

**Church 1.0**  
**Acts 4:23-31**  
**“The Power of a Prayer Meeting”**

1. Kenneth Bruner, along with seven accomplices, was just about to rob Herman’s Fine Jewelry Store in Des Moines, Iowa, when Bruner, the step-son of a Pentecostal minister, led his little band of thieves in prayer.

2. Bruner prayed for God’s protection as they carried out their heist. Apparently God was not listening, because the robbery was stopped, and the little congregation of praying criminals all ended up with federal indictments.<sup>i</sup>

3. While the prayer meetings in most churches have purer motives than those burglars, in most cases they aren’t any more effective.

4. In many churches, when the congregation gathers to pray, there is little gravity in the requests that are mentioned, and little urgency in the prayers that are offered.

5. Usually, someone stands and recites a stock prayer, watered-down with clichés and Christian catch-phrases. Very little of eternal value is asked, and not surprisingly, little of eternal value is accomplished.

6. When we turn to the book of Acts, in the fourth chapter we find the record of a prayer meeting in the early church. The subject of this prayer meeting was quite different from the headaches and hip pains, sniffles and sneezes, bursitis, tonsillitis, and arthritis that generally fill most prayer lists today.

7. This prayer was brief, and the requests were few and simple. Having been threatened by the Jewish authorities, and warned to stop preaching the gospel, these early church members cried out to God to help them as they carried out the mission Jesus had given them to do.

8. Verse 24 says, “...they lifted up their voice to God with one accord...” This concert of prayer got heaven’s attention, and God responded to His people immediately and impressively.

9. This passage speaks to our church today, and reminds us that the most powerful and effective thing our church does should be our prayer meeting.

10. As we examine this text, and the prayer of this church in Acts, I want to point out to you some things about their prayer meeting that ought to be true of our prayer meetings as well. First of all, notice:

**I. WHAT THEIR PRAYER RECOGNIZED**

1. We are living in a day of aimless prayer. Pluralism has caused most public prayers to be offered to any god who *might* or *might not* be out there, and narrowly and specifically praying in the name of Jesus is no longer politically correct and culturally sensitive.
2. The problem is that aimless prayer is useless prayer. A prayer that is not specifically addressed to the God through His Son is a waste of the breath used to utter it.
3. When we turn to the prayer meeting recorded in Acts 4, we find there was nothing aimless or vague about this prayer. The members of this first church clearly acknowledged and recognized the God to whom they were praying.
4. It is interesting that the large majority of this prayer is taken up with praise and recognition to God for who He is and what He can do. Five verses are taken up with acknowledging God, and only two are used to ask Him for something. Perhaps if we spent more time acknowledging and recognizing God in our prayers, we too would pray more effectively.
5. Notice a couple of things their prayer recognized. First of all, in their prayer they recognized:

#### **A. The sovereignty of God**

1. Look back at the text, and notice verse 24. When the people heard what the authorities had said, "...they lifted up their voice to God with one accord, and said, Lord, thou art God, which hast made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all that in them is."
2. Notice the title they used, "Lord". It is translated from a unique word that is different from the one that is usually translated as "Lord". This word is *despotes*, and it gives us our English word "despot." It is a word that describes someone who has absolute rule and authority, whose power and control are unlimited.
3. If you read on in their prayer, they quote from Psalm 2, and apply it to the crucifixion of Jesus. They talk about how Herod, Pilate, the Jews, and even the Gentiles, all came together against the Lord Jesus.
4. Now look at verse 28. All these came together, "For to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done."
5. These believers began their prayer by recognizing and acknowledging that God is always in complete control. Things don't happen accidentally or randomly in the universe over which God rules.

6. Some people pray as if God has been away, and needs to be caught up on the events of earth. They talk to God as if He is separate from this world, and that you have to beg Him to come and get involved.

7. God is not up in heaven waiting on us to tell Him what is going on. He is waiting for us to recognize that He is in charge of what is going on! These people understood and recognized the sovereignty of God.

8. Preacher and author, the late Ron Dunn, says of their prayer, “This is where they started – not with the threats of the enemy but with the absolute sovereignty of their God. That’s where victory always begins – with the recognition that God is our Sovereign Lord.”<sup>ii</sup>

9. Notice not only that in their prayer they recognized the sovereignty of God, but notice also further that they recognized:

### **B. The sufficiency of God**

1. Look again at verse 24. They call out to God, acknowledging Him saying, “Lord, thou art God, which hast made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all that in them is.”

2. In their eyes, the Sanhedrin, with their threats and warnings were no problem for the God whose hands had scooped out the oceans, heaped up the mountains, formed the gills of the fish, and the wings of the birds.

3. They were praying to a God with whom nothing is impossible. They began their prayer recognizing the omnipotence of God! In so doing, they remind us that sound theology is critical to successful prayer.

