

Persecution and prayer: “Sovereign Lord...”

1. “Brothers, Read Christian Biography”
2. Review, overview, and setting of Acts 3 and 4
3. Observation and exposition of Acts 4:23-31
4. The take-away for us

Review, overview, and setting of Acts 3 and 4 (3:1-4:31) [SLIDES]

1. **3:1-10** - Peter and John go to the temple in Jerusalem and while there they heal a man who was born lame.
2. **3:11-26** - Peter’s speech to the people who gathered around them in Solomon’s Portico as a result of the miracle healing (several thousand at least? see **4:4**).
3. **4:1-22** - Peter and John are arrested by the Jewish authorities, kept in jail overnight, the next day they stand trial before the authorities, Peter makes another speech, and they are threatened and then released.
 - a. They appeared before the Sanhedrin the next morning, probably in the council chamber, which, “according to Josephus, was situated at the eastern end of a bridge across the Tyropoeon valley (the bridge now represented by Wilson’s Arch). At the western end of the bridge lay the open-air gathering place called the Xystus, ‘the polished (floor).’”
4. **4:23-31** - Peter and John return to their friends where they tell them what happened, pray to God for courage and boldness, and God answers their prayer.

Observation and exposition of Acts 4:23-31

1. **Acts 4:23-31**
2. Peter and John are released and they return to their friends (the church), telling them what has happened (**23**)
3. Their response? (**24-30**)
 - a. Discouragement? Despair? Give up?
 - i. Prayer
 - b. Who prayed?
 - i. “They lifted their voices together to God and said...”
 - ii. Probably Peter? But they were in unity - corporate prayer.
 - c. Who are they praying to? (**24**)
 - i. “...to God...”
 1. the Father

- ii. “Sovereign Lord”
 1. The Greek word is *despotes*
 - a. English “despot”
 2. Defined by Bauer as “lord, master, owner”
 3. “denoting the possession of supreme authority” Mounce
 4. “a term used of a slave owner and of a ruler with unchallengeable power” Stott, 99
 5. “it connotes one with great power and control of circumstances, something those being persecuted naturally need to know about and affirm....The God who made all things has human history well in hand, for human beings are only one sort of God’s creatures.” Witherington, 201
 6. Used in connection with slaves (or servants = bondservants)
 - a. David **(25)**
 - b. Jesus **(27, 30)**
 - c. the believers **(29)**
 7. It has been said, and I agree, that “the basic conviction of the whole Bible is that God is sovereign, that he reigns and sits right now on the throne of the universe...”
 8. **Luke 2:25-32 [SLIDE]**
 9. **Revelation 6:9-10 [SLIDE]**

- d. God is the Sovereign Lord of creation **(24)**
 - i. He created, out of nothing, the entire universe **and** everything in it - he owns it all on the basis of creating and sustaining it.
 - ii. From beginning to end, the Bible proclaims this foundational truth that God is sovereign over all creation.
 1. **Genesis 1:1 [SLIDE]**
 2. **Psalms 146:5-6 [SLIDE]**
 3. **Isaiah 42:5 [SLIDE]**
 4. **Colossians 1:15-17 [SLIDE]**
 5. **Revelation 4:9-11 [SLIDE]**

- e. God is the Sovereign Lord of revelation **(25-26) [SLIDE]**
 - i. The inspiration of Scripture, and the fulfillment of prophecy
 - ii. **Psalm 2:1-2**
 - iii. Read **Psalm 2?**

- f. God is the Sovereign Lord of history **(27-28)**
 - i. God’s plan of redemption, established before time began, was worked out by his “hand” (power) in the events of history, especially with:
 1. “your holy servant Jesus”
 2. “Herod”

3. "Pilate"
4. "the Gentiles" (Romans)
5. "the peoples of Israel"
- ii. Consider how much control God has, complete control, to work out all these various threads of history in perfect synchronization.
- iii. "How Does God's Sovereignty Not Violate Our Decision-Making?"
 1. <https://www.desiringgod.org/interviews/how-does-gods-sovereignty-not-violate-our-decision-making>
- g. God is the Sovereign Lord of redemption **(27)**
 - i. Jesus is his anointed one
 1. the "Messiah" (Hebrew)
 2. the "Christ" (Greek)
- h. God is the Sovereign Lord of the here and now, or the present situation **(29-30)**
 - i. What did they not ask for?
 1. Peace, no threats, no persecution
 - ii. What did they pray for?
 1. Courage and boldness of speech despite the threats and persecution
 2. That God would heal and perform signs and wonders through the name of Jesus
4. God answers their prayer **(31)**
 - a. The place was shaken, similar to Pentecost, though different?
 - b. They were all filled with the Holy Spirit
 - c. They continued to speak the word of God with boldness - despite the threats by the Sanhedrin

The take-away for us

1. How to pray, based on this example.
2. There is nothing happening in your life that is not under God's complete sovereignty and control. Everything happens for God's glory and for our good.

Resources

1. <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/leave-your-century-for-a-while>
2. *The Acts of the Apostles*, F. F. Bruce
3. *The Book of the Acts*, F. F. Bruce
4. *The Acts of the Apostles*, David G. Peterson
5. *The Message of Acts*, John Stott

6. *The Acts of the Apostles*, Ben Witherington III
7. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*,
Walter Bauer