

Subject: Thank God for Prayer Meeting

Scripture: Acts 4:23-33

Churches have all kinds of meetings, but none is more important than the prayer meeting. Although some things about the church have changed since NT times, some things never change. God's Word never changes. Jesus Christ never changes. The Gospel and salvation never change. And the need for prayer meetings has not changed. A church can do more than pray, but a church can do nothing unless it first prays.

1. The PRIORITY of prayer

There's an old saying, "Birds of a feather flock together." Christians need to meet together with other Christians for worship, prayer, study, and encouragement. The first church saw the need of praying together. Prayer was not an option, but a necessity. It has been said that the church advances on its knees. When we read about the church in the book of Acts we can see how important prayer was.

Acts 1:14 – After Christ ascended to heaven they met in the upper room for prayer.

Acts 1:24 – The disciples prayed for God to show them who should replace Judas.

Acts 2:42 – After 3,000 were saved and baptized, *they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.*

Acts 4:24 – When Peter and John were released by the religious leaders, *they lifted up their voice to God with one accord.*

Acts 6:4 – *(The twelve apostles said) we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word.*

Acts 7:59 – Stephen prayed as he was being stoned to death.

Acts 8:15-17 – Peter and John prayed for the Samaritans who believed.

Acts 9:11-17 – After his conversion, Paul prayed and God sent Ananias to help him.

Acts 9:40 – Peter prayed and Dorcas was raised to life and many believed on the Lord.

Acts 10:9 – Peter was praying when God gave him a vision to go and minister to Cornelius.

Acts 12:5 – When Peter was in jail, fellow believers prayed for him and God delivered him.

Acts 13:3 – The prophets and teachers at Antioch fasted and prayed and then sent Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey.

Acts 14:23 – Paul and Barnabas prayed for those who had believed.

And that's only the first half of the book of Acts.

In our text (Acts 4) these believers had been threatened and warned to stop preaching and teaching in the name of Jesus. They could have had been discouraged, had a pity party, or

just quit, but instead they had a prayer meeting. The first thing they did was tell their brothers and sisters in Christ what happened and then they prayed. They didn't worry—they prayed. They didn't give up—they prayed. They didn't lose heart and get discouraged—they prayed. They didn't protest—they prayed.

Abraham Lincoln said, "I have been driven many times to my knees by the overwhelming conviction that I had nowhere else to go."

2. The PATTERN of prayer

We can learn some things from the way they prayed.

A. They focused on God's power (vs. 24)

He is Lord of all. The word here is *despotes*, which means Absolute Master or Ruler. Their focus was on God's almighty power and control over all things. He is the creator of heaven and earth and the sea, and all creatures. Faith in God as Creator is the foundation of all faith.

Hebrews 11:3 *Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear.*

Albert Edward Day said, "The function of prayer is to set God at the center of attention." Jesus taught us to pray like this in the model prayer:

Matthew 6:9-10⁹ *After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name.*¹⁰ *Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.*

Praying enables us to see things in the proper perspective. These believers heard the threats of the Sanhedrin, but they went to the throne of God. All human threats seemed small in comparison to God's power.

B. They remembered God's Word (vs. 25-28)

In their prayer they quoted from Psalm 2, a prophetic psalm about the Messiah. God was not taken by surprise when Jesus was rejected and crucified. All this was foreknown and predicted in Scripture. God spoke through the mouth of David and predicted the world's rejection and hatred of Christ. We need to base our prayers on God's Word. The best prayers are when we pray God's words back to Him. Their prayer is an example of what Jesus said.

John 15:7 *If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you.*

We must heed what God says in Scripture if we want Him to heed what we say in prayer.

- They asked for God's blessing (vs. 29-30)

God does whatever He desires to do. He is sovereign (in control). He rules and overrules in the affairs of men. God even uses the wicked plans of men to accomplish His purpose.

*Have faith in God though all else fail about you.
Have faith in God; He provides for His own.*

He cannot fail though all kingdoms shall perish; He rules, He reigns upon His throne.

*Have faith in God; He's on His throne. Have faith in God; He watches o'er His own.
He cannot fail. He must prevail. Have faith in God, have faith in God.*

The threats made against the believers were real. These religious leaders were the same people who murdered Jesus, and they wouldn't hesitate to kill His disciples. Jesus had warned His disciples of trouble.

John 16:33 *These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.*

Did these persecuted believers ask for comfort or safety? No, they asked for boldness to speak God's words, which was the very thing that got them in trouble in the first place.

Phillips Brooks said, "Do not pray for tasks equal to your powers. Pray for powers equal to your tasks."

3. The POWER of prayer (vs. 31-33)

The answer to their prayer came suddenly. Something special happens when God's people pray. Prayer moves the hand that moves the world. Prayer can do anything God can do, and God can do anything. When these believers prayed, three things happened:

- A. The place was shaken – This was physical sign that God's presence was with them.
- B. The people were strengthened – This was the spiritual control of God's Spirit in them.
- C. The truth was spoken – This was the answer to their only request (vs. 29).

They spoke God's word with boldness. They testified of the resurrection of Christ with great power and great grace upon them.

R. A. Torrey said, "Pray for great things, expect great things, work for great things, but above all, pray." When God's people pray, there's no limit to what God will do.

A praying church has great unity (vs. 32), great power (vs. 33), great grace (vs. 33) and great generosity (vs. 34-37). A praying church is a strong church, a confident church, a faithful church, and a blessed church.

What is the difference between the church back then and the church today? They had needs, and we have needs. The world rejected them, and the world doesn't like us either. They met together and prayed, and we meet together and pray. They prayed to God who is sovereign, the Creator of all things, the God who inspired Scripture, and always accomplishes His will. We pray to the same God.

May God help us to make prayer a priority, to follow the biblical pattern in our prayers, and to have confidence that God will hear and answer prayers in His will and in His perfect timing.