

7. Throughout this study it's been noted that Luke's intent in writing the book of Acts wasn't merely to document the emergence and early progress of the new covenant Church, but to further demonstrate the truth of his central thesis that all the Scripture finds its fulfillment in relation to Jesus Christ – His person, His redemptive work, and its consequences for Himself and His Church. Luke punctuated the end of his first account with this assertion in relation to Jesus' death and resurrection (Luke 24:13-48), and he continued to emphasize it throughout the book of Acts as he recounted Jesus' ascension and enthronement and all that resulted from it.

- At the outset, Luke recorded that Judas' betrayal and the necessity of appointing his replacement were established by the Scriptures (1:15-26).
- So also the defining event of the Spirit's outpouring was preeminently a matter of scriptural promise and fulfillment, even as it presupposed Jesus' ascension and enthronement at the Father's right hand (2:1-36; cf. Luke 24:49; Acts 1:1-8).
- Likewise, the healing of the lame man was a symbolic act of physical fulfillment by which God attested the true, eschatological fulfillment of the scriptural promise of creational restoration (3:1-26; cf. Isaiah 35:1-10).
- That miraculous healing, in turn, provided the providential occasion for initiating the fulfillment of another key component of scriptural prophecy, namely God's intention that His goal of global witness and ingathering be accomplished in connection with Israel's unbelief (Acts 3-28; note particularly the way Luke closes the book of Acts). Abraham's descendents would indeed mediate His blessing to all the earth's families, Jew and Gentile alike: *positively*, through the early witness of the believing Israelite remnant – the true ethnic sons of Abraham joined to his singular Seed (Galatians 3); and *negatively*, through the unbelief and opposition of the balance of the sons of Israel (Romans 9-11).

The early Church recognized its life and circumstance as fulfilling the Scripture, and this emboldened its witness. It is that subject to which Luke turned his attention in the very next context (4:23-31). Having been released by the Sanhedrin, Peter and John returned to the body of believers there in Jerusalem and recounted to them what had transpired that day. The response of the saints was to raise their voices in prayer and praise to God, lifting to Him the circumstances and outcome of that encounter and entreating Him for the necessary resources to go forward in faith and obedience to Christ and His gospel.

- a. The first thing to observe is the solidarity of their prayer; Luke recorded that these saints "*lifted their voices with one accord*" (4:24a). All authentic corporate prayer is characterized by singleness of heart and mind, regardless of how many individuals participate vocally. Whether one speaks or many, all are united in what is being uttered. So it was with this prayer episode, and here the common burden and petition pertained to the emerging Jewish antagonism toward Christ's Church and its gospel. Most importantly, these believers were united in their recognition that this phenomenon was a matter of scriptural fulfillment.

- b. In this regard, the saints set their unified prayer to their heavenly Father within the context of the second psalm (4:24b-26). Continuing the pattern he established at the outset, Luke drew upon an historical episode in the life of the early Church to substantiate the christocentricity of all the Scripture. He chose this particular prayer episode, not merely because it followed the preceding events, but because of the important contribution it made to his account: *It highlights the fact that the Church regarded the hostility arising against it, not as some random and unfortunate circumstance, but as the will of their sovereign God.* The irrefutable proof of this was the fact that they were experiencing the fulfillment of scriptural prophecy, and therefore something that was a matter of divine predetermination.

As these saints lifted up their hearts to God in prayer, their minds were drawn to the second psalm. Luke doesn't explain how this association came about, but as with Peter's use of Joel's prophecy at Pentecost, this particular context speaks precisely to the matter at hand: This group of believers recognized that what Peter and John had encountered with the Sanhedrin was merely the continuation of the opposition Jesus had experienced – from the Gentiles as well as the sons of Israel. Hatred and hostility toward Jesus are ubiquitous for the simple reason that they are the natural expression of human alienation from God. The early Church wasn't surprised by this hostility; their Lord had promised it. But they equally recognized that God had *preordained* it, so that it was subject to His sovereignty and the accomplishment of His purposes. This truth – which was the foundation for the saints' confident petition – is at the very heart of this psalm.

- 1) The second psalm is overtly messianic, but in a narrow and directed way. It is an *enthronement* passage which focuses entirely on the regal aspects of Old Testament messianism (to the exclusion of the priestly aspect). It highlights Yahweh's ordination of His messianic ruler to sit on His throne and administer His sovereign rule as His Son-King. This is the meaning of Yahweh's decree: "*You are My Son; today I have begotten You*" (v. 7). The notion of sonship here is economic rather than ontological. That is to say, the point isn't the origination of the person of the Son, but the ordination of this individual to assume the status of royal sonship – to rule Yahweh's kingdom in His name and in His authority (cf. Romans 1:1-4).
- 2) The psalmist designated this person Yahweh's *Christ* – His *Anointed* (Hebrew, *messiah*), not as a direct reference to Jesus Christ, but because, in context, Yahweh anointed him to be His Son-King. And it is by virtue of this sovereign authority that the Christ and the One who anointed Him are the objects of human contempt and insurrection (vv. 1-2).

The psalmist presents the mighty men of the earth as swollen with pride and intoxicated with a sense of autonomous power, united in the shared delusion that they are able to liberate themselves from the constraints and demands of divine sovereignty exercised by Yahweh and His Christ: "*Let us break their shackles and throw off their cords from us*" (v. 3).

