

## The Life of The Early Church (Acts 4:22-37)

### I. Facing Crisis With Prayer (23-31)

#### A. The Church Prays Through Persecution (23-24a)

1. Peter and John return to the believers (lit. "their own")
2. They immediately tell the believers what happened and the order to cease preaching they were given.
3. Now these thousands of believers are faced with a choice. Do we obey God or do we risk our lives?
  - a. They knew the gravity of the choice they faced
  - b. This was no longer just a "decision" to trust Christ – it was a matter of life and death
4. They immediately cried out to God in prayer
  - a. They knew they had no strength in themselves
  - b. They knew that only the Spirit could enable them
  - c. Today we face the same problem
    - i. Many will say they will die for Christ (much like Peter did at the last supper)
    - ii. No one will sacrifice himself for Christ outside of the Power of the Spirit empowering him.
    - iii. Peter would boldly die for Christ now because of the Spirit when before he would not even admit he knew Christ.
  - d. They cried out with one voice – meaning they were all in one mind and one accord
    - i. This doesn't mean they were all divinely saying exactly the same thing
    - ii. More likely, one person prayed and the other believers agreed in the same mind

#### B. The Prayer of The Church (24b-30)

##### 1. Trusting In God's Sovereignty (24b-28)

- a. God is Sovereign Creator (24b)
  - i. They begin by acknowledging that God is in complete control
  - ii. Even though events are looking grim, they understand that the creator is still all powerful and working through the events
  - iii. The word "Lord" here is not the usual term *kurios* – but the word *despotes* – it means sovereign master.
  - iv. God is the maker of all things, heaven and earth and everyone in the earth

##### b. God Foretold Persecution of Jesus (25-26)

- i. Notice that they refer to scripture even in their prayers

- Once again the believers show that it was God who actually spoke through David as they quote Psalm 2:1-2
      - By quoting Psalm 2:1-2, the believers interpret the hostility of the Jewish leaders and the Gentiles against Jesus as the fulfillment of this prophecy
    - ii. While God is the true ruler and sovereign, these kings and rulers have chosen to rebel and assert their own authority – what utter stupidity
  - c. God's Word Has Been Fulfilled (27-28)
    - i. The persecution and murder of Jesus was part of God's plan foretold by David in Psalm 2
      - Pilate represents the gentile "kings of the earth"
      - Herod and the Jewish leaders represent the "rulers"
      - The Gentiles and the Jews are the people of Israel and the Romans
    - ii. The church takes comfort in knowing that even the most horrible of evils do not escape God's perfect will
      - This doesn't mean God condones or causes evil – but He uses evil for His own good purposes
      - The Gentile Pontius Pilate and the Jewish King Herod, as well as the others did what their evil hearts desired
      - But they did exactly what God determined would happen
    - iii. Because God is ultimately in control, the church can take comfort in obeying His commands no matter what the outcome
      - Nothing can come to pass in their lives without passing through the will of God
      - Even the suffering we endure is working for the greater good of God's kingdom
2. Praying To Be Used By God (29-30)
- a. They Pray For Boldness (29)
    - i. Notice that they do not pray to be relieved of their persecution
      - They do not pray for acceptance among the religious leaders
      - They do not pray that God would kill or terrify the religious leaders

- They do not pray for their problems to vanish and life to return to normal – they don't pray to be spared at all
  - ii. They pray for boldness to obey God and continue speaking His word
    - They cry that God would hear the threatening they endure
    - They understand that God's will is perfect and He is in control
    - They want to continue to speak
    - They want to continue the mission of Christ no matter what the cost – they only ask for strength to do so
    - They value faithfulness and obedience to Christ more than their own lives
  - b. They Pray For Continued Ministry (30)
    - i. They desire that God would continue to heal and do signs and wonders
    - ii. They want their mission to continue – they want to keep preaching and keep seeing God move in the midst of Israel
    - iii. They want the church to grow even in the face of persecution
- C. The Church's Prayer is Answered (31)
  - 1. God Answers their Prayers Immediately
    - a. The place where they prayed was shaken
      - i. God answers in an earthquake
      - ii. Earthquakes often occur in the presence of God in the Old Testament
    - b. The people were all filled with the Holy Ghost
      - i. They were given divine power
      - ii. They were empowered for service to do what they prayed for
    - c. They spoke the Word with Boldness
      - i. They received exactly what they asked for
      - ii. They spoke with the boldness of the Holy Spirit despite their circumstances
- II. Living In Loving Fellowship (32-37)
  - A. The Church Was Unified Together (32-33)
    - 1. They were Joined Together in Spirit (32a)
      - a. They were all of one heart and soul
        - i. The church was up to more than 15,000 people by now – that many people being singularly focused together is an absolute miracle
        - ii. The language here represents the church as a living organism. There are many parts but one

heart and one soul. (soul could also be translated life)

- b. They were dedicated to Jesus
  - i. They were singularly focused on proclaiming the gospel of Christ and living for Him
  - ii. They share one faith and one identity as the true people of God
- 2. They Shared All With the Needy (32b)
  - a. They had all things in common
    - i. They shared their own possessions with one another
    - ii. This doesn't mean they were a communist commune. – More on this under v. 34-35
  - b. Notice that they still owned possessions but they used their private possessions for the good of the community
- 3. They Were United in The Testimony of Jesus (33)
  - a. The preaching of the gospel went forth with Great Power
    - i. The Spirit empowered their speech and their lives
    - ii. It is by the Spirit that they were able to give their possessions for those in need
    - iii. The love they demonstrated added power to their preaching
      - A life lived for Christ adds considerable weight to the preaching of Christ
      - A life lived for self removes the power of one's preaching
    - iv. They preached the gospel to the uncovered as well as the community of believers
  - b. They were given "Great Grace"
    - i. Grace from the Lord was upon them
    - ii. They reveled in the freedom and joy of knowing the kingdom promises of forgiveness and redemption were theirs
    - iii. This grace is why they were united and why their testimony was so powerful
- B. The Church Cared For One Another (34-37)
  - 1. Many Sold Possessions to Help The Needy (34-35)
    - a. No one lacked anything or was in need
      - i. This is the fulfillment of the Kingdom promises of prosperity and unity
      - ii. They demonstrated Christian love and fellowship
        - Fellowship is not just hanging out together
        - Fellowship is not just eating meals

- Fellowship is sharing your life with others
  - “There are no country homes in heaven” – We will inhabit a city. The new Jerusalem. Lack of fellowship here demonstrates sin in one’s heart
- iii. They sold property and possessions to help the needy
- Notice that this doesn’t mean they no longer owned private property
  - Remember, they met in each others houses (Acts 2:46)
  - In Acts 12:12, they meet in the house of Mary the mother of John Mark
  - The verb “brought” is in the imperfect tense which means they were continually bringing. – Believers did not have to sell everything and bring it in order to join the community. When needs arose they sold things to help – continually.
  - This was not communism – it was Christian love in the Holy Spirit
  - The sale of property was completely voluntary (as we will see in Acts 5:4)
2. Barnabas Is Held As an Example of Charity (36-37)
- a. This is actually the introduction to chapter 5
  - b. Barnabas is the example of Christian love and charity
  - c. Ananias and Sapphira show the opposite – sin is creeping in

NOTE: The first part of chapter 5 is a continuation of the study of fellowship. Barnabas is the example of Christian love while Ananias and Sapphira are shown as an example of sin and deceit creeping into the Church fellowship. We may have to split this section up depending on our time.