

Subject: A Praying Church

Scripture: Acts 4:23-33

Although times and places change, some things never change. God's Word never changes. Jesus Christ never changes. The Gospel and salvation never change. Although some things in the church have changed from New Testament times until now, the need for prayer never changes. A church can do more than pray, but it can do nothing more important than pray, and a church can do nothing more unless it first prays.

1. The PRIORITY of a praying church

The priority of a praying church is simple...it's prayer. There's an old saying, "Birds of a feather flock together." Christians need to meet together with other Christians for worship, prayer, study, and encouragement. The first church saw the need of praying together. Prayer was not an option. It was a necessity. The church literally advanced on its knees. Take a look at the book of Acts and see how important prayer was to the church.

Acts 1:14 – These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication.

1:24 – And they prayed, and said, Thou, Lord, who knowest the hearts of all men, show which of these two thou hast chosen

2:42 – And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.

3:1 – Now Peter and John went up together into the temple at the hour of prayer, being the ninth hour

4:24 – they lifted up their voice to God with one accord

6:4 – (The twelve apostles said) we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word.

6:6 – Whom they set before the apostles; and when they had prayed, they laid their hands on them.

7:59-60 – And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep.

9:40 – But Peter put them all forth, and kneeled down, and prayed; and turning to the body said, Tabitha, arise. And she opened her eyes; and when she saw Peter, she sat up.

10:9 – On the morrow, as they went on their journey, and drew nigh unto the city, Peter went up upon the housetop to pray about the sixth hour.

12:5 – Peter, therefore, was kept in prison; but prayer was made without ceasing by the church unto God for him.

13:3 – And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away.

14:23 – And when they had ordained elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed.

And that's only the first half of the book of Acts!

In our text (Acts 4) these believers had been threatened and warned to stop teaching in the name of Jesus. They could have had been discouraged, sat down and had a pity party or even worse just quit, *but instead* they had a prayer meeting. The first thing they did was tell their brothers and sisters in Christ what happened and called them to prayer. They didn't worry—they prayed. They didn't give up—they prayed. They didn't lose heart and get discouraged—they prayed. Abraham Lincoln said, "I have been driven many times to my

knees by the overwhelming conviction that I had nowhere else to go.” The old song says it best, “Where could I go, O where could I go, but to the Lord?” Skeptic makes fun of us, “You Christians are so weak-minded that you use prayer like a crutch.” That’s right, a crutch ain’t bad if you’re a cripple. There is the PRIORITY of a praying church.

2. The PATTERN of a praying church (vs. 24-30)

During His earthly ministry Jesus gave us the model prayer. This church also gave us a model or pattern for prayer. We can learn some things from the way they prayed:

- They focused on the sovereign God (vs. 24)

He is the sovereign Lord of all. The word here is *despotes*, which means Absolute Master or Ruler. Their focus was on God’s almighty power and control over all things. He is the creator of heaven and earth and the sea, and all creatures. Faith in God as Creator is the foundation of all faith.

Hebrews 11:3 *Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear.*

Albert Edward Day said, “The function of prayer is to set God at the center of attention.” Jesus taught us to pray like this in the model prayer:

Matthew 6:9-10⁹ *After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. ¹⁰ Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.* Praying like this enables us to see things in their proper perspective. These believers heard the threats of the Sanhedrin, but they went to the throne of God. All their threats seemed small in comparison to God’s almighty power.

- They rested in God’s Word (vs. 25-28)

In their prayer they quoted from Psalm 2, a prophetic psalm about the Messiah. God was not taken by surprise when Jesus was rejected and crucified. All this was foreknown and predicted in Scripture. God spoke through the mouth of David and predicted the world’s rejection and hatred of Christ. We need to base our prayers on God’s Word. The best prayers are when we pray God’s words back to Him. Their prayer is an example of what Jesus said:

John 15:7 *If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you.*

We must pay attention to what God says in Scripture if we want Him to pay attention to what we say in prayer, or as Spurgeon said: “We must hearken diligently if we would pray effectively.”

- They trusted in God’s will (vs. 29-30)

He does whatever He determines to do. He is in control. He rules and overrules in the affairs of men. God uses the evil plans and intentions of men to accomplish His eternal purpose.

Have Faith in God

Have faith in God though all else fail about you.

Have faith in God; He provides for His own.

He cannot fail though all kingdoms shall perish; He rules, He reigns upon His throne.

Have faith in God; He's on His throne. Have faith in God; He watches o'er His own.

He cannot fail. He must prevail. Have faith in God, have faith in God.

The threats made against the believers were real. These religious leaders were the same people who murdered Jesus, and they wouldn't hesitate to kill His disciples. Jesus had warned them, *In the world ye shall have tribulation.*

What did the church ask for? Comfort? Protection? No, they asked for boldness to speak God's words, which was the very thing that got them in trouble in the first place.

Phillips Brooks said, "Do not pray for tasks equal to your powers. Pray for powers equal to your tasks." There is the PATTERN of a praying church: focusing on the sovereign God; resting in God's Word; and trusting in God's will.

3. The POWER of a praying church (vs. 31-37)

The answer to their prayer came suddenly. God is more willing to answer than we are to pray. Something special happens when God's people pray. Satan trembles when he sees the weakest saints upon their knees. Prayer moves the hand that moves the world. Prayer can do anything God can do, and God can do anything.

When these believers prayed, God revealed His power in two ways: the place was shaken and the people were strengthened. They spoke God's word with boldness. They testified of the resurrection of Christ with great power and great grace upon them. They prayed, they preached, and they made a great impact for Christ.

R. A. Torrey said, "Pray for great things, expect great things, work for great things, but above all, pray." When God's people pray, there's no limit to what God will do.

A praying church has great unity (vs. 32), great power (vs. 33), great grace (vs. 33) and great generosity (vs. 34-37). A praying church is a strong church, a confident church, a faithful church, and a blessed church.

What is the difference between the church back then and the church today? Why don't we pray like they prayed? I can't find a good answer to that question. They had needs, and we still have needs. The world rejected them, and the world doesn't like us either. They met together and prayed, and we meet together and pray. They prayed to God who is sovereign, the Creator of all things, the God who inspired Scripture, and always accomplishes His will. We pray to the same God.