

Foothills Christian Assembly Sermon July 31, 2022

“Understanding and Responding to Persecution, Part 3 – Corporate Kingdom Prayer”

13 Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated and untrained men, they marveled. And they realized that they had been with Jesus. 14 And seeing the man who had been healed standing with them, they could say nothing against it. 15 But when they had commanded them to go aside out of the council, they conferred among themselves, 16 saying, "What shall we do to these men? For, indeed, that a notable miracle has been done through them is evident to all who dwell in Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it. 17 "But so that it spreads no further among the people, let us severely threaten them, that from now on they speak to no man in this name." 18 So they called them and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus. 19 But Peter and John answered and said to them, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more than to God, you judge. 20 "For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard." 21 So when they had further threatened them, they let them go, finding no way of punishing them, because of the people, since they all glorified God for what had been done. 22 For the man was over forty years old on whom this miracle of healing had been performed.

23 And being let go, they went to their own companions and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said to them. 24 So when they heard that, they raised their voice to God with one accord and said: "Lord, You are God, who made heaven and earth and the sea, and all that is in them, 25 "who by the mouth of Your servant David have said: 'Why did the nations rage, And the people plot vain 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 against Your holy Servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, were gathered together 28 "to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose determined before to be done. 29 "Now, Lord, look on their threats, and grant to Your servants that with all boldness they may speak Your word, 30 "by stretching out Your hand to heal, and that signs and wonders may be done through the name of Your holy Servant Jesus." 31 And when they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word of God with boldness.

32 Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul; neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common. 33 And with great power the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And great grace was upon them all. 34 Nor was there anyone among them who lacked; for all who were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold, 35 and laid them at the apostles' feet; and they distributed to each as anyone had need. 36 And Joses, who was also named Barnabas by the apostles (which is translated Son of Encouragement), a Levite of the country of Cyprus, 37 having land, sold it, and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet.

I. Introduction

- a. Blessed = μακάριος → supremely blessed; fortunate, well off, happy. When you think of being supremely blessed, what comes to mind? When you imagine being well off, what situation do you see? Are you happy? What will make you happy? Here's what Jesus said should make us think of being supremely blessed:
 - i. Matthew 5:10-12 "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you."
- b. Today, we continue to learn from the early Church. How did they respond to persecution? What were the elements of their response, and how can we walk in their example?
 - i. Last week: v23,24: "Understanding and Responding to Persecution, Part 2 – Together With One Accord"
 1. "And being let go, they went to their own companions and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said to them. So when they heard that, they raised their voice to God with one accord and said"
 2. The church at that moment is of one mind and one heart. They understand Who Christ Is. They know He was crucified, resurrected, and ascended. They know His commands to them. They are in perfect agreement over Who He Is, what He has accomplished and what they are to do to obey Him. They also know the Sanhedrin's power and threats. They know they have been commanded to disobey Jesus or face terrible consequences. And, they know Jesus will support and defend His people as they obey Him, against all threats of every kind, and this threatened community of shared faith comes together to cry out to God in Corporate Kingdom Prayer. They are caught up in the powerful Spirit-wrought momentum of corporate unity and obedience. So, how do they respond to this first great persecution? They stay together. They remain of one mind. They share the threats together as a community. They cry out to God in prayer.
- c. Today's sermon: v24b-30 "Understanding and Responding to Persecution, Part 3 – Corporate Kingdom Prayer"
 - i. Appeal to God as Creator: The Power of God v24b
 - ii. Scripture (Psalm 2) as Foundation for Prayer: The Promises v25,26
 - iii. Expressing the Persecution to God, based upon Scripture v27
 - iv. Trust in God's Sovereign wisdom, love and power v28
 - v. Acknowledging the threats, and our temptations to fear v29a
 - vi. Supplication - Boldness from God to overcome fear v29
 - vii. Supplication - Healing, Signs and Wonders v30
 - viii. Questions to know, love and obey God

