

## **Acts 4:23-31 -“Sovereignty, Prayer and Unity”**

**Intro:** Last week we saw Peter and John’s response to being arrested and told not to preach Jesus. We talked about civil disobedience and the historic Christian response to opposition and the post reformational Protestant Resistance Theology. Specifically, that resistance to tyrants is obedience to God and that submission to tyrants is disobedience to God. This is a theme that we will pick up again in chapter five.

Today, we will see the early Christian’s response to this threat. It will inform and motivate us in our day and time to do similarly.

Let’s dive in...

There are three emphases that I want to highlight in our text today. The first one is...

### **Three Emphases in this Passage:**

#### **1) Sovereignty of God (v24-30)**

A. “Master” or “Sovereign Lord” Grk “despot” (v24) **Q2.**

B. Quote of Psalm 2 (v25-26) **Q3.** Read all of Ps 2.

i. God laughs -only place where it says God laughs

ii. Is 11 rod of rule is the rod of his mouth. Revelation says it’s the sword coming out of his mouth.

iii. Notice that they are applying a term of “the nations” or gentiles or “heathen” to the Sanhedrin. This is a bold accusation.

C. Jesus as “servant” (v27, 30 & 25 -connection to David) cf 3:13 & 26

Them being “doulos” slaves (v29)

D. Predestined plan of God (v28) -Decree of God

Application Point: Notice that they weren’t scared or despondent. They weren’t out of sorts or perplexed. They were not surprised or shocked about what had happened. Their immediate response is to pray in light of the sovereignty of God. They see themselves as characters in God’s unfolding narrative of redemptive history.

I wonder if we see ourselves that way. Certainly, we are not living in the same times that they were but I think the point is a valid one. Namely that opposition to us and the gospel we preach is alive and well in our day, and we, like them, must rely upon a sovereign God to do what He will. We must acknowledge that none of this is outside the decree of God and His purposes stand throughout the ages.

There is a very real threat of censorship and other consequence as a result of speaking boldly in the name of Jesus. Our Chinese, and middle eastern brothers have been experiencing this for some time and know firsthand what it means to be persecuted. In China, if a man hasn’t

been to jail for his faith, he cannot be a pastor because that means he is not fit for the ministry. That's their form of seminary.

With the gay and woke industrial complex of our current trash world running things, many faithful brothers have been censored on social media and our message has been classified as hate speech. I wonder if the day is coming when we, like our overseas brothers, will see deplatforming as a sign of faithfulness. It's unfortunate but that's the way things are and God is still in control. His will never fails. He is still on the throne and the nations rage against Him and His anointed. But while the nations rise and fall, His purposes stand secure. The Eternal One sits in the heavens and laughs! We say, with the Psalmist, kiss the Son, lest He be angry with you! We defy the whole earth if necessary and trust in our Sovereign King. They can all go to hell, but His purposes stand throughout the generations. His rule is marching on! Glory, Glory Hallelujah!

So, the first emphasis is on the sovereignty of God. The second emphasis is on...

**2) Prayer, Holy Spirit, & Confident Witness** Mentioned this before and here we see it again. Craig Keener in his massive four volume commentary on Acts points out the theme of prayer in connection to the ministry of the Holy Spirit in the book of Acts.

- A. v24 -30 is the content of their prayer.
- B. v31 says that explicitly.
- C. What they are not praying for:
  - i. comfort
  - ii. personal needs ("Cast your cares upon Him for He cares for us." 1Pt 5:7)
  - iii. safety
- D. What they are praying for (v29) **Q4:**
  - i. God would notice the threats of the Sanhedrin.
  - ii. Accurate and bold communication

Application Points: Deliberate, strategic prayer & content.

Prayer strategy: Concentric Circles of Influence. War on the Floor.

Monday: Me, my immediate family, and our roles.

Tuesday: Extended family

Wednesday: Friends

Thursday: Elders and potential elders

Friday: The lost in our city and my personal contacts

Saturday: The world, different countries, continents, and areas

Sunday: The Lord's Day Divine Services

Lubbock Brothers are praying for us at their weekly meetings on Sundays.

New prayer initiative focusing on evangelism.

Stop praying for comfort. Stop praying for things that are not God's will or things that you are not sure of. Pray for the Kingdom of God. Pray for things not concerning yourself. Or, if they do concern you, make them things where you relate to what God has revealed. Spend less time on your cosmic Christmas list and more time on God's glorious kingdom work. Pray for evangelism and discipleship. Pray for the nations to know Him. Pray for your immediate and extended family not to be safe or healthy but that they would have a white-hot passion and zeal for the person of Christ.

