**Prevailing Prayer**

Acts 4:23-31

Earlier in Acts chapter 4 Peter and John ***healed a man*** who had been crippled his whole life. Everyone in the Temple area knew this man, who had been brought daily to a specific part of the Temple courts to ask for money. So when this well known parapeligic or quadrapeligic was suddenly running and jumping and praising God, it caused quite a stir.

Peter and John were very clear that it wasn’t THEIR power that had healed this man, but God’s power, accessed **in the name of JESUS**. This point - the clarity of JESUS’ name - was what prompted controversy, as it still does today.

“By the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead - by him this man is standing before you well.” Acts 4:10

The apostles made it clear that Jesus’ name was the only name by which a person could **be saved** and the only name by which **the power of God can be accessed**. That’s what the miracle represented - an indisputable manifestation of a miracle of God as proof of the power of Jesus’ name. “BY HIM this man is standing before you well.” Not the name of Peter. Not the name of John. Not the name of Israel or any individual rabbi. The name of JESUS.

What we saw last week was another reminder of ***the clarity and simplicity of the gospel***:

**The Gospel:**

Jesus is the only Savior - so trust Him 100%

Jesus is the only Lord - so obey Him 100%

***It’s all about Jesus.*** No one else can save you. No one else can give you life, power, peace, purpose, happiness and eternal life in heaven. And Jesus is the only Savior BECAUSE He is the only Lord. You can’t have Jesus as Savior and not as Lord - Jesus is a package deal. He only saves you when you call on Him as Lord.

In our passage for today Peter quotes **Psalm 2**, which is another remarkably clear Old Testament prophecy that is definitely and obviously about JESUS.

“The rulers take counsel together against the Lord and against **his Anointed**… The Lord said to me, ‘**You are my Son**; today I have begotten you.’ ...Blessed are all who take refuge **in him**.” Psalm 2:2,7,12

This is ***the message of the whole Bible*** - true life and blessing is found **in Christ alone**. Even the Old Testament proclaims this Gospel message - salvation and blessing are found in the Anointed Son of God. If you reject him as your King, you will face His terrible judgment. But if you embrace Him as your King, you come under His wonderful protection and into His glorious blessing.

This part of Acts 4 shows us **three practices of prevailing prayer**. When we face opposition, persecution and increasingly explicit threats against us from governing authorities, what do we do? The definitive answer of the apostles was - ***WE PRAY***. Call on Jesus! He is the only One with the resources to help us.

***How do we pray?*** Let’s look at these three practices so that our prayers can prevail even in the face of great fear, uncertainty and even danger. And we will practice these principles as we go!

**Practices of Prevailing Prayer:**

1. Acknowledge God’s Sovereign **Glory**

“They lifted their voices together to God and said, ‘***Sovereign Lord***, who made the heaven and the earth, and the sea and everything in them.’” Acts 4:24

This is always **the starting point of prayer** - to bow before the sovereignty of God. This is why we literally bow our heads when we pray - because we honor God as our King and the sovereign Creator of all things.

All three of these practices of prevailing prayer tie directly to **the Lord’s prayer**. The first phrase of the Lord’s prayer acknowledges the sovereign glory of God - “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be thy name.”

Prayer begins with humble worship. Arguably all of prayer IS humble worship. We try to teach children and to remind ourselves that prayer is not just asking for stuff. ***God is not a vending machine*** like you can come to Him with a $10 offering, a song and a devotional reading for the day and think you can ask for whatever you want and you will certainly get it. That’s just not how it works.

But that is often how we approach prayer. We think it’s a formula and if God doesn’t answer your prayers right away you think, “Oh, I didn’t give enough money or have enough faith or pray for enough minutes or get enough people praying the same magical prayer with me…”

Hear me, brothers and sisters - that is not how prayer works. That is how **MAGIC** works. With magic, if you have learned anything from Harry Potter, you have to do the charm correctly - you have to get the words right and wave your wand the right way. Prayer is not magic. ***Prayer is RELATIONSHIP***. And it is a relationship with the sovereign, glorious Creator of the entire universe.

