

The Prayer for Bolder Witness

Acts 4:23-31

Pastor Michael Lynn / West Hampden Baptist Church

November 15, 2023 p.m.

Introduction: Consider the beginning of the Church, recorded in Acts 1-4. We are told in Acts 2:42, “And they continued stedfastly in the apostles’ doctrine & fellowship, & in breaking of bread, & in prayers.” Let’s emphasize just the fourth of these identification of a Spirit-filled Church, “And they continued stedfastly in...prayers.” How do “church” prayers today compare with the prayers of the early church? What did they pray about then & what should we be praying about now? I want to consider 3 specific things for which the early church prayed that should lead as an example for us. We will start this evening with “the prayer for a bolder witness.”

I. The recognition of the early church (4:23-28)

A. Their **praise** > the omnipotence of God (the greatness of our God)

1. He is their Sovereign (:24, “Lord”).
 - a. Their choice of word: “*despota*” – The word “used of the absolute relationship of a master to his slaves” (Ryrie).
 - b. Their attitude of heart – “The disciples were placing themselves in that position as slaves of their Lord” (Ryrie).
2. He is their Creator (:24, “*Thou art God, which hast made heaven & earth, & all,,,*”)
 - a. By proclaiming God as Creator of all things, they acknowledge His power in the present situation, over His own creatures, especially those who are now enemies of the saints.
 - b. “The hymn has the special interest of being the earliest recorded utterance of the Christian church” (Ellicott).

B. Their **problem** > the opposition of man (the wickedness of men)

1. The opposition in word (:25):
 - a. “*The heathen rage*” – word used of snorting of horses.
 - b. “*The people imagine vain things*” – this which is empty; without inner reality.
2. The opposition in deed (:26-27):
 - a. “*The kings of the earth...*” – represented by Herod.
 - b. “*The rulers...*” - representing by Pilate.
 - c. “*Against the Lord & His Christ...*” – literally, “against Jehovah & His Messiah.”
3. The opposition in God’s decree (:28):
 - a. Christ’s fore-ordained death (cf. Acts 2:23; 3:18).
 - b. God’s infinite wisdom (Romans 11:33).

II. The request of the early church (4:28-30)

A. Their **petition** > what they did not ask for:

1. No lament – no sorrow for their imprisonment or threatening.
2. No criticism – no criticism for the Sanhedrin.
3. No despair – no discouragement.

B. Their **petition** > what they did ask for:

1. “*Behold their threatenings...*”
2. “*...Boldness they may speak Thy word...*”

Note: “Thus they prayed for the continuance of that very activity which had produced the hostility” (Morgan).

III. The **result** of the early church (4:31)

A. Their **endowment** >

1. Physical movement; “...*the place was shaken...*” [token of God’s presence?]
2. Spiritual “fillment”; “...*they were filled by the Holy Ghost...*”

B. Their **empowerment** >

1. “*They spake the Word of God...*”
2. “*They spake the Word of God with boldness.*”

Summary: “*’Lord, Thou are God!’* What a declaration of faith & what a practical application of good theology! However, if their lives had not been submitted to His control, they could not have prayed that way. Boldness in prayer is the result of faithfulness in life & service” (Wiersbe).

Conclusion: How did the believers in the early church pray? We have seen that the church offered prayer for the boldness of servants. Wiersbe comments: “To begin with, it was a prayer that was born out of witness & service for the Lord. Peter & John had just come in ‘from the trenches,’ & 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 & 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 & blessing when the church meets for prayer.” Note that the prayer of the church was based on the Word of God – see the connection with Psalm 2. Prayer & the Word of God go together. “In His Word, God speaks to us & tells us what He wants to do. In prayer, we speak to Him & make ourselves available to accomplish His will. True prayer is not telling God what to do, but asking God to do His will in us & through us. It means getting God’s will done on earth, not man’s will done in heaven” (Wiersbe).

Consider again the power of God through prayer. While God’s power has not ceased, is it possible that God’s people have failed to ask for His power? Someone suggested, “Nothing lies beyond the reach of prayer except that which lies outside the will of God.” Dr. R. A. Torrey (evangelist) said, “Pray for great things, expect great things, work for great things, but above all – pray.”

For what are we praying?