REKINDLE THE FIRE
Sunday April 2, 2017

Scripture Reference: Act 4:13-31

Intro.

A. Good morning everyone and let me just begin by saying how wonderful it is to see each and every one of you today. Of course we have just finished coming off the longest vacation we have every taken and been away from our church family longer than we have ever been. So you can imagine that we are excited to be back with you and we are also excited because we are about to enter into a powerful time in the life of our church.

1. In just five short days we will begin a special series of meetings we call Revival. I am just curious because the term revival is not used much these days so I am curious how many of ever attended a “revival” service? I know many of you have but I also know some of you have not so just what is “revival”? The dictionary defines revival with words like, “renewal”, “awakening” or “restore”. I ran across these words by the late preacher C.H. Spurgeon. He said this “The word "revive" wears its meaning upon its forehead; it is from the Latin, and may be interpreted thus—to live again, to receive again a life which has almost expired; to rekindle into a flame the vital spark which was nearly extinguished.” Revival in its strictest terms is not about the unbeliever. While evangelism is not excluded from term revival the reality is you can’t revive something that has not yet been alive. The scripture that we most often associate with the term revival is found in the Old Testament book of 2 Chronicles 7:14 which says, “if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land.” 2 Chronicles 7:14 (NIV) Obviously that scripture is aimed at believers who have fallen away and are seeking the Lord to be restore, to be renewed or as we are looking at today, to be revived. For us today I want to explore a New Testament passage that I think speaks to the revival message we need to hear as we approach this time of special services at Cornerstone. Look with me at the book of Acts chapter 4 verses 13-31. “The members of the council were
amazed when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, for they could see that they were ordinary men with no special training in the Scriptures. They also recognized them as men who had been with Jesus. 14 But since they could see the man who had been healed standing right there among them, there was nothing the council could say. 15 So they ordered Peter and John out of the council chamber and conferred among themselves. 16 “What should we do with these men?” they asked each other. “We can’t deny that they have performed a miraculous sign, and everybody in Jerusalem knows about it. 17 But to keep them from spreading their propaganda any further, we must warn them not to speak to anyone in Jesus’ name again.” 18 So they called the apostles back in and commanded them never again to speak or teach in the name of Jesus. 19 But Peter and John replied, “Do you think God wants us to obey you rather than him? 20 We cannot stop telling about everything we have seen and heard.” 21 The council then threatened them further, but they finally let them go because they didn’t know how to punish them without starting a riot. For everyone was praising God 22 for this miraculous sign—the healing of a man who had been lame for more than forty years. 23 As soon as they were freed, Peter and John returned to the other believers and told them what the leading priests and elders had said. 24 When they heard the report, all the believers lifted their voices together in prayer to God: “O Sovereign Lord, Creator of heaven and earth, the sea, and everything in them—25 you spoke long ago by the Holy Spirit through our ancestor David, your servant, saying, ‘Why were the nations so angry? Why did they waste their time with futile plans? 26 The kings of the earth prepared for battle; the rulers gathered together against the LORD and against his Messiah.’ 27 “In fact, this has happened here in this very city! For Herod Antipas, Pontius Pilate the governor, the Gentiles, and the people of Israel were all united against Jesus, your holy servant, whom you anointed. 28 But everything they did was determined beforehand according to your will. 29 And now, O Lord, hear their threats, and give us, your servants, great boldness in preaching your word. 30 Stretch out your hand with healing power; may miraculous signs and wonders be
done through the name of your holy servant Jesus.” 31 After this prayer, the meeting place shook, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit. Then they preached the word of God with boldness.” Acts 4:13-31 (NLT)

B. Now I feel it is very important to point out to you that the context of this scripture does not have us dealing with a rag tag group of backslidden sinners. This were not a group of people who had turned their backs on God. In fact just the opposite is true. In fact this passage comes on the heels of the great miracle that Peter had performed for the lame man at the gate called Beautiful. In fact we know that on the day of Pentecost 3000 people got saved and we now know from the beginning of this chapter that number has now increased to around 5000. But these people still understood that there was greater work to be done and they sensed that if they were to accomplish all that God wanted them to do they needed to have the fire of God rekindled in their lives.

