

Series: Building the Bridge

May 27, 2018

## **Title: The Power Equation**

**[Slide 1]**

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

### **Opposition**

**Leilani Estates:**

**[Slide 2]**

Leilani Estates has become the most well-known neighborhood in the entire United States. A month ago Leilani Estates was a quiet little paradise in the northeast corner of the Big Island of Hawaii. People were planting flowers and mowing lawns, with no idea of what was about to happen just beneath their feet!

Then, on May 3<sup>rd</sup> the ground split open and molten lava began shooting into the air. Inexorably the lava spread across the community, destroying homes and covering the neighborhoods streets with lava. Poisonous gases now fill the air. The lava fountains roar like jet airplanes. The rivers of lava stretch all the way to the Pacific Ocean. With the last highway in danger of being inundated by the lava flows, the government is making plans to evacuate the entire populace of the area.

Imagine what it must feel like this Memorial Day weekend to be living in a homeless shelter or camping in a parking lot, not knowing if your home is still intact, or wondering if you will ever get to rebuild it. For the Leilani Estate refugees the words "terra firma" will never be the same!

**Jerusalem, A.D. 33:**

I imagine that the first Christians must have felt a bit like this when their fledgling movement became the target of fierce opposition from their own religious leaders. For a few short days or weeks the Good News about Jesus had become the talk of the town. Imagine: 3000 people becoming followers of Jesus the Messiah in one day! A tiny group of perhaps 120 people was now a major religious sect in Jerusalem. Every day the Holy Spirit worked

healings in their midst. These believers were living the dream of being a part of God's New Creation.

But then the ground began to open up under them. When Peter and John defended themselves before the religious authorities, they were put in jail. They were ordered to never again speak of Jesus of Nazareth. The threats came thick and fast. They knew full well where all of this would lead. Hadn't they seen what these same men did to Jesus?

It was time to sound a warning:

### **[Slide 3]**

*Acts 4:23 NIV*

*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.*

## **Prayer**

### **Appeal to a Higher Court!**

Faced with such opposition, the believers had to make a choice: Would they back down and abandon their new-found faith? Would they go underground and stop announcing the Good News? Would they take their fight to the streets like other militant movements? Or was there another way forward?

Rather than trying to fight this battle on their own, the believers made a direct appeal to a Higher Court!

### **[Slide 4]**

*Acts 4:24a NIV*

*When 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."*

They directed their voices to the One who is greater than all human institutions and powers: the God who created and sustains everything. No fooling around with lesser authority figures. They went straight to the Top!

They did so because they had a personal relationship with God, one that brought full covenant/family status. They were part of God's New Creation. They were part of God's restoration work force. Rather than arguing with those who opposed the New Creation, they went straight to the Master Engineer.

### **Connecting the Dots:**

In their prayer, they quoted an ancient psalm of David:

#### **[Slide 5]**

*Acts 4:24b-26 NIV*

*"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 [literally: His Messiah or Christ]'*

Then they connected the dots between this psalm and their current situation:

#### **[Slide 6]**

*Acts 4:27-28 NIV*

*"Indeed Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles [Lit. the nations] and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed. They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen."*

David had identified two groups that opposed God's King: the *nations* and the *peoples*. In their prayer, the Christians link these two groups to the two groups that conspired to kill Jesus.

- The nations are represented by the Gentile Roman governor and the empire that empowered him.
- The people are represented by Herod, the local ruler of Galilee. He and the religious authorities of Jerusalem conspired with Pilate to have God's Messiah King crucified.

But all of this was part of God's greater plan. In the psalm, David says that God laughs at His opponents because their hostility plays right into His greater plan. The same thing has happened here: the nations and the people of Israel, in killing Jesus, had actually set the stage for Him to become King.

### **Prayer for *more* Power:**

And that is why they conclude their prayer with these words:

#### **[Slide 7]**

*Acts 4:29-30 NIV*

*"Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. Stretch out your hand to heal and perform signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus."*

Instead of asking God to protect them from their enemies, they ask God for *more power to speak and act on His behalf!* No backing down here. No retreat into the old creation. No bitter complaining or lamenting their fate. Instead, they can see that *the opposition is proof that they are doing the right thing.* So what they need most right then and there is *more of God's power, not less.*

You might say that they could see the lava which was erupting from the ground as part of the renewal of the world, not its destruction. Of course, any Hawaiian knows that without the volcanoes, there wouldn't be any Hawaii. The current eruption, however much localized destruction it may cause, is only making the island bigger.

### **Power Equation**

#### **A new shaking:**

In answer to this prayer for power, Luke tells us:

#### **[Slide 8]**

*Acts 4:31 NIV*

*After they had 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 answer to hostile opposition was a new Pentecost. The same Holy Spirit who had been poured out on the believers in the Upper Room on Pentecost Sunday came in power to refresh and re-fill the believers for a new challenge.

**Power:**

An amazing thing happens to the black desert of a fresh lava flow once the molten rock has cooled. Within just 3 months blue green algae colonizes the rock surface. 3 months later tiny ferns take root in the cracks. They are accompanied by mosses, lichens. Eventually shrubs and trees take over and the lava flow becomes a tropical paradise.

When you face opposition, it can feel like the ground has opened up beneath your feet and hot lava is about to consume your world. Perhaps someone you know is lashing out with anger at you. Perhaps you are being singled out at work because of your faith in Jesus. Whatever the case, this is the time to apply the "Power Equation":

**[Slide 9]**

Opposition + Prayer = God's Power

The opposition is real and hostile. But God is greater, and in His purposes even that opposition advances His New Creation. As Paul wrote:

**[Slide 10]**

*Romans 8:28 NIV*

*And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.*

So when the ground opens up and the lava starts flowing, apply the Power Equation. God's plan is infinitely bigger than the troubles we face. And His plan works for our good. After all, we're part of His New Creation!