

**Acts 4:23-31, The Aftermeeting:  
How to Pray in Persecution  
January 10, 1992  
H. Van Dyke Parunak**

**Overview**

1. Conclusion of the preceding episode:
  - a) Peter and John go to pray
  - b) Heal lame man
  - c) Interest leads to sermon
  - d) Sermon leads to arrest and threats by Sanhedrin
  - e) Now they come back and pray. The big issue: how should we respond to persecution and other unhappy circumstances?
2. Other contextual observations (not in sermon)
  - a) Can be construed as chiasm with doubled second panel.

1) Prayer	3:1		4:23-31
2) Lame man inspires wonder	3:2-11	4:13-17	4:22
3) Peter speaks	3:12-26	4:8-12	4:19-20
4) Arrest, legal trouble	4:1-3	4:5-7	4:18
5) People saved	4:4		
  - b) Answers to the prayer in 29,30 unfold in following sections:
    - 1) boldness in speech, 31
    - 2) healings, signs, and wonders, 5:12-16
    - 3) Why is 4:32-5:11 inserted here?
  - c) Relation to 2:42. These ideas seem scattered throughout the first six chapters.
    - 1) Doctrine: 3:12-26, others.
    - 2) Fellowship: 4:32-5:11
    - 3) Breaking of Bread: 6:1-7
    - 4) Prayer: 3:1; 4:23-31
3. Overview of the passage:
  - a) 23, share the problem with the saints.
  - b) 24-30, together take it to the Lord.
  - c) 31, expect him to answer

**A. 23, They Share the Problem with the Saints**

1. Their first stop is back with the believers, perhaps in the upper room where they met.
2. They report what has happened. Note again mention of priests and elders, but not scribes. As devout Jews, they are somewhat taken aback. They are not surprised that the scribes could be so picky. But that the priests and elders could be so blind is hardly credible. How could leaders established by Moses reject the Messiah so violently?
3. Underlying principle: 1 Cor. 12:26. When one suffers, all suffer. We are intended to bear one another's burdens, Gal. 6:2.

*What response should the church take to such problems?*

1. *Hold a pity party and moan together over how rough things are?*
  2. *Analyze and debate the matter intellectually?*
  3. *Mount a program of political action to set things right?*
- We should be careful to follow the approach of these early saints: take the matter directly to God.*

## B. 24-30, Together, They Share the Problem with God

1. The *time* of their prayer  
This is their first encounter with opposition, and they pray after. Even better is for the church to uphold those being persecuted during the event, as in 12:3, cf. Heb. 13:3.
2. The *mode* of their prayer: "with one accord." Not just that they spoke together in unison, but they were "of one mind." They agreed concerning their request, and thus met the Lord's requirement in Matt. 18:19, which is the fundamental charter of the church, whether applied to discipline (18:18), prayer (18:19), or meetings in general (18:20).
3. The *structure* of their prayer: two parts, each introduced by a vocative to the Lord. In English, both are translated "Lord," but they represent different Greek words.
  - a) 24-28 is addressed to God as "Despot," absolute and totalitarian ruler, the master of a slave. This section *acknowledges God's power*.
  - b) 29-30 is addressed to God as "Lord," emphasizing his power in relation to man, the ruler of a willing people. This section *asks for his provision*.

This order, praise before petition, is almost universal in Bible prayers. God wants us first to reflect on the greatness of his resources before asking for something. Look at the balance before writing a check. It would be well for us always to praise God for those attributes that make him a reasonable giver, before asking for the gift.

- a) Do we ask for healing? First praise him as the author of life.
- b) Do we ask for guidance? First praise him for his great wisdom.
- c) Do we ask for the salvation of a loved one? First praise him for his abundant provision of redemption in the Lord Jesus.

It's also worthwhile pausing to ask whether we are willing to own God both as Despot and as Master. Some recognize his absolute, universal power as Despot, and despise him for it; they do not submit to him as Master. Others see their relationship with him as purely voluntary, but deny his complete sovereignty in the affairs of men; they own him as Master but not as Despot. He wants us to recognize him in both ways.