Therefore true, prevailing prayer always begins with an acknowledgement of the glory of God.

**Practices of Prevailing Prayer:**

1. Acknowledge God’s Sovereign **Glory**
	* The Creator has absolute **authority** over His creation

“***Sovereign Lord***, who made the heaven and the earth...’” Acts 4:24

Specifically this means recognizing God as the Creator who has absolute rights, unconditional authority over every aspect of His creation. God is our loving Father. But He is also our all sovereign Creator and Lord. He is the potter, we are the clay.

So much of our faith struggle comes in when ***we flip this upside down***. We think God OWES US something - that we know better and deserve better. What does CLAY deserve from the POTTER? What does a gnat deserve from its Creator? In the scheme of eternity and the scope of the cosmos, you and I are gnats on a little smear of clay.

Prayer helps us ***flip the script back right side up***. It reminds us that God is God and we are not - that He is the all-wise, all-powerful, all-good God of heaven and we are ignorant, weak, sinful, selfish sinners.

Let’s pause and pray right now - acknowledging God as our sovereign Lord and all-glorious Creator!

**Have an elder pray a prayer of PRAISE:**

*Our Father in heaven, we bow before you now. We come to you humbly, gratefully, to worship you and honor you as the King of all Kings and as the Lord of our lives. You made the heaven and the earth, you made every creature on land, in the sky and in the sea. You are infinite in power, glory, wisdom, goodness, mercy and grace.*

*Lord Jesus, we call upon your Name, confessing that yours is the Name above every name. One day every knee will bow before you, so right now we bow our hearts and lives before you. For you, Lord Jesus, are the only Savior! You are the only Lord!*

*Forgive us for letting our hearts turn away from you. Forgive us for trusting in other gods, for looking to other people, other pursuits for our security, happiness and purpose in life. We know that life and blessing are found in you alone - so we come to you today!*

***SING - O Praise the Name!***

The first practice of prevailing prayer is to acknowledge God’s sovereign glory and His absolute authority as our Creator. Second, in prayer we align our will with God’s sovereign will.

**Practices of Prevailing Prayer:**

1. Align with God’s sovereign **Will**

“Why did the Gentiles rage… and the rulers gathered together against the Lord and against his Anointed?” Acts 4:26; Psalm 2:1-2

**If your prayers are not regularly answered** the reason is almost certainly that they do not line up with God’s will for you. Prayers that are not aligned with God’s will are not going to be answered. That’s why starting with worship and praise sets us in the right direction. It gives us the posture of humility and sets us up to align our will with His will. We move from praying, “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Thy name,” right into “Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.”

If we regularly pray, ***“MY kingdom come, MY will be done,”*** we should not be surprised that those prayers go unanswered. Jesus said that prayer is like talking to your Father. That’s the beginning of the Lord’s prayer, “Our FATHER.”

Let’s say your child or grandchild comes to you and says, “Poppy” (or whatever your quirky name is), “Poppy, Grammy, would you ***buy me a Ferrari***?” What would you say? What would you think?

Well, first of all, you are seven - so a car probably isn’t the best plan for you right now. Second, you can ask me all you want for a Ferrari, but a Corolla is probably more in the realm of possibility - or a Buick Century or something.

Oh, how often do we go to the Lord asking for a Ferrari! And the Lord, our Father, smiles down at us and says, “I don’t think you’re ready for a Ferrari just now… And even if I gave it to you, it really wouldn’t be the best thing for you.”

***What is YOUR Ferrari prayer request right now?*** What are you asking for from the Lord? Have you taken the time to really surrender that request to the sovereign wisdom and will of God?

The believers are praying God’s Word here. They are praying **Psalm chapter 2** - which is a very significant chapter in Scripture. And they set the example for us for how to align our will with God’s will - ***PRAY SCRIPTURE***. If your only prayer time is praying through YOUR LISTS and YOUR REQUESTS, you may find your prayers not answered very often. But if you use Scripture to guide how you pray for your lists of people and requests, I bet you will see those prayers get answered far more often.