II. Prayer: Appeal to God as Creator v24b

- a. "Lord, You are God, who made heaven and earth and the sea, and all that is in them"
- b. "Lord, You are God"
 - i. The Sanhedrin has positioned itself as god, asserting its power and authority to give and take reputation, property and life according to its own decrees. Faced with this god-like threat of the Sanhedrin, the people of God first proclaim aloud the reality that only the Lord is God. This is the anti-idolatry cry, "Lord, You are God." Such a cry refuses to bow down and worship false gods, no matter what may occur.
- c. They begin their prayer by returning to Genesis 1, proclaiming the invincible might of God, Creator of all.
 - i. Gen 1:1 "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth."
 1. "In the visible world it is easy to observe, [1.] Great variety, several sorts of beings vastly differing in their nature and constitution from each other. *Lord, how manifold are thy works, and all good!* [2.] Great beauty. The azure sky and verdant earth are charming to the eye of the curious spectator, much more the ornaments of both. How transcendent then must the beauty of the Creator be! [3.] Great exactness and accuracy. To those that, with the help of microscopes, narrowly look into the works of nature, they appear far more fine than any of the works of art. [4.] Great power. It is not a lump of dead and inactive matter, but there is virtue, more or less, in every creature: the earth itself has a magnetic power. [5.] Great order, a mutual dependence of beings, an exact harmony of motions, and an admirable chain and connection of causes. [6.] Great mystery. There are phenomena in nature which cannot be solved, secrets which cannot be fathomed nor accounted for. But from what we see of heaven and earth we may easily enough infer the eternal power and Godhead of the great Creator, and may furnish ourselves with abundant matter for his praises. And let our make and place, as men, remind us of our duty as Christians, which is always to keep heaven in our eye and the earth under our feet."¹
- d. By returning to creation, they look to God as Father of all the universe, with MIGHT that is invincible. The God of Creation is the unmade Maker of all, and those who worship Him as Almighty Creator are comforted when threatened.
 - i. "...we Christians distinguish ourselves from the heathen, that, while they worship gods which they have made, we are worshipping the God that made us and all the world. And it is very proper to begin our prayers, as well as our creed, with the acknowledgement of this, that God is the

¹ Matthew Henry, [*Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume*](#) (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 3.

Father almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible. Though the apostles were at this time full of the mystery of the world's redemption, yet they did not forget nor overlook the history of the world's creation; for the Christian religion was intended to confirm and improve, not to eclipse nor jostle out, the truths and dictates of natural religion. It is a great encouragement to God's servants, both in doing work and suffering work, that they serve the God that made all things, and therefore has the disposal of their times, and all events concerning them, and is able to strengthen them under all their difficulties. And, if we give him the glory of this, we may take the comfort of it."²

- e. Faced with severe threatenings from their nation's greatest political and ecclesiastical power, instead of focusing upon the might of the Sanhedrin (and by inference, the Romans), they lift up their eyes to God, Who Alone is Invincible. This has been the cry of all faith-filled saints throughout history.
 - i. Ps 121: "I will lift up my eyes to the hills--From whence comes my help? 2 My help comes from the LORD, Who made heaven and earth. 3 He will not allow your foot to be moved; He who keeps you will not slumber. 4 Behold, He who keeps Israel Shall neither slumber nor sleep. 5 The LORD is your keeper; The LORD is your shade at your right hand. 6 The sun shall not strike you by day, Nor the moon by night. 7 The LORD shall preserve you from all evil; He shall preserve your soul. 8 The LORD shall preserve your going out and your coming in From this time forth, and even forevermore."
- III. Prayer: Scripture (Psalm 2) as Foundation for Prayer: The Promises of God v25,26
- a. 25 "who by the mouth of Your servant David have said: 'Why did the nations rage, And the people plot vain things? 26 The kings of the earth took their stand, And the rulers were gathered together Against the LORD and against His Christ.'
 - b. They quote this Scripture from Psalm 2:1,2 as the basis for their understanding of their current situation. By doing so, they are also showing forth their understanding and reliance upon all the principles associated with this Psalm that goes on to answer the question posed by David in v1,2 of Psalm 2. They look to God's Word, holding on to His promises, praying to Him according to His promises in Psalm 2. Here, they bring together God's Power with His Promises.
 - i. Promise of focus: All the plots and powers of the earth's mightiest nations, peoples, kings, and rulers are pure futility against God and His Christ.
 - ii. Calvin "They descend now into the second member, that they ask nothing but that which God hath promised to perform, so that his will and power are joined together, to the end they may fully assure themselves that they shall obtain their requests; and because the kingdom of Christ is

