

## Acts 4:23-31 Prayers that Change Lives

I. The need for prayer is shared.

- a) **23 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. 24 When they heard this, they raised their voices together in prayer to God.**
- b) “their own people” living in close community
- c) Reports = testimonies
- d) Their first response was to pray not to complain, but to lift their voices to God.
  - i. V24 [raised their voices together or] “with one accord” This unity of heart and mind characterized the early church (cf. 1:14; 2:46; 4:24; 5:12; 15:25). There is spiritual power and focused action in this atmosphere of unity of purpose.
  - ii. The people were of one heart and mind, and God answered their requests.
  - iii. The Church was unified—perhaps more so than ever.

- Thought the same? Goals were the same?

- iv. Contrastly, division in the church always hinders prayer and robs the church of spiritual power.”<sup>i</sup>
  
- v. ILL: A.W. Tozer, “Has it ever occurred to you that one hundred pianos all tuned to the same fork are automatically tuned to each other? They are of one accord by being tuned, not to each other, but to another standard to which each one must individually bow. So one hundred worshipers [meeting] together, each one looking away to Christ, are in heart nearer to each other than they could possibly be, were they to become 'unity' conscious and turn their eyes away from God to strive for closer fellowship.”<sup>ii</sup>
  
- vi. APPL: CrossPoint unified in its hopes.

II. **The Prayer** “This is one of the truly great prayers recorded in the Bible, and it is a good example for us to follow.”<sup>iii</sup>

- a) Three movements may be discerned in this prayer of the early church
  - i. God’s Sovereignty and power acknowledged from the Scriptures

ii. Man's futility reinforced from the Scriptures

iii. Supplications

b) Let's look at the movements one at a time:

### III. God's Sovereignty and power acknowledged from the Scriptures

**“Sovereign Lord,” they said, “you made the heavens and the earth and the sea, and everything in them.**

a) God is sovereign / Greek: *despotēs* (*des-pot-tAs*), lit: “a lord, master, especially of slaves,”<sup>iv</sup>

i. v. 24). “denoted absolute ownership and uncontrolled power”<sup>v</sup>

ii. “implies someone exercising “unrestricted power and absolute domination, confessing no limitations or restraints” (R. Trench, 96)”<sup>vi</sup>

b) From Psalm 2 ... “Psalm 2 describes the revolt of the nations against the Lord and His Christ. The psalm originally grew out of the crowning of a new king in Israel, perhaps David, but its ultimate message points to the King of Kings, Jesus Christ. Whenever a new king was enthroned, the vassal rulers around

were required to come and submit to him, but some of them refused to do this. God only laughed at their revolt, for He knew that they could never stand up against His King.”<sup>vii</sup>

c) They used the Scriptures to be the foundation of and guide their prayers.

d) **GREAT QUOTES:**

i. Wiersbe, “**Nehemiah** approached God on this same basis (Neh. 9:6), and so did the **psalmist** (see Ps. 145) and the prophet Isaiah (Isa. 42). Years later, when he wrote his first epistle, **Peter** encouraged suffering saints to yield themselves to the faithful Creator (1 Peter 4:19).”<sup>viii</sup>

ii. Wiesbe, “True prayer is not telling God what to do, but asking God to do His will in us and through us (1 John 5:14–15). It means getting God’s will done on earth, not man’s will done in heaven.”<sup>ix</sup>

iii. Wiersbe, “In His Word, God speaks to us and tells us what He wants to do. In prayer, we speak to Him and make ourselves available to accomplish His will.”<sup>x</sup>

e) APPL: Stop asking for things and start praying to be used of God.

#### IV. Man's futility reinforced from the Scriptures

### **25 You spoke by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of your servant, our father**

#### **David:**

- a) servant = “a boy (as often beaten with impunity), or (by analogy), a girl, and (genitive case) a child; specially, a slave or servant (especially a minister to a king; and by eminence to God)”<sup>xi</sup>
  
- b) This should be our attitude: We are boy and girl slaves to an Almighty, Sovereign, Perfectly Holy, God.
  
