

It's that time of year when it's hard to be a football fan.

You may think that I have it backwards, but I meant what I said and I said what I meant. This is a hard time of year to be a football fan. It's not hard to be a fan of football in general, but it's a hard time of year to be from anywhere but New York, Indiana, Louisiana or Minnesota. After all, if you're not from one of those areas, who are you supposed to be rooting for?

So people get together for the big games and they feel the need to declare allegiances and defend their choices. I've seen a room full of steamed people watching championship games before. It's not pretty. I'll tell you what's interesting about it, though. What's interesting is the way that the people in the room will suddenly grow quiet when something big happens on the other team.

When the game is up in the air or their side is winning, they talk up a storm! They hoot and they holler! They even make fun of the fans rooting for the other team. But when it starts to look like they're going to lose the game, all that goes away and they quiet right down. They don't want to make fools of themselves by talking about what a sure thing it is that they're going to take the game.

Is that why Christians are so often reluctant to speak up? Is it possible that they're not as sure about the outcome of the "game" as they say they are? Well, **Speak Up. You're Not Wrong.** Pray like the Christians in Acts 4 did that we may all speak boldly about our Savior and the fact that, in the end, no matter how things look in the meantime, "*he will stand upon the earth*" and that "*in my flesh I will see God*" (Job 19:25-27).

You might think about that a little bit as you watch the last few games of the year now. Think about how it would be if you were absolutely certain of how the game would come out, no matter what happened. It would make all the difference in the world, wouldn't it? You'd absolutely speak up about it. Really, you could be as boastful as you wanted and still know you were okay. I suspect you would even put money on the game—that is, assuming there was someone who would still want to bet after you told them that you knew how the game was going to come out!

That's like the early church, isn't it? They totally knew how this was all going to come out. These were the very people who personally saw Jesus rise from the dead. They absolutely understood this. And since Jesus had risen there had been the miraculous outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. There had been the conversion of 3,000 people in one day. More and more had joined the church until, at this point, there were actually 5,000 people who believed in Christ, and it looks like all this had happened within a few months of his execution. Of *course* they could see that all of this was working toward some great victory! And why would they not be bold to speak up about it?

Sure. They knew they weren't wrong. I mean, Peter and John had just been released after an arrest by the Sanhedrin, but what were they arrested for? They had miraculously healed a man born lame and given the credit to Jesus. It was pretty obvious to them that they weren't wrong.

So why did they even need to pray for boldness? Wasn't the "big game" going in their favor? Wasn't their team scoring all the touchdowns? And didn't they know that they were the ones destined by God to win? So why did they have to pray for boldness? Why weren't they naturally bold, like a superfan watching his team trounce all over the opposition at the Superbowl?

That's because the prophecies that spoke of their destinies as winners also spoke of circumstances that would make them look and feel like losers. We look at their time and we think, "Miracles—cool! Wouldn't it be neat to have *those*?" I'm sure they would have looked ahead to our time (if they could) and thought, "Wow! Peace and freedom to speak of the gospel. Wouldn't it be cool to have *those*?"

Okay, so perhaps you've never seen a disciple of Christ reach out his hand and perform a genuine miracle of physical healing. So what? You're still not wrong. You're still on the winning side. Do you really doubt that? Do you think it's disheartening to have people belittle you for speaking up about Christ and that's the reason you don't want to say anything? Really? You cave into peer pressure and live like the rest of the world because you want to be

popular with the people who live like nothing but self-righteous and rebellious sinners, but all this time you could have been using your freedom of speech to offer them the truth, to show them that they are the ones on the losing side. You could be telling them that the ultimate winner, Jesus Christ, has already purchased them a ticket to sit on the winning side and that he has left that free ticket in their names at the will-call window. Speak up! You're not wrong about this. Those who do not believe and mock Jesus with their sins are wrong—and if they stay that way, they'll ultimately be damned. Why would you live like them? You're a child of heaven! Speak up!

Besides, if you think that seeing some miracles—or even performing some miracles—is the ticket to speaking boldly, think again. This prayer for boldness came from people who were already performing miracles. They were performing miracles, but they were also witnessing great evils. They themselves were witnessing the unholy alliances that were always working against the Christ, the “nations raging” and the “peoples plotting,” all of which was prophesied in Psalm 2, which they quoted. They had seen it directly and powerfully through the collaboration of two men: a Jewish King over the peoples of Israel (Herod) and a Gentile ruler over Palestine (Pontius Pilate). They not only saw them plot against the Anointed One, but they saw the rulers murder him!

If this was a Superbowl, then it was looking like a blowout *in the other side's favor*. At least, it would have appeared to be a blowout for the majority of the game. If this was a Superbowl, most people would have started watching the commercials and skipping the game a long time ago. They would have assumed that the devil, the world, and our sinful flesh had gotten this game sewn up almost before it was started.

Remember that this is how it would have looked to them, since that same council that killed Jesus was still in charge of God's people Israel. The side that would ultimately win it all, then, was in danger of giving in to the opposition and clamming up in the face of their mockery and persecution. We know that

would have been foolish when we look back now, but that's only because we live in the future and we know how this is all going to work out! But, as far as they were concerned, this was the situation: The rulers of the world had plotted against the Christ and—guess what—they had actually killed him. Now, he rose from the dead, so at least the home team was answering these big scores in spades, but now what? Jesus arose and had ascended into heaven, and now all that ire that had been directed against him was being directed instead against his much weaker followers!

So they prayed for boldness. They prayed for the courage to speak up. God had told them how this was going to end. It didn't matter which way the game was going at any given moment. They needed to speak up because they weren't wrong about the outcome of this “game,” and the Holy Spirit demonstrated how true this was by shaking the place where they were meeting, and “*they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly.*”

And now, you. Now, *us*. Disheartening things have happened to us. Temptation has stricken many blows among us. It has even gained some victories. Perhaps most frustrating of all is that, under much less pressure, we have prayed for help much less often than the early church did, and we have become far too much a part of this world, rather than being the bold witnesses to the truth that we are called and privileged to be. How can we speak under such shame?

By the power of the Spirit. By the power of the Spirit who shook the room where the early church met. We can speak up because the Spirit comes to us through this earth-shaking message: As incredible as it sounds, you are forgiven. Despite your failures, God does not count you as wrong; he counts all of your wrong against his Son for your salvation. Jesus was a perfect witness that God may see a perfect witness in you for Jesus sake. Now that makes you a personal witness of his forgiveness and salvation.

So speak up! You're not wrong, so speak up! You know the salvation of God. You know his forgiveness. You know how this story ends, so speak up, and God will surely bless. Amen.