Pray that you and your children are bold witnesses for Christ. Pray what you know God wants. He wants you to be filled with His Spirit and to be a Christian who is confident in what God has done and what He will do. Stop with this mamby pamby soft "Lord, just let them see how much you love them" weak and fake so-called gospel. That is not the gospel. Read the book! Show me somewhere, anywhere where the apostles present the gospel like that. Show me where they start with the love of God! You can't because they don't do that. They start with the holiness of God and our sinfulness and how we killed Jesus, but God rose Him from the dead and now he is seated ruling and reigning and commands everyone to repent and believe. THAT is the gospel. It is good news and if they submit to king Jesus, He will adopt them and save them, and change them, and give them the Holy Spirit, and make them clean, and whole, and full and free! Pray for yourselves and your children and that all of us would be BOLD TO PROCLAIM THAT MESSAGE!

The second emphasis in the text is on prayer.

The third is on...

### 3) Unity in Community (v23-24; 32-37) Q7.

A. they went to their own (v23-24) Q1.

B. "One heart and soul" (v32) -they wanted the same things. Alignment of desire and direction. John 17:20-23 Q6.

C. "great power the apostles were bearing witness to the resurrection." (v33)

D. Common good, meeting needs

Understanding the poor of their day...

E. Introduction of Barnabas (v36-37)

-Real name is Joseph (v36a)

-Levite of Cyprian birth (v36b)

-Nickname "Barnabas" (v36c) -means "son of encouragement" or Barney the believer. Bar means "son". Q9.

-Volunteered to sell a field and donate the proceeds to the work of the ministry (v37).

-He is going to come up later and we will address him more directly then but please take note of his faithfulness as it will be contrasted in the next chapter.

The overarching point is that the people were in unity, having the same purpose and direction.

Application Point:

If you have financial needs, please come and let me know. This is a sincere and open invitation for anyone having financial hardship or if you have needs, let's talk.

If God has given you means, realize that it's not just for you. Be generous. 2Cor 9:6-7 says that God loves a cheerful giver **Q8**. Many people here are doing exactly that. I do not have direct access to who is giving what, but I know how much we have in the bank and see the reports. We have many faithful families and people. Praise the Lord.

Three emphases in today's text: 1) The Sovereignty of God, 2) Prayer, 3) Unity and Community

Closing Prayer:

Sovereign Lord and Father, would you give us the same heart as these believers that we've read about? Would you help us to be less concerned about the temporal issues in front of us and cause us to deeply desire for your Holy Spirit to bring fire and consume us? Give us a passion to speak boldly and confidently about your Servant and Son, Jesus. Let us be faithful to proclaim the excellencies of your greatness to everyone and call all men everywhere to repentance and faith. For Christ's sake and in His name, Amen.

**Textual Commentary:**

**Response of the people to Peter and John being threatened (23-31)**

- They went to their own (v23) and were in "one accord" (v24) -need for community and togetherness. You need people. People need you.
- Despot "Sovereign Lord" (v24 & v28)
- Theme of Jesus as God's "servant"(v25, 27 & 30) and us as his slaves "doulos"
- Quote of Psalm 2
  - Messianic Psalm
  - God laughs -only place where it says God laughs
  - Is 11 rod of rule is the rod of his mouth. Revelation says it's the sword coming out of his mouth.
  - Notice that they are applying a term of "the nations" or gentiles or "heathen" to the Sanhedrin. This is a bold accusation.
- Theme of "confidence" (v29 & 31c)
- Theme of "filled with the Holy Spirit" (v31)
- Inclusion of the providence of God (v28; cf. v 24 "sovereign Lord")
- Focus on prayer (v31)

## **Meeting of Physical Needs (v32-37)**

“One heart and soul” (v32) -they wanted the same things. Alignment of desire and direction. John 17:20-23

“great power the apostles were bearing witness to the resurrection.” (v33)

Common good, meeting needs

Understanding the poor of their day...

Open invitation to anyone needing help.

Introduction of Barnabas (v36-37)

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Levite of Cyprian birth (v36b)

Nickname “Barnabas” (v36c) -means “son of encouragement” or Barney the believer. Bar means “son”.

Volunteered to sell a field and donate the proceeds to the work of the ministry (v37).

## **Direct Textual Questions:**

1. Who do Peter and John come back to after being arrested (v23)?
2. How does the church address God in their prayer (v24)?
3. What passage do they quote in their prayer (v25-26)?
4. What two things do they pray for (v29)?
5. What is the result (v31)?
6. What one word describes the attitude of the believers (v32)?
7. How are the believers behaving (v32-37)?
8. What does God love (2Cor 9:6-7)?
9. What does “Barnabas” mean (v36)?

## **Application Questions:**

1. How is your commitment and attitude towards meeting with the brethren? Is it healthy and right? How much are you seeking to contribute more than you consume? Does something need to change? If so, what?
2. What is your understanding of the sovereignty of God? How do you lean on this attribute of the character of God?
3. What is your level of Biblical literacy? Are you systematically reading, studying and praying the Scriptures? Are you practicing obedience to “hear the word of the LORD”? How are you doing this?

4. What is your prayer life like? How are you systematically and intentionally praying for the needs around you? Are you praying like the people in the Bible prayed? How are we practicing this as a family?

5. Do you know people well enough to know their needs? Are you generous with your time and resources to help those in the body who are needy? How are you and your family practicing hospitality?