***Use the Lord’s prayer.*** Use Psalm 23 and other Psalms. Use the prayers of Paul in the New Testament or the prayers of the Old Testament heroes like Daniel, Nehemiah, Moses and others. Pray Scripture.

If you were **lost in the wilderness** but you knew there was a village to the west of your position, you would orient toward the setting sun and keep walking that direction until you came to that village. ***The compass point for us as believers is God’s Word.*** **God’s Word aligns us with God’s Will.**

In this case the disciples needed clear direction about whether to stop talking and preaching about Jesus or whether to keep on preaching the name of Jesus. Psalm 2 gave them crystal clear guidance on that point. Peter and John had already said, “We must obey God rather than people.” And Psalm 2 makes that exact point.

It contrasts the kings of the earth, who rage against God and against Israel, with God-fearing believers who worship and serve the Lord. Psalm 2 is a strong and prophetic WARNING to all people in positions of authority to use that influence in service to God or else they will answer to King Jesus one day. Does Psalm 2 say JESUS? Pretty much!

**Practices of Prevailing Prayer:**

1. Align with God’s sovereign **Will**

“The rulers take counsel together against the Lord and against his Anointed… ‘I have set my King on Zion… You are my Son…’” Psalm 2:2,6-7

The Anointed One was the Messiah, the coming Savior of Israel. Kings, like David, were anointed to lead the nation. But this prophecy of the coming Messiah King names Him as the Son of Yahweh! So, yes, Psalm 2 speaks clearly and directly about Jesus. And that’s certainly what the apostles meant in Acts 4.

**Practices of Prevailing Prayer:**

1. Align with God’s sovereign **Will**

“In this city were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate.” Acts 4:27

***Psalm 2 was directly fulfilled*** in Jesus’ trial and execution under Herod and Pilate, with approval from the Jews and Romans. Everyone ganged up on the Messiah, the Anointed One, and called for His crucifixion. The nations RAGED against Him and set themselves against Him, mocking Him as “the King of the Jews,” and calling on Him as Savior to save Himself.

But Jesus didn’t come to save Himself. He came to save all of us - including those who crucified Him.

**Practices of Prevailing Prayer:**

1. Align with God’s sovereign **Will**

“Herod and Pontius Pilate… to do what your hand and your plan had predestined to take place.” Acts 4:28

This was God’s plan from the very beginning - to sacrifice His only Son in payment for the sins of mankind. It wasn’t Herod’s plan or Pilate’s plan - they were pawns in a much bigger design. Both tried to work their own will, but their efforts could not overcome God’s sovereign will. And ultimately since neither repented, they died in opposition to the will of God - which is the ultimate folly.

That is the message of Psalm 2.

**The Gospel in Psalm 2:**

* Opposing Jesus is the ultimate **Folly**

“You shall break [the nations] with a rod of iron… Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and you perish in the way…” Psalm 2:9,12

**Jesus is the Anointed King**, the One appointed by God the Father to rule over all things and all people forever. He is the Judge assigned to determine the eternal state of every soul. So don’t fear Kings like Herod and Pilate. Fear Jesus! Fear the ultimate King! The One with authority over your soul.

It is the essence of all foolishness to oppose someone in authority over you. If a ***policeman pulls you over*** for speeding in a school zone (just for one random, hypothetical example) you don’t yell at him for messing up your schedule - you apologize profusely and with great humility and respect say, “Oh, I’m so sorry - I didn’t realize it was a school zone even though I literally just dropped my boys off at school.” And if you are lucky, as I was *a very long time ago when this happened last year*, the nice officer will let you off with a warning.

If it’s dumb to be disrespectful to a police officer, ***it is INSANE to dishonor Jesus***. The officer can write you a ticket for a couple hundred dollars. Jesus will determine the fate of your eternal soul.

But Psalm 2 ends with a positive note of blessing.

**The Gospel in Psalm 2:**

* Serving Jesus is the ultimate **Blessing**

“Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son… Blessed are all who take refuge in him.” Psalm 2:11-12

***Jesus Christ is Lord!*** He is the sovereign ruler over all things and He is coming back soon to judge the living and the dead. It is the height of insanity to reject or defy Jesus. And it is the height of wisdom and joy to worship and serve and trust in Jesus. That is where every spiritual blessing is found - IN CHRIST.