² Matthew Henry, [*Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume*](#) (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 2078.

now in hand, they make rehearsal of the promise of God, wherein he promiseth to defend and maintain the same, so that when the whole world hath done what it can to overthrow it, yet all shall be in vain; and herein appeareth their godliness and sincere zeal, in that they are not so much careful for their own safety, as for the increasing and advancement of the kingdom of Christ.”³

- IV. Prayer: Expressing the Persecution to God, based upon Scripture v27
- a. 27 "For truly against Your holy Servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, were gathered together"
 - b. Their prayer goes on to define the fulfillment of Psalm 2 in the futile attempts of Herod, Pilate, the Romans and the Jews to destroy the Messiah and His Kingdom. The crucifixion of Jesus is the fulfillment of Psalm 2:1-3. They know this, and they are focused upon Christ and His glory, not themselves and their own safety. Their personal protection is secondary to their personal mission to do God’s will. Their focus is upon the threat to the Kingdom. As they bring together the power and promises of God in their corporate prayer, they do so to focus upon praying against the threats to the Kingdom.
 - i. Ps 2:1-3 “Why do the nations rage, And the people plot a vain thing? 2 The kings of the earth set themselves, And the rulers take counsel together, Against the LORD and against His Anointed, saying, 3 "Let us break Their bonds in pieces And cast away Their cords from us.””
 - c. They apply the futility of the prophecy of Psalm 2 to the current enemies of Christ. They bring the promise of Scripture into their current situation. Why are the plots against Christ vain? Because the Lord is God, the Creator of all, and His Might is unmatched and He has set His Son on Heaven’s Throne and given Him all the earth as His inheritance, and all the rulers of the earth are under His sovereign power and plan. They will submit or be destroyed.
 - i. Ps 2:4-12 “He who sits in the heavens shall laugh; The Lord shall hold them in derision. 5 Then He shall speak to them in His wrath, And distress them in His deep displeasure: 6 "Yet I have set My King On My holy hill of Zion." 7 "I will declare the decree: The LORD has said to Me, 'You [are] My Son, Today I have begotten You. 8 Ask of Me, and I will give [You] The nations [for] Your inheritance, And the ends of the earth [for] Your possession. 9 You shall break them with a rod of iron; You shall dash them to pieces like a potter's vessel.' " 10 Now therefore, be wise, O kings; Be instructed, you judges of the earth. 11 Serve the LORD with fear, And rejoice with trembling. 12 Kiss the Son, lest He be angry, And you perish [in] the way, When His wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed [are] all those who put their trust in Him.”
- V. Prayer: Trust in God's Sovereign wisdom, love and power v28

³ John Calvin and Henry Beveridge, [*Commentary upon the Acts of the Apostles*](#), vol. 1 (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010), 183–184.

- a. 28 "to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose determined before to be done.
- b. Their prayer goes on to express their trust in God's perfect sovereignty over all things, even over the diabolical murder of Jesus their Messiah. They are filled with trust in God's love and power and wisdom. They continue in their reference to Psalm 2 ("I will declare the decree") as they lift up the sovereign Providence of God over all things, and specifically, over their current situation. The unholy alliance of the Jews and the Romans, the crucifixion of Christ, and their current persecution are all part of God's great plan, foretold throughout the Bible, but particularly in Psalm 2.
 - i. "The Jerusalem believers affirm in the final statement of the first part of the prayer that God had worked out his plan in the history of the opposition to Jesus, which they had just reviewed. The aorist infinitive "to do" (ποιῆσαι) expresses the purpose that God accomplished with the conspiracy of Herod Antipas and Pontius Pilate, who executed Jesus. Jesus' death was an event that happened as the result of what God's "power" (ἡ χεὶρ σου; lit., "your hand") and God's plan (ἡ βουλή σου) had decided beforehand. The aorist indicative verb translated as "decided beforehand" (προώρισεν) refers to what God had decided before it happened. God had predetermined Jesus' death. Herod Antipas and Pilate were instruments in God's hand. In the context of the quotation of Ps 2:1–2, the believers assert that the psalm had announced in the past what God had decided should take place, and what "in truth" did take place when Jesus was arrested, interrogated, and condemned to die by crucifixion."⁴
- c. So, the introduction of the prayer points to God's Power, God's Promises and God's Providence. They are settled in Him as a people, fully confident He will hear their supplications. They are ready now to make supplication with full confidence.
 - i. How often do we run to supplications before we adore God and proclaim aloud His power, promises and providence, searching for the intersection with our current situation?