- c) **“Why do the [Gentiles] nations rage and the peoples [devise vain intrigues (AT)<sup>xii</sup>] plot in vain?**
  - i. “‘rage’ This is literally ‘to snort through one's nose.’ This implies a haughty arrogance.”<sup>xiii</sup>
  
- d) **26 The kings of the earth rise up and the rulers band together against the Lord and against his anointed one.**
  - i. Worldly opposition is to be expected, but so too, is the victory of YHWH.

- ii. they “found proof of [the Scriptures] divine origin in the fulfillment which had so recently taken place in their own experience.”<sup>xiv</sup>
  
- iii. **27 Indeed [for in truth<sup>xv</sup>] 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.**

1. Herod, the Roman appointed ruler of Palestine

- a) Herod Antipas was the son of Herod the Great
  
- b) “He ruled as "tetrarch" of Galilee and Peraea (Lu 3:1) from 4 BC till 39 AD.”<sup>xvi</sup>
  
- c) “The gospel picture we have of him is far from [appealing]. He was superstitious (Mt 14:1), foxlike in his cunning (Lu 13:31) and wholly immoral.”<sup>xvii</sup>

2. Pontius Pilate, the Roman administrative leader of Palestine

- a) “Speaking roughly, [he was over] the southern half of Palestine, including Samaria. Being an imperial province (i.e. under the

direct control of the emperor), it was governed by a procurator.”<sup>xviii</sup>

3. Gentiles, which might refer to the Roman army or proselyte Jews
  4. the "people of Israel," which would refer to the Jewish authorities and the Jewish mob who asked for Barabbas to be released and Jesus to be crucified
  5. **in this city**
  6. **to conspire against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed.**
- ii. **28 They did what your power and will [hand and your counsel designated should happen<sup>xix</sup>] had decided beforehand should happen.**
1. “the believers again saw God's sovereign hand (the ultimate effective cause) behind human actions (the secondary instrumental cause, v. 28; cf. 2:23a; 3:18).”<sup>xx</sup>

2. “We must be careful of our western (American) individualism or our evangelical zeal coloring this wonderful truth. We must also guard against being polarized into the historical, theological conflicts between Augustine and Pelegius or Calvinism and Arminianism.
  
3. Utley, “Our perspective and mental abilities are limited. There is no contradiction between God's sovereignty and mankind's free will. It is a covenantal structure. This is another example of biblical truth given in paradoxical, dialectical, tension-filled pairs. Biblical doctrines are presented from different perspectives. They often appear paradoxical. The truth is a balance between the seemingly opposite pairs. We must not remove the tension by picking one of the truths. We must not isolate any biblical truth into a compartment by itself.”<sup>xxi</sup>

## V. Supplications

**29 Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants [slaves<sup>xxii</sup>] to speak your word with great boldness.**

- a) Consider their threats - asking for God’s ruling, opinion, and power in the situation.



- i. God's plan includes believers' facing opposition
  
- b) Enable your servants ... they wanted that powerful enabling from God.
  - i. To speak your word
    - with great boldness
  
    - “I am the Vine...”
  
  - ii. “They did not assume that God would automatically give them the courage to witness boldly, as He had done in the past. They voiced a fresh appeal for this grace, since additional opposition and temptations lay ahead of them (cf. Mark 9:29). They also acknowledged that God, not they, was doing a spiritual work. In these respects their prayer is a helpful model for us.”<sup>xxiii</sup>
  
  - iii. “They did not pray to have their circumstances changed or their enemies put out of office. Rather, they asked God to empower them to make the best use of their circumstances and to accomplish what He had already determined (Acts 4:28). This was not “fatalism” but faith in the Lord of history who has a perfect plan and is always victorious. They asked for divine enablement, not escape, and God gave them the power

that they needed.”<sup>xxiv</sup>

1. “‘Do not pray for easy lives,’ wrote Phillips Brooks. ‘Pray to be stronger men and women. Do not pray for tasks equal to your powers. Pray for powers equal to your tasks.’”<sup>xxv</sup>

iv. "Prayer is not an escape from responsibility; it is our response to God's ability. True prayer energizes us for service and battle."<sup>xxvi</sup>

v. "The one thing that never even struck them was to obey the Sanhedrin's command to speak no more. Into their minds at that moment there came certain great convictions and into their lives there came a tide of strength."<sup>xxvii</sup>

vi. “[T]hese Christians did not pray for judgment on their persecutors, nor freedom from persecution, but for strength and enablement in their persecution (cf. Isa. 37:16-20). They rightly saw that their number one priority was preaching Jesus to a needy world.”<sup>xxviii</sup>

vii. ILL:

“Hudson Taylor, founder of the China Inland Mission, knew the secret of strength through weakness. Complimented once by a friend on the impact

of the mission, Hudson answered, “It seemed to me that God looked over the whole world to find a man who was weak enough to do His work, and when He at last found me, He said, ‘He is weak enough—he’ll do.’ All God’s giants have been weak men who did great things for God because they reckoned on His being with them.”<sup>xxix</sup>

c) **30 Stretch out your hand to heal and perform signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant [boy, child] Jesus.”**

viii. “[T]hey wanted to glorify God’s Child (Servant) Jesus Christ (Acts 4:27, 30). It was His name that gave them power to minister the Word and to perform miracles, and His name alone deserved the glory. The glory of God, not the needs of men, is the highest purpose of answered prayer.”<sup>xxx</sup>

i. “‘Nothing lies beyond the reach of prayer except that which lies outside the will of God.’ I don’t know who first said that, but the statement is absolutely true. Dr. R. A. Torrey, the noted evangelist and educator, said, Pray for great things, expect great things, work for great things, but above all—pray.”<sup>xxxi</sup>

## VI. Result

**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.**

- a) "The place was shaken, and that made them all the more unshaken." <sup>xxxii</sup>
- b) The clearly hoped for, surley expected, then received what they asked for.

## VII. Conclusion

- a) "The early church strongly believed in God's sovereignty and His perfect plan for His people. But note that they did not permit their faith in divine sovereignty to destroy human responsibility, for they were faithful to witness and pray. It is when God's people get out of balance and overemphasize either sovereignty or responsibility that the church loses power. Again, we are reminded of Augustine's wise words, 'Pray as though everything depends on God, and work as though everything depended on you.'"<sup>xxxiii</sup>
- b) "To begin with, it was a prayer that was born out of witness and service for the Lord. Peter and John had just come in 'from the trenches,' and the church met to pray in order to defeat the enemy. Too often today, believers gather for prayer as though attending a concert or a party. There is little sense of urgency

and danger because most of us are comfortable in our Christian walk. If more of God's people were witnessing for Christ in daily life, there would be more urgency and blessing when the church meets for prayer."<sup>xxxiv</sup>

All notes are kept in long form for future use and proper reference due to editing.