***Jesus is the Anointed One*** - from eternity past God the Father designated God the Son as the One who would give His perfect, infinitely valuable life on the cross for you and me. Serve Jesus with fear. Rejoice in Him with a trembling heart. Consider the cost of your salvation - the precious blood of Jesus!

**Bow before King Jesus** and kiss His royal ring as a sign of affection and submission. In ancient times alliances were made in this way. You would swear allegiance to a local king and pay tribute to earn his protection. If you chose the wrong king to align with it could cost you everything. If you didn’t adequately show your faithfulness and devotion to this king he might betray your agreement and turn against you.

The point for prayer is to ***ALIGN your will with the will of Jesus.*** Bow before King Jesus when you pray and submit your will to His. This is what Jesus did in the Garden of Gethsemane praying, “Not my will but yours be done.” That is our model for prayer. “Your kingdom come, your will be done.”

Let’s pray together, professing our confidence in Jesus as commitment to pursuing HIS will!

**Pray to align w/ Jesus’ will.**

Sing ***Beautiful Name*** or ***Forever*** or ***In Christ Alone***

To prevail in prayer we acknowledge God’s sovereign glory, we align with God’s sovereign will and third:

**Practices of Prevailing Prayer:**

1. Ask for God’s sovereign **Power**

“And now, Lord, look upon their threats and grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness.” Acts 4:29

In response to threats from powerful religious leaders, **the early Christians PRAYED**. They came together in unified faith and called on the Lord. This is an important corrective to our independence and self-sufficiency. Oh, how we need to learn the importance of prayer!

***Apart from Jesus, we can do NOTHING***. He is the vine, we are the branches. And yet we operate day to day as if we are vine enough. Instead, may we follow the example of the apostles and bring our concerns and fears to the Lord, not worrying about things but praying about the things that worry us, and asking the Lord to empower us to continue to do His work even when people oppose it.

**Practices of Prevailing Prayer:**

1. Ask for God’s sovereign **Power** - in humble, unified faith

“And when they heard it, they lifted their voices together to God…” Acts 4:24

After Peter and John shared what had happened, **the first response** of the believers was to bow their heads together in prayer. They didn’t rush out to start a petition. They didn’t write a scathing letter to the High Priest. They didn’t appeal to the Sanhedrin. They didn’t call in Nicodemus, who was on the Sanhedrin and was a believer.

They prayed.

Oh, don’t we rush to all kinds of **human solutions** first!

* When you struggle with **money** do you start scrambling to find a little here, a little there, or do you pray?
* When you struggle in your **marriage**, do you bicker and fight, trying to get your way, or do you pray?
* When you struggle with your **work**, do you fuss and complain to anyone who will listen, or do you pray?
* When you have **worries and fears**, do you spread them to all of your friends or do you get with a friend TO PRAY?

There is more power in a one minute prayer than in one hour of worrying. There is more hope and peace and encouragement in asking a friend to PRAY for you than in complaining to each other for an hour. There is WAY more hope and power in spending time in PRAYER in your small group rather than in talking about politics for an hour and the latest silliness being harped on by the media.

**Practices of Prevailing Prayer:**

1. Ask for God’s sovereign **Power** - in humble, unified, obedient faith

“And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness.” Acts 4:31

They asked God for power and boldness, and when He gave them that power and boldness they went right back out and **continued to preach**. They knew Jesus had sent them to proclaim His victory over sin and death. They knew persecution and opposition would come.

* They acknowledged God’s sovereign glory and trusted in His control over all things - praying to our Father in heaven and asking that His name be honored.
* They aligned their will with God’s sovereign will - praying that His kingdom would come and His will would be done.
* And they asked for God’s sovereign power - coming together in humble, unified, obedient faith.

That is our model for prevailing prayer!

**Darin prays**

Let’s say the Lord’s Prayer together - would you stand with me as we pray this?

**Pray the Lord’s Prayer** (This version):

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.

**Closing songs**