VI. Prayer: Acknowledging the threats, and our temptations to fear v29a

- a. 29 "Now, Lord, look on their threats,
- b. Their first petition asks God to look with them on the severe threats. The implication is that once God fully engages with these threats, He will act on behalf of Christ.
 - i. "The implication of this petition is that when God turns his attention to the threats of the Sanhedrin, he will intervene on their behalf."⁵

⁴ Eckhard J. Schnabel, [Acts](#), Expanded Digital Edition., Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), Ac 4:28.

⁵ Eckhard J. Schnabel, [Acts](#), Expanded Digital Edition., Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), Ac 4:29.

- c. Also, their prayer here acknowledges that these threats are strong enough to terrify them into cowardly retreat and silence. They believe God, but they know they need His mighty assistance to continue to obey Him. This leads to their next petition.
 - i. “They do not dictate to God what he shall do, but refer themselves to Him, like *Hezekiah* (Isa. 37:17): “*Open thine eyes, O Lord, and see; thou knowest what they say, thou beholdest mischief and spite* (Ps. 10:14); to thee we appeal, *behold their threatenings*, and either tie their hands or turn their hearts; make their wrath, as far as it is let loose, to praise thee, and the remainder thereof do thou restrain,” Ps. 76:10. It is a comfort to us that if we be unjustly threatened, and bear it patiently, we may make ourselves easy by spreading the case before the Lord, and leaving it with him.”⁶

VII. Prayer: Supplication - Boldness from God to overcome fear v29

- a. and grant to Your servants that with all boldness they may speak Your word,
- b. A simple request based upon their humble acknowledgement of need. The threats are indeed terrible. They know the terror is meant to silence them. So, they ask God for boldness to continue to speak His Word. They did not ask God to destroy all their enemies, but rather for the grace to courageously face the enemies as ambassadors of Christ.
 - i. “Note, In threatening times, our care should not be so much that troubles may be prevented as that we may be enabled to go on with cheerfulness and resolution in our work and duty, whatever troubles we may meet with. Their prayer is not, “*Lord, behold their threatenings*, and frighten them, and stop their mouths, and fill their faces with shame;” but, “*Behold their threatenings*, and animate us, open our mouths and fill our hearts with courage.” They do not pray, “Lord, give us a fair opportunity to retire from our work, now that it is become dangerous;” but, “Lord, give us grace to go on in our work and not to be afraid of the face of man.”⁷

VIII. Prayer: Supplication - Healing, Signs and Wonders v30

- a. 30 "by stretching out Your hand to heal, and that signs and wonders may be done through the name of Your holy Servant Jesus."
- b. They have seen the wondrous combination of miracles and God's Word preached. They ask God to continue to stretch out His hand from heaven unto more healings, signs and wonders in Jesus' Name. They glorify Christ as God's Holy Servant. They desire faithfulness to do God's will (boldness), and they ask God to glorify the Name of Jesus by healings, signs and wonders.

⁶ Matthew Henry, [*Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume*](#) (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 2079.

⁷ Matthew Henry, [*Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume*](#) (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 2079.

- i. “Note, Nothing emboldens faithful ministers more in their work than the tokens of God’s presence with them, and a divine power going along with them. They pray, [1.] That God would *stretch forth his hand to heal* both the bodies and souls of men; else in vain do *they stretch forth their hands*, either in preaching (Isa. 65:2), or in curing, ch. 9:17. [2.] *That signs and wonders might be done by the name of the holy child Jesus*, which would be convincing to the people, and confounding to the enemies. Christ had promised them a power to work miracles, for the proof of their commission (Mk. 16:17, 18); yet they must pray for it; and, though they had it, must pray for the continuance of it. Christ himself must ask, and it shall be given him. Observe, It is the honour of Christ that they aim at in this request, that the wonders might be done by the name of Jesus, the holy child Jesus, and his name shall have all the glory.”⁸

IX. Questions to know, love and obey God

⁸ Matthew Henry, [*Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume*](#) (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 2079.