**Trans:** Today I want to speak to you about the challenges we too face as we endeavor to live out God’s purpose for our lives and how we meet those challenges victoriously. The first thing I would point out to you is that:

**I. WE HAVE TO RECOGNIZE THE PRESSURES CONFRONTING THE CHURCH.**

I would remind you that there really is no such thing as “The good old days”. Even the so called good old days had bad days we just tend to have selective memories about them. I think that one of the most dangerous things the church can do is allow itself to believe that if it had just lived in a different time or even if it could return to a different time then God could do more with us. I have a pastor friend named Mark Pitcher and he used to always open his service this way, “This is the greatest day to be alive, this is the day the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it.” How true that is. This is our day, not yesterday and not tomorrow. This is the day God has given to us so let’s not only rejoice and be glad in it, but let’s also make the most of it in serving our Lord Jesus! We need to recognize that the church has always been under pressure and that pressure usually comes at us in two ways. Let’s look at them. First there is:

**A. The External Pressures.**
1. By the external pressures I of course mean those things that come from outside of ourselves. In the story we are looking at today the pressure was coming from a group known as the Sanhedrin. As most of you know the Sanhedrin were the religious ruling council. These were of course the people who had opposed Jesus and who had made possible his crucifixion. Obviously these people had the power to inflict pretty stick punishment on those how did not tow the party line so to speak.

2. Now I think I need to let you know right up front that confrontation is inevitable. We don't look for it and we don't try to instigate it, but if we chose to live our lives according to the Truth of God’s word then we must understand that confrontation will happen. Look at the prayer of these people, “you spoke long ago by the Holy Spirit through our ancestor David, your servant, saying, ‘Why were the nations so angry? Why did they waste their time with futile plans? 26 The kings of the earth prepared for battle; the rulers gathered together against the LORD and against his Messiah.’” Acts 4:25-26 (NLT) We must understand that if we chose to lift up the Bible as God’s sole authority in our lives there will be opposition, but let us also never forget what Paul told us, “For we are not fighting against flesh-and-blood enemies, but against evil rulers and authorities of the unseen world, against mighty powers in this dark world, and against evil spirits in the heavenly places.” Ephesians 6:12 (NLT) While it is true that Satan may have control over some people, our battle is not with people but with the spiritual powers of darkness that oppose the truth. And because this is a spiritual battle it must also be fought in spiritual terms which I will address in a few minutes.

3. I am involved enough in politics to know that there are some buzz words that quite prevalent in our culture today and one of those words is “moderate”. We are told we need to be more moderate or that we need to seek more moderate politicians, but what does that means? To be moderate means, “of medium quality or mediocre.” Moderate means also to avoid extremes or excesses. Well I think we would all agree that for the most part those would be good things, but how does it play out in the life of someone committed to following Jesus? Let’s look at some of the examples from the life of Jesus.
a) Here is what Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount. “You are the salt of the earth. But what good is salt if it has lost its flavor? Can you make it salty again? It will be thrown out and trampled underfoot as worthless.” Matthew 5:13 (NLT) I must be honest and tell that this does not sound very moderate to me.

b) How about this? “Another of his disciples said, “Lord, first let me return home and bury my father.” 22 But Jesus told him, “Follow me now. Let the spiritually dead bury their own dead.” Matthew 8:21-22 (NLT)

c) How about this? “If you love your father or mother more than you love me, you are not worthy of being mine; or if you love your son or daughter more than me, you are not worthy of being mine.38 If you refuse to take up your cross and follow me, you are not worthy of being mine. 39 If you cling to your life, you will lose it; but if you give up your life for me, you will find it.” Matthew 10:37-39 (NLT)

Let me give you just one more example.

d) “I know all the things you do, that you are neither hot nor cold. I wish that you were one or the other! 16 But since you are like lukewarm water, neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth!” Revelation 3:15-16 (NLT)

4. I am sure it will be disappointing to some to know that Jesus was not a moderate, but he was not an extremist either. The problem lies in the fact that we have strayed so far from the truth that right is beginning to seem wrong and wrong is beginning to seem right.

5. One of the pressures we experience externally is the pressure to conform. That is exactly what these people were experiencing in this story. These people were told that they could speak, they could preach but it had to be a message that conformed to the narrative of the religious council and not the Bible. I think we can see some of these same pressures being exerted on the church today. Go ahead and have your religious services, just keep it within the confines of your buildings. Don’t come outside and tell us that Jesus is the only way to God. You can talk about feeding people and caring for the poor, but do not speak to us about things like SIN because these things make us uncomfortable. We are told in so not so many words that it is fine to talk about Heaven but do not speak of such a place as hell. You have heard me mention many times that
newspaper ad put out by a church in the community I first pastored in. It said “We don’t believe in all that fire and brimstone stuff. Come experience Love.” That ad was not produced by some Middle Eastern faith or a cult. In fact the church group that produced it came from a church pastored by a famous early American Pastor name Jonathan Edwards. He is famous for one message which was called “Sinners in the hands of an angry God”.

