

FBS “Missions 101—Reaching Out at Home: The Power of Prayer” October 30, 2011
Joel Breidenbaugh (Acts 4:23-31)

Intro. Tomorrow marks 494 years since Martin Luther, that Roman Catholic monk & teacher, nailed his 95 Theses on the church door of Wittenberg, Germany. His intent was to address some theological problems within the church, hoping for a healthy debate and modification where needed. What ensued over the next few years, however, led to a complete Reformation & start of Protestant denominations (those protesting the Roman Catholic Church). The primary issues dealt with the doctrine of salvation—how is one right with God? One of the related issues concerned prayer, for RC taught that you needed to confess your sins to a priest to have forgiveness, but Luther (and other Reformers) taught that any individual with faith in Christ could go directly to God through Christ. Prayer, and the power of God through prayer, must not go through a priest ordained by the RC Church, but believers made up a kingdom of priests with direct access to God through Christ. Today, we continue our series in the first several chapters of Acts on “Missions 101—Reaching Out at Home” as we look at chapter 4 & “The Power of Prayer.”

Theme: Local Missions & Prayer

Background: After Jesus’ ascension into heaven, He sent the Holy Spirit to empower His followers to witness of Him. Chapters 2-4 give us some snapshots of such witnessing, including the preaching to & healing of a 40-year old lame man. The Apostles Peter & John had been held in custody & then warned not to preach of Jesus anymore.

➤ I want you to talk to you about 2 considerations in “The Power of Prayer.”

I. Find Power in Prayer in Considering the Lord’s Identity (4:23-28)—who He is

- “Sovereign Lord”—though the Sanhedrin had threatened the apostles not to preach Jesus, they knew they served a higher authority than the Sanhedrin
- Divine sovereignty saturates this prayer (see Stott, 99-100)

A. The Lord is the God of creation (4:24)—“You made”

Illus: Show “How Life Began” (2:32 from *Expelled: No Intelligence Allowed*)—start DVD at 32:24 & end at 34:56

- Addressing God as Sovereign Lord and Creator of all is similar to several OT passages—see Exodus 20:11; Nehemiah 9:6; Psalm 146:6; Isaiah 42:5

B. The Lord is the God of revelation (4:25-26)—“You spoke”

- Hezekiah’s prayer in Isaiah 37:16-20 sounds similar to this prayer
- They quote Psalm 2:1-2—this psalm, with the explicit reference to the Anointed (Messiah) of God had been interpreted of the coming Deliverer of David’s line at least as early as the middle of the 1st century BC (Psalms of Solomon 17:26)
- The larger context of Psalm 2 includes “You are My Son,” (v. 7), which was spoken from the voice from heaven at Jesus’ baptism (Luke 3:22)
- The nations were the Gentile rulers & their cohorts, including the soldiers, the people of Israel were those who plotted in vain, Herod represented the kings of the earth (cf. Luke 23:7-12), Pilate represented the rulers, & Christ was the anointed (cf. Luke 3:22; 4:10; Acts 10:38)—God’s “holy servant Jesus” is none other than the royal Son of God of Psalm 2—the Messiah

C. The Lord is the God of history (4:27-28)—“You predestined”

- My Baptist lips have trouble saying that Presbyterian word! But it’s not a Presbyterian word, it’s a Bible word

Illus: I'm curious, how many of you believe in predestination? Every hand should have gone up, because I didn't ask you what form of predestination but just predestination in general. It is a biblical concept, so you need to believe in it (even though you may not agree with my view of it)

- While I have cautioned against building major doctrines strictly from narrative genre, when we come to the doctrine of predestination, we find it numerous times in Acts & the Epistles—predestination (and foreordaining) simply means that God has planned something in advance without contradicting human responsibility (see Acts 2:23, 36; 3:13-17; Romans 9-11; Ephesians 1:4, 11; 1 Peter 1:19-20)
- I don't know that anyone on this green earth can understand these apparent contradictions—divine sovereignty & human responsibility—fully & no one has been able to provide a clear explanation of how these work & yet Scripture upholds both as true

Illus: Charles Spurgeon said these 2 issues are like the 2 rails on a train track—though we look down & wonder how they could ever meet, we look to the horizon & it appears that they do—we trust that God has reconciled these doctrines in heaven & we trust Him who is sovereign while carrying out our human responsibility

II. Find Power in Prayer in Considering the Lord's Ability (4:29-31)—what He can do

A. The Lord can give you courage (4:29)

- The Christian community continued to see the fulfillment of the Psalm not simply in Christ but also in the experience of the church
- Notice how the believers didn't ask God for further deliverance (that's what we would pray first), but that they asked Him for boldness, for courage to stand up & do the right thing

Illus: Show "Courage Is..." (1:14 from bluefishtv.com)

B. The Lord can work miracles (4:30-31)

- For shaking phenomena signifying the presence of God, see Isaiah 6:4; Exodus 19:18
- God answered their request by enabling them to speak boldly in Jesus' name
- Some people have trouble with miracles, but if you accept the first verse of the Bible, then there is no difficulty with miracles.
- Miracles happened in the NT church when the gospel went into new places or when there was pervasive unbelief—we shouldn't consider it the norm (or it wouldn't be a miracle) or impossible (or we lack faith in God)

Conc. When Martin Luther nailed the 95 Theses, one of the areas he addressed was the believer's access to God through faith in Christ, but you must have faith. All the plotting against God's anointed is in vain because God has already predetermined the outcome (cf. 2:23; 3:18)—just as God predetermined the timing of Christ's death & how it would happen & He prevailed against man's desires, so He has predetermined the return of Christ & what will happen with all those who have not surrendered to Him, so what makes you think you can put off trusting in Christ as though God would deal with you differently when the day of reckoning comes?