

UNIFIED

ACTS 4:23-37

Unified. When you think of Church, is THAT what you think of? Most people don't. Sadly, athletic teams are more unified than most churches. Today we discover how the purpose that unified the 1st century followers of Jesus can unify the 21st century followers of Jesus.

From last week: Peter and John had been warned not to speak about Jesus any more.

But Peter and John replied, "Whether it is right before God to obey you rather than God, you decide, for it is impossible for us not to speak about what we have seen and heard." (Acts 4:19-20 NET)

UNIFIED in Prayer and Purpose

Acts 4:23–24a (NET) ²³ When they were released, Peter and John went to their fellow believers and reported everything the high priests and the elders had said to them. ²⁴ When they heard this, **they raised their voices to God with one mind** and said,

Unified in Prayer: Persecution drove the followers of Jesus to prayer. Where do you turn when your back is to the wall? Some turn to something that removes them from reality - at least for a little while - a drink, a drug, a sexual encounter. Some turn to friends - and that's a good thing. But what happens when friends can hear and **just can't** help? That's when it's important that you have friends who will lift you up to the King of Creation.

Do you have friends like that?

Peter & John did. After they told their story about being persecuted by men & the Presence of the Spirit through it, **they raised their voices to God with one mind** and prayed:

Acts 4:24b-26 (NET) "**Master of all**, you who made the heaven, the earth, the sea, and everything that is in them,²⁵ who said [God spoke] by the Holy Spirit through your servant David our forefather, *'Why do the nations rage, and the peoples plot foolish things?'*²⁶ *The kings of the earth stood together, and the rulers assembled together, against the Lord and against his Christ.* [Messiah = "anointed"]

PRAYER: Acknowledge WHO you are talking to.

They called out to the **Master of all**, the creator of **heaven** (above the earth), the **earth & sea**, and **everything that is in them** - the sun every other star, every tree & body of water, every mountaintop & valley, and every living creature.

Is that who YOU pray to...or do you approach God like you would approach Santa Clause? Do you take time to consider WHO you are really talking to?

God, the **Master of all**, spoke **by the Holy Spirit through your servant David our forefather**. The Jews had long recognized that the Holy Spirit had spoken through King David to write Scripture. Many of David's Psalms were Israel's songs to Yahweh. **Psalm 2** - was about people standing **against the Lord and his Christ** meaning anointed king King of Israel - David, himself.

But now the Jewish followers of Jesus recognized this Scripture was pointing beyond the anointed king David and was ultimately fulfilled in the anointed King Jesus! So Psalm 2 wasn't just about enemies standing against David, God's *anointed* king; it was about those who stood against Jesus - God's *ANOINTED* king of kings!

* Note: "The quotation of Ps. 2:1-2 in vv. 25-26 is verbatim from the LXX"¹ (aka Septuagint: Greek translation of Old Testament), which explains why the wording is somewhat different than quoting from Ps. 2:1-2 in your translation - which is based on Hebrew text.

God's Plan Played Out

Acts 4:27-28 (NET) ²⁷ "For indeed both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, assembled together in this city against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed,²⁸ to do as much as your power and **your plan had decided beforehand would happen.**

Now they could see the BIG PICTURE. **The death of Jesus wasn't 'Plan B'.** It was the plan the whole time. The script was written long before the actors auditioned. Unbeknownst to Herod, Pilate, & the Jewish leaders, they played their parts from the Scripture.

Isn't it amazing how 'the enemy of my enemy is my friend'? Luke wrote about this in his previous volume.

Luke 23:6-12 (NET) ⁶ Now when Pilate heard this, he asked whether the man was a Galilean. ⁷ When he learned that he was from Herod's jurisdiction, he sent him over to Herod, who also happened to be in Jerusalem at that time. ⁸ When Herod saw Jesus, he was very glad, for he had long desired to see him, because he had heard about him and was hoping to see him perform some miraculous sign.⁹ So Herod questioned him at considerable length; Jesus gave him no answer. ¹⁰ The chief priests and the experts in the law were there, vehemently accusing him.¹¹ Even Herod with his soldiers treated him with contempt and mocked him. Then, dressing him in elegant clothes, Herod sent him back to Pilate. ¹² That very day Herod and Pilate became friends with each other, for prior to this they had been enemies.

