

Acts 4:23-30

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/acts/acts-4/acts-423-30/>

The believers gather together and pray that God would give them courage to continue preaching and healing in Jesus's name.

Peter and John had been put on trial before the Sanhedrin for healing a lame man and preaching that Jesus was resurrected. The Sanhedrin asked them how they healed the man, and Peter and John explained that they did so through the name of Jesus, who the religious leaders had put to death, but who was resurrected, and was God's Messiah, and was the only name by which the Jewish people could be reconciled with God. The Pharisees and Sadducees could find no reason to punish Peter and John, because the people who had witnessed the healing were glorifying God. Thus, they let Peter and John go, but warned them not to teach about Jesus anymore. The apostles openly replied that they would keep teaching about Jesus, because they chose to obey God, not men. In doing this they chose to follow the higher authority of God rather than the inferior authority of those pretending to be ruling in the name of God.

*When Peter and John had been released from custody, they went to their own companions in the city and reported all that the chief priests and the elders had said to them. The chief priests and elders had "commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus" and "had threatened them further" (vs. 18, 21). The emerging church of believers in Jesus was experiencing its first pushback from the religious elite in Jerusalem. Of course, the apostles and disciples had been party to many debates and threats from the Pharisees during Jesus's ministry, and had seen the *priests and elders* arrange Jesus's arrest and crucifixion. They were probably not surprised that the gospel had enemies opposing it. In fact, Jesus had warned them to expect it (Luke 12:11-12; John 16:1-4).*

So after hearing of Peter and John's trial and the threats against them, the believers' response is to pray:

And when they heard this, they lifted their voices to God with one accord and said, "O Lord, it is You who made the heaven and the earth and the sea, and all that is in them.

Their prayer is audible and loud, for they *lifted their voices to God*. It is also unified, that they prayed *with one accord*. There was harmony in their prayer. The disciples and apostles begin by using phrases that acknowledge God's role as the creator of everything, *O Lord, it is You who made the heaven and the earth and the sea, and all that is in them*. These phrases are similar to other prayers in the Old Testament, such as in 2 Kings 19:15 and Isaiah 37:16, both of which are references to a moment in Israel's history when King Hezekiah is in jeopardy of being wiped out by the most powerful military force in the world, the Assyrians, and he prays for God to offer salvation to the nation so that the world would know that God alone is the true God.

In Nehemiah 9:6 as well, where again the people of Israel find themselves outgunned and out-manned, they also pray a prayer with similar language.

The believers go on to quote Psalm 2, attributing authorship both to *David* and to the *Holy Spirit* speaking through David: *who by the Holy Spirit, through the mouth of our father David Your servant, said,*

*'Why did the Gentiles rage,
And the peoples devise futile things?
The kings of the earth took their stand,
And the rulers were gathered together
Against the Lord and against His Christ.'*

This psalm recognizes that human authorities will always tend to rebel against God. Here, *David* asks *Why the Gentiles rage*. The *Gentiles* refers to all the nations apart from Israel. But in this chapter of Acts it was the Jewish religious leaders who opposed God's will. This seems to place the Jewish leaders as being in league with the Gentile nations (such as Rome) in opposing God's people, and its true King, who is God (1 Samuel 8:7). The quoted psalm charges several groups for reacting with hostility to God: *the peoples who devise futile things, kings of the earth who took their stand* against God, *the rulers who gathered together Against the Lord and against His Christ*.

These categories are of men in authority, *kings* and *rulers*, and they treat *the Lord* and *His Christ* as enemies. When man acquires power it is unusual for him to give it up, or to use it in service of others. But God, as the ultimate authority, calls for all men to submit to Him, and to serve Him by serving others. That is the opposite of the behavior of these Jewish leaders. They ignored a miracle of God and threatened Peter and John in order to protect their own political power. They are not serving others, they are simply self-serving.

It is thus with most kings throughout the Biblical story. They resist God, from Pharaoh to Herod. Rather than using their power to serve, they use their power to perpetuate their power. The moment Jesus was born, King Herod saw Him as a threat and used force of arms to massacre the babies of Bethlehem where he knew Jesus to be. He used his authority to resist the *Christ* sent from *the Lord*. The disciples have seen this psalm play out before their eyes. The authorities of *Israel* and of the *Gentiles* had colluded to execute Jesus, the *Christ*. These were the same forces now threatening them; they knew the threat was real.

