

ACTS

Part 10 – How to Pray Under Persecution

Acts 4:23-31

Main Idea: In the face of persecution the church responded with prayer that confessed God's sovereign rule and petitioned for boldness to proclaim the gospel.

Christians have the enormous privilege and responsibility to pray. We also have the comfort of knowing that the God to whom we pray is the sovereign creator of all things and is, therefore, uniquely able to do something about that for which we pray. In today's passage we are able to see the church's response to persecution. Their first response is prayer. It is prayer focused on the sovereignty of God and sustained by Scripture. In this we have a valuable pattern to follow in our own praying, particularly in times of trouble.

The prayer recorded in verses 22-30 may be divided into two categories: 1) Their confession and 2) Their petition.

1. Their Confession

The believers begin their prayer by acknowledging or confessing particular truths about God.

a) God is the Sovereign Lord.

V. 24 – The Christians begin their prayer by acknowledging that God is the “Sovereign Lord.”

- From the very beginning they acknowledge that the God to whom they pray possesses authority and power over all things.

Vv. 27-28 – “...for truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place.”

- Here we are given a window into the Divine mystery of providence. Herod, Pontius Pilate, and the rest were fully responsible for their treatment of Jesus. They acted according to their own sinful desires and are therefore accountable for their actions. Yet, at the very same time it is true that Jesus died according to the “predestined” plan of God.
- There is a Divinely orchestrated congruence between the actions of mankind and God's sovereign providence.

b) God is the Creator.

Vs. 24 – “And when they heard it, they lifted their voices together to God and said, “Sovereign Lord, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them...”

- Since God is the Creator of all there is, so too is He the sustainer of creation. He has made not only the earth, but everything in it. That includes Herod and Pontius Pilate. Therefore, God has the resources to fully care for Peter, John, and the rest of the Christians during their time of suffering.

c) God has spoken to His people.

Vv. 25-26 – “...who through the mouth of our father David, your servant, said by the Holy Spirit,

‘Why did the Gentiles rage,
and the peoples plot in vain?’

The kings of the earth set themselves,
and the rulers were gathered together,
against the Lord and against his Anointed’—

- Here the Christians confess that God has spoken to them through His Word. In their prayer, they quote from Psalm 2 (vs. 26) which is a coronation Psalm. These words, they confess, are the very words of God spoken through David by the Holy Spirit. In that brief statement we are given a powerful testimony to the nature of Scripture as the means by which God speaks to His people.

2. Their Petition

Vv. 29-30 – “And now, Lord, look upon their threats and grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness, while you stretch out your hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of your holy servant Jesus.”

The believer’s petition is made up of three parts:

a) “Look upon their threats”

Vs. 29 – “And now, Lord, look upon their threats...”

- The implication is that by looking upon the threats leveled against the disciples, the Lord will intervene on their behalf.

b) “Grant to your servants...boldness”

Vs. 29 – “...grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness...”

- The word “servant” (*douloi*) is normally translated “slave.” Christians are slaves of Christ. They do not pray that the Lord will lift them out of their suffering. They do not pray that the Lord will keep them from all opposition or persecution. It is assumed that since Jesus was persecuted unto death that so too will his servants. The intervention for which they pray is a divinely supplied boldness that they might stand up under the persecution and continue to proclaim the gospel with boldness.

c) “Stretch out your hand”

Vs. 30 – “...while you stretch out your hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of your holy servant Jesus.”

- The power to work miracles is always under God’s sovereign choosing. Thus they pray for God to stretch forth *His* hand. The Christians knew they could not be the cause of the miraculous. It is always only by the power of God that the miraculous takes place.
- The Christians ask God to act in power through the apostles through healings and other signs and wonders. The healing of the blind man at the Beautiful Gate is fresh on their minds. That healing gave the apostles opportunity to proclaim Christ. It is for those opportunities to continue that the Christians pray.

Theology in Application

1. Christians pray.
2. God is present with his people through the means of prayer.
3. Prayer is an expression of dependence upon God.
4. Prayer is an expression of obedience to God.