4. In other words, what you believe about God will affect the way you approach Him, and how you talk to Him.

5. There are a lot of people whose prayer life merely consists of them complaining aloud to God about the things they are worried He is not going to do. They are not really asking God for anything, they are just verbalizing to Him how little they trust Him.

6. If this first church prayed as some Christians do, their prayer would sound like this: “Oh Lord, what are we going to do about the Sanhedrin? What if they really lock us up? What if Peter and John get killed? Oh Lord, what’s going to happen? You need to tell us what we need to do.”

7. In contrast to our faulty faith, these early Christians truly believed that no challenge was challenge to God. He is mighty and sovereign, and nothing that happens on earth surprises Him or scares Him.

8. John Newton, the author of *Amazing Grace*, once wrote:

*Thou art coming to a king,  
Large petitions with thee bring,  
For His grace and power are such,  
None can ever ask too much!*

9. This powerful prayer meeting began with the people recognizing and acknowledging that God is sovereign over their lives and sufficient for their needs.

10. Notice a second truth we draw from this passage and this prayer. Not only do we see *what their prayer recognized*, but notice also further:

## **II. WHAT THEIR PRAYER REQUESTED**

1. Once the people made clear their conception of God, and acknowledged who He is, and what He could do, then they proceeded to present Him with their request.

2. It is interesting to note what they *did not* request. They did not request that God rain down fire on the Jewish authorities. They did not request that God remove them from the city, and put them on an easier mission field.

3. Their prayer requests were not selfish; they were spiritual. The things they asked God for were the very things God wanted to do through them.

4. Warren Wiersbe says, "True prayer is not telling God what to do, but asking God to do His will in us and through us. It means getting God's will done on earth, not man's will done in heaven."<sup>iii</sup>

5. When you think of all this church could have requested from God, and then you see what they actually asked of God, we find some valuable instructions on the kinds of things we ought to pray for.

6. Notice a couple of things about what their prayer requested. First of all, they asked God:

### **A. To embolden their witness**

1. Earlier in this chapter, the Jewish religious authorities had issued a warning to Peter, John, and the rest of the Christians. Verse 18 says, "And they called them, and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus."

2. These authorities had the power to imprison, to punish, and if need be, to execute someone who defied their orders. This warning was a threat against the very lives of these first church members.

3. Yet, when we come to the prayer meeting in our text, we don't find them praying to avoid prison, or beatings, or death. No, instead they ask God to help them to do more of the very thing that had gotten them in trouble.

4. Look at verse 29. The people prayed, "And now, Lord, behold their threatenings: and grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy word."

5. They did not pray for escape from their difficulty. They prayed for enablement in their difficulty! They did not simply want to use God for their comfort. They wanted God to use them in His will!

6. The things for which this church prayed speaks to the lifeless, powerless church of today, and teaches us that when we as a church quit praying so much for selfish things, and start calling out to heaven for spiritual things, we will see God's hand move again in our lives.

7. This church prayed to be bolder witnesses because they were more concerned with what God wanted. Unfortunately, most of our prayers reveal that we are more concerned with what we want.

8. Imagine, you send your child to their room with instructions to clean it. However, rather than doing what they are told, your child keeps asking you to give them another room to live in – one they don't have to clean.

9. In many ways, this is how we pray. We pray for God to change our circumstance rather than our character. This first church requested that God would embolden them to do the task He had given them.

10. Notice something further about what their prayer requested. They not only asked God to embolden their witness, but also:

### **B. To empower their work**

1. In the fourth century, St. Augustine said, "Pray as though everything depends on God, and then work as though everything depended on you."

2. The requests offered at this prayer meeting in Acts 4 reveal that these Christians were ready to do the work that God had given them, but they also understood that apart from His enablement, their efforts were futile.

3. Look again at the text, and notice verse 30. In verse 29, the people asked for boldness, and then in verse 30, they ask God to do what only He could, "By stretching forth thine hand to heal; and that signs and wonders may be done by the name of thy holy child Jesus."

4. We must be bold enough to preach the gospel in a world that resists us, but we must also be wise enough to know that our preaching alone cannot change anything or anyone!

5. The power of God must infuse everything we do, or we do it in vain. Therefore, we should constantly be asking God to work through us in a tangible, visible, undeniable way.

6. Two men hold a paint brush in front of a canvas. Both men are given the assignment of painting a sunset. One man's name is Roy, the other is Rembrandt. Rembrandt's sunset is so striking, so real, it is almost magical. Next to it, Roy's painting looks childish and messy.

7. What makes the difference? There is something inside of Rembrandt, a god-given gift that enables his work with the paintbrush to be extraordinary and special.

8. All churches have basically the same tasks. The gifts of the Spirit mean that most churches have basically the same tools. Yet one church touches the world through its efforts, while another withers and dies. What is the difference? It is the power of God operating within the efforts of a church that take it beyond the normal to the supernatural!