The apostles acknowledge this as they pray, *For truly in this city there were gathered together against Your holy servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel.*

It was the Jewish religious leaders who plotted to put *Jesus* to death, but the Roman leadership had to permit it and carry it out. At Jesus' trial He was passed around to multiple *rulers*: the Pharisees and Sadducees, King *Herod*, and *Pontius Pilate*. All played a hand in putting Him to death. The *peoples of Israel* and the *peoples of the Gentiles* all took *their stand* against the will of God. All joined to *devise* the murder of God's *holy* servant, the *anointed* one (or the *Christ*, or the Messiah, each term meaning the same thing: the one chosen, set apart, and sent by God). But it was *futile*, because the *Christ* was resurrected from the dead. He defeated both sin and death (Colossians 2:14; 1 Corinthians 15:54-55).

The crucifixion was *predestined to occur* by God's *hand and God's purpose*. It was God's plan that Jesus should die (Philippians 2:5). Jesus came to earth for this very reason (John 12:27) The disciples did not understand this until after He had resurrected (John 2:22).

But now the apostles and disciples are not shocked. They know exactly where they are. They recognize that their own leaders, their own political leaders, their own social and cultural influences, have been a part of this rejection of Jesus. So they align themselves with God, the true authority, through prayer. God is Sovereign. Recognizing the danger of their situation, the disciples make requests of God. But they do not ask Him to remove the danger from them, rather, they ask God to give them courage:

And now, Lord, take note of their threats, and grant that Your bond-servants may speak Your word with all confidence.

The apostles and disciples desired *confidence* to continue to *speak God's word*, calling themselves *bond-servants* of God, meaning their life and service belonged to Him alone. The apostles and disciples knew that more opposition awaited them. They may have remembered Jesus's words when He told them how the world would hate them and persecute them (John 15:18-25). The disciples understood that their commission was to be faithful and courageous witnesses (Matthew 28:18-20; Acts 1:8). All believers have been called to follow this same example (Revelation 1:3; 3:21).

This response indicates that the disciples understood that their greatest opportunity in gaining fulfillment from life rested in suffering the sufferings of Christ. This is likely part of what Jesus had taught them during the forty days following His resurrection where He instructed them about the kingdom of God (Acts 1:3). This principle is taught throughout the New Testament for succeeding generations (Philippians 2:5-10; Romans 8:17b; Hebrews 2:9-11; 2 Timothy 2:2-4).

The disciples want to continue to be a part of God's ministry, they want to be His instruments to bring lost souls to Him through the miraculous works of God: *while You extend Your hand to heal, and signs and wonders take place through the name of Your holy servant Jesus*. They attribute all power and miracles done through them to God, not to themselves. The *signs, wonders*, and the ability to *heal* is done by the *hand* of God, in the *name* of *Jesus*, who was God's *holy servant*. They are adamant and repetitive about naming Jesus as God's *Christ* and *holy servant*. He was not just a man. He was God, and the Messiah that Israel had long waited for.

But the disciples and apostles ask for *confidence* against the *threats* against them. *Confidence* to continue to live and speak in the name of Jesus. They clearly find their comfort in God, not circumstances. They view their opportunity to be witnesses as a privilege, and pray that they might be faithful witnesses. This shows a true understanding of the greatest priorities in life.

Biblical Text

23 When they had been released, they went to their own companions and reported all that the chief priests and the elders had said to them. 24 And when they heard this, they lifted

their voices to God with one accord and said, “O LORD, IT IS YOU WHO MADE THE HEAVEN AND THE EARTH AND THE SEA, AND ALL THAT IS IN THEM, 25 who by the Holy Spirit, through the mouth of our father David Your servant, said, ‘WHY DID THE GENTILES RAGE, AND THE PEOPLES DEVISE FUTILE THINGS? 26 ‘THE KINGS OF THE EARTH TOOK THEIR STAND, AND THE RULERS WERE GATHERED TOGETHER, AGAINST THE LORD AND AGAINST HIS CHRIST.’ 27 For truly in this city there were gathered together against Your holy servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, 28 to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose predestined to occur. 29 And now, Lord, take note of their threats, and grant that Your bond-servants may speak Your word with all confidence, 30 while You extend Your hand to heal, and signs and wonders take place through the name of Your holy servant Jesus.”