4. 24-28, Praising God's Power  
They recall two aspects of his power. The first, while showy and dramatic, is a little impersonal. The second focuses on a demonstration of his power more directly relevant to their circumstances. Compare the prayer in Neh. 9, which follows just the same approach in worship.

- a) 24, he is the creator of the physical universe. A simple, straightforward proposition, quoted from Exod. 20:11, clearly attested in Gen. 1:1. Little argument here. Most people who believe in God at all believe in him as creator of the world.
- b) 25-28, he is the director of history. Now we are dealing with God's power, not over purely physical forces, but in the minds and hearts of people. This is the point that folk are more reluctant to acknowledge, and the believers develop the idea quite carefully.

- 1) First they quote the second Psalm, which was recognized as Messianic long before the birth of Jesus of Nazareth. The Psalm names four classes of opponents to the Messiah: nations, peoples, kings, and rulers.
- 2) Then they observe, from their own experience and that of their Lord just two months before, how accurately this prophecy was fulfilled. The last verb in the quotation from the Psalm, "gathered together," is in Gk. the very first word in v.27, and the list in v.27 matches the categories in the quotation.
  - a> Herod is a *king*.
  - b> Pontius Pilate is a *ruler*.
  - c> "Nations" is the word commonly rendered "gentiles," and indeed the Romans were involved in Christ's death. The prophecy would not have been fulfilled if the Jews had had the autonomy to execute the death sentence on their own!
  - d> "Peoples" uses the term that is usually applied to Israel, and in fact the nation did reject its own Messiah. Their own experience strengthens this point.
- 3) In v.28, they draw the conclusion. If God can describe the events and actors of history, he must control them. They have only been doing what he ordained for them to do.

#### 5. 29-30, Praying for God's Provision

Knowing that they have such a despot, and having submitted themselves willingly under his rule, they now bring requests appropriate to one with such power as they have just described. Three requests:

- a) 29a, "Behold their threatenings." Not inviting God just to be aware of them, but to supervise them and keep them under control. The verb is used throughout the OT for God's involvement in human affairs, or for a human victor's satisfied review of defeated enemies (Micah 7:10; Psa. 118:7). In this case, the prepositional effect on the verb is pretty transparent: *epi* + *horaw*, to look down on from above, from a position of superiority.

This is why we can turn the other cheek and not seek revenge:

because vengeance belongs to the Lord, and he will repay our accounts, Rom. 12, 2 Thes. 1.

- b) 29b, "Give us boldness to speak." We might expect them to say, "That was too close. From now on we'll keep our mouths shut, and Lord, you smooth over the upset and keep us out of trouble." But they know it is their duty to speak, and they feel the force of the threats. We should not view them as men of unusual boldness. In their own strength, they would remain silent. But they turn, as can we, to God for superhuman boldness, to do what they ought to do.

The same principle applies to Ezekiel (the need in 2:6; the provision in 3:8), Micah (3:8), Paul (Eph. 6:18-20). It is a mistake to feel that we can never match the boldness of these giants of the faith, for it was not their personal boldness, but "the spirit of ... power," 2 Tim. 1:7.

- c) 30, "While you stretch out your hand for healing and for the performance of signs and wonders." AV sees this as the MEANS of their boldness, but then how can we be bold if God doesn't do miracles? Better understood as what God will do WHILE they are boldly speaking. Having seen the impact of the healing of the lame man and the miracles of pentecost, coupled with preaching, they ask that this coupling might continue. In fact, they continue to preach and he continues to do wonders, but as time goes by the two are not joined so closely.

### C. 31, God Begins to Answer Prayer

God gives them the sign of an earthquake and they speak boldly under the Spirit's enabling. But there are not yet the public signs and wonders for which they asked, or the healings. These come in 5:12-16, after an intervening episode.

Sometimes God does not answer right away, or answer as one might think he should. The events of 4:32-5:11 appear to cover some days, at least enough time for the practice of sharing goods to become common and people to seek to emulate one another selling goods and bringing the money. Yet no healings or explicitly recognized "signs and wonders" until mid-ch. 5. Why the break? Suggestions next week, DV. Meanwhile, we recognize the Lord's hand in answer to prayer.