9. Oh that we could learn from the requests given in this prayer meeting! What a difference it would make if when we prayed, we simply asked God to fill our feeble hands with His enabling power!

*Oh Lord, send the power just now,  
Oh Lord, send the power just now,  
Oh Lord, send the power just now,  
And baptize every one!*

10. There is a third truth we draw from this powerful prayer meeting. Notice not only *what their prayer recognized*, and *what their prayer requested*, but notice also thirdly and finally:

### **III. WHAT THEIR PRAYER RECEIVED**

1. What is truly unique about this particular prayer meeting is what occurred just after it. This was not your typical, sleepy, Wednesday night service. Revival broke out at this prayer meeting.

2. Look again at the text, and notice verse 31. It says, “And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness.”

3. In John 16:24, Jesus said, “...ask, and ye shall receive...” That promise is certainly fulfilled in this particular case. As the people called on God, He responded to their requests.

4. Notice a couple of things about what their prayer received. Notice first of all that:

#### **A. They got a definite response**

1. Verse 31 says that no sooner than they had said “amen”, God let them know their prayers had been heard. The Bible says, “...the place was shaken where they were assembled...”

2. This mini-earthquake – this heaven-sent tremor – was a physical sign of the fact that God was with His people. It was an undeniable response to the prayers of this church.

3. I wonder, when was the last time you saw a definite response to your prayers? When was the last time, as a church, we saw God respond clearly and obviously to our corporate prayers, in a way that we could say, “That was God”?

4. We should not always expect to see a spectacular and fantastic response to our prayers, but we should hunger to see *some* evidence of answered prayers in and among our church body.

5. We should not offer prayer requests, just because it is a nice thing to do, or because it makes us feel better to share it. We pray to God believing and expecting to see Him respond!

6. Michael Powers, who lives in Pikeville, TN, was surprised when he opened his mailbox recently and found a handwritten reply to a letter he had sent to President Obama. According to the New York Times, Michael’s letter was one of ten daily letters from citizens that are selected for the president to read.

7. While a reply from the president would be surprising, a reply from God should not be! He urges us to call upon Him, and when we do, we should look for Him to respond!

8. Notice something else about what their prayer received. Notice not only that they got a definite response, but notice also further that:

## **B. They got the desired response**

1. Not only did God shake the building, but verse 31 also says that He filled the believers as well. It says, "And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness."
2. The people had asked God to give them boldness, and through His Spirit filling all of them, that is exactly what they got! God gave them the things they desired.
3. The Apostle John, who was a part of this prayer meeting, many years later would write these words: "And if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him (I John 5:15)."
4. What does the fact that God so readily and mightily responded to the prayers of His people in this text say to us today, when so often our prayer meetings are lifeless, heartless, and pointless?
5. What it says is that the problem does not lie with the response of God! God is ready to answer the requests of His children, and give them the very things they ask from Him.
6. If we are seeing no response to our prayers, and are receiving nothing from God, it is because there is a problem with our prayers, not our God!
7. Vance Havner used to tell about the old mill in the little mountain town where he was raised. The water would flow down the creek, turning the big wheel, which in turn would operate the rest of the mill.
8. If something upstream clogged up the creek, and the water quit flowing, the wheel and mill would stop as well. Havner you say that the old miller wouldn't waste time trying to fix the wheel. Instead, he would head up the creek and remove whatever was blocking the water.
9. Many churches today are busy trying to fix the wheel, or change the wheel, or get rid of the wheel altogether. However, the problem is not that the wheel is broken. It is that the water from heaven that turns the wheel has been blocked.
10. If we will confess our sins, and align our prayers with the will and work of God, we can unblock the flow, and we too can get the things we have desired in prayer.

1. The strength of a church is not revealed in the business meeting. It is revealed in the prayer meeting. The prayer-life of a church is the true life of a church.
2. Programs, ministries, services, activities – all are useless unless they are supported by prayer and anointed by the Spirit. The early church knew this, and their prayer meetings were demonstrations of how God’s people ought to pray.
3. If we want to see our church minister and multiply as the first church did, then when we pray – and we must pray – our prayers should recognize the person of God, request the power of God, and receive the provision from God.
4. May the original church speak to our church, and remind us of the priority and the power of a prayer meeting!

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<sup>i</sup> McHenry, Raymond, McHenry’s Stories for the Soul, (Hendrickson Publishers, Peabody, MA, 2001), p. 222

<sup>ii</sup> Dunn, Ron, When the Church Prays, *Pastorlife.com*, accessed 5/1/09, [http://www.pastorlife.com/members/sermon.asp?SERMON\\_ID=1421&fm=authorbio&authorid=3345](http://www.pastorlife.com/members/sermon.asp?SERMON_ID=1421&fm=authorbio&authorid=3345)

<sup>iii</sup> Wiersbe, Warren, Be Dynamic, (Victor Books, Wheaton, IL, 1988), p. 54