

YOU

Sermon Series: When Emotions Rise

To be used with: Session 2: Shaking Off Fear

**Sermon Title Possibilities: Pressing On When the
Pressure Mounts**

Scripture: Acts 4:23-37

Connection with Unit Theme: To complement the small group study “When Emotions Rise,” these sermon outlines will follow the same theme as the small group study, so the pastor can reinforce the study from the pulpit.

Introduction: As I write this, John MacArthur has been in the news. He is the senior pastor of Grace Community Church in Sun Valley, CA, and he has been under fire for his refusal to abide by the Coronavirus restrictions set out by the California state government. I’ve found this intriguing because Dr. MacArthur has not been the kind of pastor to get involved in political controversy. On the contrary, he has often warned about the dangers of relying too heavily on politics, and he always kept his distance from groups such as the Moral Majority or the Christian Coalition. He has also urged Christians to submit to civil authority, and he did so when this pandemic first broke out. It’s not like him to throw down the gauntlet this way, so he must really think the government has crossed a line.

I realize Christians have varying opinions on how we should respond to the Coronavirus restrictions, and I’m not going to get into that. I agree that Christians should obey both God and government as much as possible, but if current trends continue, the day may come when we may not be able to do both. What are we to do if the government goes too far? If we choose to obey God, people will criticize us. They’ll accuse us of promoting anarchy, or of undermining the social order. The reaction may go beyond criticism into outright persecution. How are Christians supposed to respond? How did the early church respond when Jewish authorities told them to quit preaching the Gospel?

1) A prayerful request.

- a) A. Peter and John had recently been on trial before the Sanhedrin.
 - i) It started when they healed a lame man in the temple.
 - (1) The man was over forty years old, and he had begged at the gate of the temple for many years.
 - (2) Peter and John drew a crowd when they healed him, and Peter preached to them about Jesus.
 - ii) The Sadducees ordered their arrest.
 - (1) They did not believe in any kind of life after death, so they did not like this talk about Jesus’ resurrection.
 - (2) They did not like any kind of public commotion that might attract the attention of the Romans.
 - (3) They had no reason to hold Peter and John, so they let them go, but they warned them not to preach anymore about Jesus.

- b) When Peter and John told the rest of the church what had happened, how did they respond?
 - i) They took the whole matter to God in prayer.
 - (1) We live in an age of advanced science and technology, so when trouble arises, we often consult everyone except God.
 - (2) The COVID 19 pandemic has stymied literally everyone. What would happen if churches all over the world united in prayer for it?
 - (3) Their prayer acknowledged God's sovereignty. Do we still believe God is in control of everything today?
 - ii) They took comfort in God's Word.
 - (1) The Bible has power that no other book in the world has, because it is the very Word of God.
 - (2) The word "Christ" literally means "anointed one". Originally, this was understood as a reference to David. By the time of Jesus, many Jews had come to believe it referred to the Messiah.
 - (3) Though the Gentiles and the Jewish religious leaders rose up against Jesus, God was way ahead of them.
- c) They prayed for more boldness.
 - i) Lesser men might have prayed for more discretion, or that God would show them a "less offensive" method of sharing the Gospel.
 - ii) Has the church become too timid? Maybe it's time that we started praying for more boldness!
- d) They prayed for God to move in a mighty way.
 - i) Adrian Rogers used to say, "I would love to see a movement of God in America that Dan Rather cannot explain."

2) A powerful response.

- a) The place where they gathered "was shaken."
 - i) This was no mere earthquake.
 - (1) An earthquake affects a large area, but this only shook the place where they had gathered.
 - (2) They knew this was a movement of God.
 - ii) They were filled with the Holy Spirit.
 - (1) They had already been baptized with the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost, but this was a fresh anointing.
- b) When you're filled with the Holy Spirit, He gives you a boldness to do things you never thought you could do.
 - i) In my years of ministry, I have dealt with some rough characters. I can think of times I spoke to them with a bluntness I don't normally have, and I've walked away saying to myself, "Wow! Did I really say that?" As I look back, I realize it wasn't me saying those things. It was the Holy Spirit speaking through me.
- c) What happened as a result?
 - i) They were generous to people in need.
 - (1) "They had all things common" – This does not mean everything was community property. It simply means they shared their goods and resources with one another.
 - (2) Some of them even sold property and gave the money to the church.

- (a) This does not mean Christians should not own private property, but it does mean we should give to people in need. How much you help them and to what extent is between you and God. As I often tell my church, you can't out-give God!
- ii) They continued preaching the Gospel.
 - (1) On the one hand, words don't mean much to a person who is hungry and cold (James 2:15-16).
 - (2) On the other hand, a person can be well-fed and warm, and still die and go to hell.
 - (a) I remember seeing a "Peanuts" comic strip where Snoopy was sitting out in the snow, shivering. Charlie Brown and Schroeder walked by, and they thought they should say something to comfort him. They walked up to him, and Charlie Brown said, "Be of good cheer, Snoopy." Schroeder agreed, "Yes, Snoopy, be of good cheer." Then they walked away, and Snoopy still sat there shivering. He was obviously thinking, "Huh?" Mere words don't do much good to someone with physical needs. As I heard someone say many years ago, "There is no 'social gospel', but there are many social implications of the Gospel."

Conclusion: When a young monk named Martin Luther began to question the teachings of the Roman Catholic church, he launched a major movement known as the Protestant Reformation. Luther believed the Bible, not the pope, should be the final authority in spiritual matters. He also believed that forgiveness and reconciliation with God are not found through sacraments or any other type of ritual, but through faith in Jesus. Before long, he was branded a heretic. An envoy from the church came to see him, and they warned him if he kept preaching these things, the church would take harsh action. They warned him that even his supporters would abandon him before it was over, and they asked him where he would be then. Luther's reply was quick and profound. He said, "Then, as now, in the hands of God."

Let us remember, friends, that the church is still in God's hands. Let us obey Him first and trust Him to take care of us. What's the worst that can happen? If the government kills us, we have a better home waiting for us in heaven! Then, as now, we will be in God's hands, so let us press on when the pressure mounts, and keep proclaiming the inerrant Word of God.

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