#### Summary

1. Bring problems to the church. We ought to bear one another's burdens. One characteristic of many conventional churches is that everyone is always smiling, and never dares admit to any problem. How sterile! We are to find strength and encouragement together.
2. The church's response should be prayer, not griping, intellectualizing, or political action.
3. Prayer should move from praise to petition. Let us first review the resources at our disposal, then invoke them for the problem.

A universal characteristic of Bible prayers.

4. When we do ask, ask for strength to do what is right, rather than for protection in failing in our duty.
5. Look for God to answer, perhaps not just in the time or exact way that we anticipated.

**Hymn:** Come My Soul, Thy Suit Prepare

**Analysis:** The Aftermeeting

A. Sharing it with the others.

1. 23 )Apoluqe/ntes de\ h)^lqon pro\s tou\s i)di/ous
2. kai\ a)ph/ggeilan o(/sa pro\s au)tou\s oi( a)rxierei^s kai\ oi( presbu/teroi ei)^pan. [Again, they ignore the scribes.]

B. Sharing it with God

quote p

1. quote f: 24 oi( de\ a)kou/santes o(moqumado\n h)^ran fwnh\n pro\s to\n qeo\n kai\ ei)^pan,
2. quote:
  - a) De/spota,
  - b) su\ o( poihsas to\n ou)rano\n kai\ th\n gh^n kai\ th\n qa/lassan kai\ pa/nta ta\ e)n au)toi^s,
  - c) quote p
    - 1) quote f: [su] 25 o( tou^ patro\s h(mw^n dia\ pneu/matos a(gi/ou sto/matos Dauid paido/s sou ei)pw/n,
    - 2) quote:
      - a> (Inati/ e)fru/acan e)/qnh kai\
      - b> [(inati] laoi\ e)mele/thsan kena/;
      - c> 26 pare/sthsan oi( basilei^s th^s gh^s
      - d> kai\ oi( a)/rxontes sunh/xqhsan e)pi\ to\ au)to\
        - 1> kata\ tou^ kuri/ou
        - 2> kai\ kata\ tou^ Xristou^ au)tou^.
    - d) 27 sunh/xqhsan ga\r e)p' a)lhqei/as e)n th^| po/lei tau/th| e)pi\ to\n a(/gion pai^da/ sou )Ihsou^n, o(\n e)/xrisas,
      - 1) (Hrw/|dhs [king]
      - 2) te kai\ Po/ntios Pila^tos [ruler]
      - 3) su\n e)/qnesin
      - 4) kai\ laoi^s )Israh/l,28 poihsai o(/sa h( xei/r sou kai\ h( boulh/ [sou] prow/risen gene/sqai.
    - e) 29 kai\ ta\ nu^n, ku/rie, e)/pide e)pi\ ta\s a)peila\s au)tw^n,
    - f) kai\ do\s toi^s dou/lois sou meta\ parrhsi/as pa/shs lalei^n to\n lo/gon sou,
      - 30 e)n tw^|
        - 1) th\n xei^ra/ [sou] e)ktei/nein se
          - a> ei)s i)/asin
          - b> kai\ shmei^a kai\ te/rata gi/nesqai
            - 1> dia\ tou^ o)no/matos tou^ a(gi/ou paido/s sou )Ihsou^.

Is this clause subordinate to *eis* (Bruce?, Robertson), *ekteinein* (Meyer, Bruce?), or *dos* (AV,

ASV)? In an earlier study I suggested that all three nouns were subjects of *ginomai* (thus DeReine, Segond), but *eis* appears to govern an inf. only through an article. I now prefer Meyer's analysis.

C. Answered prayer.

1. 31 kai\ dehqe/ntwn au)tw^n e)saleu/qh o( to/pos e)n w(^| h)^san sunhgme/noi,
2. kai\ e)plh/sqhsan a(/pantes tou^ a(gi/ou pneu/matos,
3. kai\ e)la/loun to\n lo/gon tou^ qeou^ meta\ parrhsi/as.