Unbelieving Israel, represented by the **chief priests & experts in the law** - the very ones who should have bowed to their Messiah - rejected Him and allied themselves with the Gentile enemies of God (Herod & Pilate). But that's exactly what God planned would happen.

Asking God for...What?

Acts 4:29-31 (NET) ²⁹ And now, Lord, pay attention to their threats, and **grant to your servants to speak your message with great courage,**³⁰ while you extend your hand to heal, and to bring about miraculous signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus."³¹ When they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken, and they were all **filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak the word of God courageously.**

Many of us would likely ask the Lord to keep us FROM persecution. These folks asked the Lord to keep them THROUGH persecution. They asked for God's PRESENCE - that HE would heal & they would *speak* the message of Jesus *with great courage!*

¹ Ben Witherington III, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998), 202.

Prayer TO God precedes Power FROM God. We see this over and over again in Acts (see 1:14/2:1; 2:42; 8:15; 9:11, 17; 10:30, 44–46; 12:5–17; 16:25–26; 28:8).

Is it possible that the reason we aren't experiencing the POWER of God is because we aren't seeking the PRESENCE of God. Do we want the GIFT, without the GIVER?

These 1st century believers wanted God's PRESENCE, and they were once again *filled with the Holy Spirit* and it was obvious as *they began to speak the word of God courageously*. So in the midst of warnings and coming persecution, they spoke about Jesus!

BIG TRUTH: *The UNIFIED Church is Connected by Prayer and Purpose*

They prayed together. They served together. They shared together.

They invested time in one another & pursued the Presence of God together!

Evidence of God's Presence

Acts 4:32-33 (NET) ³² The group of those who believed were of **one heart and mind**, and no one said that any of his possessions was his own, but everything was held in common.³³ With **great power** the apostles were giving testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and **great grace was on them all**.

These two verses are almost identical with 2:43–44, only in reverse order.²

The first followers were unified.

1) **Shared Purpose:** “one heart and mind”

🌟 **Aristotle** said that a friend was “*one soul dwelling in two bodies.*”³

2) **Shared Possessions:** “everything was held in common”. That's what FRIENDS do!

3) **Shared Presence:** “great power” by the apostles and “great grace was on them all”

The UNIFIED Church is Connected by Prayer and Purpose.

Possessions: Tools, not goal

Acts 4:34-37 (NET) ³⁴ For there was **no one needy among them**, because those who were owners of land or houses were selling them and bringing the proceeds from the sales ³⁵ and placing them at the apostles' feet. The proceeds were distributed to each, as anyone had need. ³⁶ So Joseph, a Levite who was a native of Cyprus, called by the apostles Barnabas (which is translated “son of encouragement”),³⁷ sold a field that belonged to him and brought the money and placed it at the apostles' feet.

This wasn't forced, it was voluntary. Everyone didn't sell everything they had, but they sold extra stuff to meet the needs of other believers. **Our stuff is a TOOL, not the goal.** Use your stuff - your home, your boat, your money, your food, your stuff...for the KINGdom!

² John B. Polhill, Acts, vol. 26, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1995), 151.

³ Diogenes Laertius 5.20

FEET2FAITH

- **Share your needs with another believer who prays.** Do you have friends who will lift you to God? Have you TOLD them what is going on? If not, why not?
- **Remember WHO you're praying to.** When you pray, do you consider WHO you are really talking to? Why does this even matter?
- **Ask God to give us passion to live the gospel & courage to share the gospel.** Would you pray every day with us this week about that?
- **Ask God to help you use your stuff as a tool for the KINGdom.** What are some ways you can use your stuff to further the good news of Jesus?
- **Pray with us this Wed. night 5:30-6:15pm.** We will ask God to move among us. Some of you will go serve in AWANA. Let us pray with you, beforehand. Pop in - and pop out.

The UNIFIED Church is Connected by Prayer and Purpose.

Read for next week: **Acts 5**

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