**A Prayer Offered by Threatened Disciples**

*Acts 4:23-31*

**Introduction**

1. Context:
   1. Gospel first preached on Pentecost, and church/kingdom established – **Acts 2**
   2. Gospel continues to be preached, miracles being performed to demonstrate the authority of Jesus in the words, confirming the message – **Acts 3**
      1. Man lame from birth healed – over 40 yrs of age (**4:22**), notable miracle **(4:16).**
      2. Crowd gathered, and Peter and John preach the gospel **(3:11-26**)
      3. Number of believers grows to be about 5,000 (**4:4**).
   3. NOTE: Jesus’ promise to the apostles – **John 15:18-25** – hated without a cause, words rejected.
      1. Peter and John arrested for preaching in Jesus the resurrection (**4:3).**
      2. Peter and John stand before the Sanhedrin and are questioned concerning the authority and name under which the miracle and preaching had occurred **(4:7).**
      3. Jesus preached to Sanhedrin, convicting them of the sin of killing Jesus (**4:8-12).**
      4. Sanhedrin consulting together about what to do with Peter and John due to the notability of the miracle, and the sway of the crowd. Decided upon threatening them (**4:16-17).**
      5. Peter and John were threatened, refused to stop preaching, and further threatened and released (**4:18-22**).
      6. NOTE: not a mild, or empty threat.
         1. **(4:17)** – ***“severely threaten”*** – *apeilē apeileō* (both meaning to threaten).
            1. “Greek: “Let us threaten them with a threat.” This is a “Hebraism” expressing intensity, certainty, etc. “ (Albert Barnes)
         2. After being arrested for preaching again, released by an angel of the Lord and arrested again, beaten and let go **(5:40-42).**
2. After being threatened and released, the two apostles returned to the other apostles and gave them the news (**4:23).**
3. Their reaction was to pray to God together (**4:23-31).**
4. This says a lot about the importance of prayer, and how it should be utilized in the life of a Christian as we seek to fight the war we’ve been enlisted in.
5. The Place for Prayer
6. Prayer is seen throughout scripture as a staple of the Christian faith.
   1. When the apostles awaited the Promise of the Lord in Jerusalem – **Acts 1:12-14**
   2. When choosing Judas Iscariot’s replacement – **Acts 1:24**
   3. At the establishment of the church – **Acts 2:42**
      1. ***“they continued steadfastly” (NKJV)***
      2. ***“continually devoting themselves” (NASB)***
      3. ***“they devoted themselves” (ESV)***
   4. Especially during tribulation – Peter in prison after James was killed – **Acts 12:5**
7. Prayer is commanded – **1 Thessalonians 5:17**
   1. It is our main line of communication to God, while He speaks through His word.
   2. It shows our acknowledgment of our dependence upon God.
   3. It shows our faith in God’s ability to aid us, and our trust in His wisdom to do what is necessary.
8. Prayer is effective – **James 5:16-18** – we should not undervalue it and neglect it.
9. Prayer is essential in our spiritual endeavors – **Ephesians 6:18** – after the panoply of God.
10. So, the apostles, having been threatened, prayed – **Acts 4:24**
    1. The content of their prayer is beneficial to consider, especially in the context of trial and tribulation.
    2. We may never encounter the opposition they did, but we still are subject to the threats of our great adversary, and the daily spiritual battle.
11. The Prayer Offered
12. Acknowledgement of God’s Position and Power **(v. 24)**
    1. They knew the One they were laboring for, and petitioning was greater than the threats of their enemies.
    2. Possibly in reference to **Psalm 146:6** – a Psalm concerning the blessedness of the one who has put trust in God.
       1. **(vv. 1-2)** – Praise to God.
       2. **(vv. 3-4**) – Don’t put trust in man, not even those with pomp and power.
       3. **(vv. 5-7)** – The happy man puts trust in God.
          1. Eternal creator concerned with truth.
          2. Just, benefactor, liberator.
       4. **(vv. 8-9)** – He looks after, and cares for those in need who are righteous, and FRUSTRATES THE SCHEMES OF THE WICKED.
