

Happy New Year!!!

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOU PRAY? Unlocking God's Prayer

Locker 01/08/06

Acts 4:23-31 (NIV) Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society

The Believers' Prayer

23On their release, Peter and John went back to their own people and **reported** all that the chief priests and elders had said to them. 24When they heard this, they **raised their voices together in prayer** to God. "**Sovereign Lord**," they said, "You made the heaven and the earth and the sea, and everything in them. 25You 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?

26The kings of the earth take their stand
and the rulers gather together
against the Lord
and against His Anointed One. [from Psalm 2:1,2]

27Indeed Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against Your Holy Servant Jesus, whom You anointed. **28They did what Your power and will had decided beforehand should happen.** 29Now, Lord, **consider their threats** and **enable Your servants to speak Your Word with great boldness.** 30Stretch out Your hand to heal and perform miraculous signs and wonders through the Name of Your Holy Servant Jesus."

31After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all **filled with the Holy Spirit** and spoke the word of God boldly.

Unlocking God's Purposes

When you pray, if you pray, do you expect Him to answer? Is there a feeling that if I say the prayer a certain way, He will not only hear me but He will 'give' me what I have been asking for?

How many times do I pray over a certain thing? Just say the prayer once and leave it there or do I persist at the prayer for weeks and years?

How do I unlock the Prayer locker of God?

Is there a right way for asking and is there a wrong way? Is it always right to do the asking in a certain way? Should I be on my knees when I pray? Should I lift my hands up in prayer?

What do I call Him when I pray? If I do not end the prayer with "In Jesus' Name" will He not hear?

WHAT NAME DO I USE WHEN I PRAY?

This question of PRAYER comes up often in my line of work. I get to pray for all sorts of things—*because I am 'the Pastor.'* In some meetings, I have been asked to come up and offer a prayer for someone who needs prayer—as *though I am someone very special*—because I have an inside edge with God.

This passage today gets my blood boiling! I love it! Let me go over the story with you as a point of reminder.

Background to this part of the story:

Almost beaten, they were released under orders **NOT to speak anymore in the Name of Jesus.**

The Apostles' Report (4:23)

They told or reported ALL that was said to them.

We now can see that this new Faith is both innocent before the authorities and totally triumphant when its enemies seek to use state authority to hinder its advance. (See 5:40, 16:35-40; 18:14-16, 23:28-29; 25:25-27; 26:32).

These first Christians were **realists to the core** and so must we be. These intimidations, coming as they did from the highest civil rulers, had the full force of Law. **Obedience to Christ in the middle of a hostile environment will be costly.** Will we realistically face that **SAME** cost as well?

The Prayer's Response (4:24-28)

After the report, *the response was fear and flight!* No, verse 24 says differently. "When they heard this, they raised their voices together in prayer to God." A great response! A heart centered response. A very Godly response. Would you have done the same?

Here is what they said. Listen to what they called their God.

"Sovereign Lord"

- A. Having supreme authority or power.
- B. Outstanding in its excellence or effectiveness.

So, **"Sovereign Lord"** is the title these followers of Jesus call their God. **What understanding does come with this usage?**

In **Luke 2:29**, Simeon uses this same term in calling out to his Lord God. It denotes a knowledge of history. "...as You have promised..." In **Rev 6:10**, the martyrs of the faith are calling out to their Sovereign Lord and are told to hold on...to wait. Here in Acts, they raised their voices **together in prayer**. This shows unity. **"Sovereign Lord"** is not a commonly used word. It is held for special times and this is one of those times.

Historically speaking, the use of this term is grounded in the Old Testament such as in **Exodus 20:11** For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but He rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

Psalm 146:6 the Maker of heaven and earth,

the sea, and everything in them—

the LORD, who remains faithful forever.

They looked and understood the scope of God's **omnipotence**, or all-powerfulness, or supremacy.

They were empowered with this boldness BECAUSE who their God was and that they recognized Him as such.

