

“Lord, Consider ... and Enable”

by Pastor Steve Hammond on 7/05/2020
Text: Acts 4:23-31 at FBC of Newport, NH

//23 On their release, Peter and John went back to their own people and reported all that the chief priests and the elders had said to them. 24 When they heard this, they raised their voices together in prayer to God.//

—Acts 4:23-24 (NIV)

This is such an instructive and inspirational passage on praying as the body of Christ. It is so fundamental, universal and practical. We as a church should keep this God-given example in our hearts and minds always.

It starts with Peter and John reporting to the church just what went on when they had to stand before the local authorities of the chief priests and elders. How they held them in jail; how they could not dispute the healing of that crippled man; how they instead ordered them to stop speaking and teaching in the name of Jesus; and how the apostles refused to comply with that order. With this report, the congregation went immediately to prayer. **“Sovereign Lord,” they said, “you made the heavens and the earth and the sea, and everything in them.”** (Acts 4:24b)

Two things are worth noting first here:

#1 They don't immediately appeal to God for help. They simply appeal to God as God, the sovereign Lord, creator of all that is in existence. That fact alone should give anyone pause upon approach. When a person stands before an earthly judge, it is best to recognize and respect that position. On the other hand, even if children were asking their Dad to turn the car to the left so it goes to the Taste Freeze, instead of turning it to the right to go home (after a wonderful trip to the dump, by the way), it's best to remember that's your father you're talking to and not your chauffeur. Even more so, the church here in Acts was obviously and fundamentally right in their approach to God for prayer.

#2 The church prays as one voice. The scripture says, “they” raised their voices and “they” prayed the words recorded in this passage. Did they do it all at once? Did only one person pray? Was there more said than what's here? I suspect the answer to all those questions is yes. Certainly everyone was praying in their hearts at the same time. And I see no problem with there being a number of voices that may have overlapped at times, especially at the beginning. But surely there was also a time for one voice to speak, by the Spirit of God, what is on all their hearts, or what God wants on all their hearts together. The main point here is that, however they did it, they prayed to God with a united voice, as it's reflected here.

After this, what stands out to me is how they prayed with a tight allegiance to the scriptures. This is heard in their quote from Psalm 2. **//You spoke by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of your servant, our father David: “Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth rise up and the rulers band together against the Lord and against his anointed one.”//** (Ps. 2:1-2)

This is no random scripture. It is representative of the long history of contention and conspiracy on the part of the nations of this world against their own creator and against God's Christ. (This was true even before Christ was born! Think about that.) So when this church brings up their concern about the Jewish opposition to the Apostles and their preaching of the Gospel, they do so more from God's perspective than from just their personal opinions or fears or mix of feelings about the situation around them. They see even Herod and Pilate as but a small continuation of vain attempts to oppose God and his anointed Son Jesus.

From up close in their circumstances, think how huge the power of King Herod, Pontius Pilate and now the high priests and elders of Jerusalem must have looked to this group of nobodies gathered in prayer around two seemingly unemployed fishermen! What chance would they have in standing up against such a massive army as that?

But through the elevation of their prayer, through the grounded history and truth of God's Anointed, through their agreement with the word of God, and in keeping with what God has already done—these believers are not coming before God in desperation or throwing words up into the sky hoping something might be heard. They are faithfully calling out as one voice to their God and Savior, as his servants, even as soldiers, *peaceful* soldiers (the likes of which the world has never seen) ready to trumpet the continued work of God's kingdom—in the very midst of this raging world.

So, this church knows to Whom they are talking; they know the history of conflict between God and Man; they know that the current opposition voiced at Peter and John is really against Jesus; and they know the world is no match against Jesus, for he is God's Anointed, the Son of God. That was proved decisively at the cross and empty tomb.

Now, in light of all this, comes the heart of the prayer. They make a request, an appeal to God. And they do so with both a humility and confidence that this appeal is right. It is fitting for God's will, for his purposes and perfect will. It's what God himself wants.

//Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. Stretch out your hand to heal and perform signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus.”// (Acts 4:29-30)

They knew better than to pray for the destruction of their enemies. That would not have been in line with the Gospel of Jesus. But they did pray for God to take their enemies' threats into consideration. Implying they couldn't stand by their own strength alone.

They knew better than to pray for superpowers, too. They didn't pray for another crippled man to be healed, or for something sensational to happen from their imaginations. Though they did pray for there to be more healing and more demonstrations of God's signs and wonders—all in keeping with the name of Jesus Christ. They left it up to God as to how and when those signs would come again.

But I love what they did pray for specifically, for themselves: they prayed for God to enable them to do the ordinary thing to which they were called—to speak God's word—and to do it with *great* boldness, for that is what it deserves.

This is an admission on their part that they were afraid in the first place as they aimed to communicate a message that flies in the face of the world and everything it thinks it knows about life.

It is also a confession of faith that God will give them what they need. For it's God's message. And they need to employ the sword of God's word with bold strokes and piercings if they're going to make any real difference in the world where they live.

What is the report to the church in our day? What are we praying for? What are we reporting back to the church for prayer? What have we gone through ourselves that God wants the church to hear about and support?

Well, first of all, don't confuse the report we're looking for with the report of the world. The church in Acts would have surely heard a different story if they had been listening to the high priests and elders, or to the gossip around Jerusalem. Instead, they listened to Peter and John as they knew the situation directly and they had the mind of God about them as they reported it.

We need to be discerning about what we are struck with as most urgent for our prayers. I'm not saying we can't pray for the big news of the Coronavirus and the riots, the current battle for the high ground on racism, and the daily political storms blowing through this election year. However, I *am* saying we should question whether these things should be our highest focus for prayer. The question should be: What is the report to us on what is threatening our obedience to God, our proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ?

Or, what report might there be of an open door for such service?

Either way, we should pray to God, seek out his mind on the matter, and make a request we know is in keeping with His priorities and our need. Consider this. So we might pray here in the twenty-first century the same way the church prayed in the first century.

Amen?