6. These religious leaders said to these people, “It stops right here.” This is as far as it goes and so I ask you today is this where we stop? We have been seeing God work in our church particularly over the past six months or so. We are seeing an increase in our attendance and even a bit of increase in giving so is this as far as we go? As we have been moving forward to allow ourselves to be driven by God’s purposes I see God working, but will we allow the enemy to say to us, “No further?”

Several years ago when our church was much smaller we were kind of coasting along with very few problems except of course filling the chairs of our church. But now as God is moving us and as we are getting more aggressive about reaching the lost and becoming the people God created us to be there is conflict and confrontation. Will we long for the so called “good old days” or will we say, “NO, it is straight ahead to fulfill the will and purpose of God in our lives.” There was an old poem written about the children of Israel and their entering the land of Promise that goes like this. “They came to the gate of Canaan, but they never entered in. They came to the very threshold, but they perished in their sin. On the morrow they would have entered, but God had shut the gate; they wept, they rashly ventured, but alas it was too late. And so we are ever coming to the place where two ways part, one leads to the land of promise and one to a hardened heart.”

7. Just in case you didn’t know this we face huge challenges to the work of God’s kingdom in our area. Did you know that with a 3 mile radius of this church there are almost 200,000 people? That is just within 3 miles. When I looked at a five mile radius that number grows to almost 500,000. The idea that there are too many churches in our area is up surd! The reality is we don’t have enough churches. We don't have room for
all the people around us even if we filled all our church four times over every Sunday. So how do we meet this enormous challenge? Here is what I suggest.

II. FOLLOW THE EXAMPLE OF THE EARLY CHURCH.

Now please do not misunderstand this is not a call to the good old days, this is simply a call or a recall to Biblical truths that never change no matter where or when we are. What did the early church do when they faced the obstacles to the ministry God had given them?

A. They Prayed!

1. “As soon as they were freed, Peter and John returned to the other believers and told them what the leading priests and elders had said. 24 When they heard the report, all the believers lifted their voices together in prayer to God:...” Acts 4:23-24 (NLT) Dare I say that too often when we are confronted by opposition that instead of prayer we debate, we analysis, we discuss, we try to form some sort of consensus. Too often we are guilty of sharpening our pencils instead of sharpening our faith. If we wish to experience the same power evident in the life of the early church then we must follow their example and start praying. Now notice something very important here. It is not simply that they prayed, but I want you to see how they prayed.

B. How They Prayed.

1. They didn’t pray, “Lord get us out of this mess.” They didn’t pray, “Lord help us to find common ground with these people.” They didn’t pray for how they might become more moderate and acceptable. Look at how they prayed, “And now, O Lord, hear their threats, and give us, your servants, great boldness in preaching your word.” Acts 4:29 (NLT) They didn’t pray, “Lord show us an easily way.” No they prayed, “Lord give us the power to do your will.” They prayed for boldness and so must we!

2. When Nehemiah was rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem they were making progress but their enemies were angry and opposing them. Their enemies were threatening to kill them if they kept going so what did they do? Here is what it says. “Meanwhile, our enemies were saying, “Before they know what’s happening, we
will swoop down on them and kill them and end their work.” 12 The Jews who lived near the enemy came and told us again and again, “They will come from all directions and attack us!” 13 So I placed armed guards behind the lowest parts of the wall in the exposed areas. I stationed the people to stand guard by families, armed with swords, spears, and bows. 14 Then as I looked over the situation, I called together the nobles and the rest of the people and said to them, “Don’t be afraid of the enemy! Remember the Lord, who is great and glorious, and fight for your brothers, your sons, your daughters, your wives, and your homes!” Nehemiah 4:11-14 (NLT) How do we fight? Well the Bible says that we do not use the normal weapons of warfare. Our greatest weapon against our enemy is prayer.

**Conclusion**

A. There is so much more to share here but let me finish with this. The scripture tells us this, **“After this prayer, the meeting place shook, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit. Then they preached the word of God with boldness.”** Acts 4:31 (NLT) I have looked at different ideas about what this meant for the place they were meeting to be shaken, but here is what I do know. God heard their prayer! Whatever it means I know that God heard them and they when out for that room with the fire of God rekindled in their lives and all I can say is; **“OH GOD DO IT AGAIN!”**

1. What will happen to Cornerstone if we too return to the Lord in fervent prayer? What if we too tell the Lord that there are those who oppose what He wants us to do, but that our eyes are on Him and we will trust Him fully? I believe we too will be shaken. Maybe not this building but our hearts and our lives will be shaken. We too will be empowered by the Holy Spirit of God to do the things only God Himself is capable of.

2. Will you become a part of the group of people who come together to lift their voices to God for another moving of the Holy Spirit at Cornerstone Community Church? I challenge you be part of a movement that shakes the foundations of this church and then spreads to shake the foundations of this community and beyond.