These followers of Jesus encouraged themselves through Praise that even the Sanhedrin was not outside God's powerful control. He was **"Sovereign Lord"**!

FACT: Confessing the truth about God's relationship to our circumstances always brings encouragement, especially when we are aware of danger and feel out of control.

Look at the way Jesus responded to the Cross. **Luke 22:42** "Father, if You are willing, take this cup from Me; yet not My will, but Yours be done."

Jesus knew that the Father's plan was for Him to die for ALL mankind. Our sins were to be piled onto Him—who knew no sin. Even the thief on the Cross knew that...**Luke 23:41** We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this Man has done nothing wrong."

What a great encouragement this was to them! The very same group that was threatening these believers opposed their Lord. The persecutors' earlier success brought Christ's death **but it was really according to**

God's plan and by His hand. Surely any suffering these believers--or we--endure, then, is not outside God's control and will serve only to advance the purposes of the Risen and Reigning Messiah in our lives and for the world to see...to Know Him and to make Him known.

The Church's Prayer for Boldness (4:29-30)

The church asks God to pay attention to the Sanhedrin's threats without further defining what they expect Him to do about them. He is Sovereign Lord. He knows what to do!

The easy transition from opposition to Jesus to threats against the apostles is possible because theologically there is a close identification of the people of God with their suffering and risen Lord, not only in continuing His work (**1:1**) but also in the pattern of His life (**Lk 24: 25** He said to them, "How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! 26Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter His Glory?" 27And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, He explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning Himself."

Or **1 Pet 2:20-25** 20But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God. 21To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in His steps. 22"He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in His mouth." 23When they hurled their insults at Him, He did not retaliate; when He suffered, He made no threats. Instead, He entrusted Himself to Him who judges justly. 24He Himself bore our sins in His body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by His wounds you have been healed. 25For you were like sheep going astray, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls."

1 Peter 4:13 But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when His Glory is revealed.

In short, **bad things happen to good people.** It is what life is all about. Just because we believe in Jesus and that our sins are forgiven, that does not conclude that all will go well with us and that we live happily ever-after lives.

The Life and misery of Joseph is a good example, if not the life of Jesus, Himself. A son of a wealthy man, sold into slavery by his jealous older brothers, lifted up as a governor of an estate, only to be brought down again and put back in jail, to be lifted out to become second in Egypt. **Sure the story ends well but what about those years in jail?** How did he hold his heart upright? Do you think he ever gave up hope? Doesn't seem so, BECAUSE he believed in the **Sovereign Lord** of his father and so must we!

With this request we learn the believers' great concern is not for their own safety but for the mission's advance. God uses the opposite to bring His Glory around. What was meant for harm, God uses that action for His Glory. God built good out of evil as in Joseph's life as a slave and prisoner in Egypt.

Verse 30 is not a request but a confident assumption of what will accompany the enablement to speak the word boldly. ("while You stretch out Your hand"). The believers understand the corroborative weight that the healings, signs and wonders have for their preaching of the gospel. **The recent experience with the crippled beggar had taught them both the impact and the limits of a miraculous sign through the Name of Your Holy Servant Jesus (3:6-7, 16; 4:10, 14).**

When we realize that this statement is not a request but a **statement** of what God can do, we are freed from both the belief based on the fact that something is considered to be likely and following anxiety which comes with demanding the miraculous from God. We need to let God be God and not take anything back once it is given to Him. He will do what He does.

The Answer: Spirit-Filled Witness (4:31)

In answer to their prayer and in fulfillment of His promise (**Lk 11:13** *13If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!*"), the place is shaken, and all--not just the apostles--are filled with the Holy Spirit (**2:4; 4:8**). **They spoke** (literally, were speaking--continuous action) **the Word of God**, (God's great good news of salvation; **11:19; 13:46; 14:25**) **with boldness**. **The messengers are unstoppable!** The mission continues with divine momentum. As a Church historian observed about the place being shaken: **"and that made them the more unshaken"** because they knew the presence of the Sovereign God!