- <sup>i</sup> Warren Wiersbe, *The Wiersbe Bible Commentary: NT* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2007), 334, 335.
- <sup>ii</sup> A.W. Tozer, *The Pursuit of God*. As quoted in “Unity” (Sermon Illustration), <http://www.sermonillustrations.com/a-z/u/unity.htm>.
- <sup>iii</sup> Warren Wiersbe, *The Wiersbe Bible Commentary: NT* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2007), 334.
- <sup>iv</sup> BillMounce.com, “δεσπότης”, <https://www.billmounce.com/greek-dictionary/despotēs>.
- <sup>v</sup> Greeklexicon.org, “1203: δεσπότης”, <https://greeklexicon.org/lexicon/strong/1203/>.
- <sup>vi</sup> Bible Hub, “1203. despotēs”, <https://biblehub.com/greek/1203.htm>
- <sup>vii</sup> Warren Wiersbe, *The Wiersbe Bible Commentary: NT* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2007), 335.
- <sup>viii</sup> Warren Wiersbe, *The Wiersbe Bible Commentary: NT* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2007), 335.
- <sup>ix</sup> Warren Wiersbe, *The Wiersbe Bible Commentary: NT* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2007), 335.
- <sup>x</sup> Warren Wiersbe, *The Wiersbe Bible Commentary: NT* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2007), 335.
- <sup>xi</sup> J. Strong, *Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*, 1890. Accessed from <https://greeklexicon.org/lexicon/strong/3816/>.
- <sup>xii</sup> David Bentley Hart, *The New Testament: A Translation* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2017), 227.
- <sup>xiii</sup> Bob Utley, “Luke the Historian: Acts” (Bible Lessons International, 2012), <https://bible.org/seriespage/acts-4>.
- <sup>xiv</sup> F.F. Bruce, *The Book of Acts: The New International Commentary on the New Testament*, ed. Gordon D. Fee (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1988), 98.
- <sup>xv</sup> David Bentley Hart, *The New Testament: A Translation* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2017), 227.
- <sup>xvi</sup> Henry E. Dosker, “Herod” in the International Standard Bible Encyclopedia Online, ed. James Orr (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1939), <https://www.internationalstandardbible.com/H/herod.html>.
- <sup>xvii</sup> Henry E. Dosker, “Herod” in the International Standard Bible Encyclopedia Online, ed. James Orr (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1939), <https://www.internationalstandardbible.com/H/herod.html>.
- <sup>xviii</sup> J. Macartney Wilson, “Pilate; Pontius” in the International Standard Bible Encyclopedia Online, ed. James Orr (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1939), <https://www.internationalstandardbible.com/P/pilate-pontius.html>.
- <sup>xix</sup> David Bentley Hart, *The New Testament: A Translation* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2017), 228.
- <sup>xx</sup> Thomas Constable, “Notes on Acts” (2021 ed.), <https://www.planobiblechapel.org/tcon/notes/html/nt/acts/acts.htm>.
- <sup>xxi</sup> Bob Utley, “Luke the Historian: Acts” (Bible Lessons International, 2012), <https://bible.org/seriespage/acts-4>.
- <sup>xxii</sup> David Bentley Hart, *The New Testament: A Translation* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2017), 228.
- <sup>xxiii</sup> Thomas Constable, “Notes on Acts” (2021 ed.), <https://www.planobiblechapel.org/tcon/notes/html/nt/acts/acts.htm>.
- <sup>xxiv</sup> Warren Wiersbe, *The Wiersbe Bible Commentary: NT* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2007), 335.
- <sup>xxv</sup> Warren Wiersbe, *The Wiersbe Bible Commentary: NT* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2007), 335.
- <sup>xxvi</sup> Warren Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*. 2 vols. (Wheaton: Scripture Press, Victor Books, 1989), 1:416. As quoted in Thomas Constable, “Notes on Acts” (2021 ed.), <https://www.planobiblechapel.org/tcon/notes/html/nt/acts/acts.htm>.
- <sup>xxvii</sup> William Barclay, *The Acts of the Apostles*. The Daily Study Bible series. 2nd ed. (Edinburgh: Saint Andrew Press, 1962), 39. As quoted in Thomas Constable, “Notes on Acts” (2021 ed.), <https://www.planobiblechapel.org/tcon/notes/html/nt/acts/acts.htm>.
- <sup>xxviii</sup> Darrell L. Bock, *Acts*. Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament Series (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007) 202. As quoted in Thomas Constable, “Notes on Acts” (2021 ed.), <https://www.planobiblechapel.org/tcon/notes/html/nt/acts/acts.htm>.
- <sup>xxix</sup> “All God’s Giants Have Been Weak Men” (Our Daily Bread, May 13, 1996). Accessed from <https://bible.org/illustration/all-god%E2%80%99s-giants-have-been-weak-men>.
- <sup>xxx</sup> Warren Wiersbe, *The Wiersbe Bible Commentary: NT* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2007), 335.
- <sup>xxxi</sup> Warren Wiersbe, *The Wiersbe Bible Commentary: NT* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2007), 335.
- <sup>xxxii</sup> As quoted in Thomas Constable, “Notes on Acts” (2021 ed.), <https://www.planobiblechapel.org/tcon/notes/html/nt/acts/acts.htm>.
- <sup>xxxiii</sup> Warren Wiersbe, *The Wiersbe Bible Commentary: NT* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2007), 335.
- <sup>xxxiv</sup> Warren Wiersbe, *The Wiersbe Bible Commentary: NT* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2007), 334.