us were praying for them and she just had to call to tell me that God is faithful to answer prayer.

When we pray, God moves. There is a real time connection between our praying and the work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of other people.

**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.**