       5. **(v. 10)** – He reigns, is in authority and control, always.
    3. Acknowledging God as creator is to acknowledge that He is above the evil, danger, and mess on earth, and has the power to intervene in ways we need – HE IS IN CONTROL.
    4. **Psalm 11** – David acknowledging the Lord’s control in the midst of danger and corruption.
13. Acknowledgement of the Power of God’s Will and Word **(vv. 25-28)**
    1. While the apostles were physically threatened, their main concern was for the will of the Lord to continue:
       1. **Acts 4:19-20** – they are compelled to speak the gospel.
       2. **Acts 5:29** – they must obey God rather than men.
    2. It was right for them to remember, and appeal to the fact of God’s past of successfully suppressing the attempts of His enemies to overthrow His will, which was exactly the situation with the threatening of the apostles.
    3. **Psalm 2:1-2** quoted – those opposed to God’s plan to set up His Son as King seek to thwart God’s plans, and fail miserably:
       1. **(vv. 4-6)** – God’s reaction to the rebellion – laughs at attempt, and proceeds to do His will.
       2. **(vv. 7-9)** – God’s decree (for His Son to be set on the throne) is realized.
       3. **(vv. 10-12)** – warning/command to those opposed, and blessedness of those who trust in God.
    4. **(vv. 27-28)** – as was prophesied in Psalm 2, Herod, Pilate, the Gentiles and Jews crucified Jesus, accomplishing the exact thing God had planned.
    5. God’s word accomplishes what it intends to **– Isaiah 55:8-11**
    6. Words of Gamaliel – **Acts 5:33-39** – If it is of God you cannot overthrow it.
       1. **Psalm 33:10-11** – Man’s plans against God are brought to nothing, while the Lord’s will stands forever.
    7. Such was the case with the apostles and their commission by the Lord – regardless of the threats, they knew, as they appealed to God, that He would overcome as He did in the past.
14. A Request for God’s Attention, Help and Intervention **(vv. 29-30)**
    1. It is not as though they thought God had not yet noticed their plight – **Psalm 33:18-19; 34:15-16**
       1. God always knows the struggles of His people. (**cf. Isaiah 40:27-31**)
       2. God wants us to reach out in prayer for help – **Hebrews 4:16**
    2. However, it is right to call God’s attention to our troubles in faith as a request for Him to act as He sees fit on our behalf.
    3. Their request was not for a deliverance from their oppressors, but that God would work for the success of His will through them.
       1. Appointed to suffering for His name – **1 Thessalonians 3:3; 2 Timothy 3:12**
       2. Given what is necessary to endure through sufferings for His sake – **2 Timothy 1:6-8**
       3. A prayer for deliverance isn’t wrong, but it must come with the same appeal as the Savior – **Matthew 26:39** – Your will be done.
    4. God will aid us in our spiritual journey when faced with opposition, but it may be that His will is for us to endure such struggles to benefit spiritually – **James 1:2-8** – we pray in faith, i.e. trusting God’s will, and in the interest of growing as He desires us to.
    5. Their focus was on fulfilling what Christ had called them to, and they knew they needed God’s help to do so – **cf. Colossians 4:2-4** – prayers concerning the furtherance of God’s will.
       1. Such was always on their minds, and was their main concern.
       2. Such it should be with us.
15. The Result **(v. 31**)
    1. **(v. 31)** – The Lord caused them to know their prayer was heard, and gave them their request – they were then able to speak the word successfully and boldly in spite of the threats and opposition.
    2. Prayer is effective – **James 5:16**
    3. However, it is only effective when it is utilized **– James 4:3**
    4. God will grant us what we ask of Him, especially when it is in conjunction with His will, and pertaining to our spiritual walk – **Matthew 7:7-12; 6:10, 12-13; 26:41**

**Conclusion**

1. In a time of great trial during the early parts of the apostles’ ministry they turned to God in prayer.
2. Prayer is vitally important to our spiritual success.
3. We would do well to note and emulate the apostolic example and prayer in this passage.