Eden's seduction had alienated the creaturely image-son from his divine Creator, and the passage of time and generations embedded in the human psyche a sense of human self-identity entirely distinct from any authentic relational connection with the One whose likeness is the very essence of humanness. Man came to believe, as a matter of innate conviction, that his humanity is self-derived, self-defined and self-contained, and the corollary of this is the conviction of self-authenticity and self-sufficiency. Viewing themselves from this vantage point, men sense that intimate involvement with God is potentially detrimental to their humanity rather than defining it; man is only free to be *man* when he is liberated from divine constraint.

Thus, while the contextual players are the "kings of the earth" and the "rulers," the larger biblical context shows that these individuals symbolize in an epitomizing way the entirety of the human race. Evident in their lives if not their words, all men rise up against God and seek to break His shackles. The saints in Jerusalem recognized this, and so extended the psalmist's words beyond his narrow designation: Herod and Pilate had taken their stand, but so had the Gentiles and the people of Israel (4:27).

- 3) But despite human megalomania and the hardened refusal to yield to Yahweh's lordship, He has prevailed by installing His Son upon His throne (vv. 1-6). Moreover, the dominion of the enthroned Son-King is comprehensive and everlasting. All things, and, in context, all people – including the earth's most powerful men (kings, rulers, judges) – are under His lordship and will be made subject to Him (vv. 7-9).

The psalmist further shows that this universal triumph in subjecting the human race is to take two forms: First, many from every tribe, tongue and people will serve Him with devotion as those who have taken refuge in Him; the balance of mankind will yield to His dominion in destruction (vv. 10-12). Whatever the disposition of men and their confidence that they can liberate themselves from God, His sovereignty stands. The psalmist portrays Him as laughing at and ridiculing the impotent mutineers, then striking fear into their hearts as He declares His invincible decree to grant all authority, power and dominion to His Christ. Yahweh has installed Him upon His throne, and He has given to Him "*the nations as His inheritance*" and "*the ends of the earth as His possession.*"

- c. Understanding the psalm's message and contribution to the Scripture's revelation of redemption makes it apparent why these saints drew upon it in their confession and petition to their heavenly Father. Their prayer was united by their common perception of their circumstances as a matter of scriptural fulfillment. They had witnessed mankind's violent insurrection against the Lord and His Christ that reached its pinnacle at Calvary, but they had also experienced God's triumph in the exaltation and enthronement of the Son-King. Now they were witnessing the Son's exercise of His lordship as He began the work of establishing His kingdom.

Having been “*installed upon Zion*” (Mount Zion symbolizing *sacred space* – God’s sanctuary-throne) Jesus’ Father has given to Him all the earth and its peoples; He is the King of kings and Lord of lords. And so, while one would expect fear and concern to be the Christians’ response to the hostility they were encountering (and knew would only increase), their ability to discern what their eyes couldn’t see left them assured and settled, unmoved by opposition. The God they trusted and served had prevailed and would yet prevail; thus it was to the *sovereign Lord* (Greek, “despotes”; cf. 2 Peter 2:1; Jude 4; Revelation 6:9-10) that they directed their confession (4:24-28) and petition (4:29-30).

The gathered saints **confessed** this One as the Sovereign who brought forth the created order (4:24), but did so for the specific purpose of rendering it sacred space – the realm of His everlasting dominion and communion as Creator-Father. Given the creation’s estrangement and enslavement, this outcome depended upon the triumph of the Anointed One, and His installation as Son-King affirmed that He had indeed accomplished His redemptive task.

At the same time, insurrection was the ordained means of the Christ’s triumph – it was through rejection that the Stone was to be exalted to become the “head of the corner.” So the unified human effort to break the divine shackles by rejecting Yahweh’s Christ had only succeeded in effecting His enthronement: Herod and Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, had come together only to do what God’s hand and purpose “*had predestined to occur*” (4:27-28).

Confessing the Sovereign Lord’s triumph through human opposition, these Christians **petitioned** Him in view of it: Bearing the life and likeness of the Christ and holding forth His gospel, they were finding themselves the objects of the same opposition He had endured. The fires of persecution were being stoked, but the saints recognized this to be a matter of divine determination: *These believers’ confession of God’s sovereign power and purpose in the Christ event was their confession of the same power and purpose in their own circumstance, and that understanding informed as well as provoked their appeal to God.*

The provision they sought wasn’t the cessation of opposition or deliverance from it. They didn’t petition their Father to alter their circumstance, but to grant the fruit of renewed minds that discern what cannot be seen: *They prayed that the Master would strengthen them in boldness and confidence as He kept them mindful of the meaning of what they were experiencing.* Moreover, these saints (as epitomizing the entire Church) sought boldness, not for the sake of their personal endurance or peace of mind, but for the sake of the **gospel**. They asked for boldness in their *proclamation*, and especially that God would bear His own testimony and make His word effectual through the power of His Spirit (4:29-30).

- d. The Creator-Redeemer heard their prayer, and answered it by a supernatural manifestation of the Spirit’s presence and power. He would grant them their petition, and thus they went forth, “*speaking the word with boldness*” (4:31).