

The Believers' Prayer

Acts 4:23-31 NIV

In this message from Acts, chapter 4, we are going to look at the believer's prayer that followed Peter and John's release, and part of that prayer that could be called a divine appointment.

In verses 18-22 of Acts 4, Peter and John are forbidden to speak anymore in the name of Jesus. They have waited outside the courtroom. The judges have decided on a course of action. Peter and John were called back inside to hear the decision of the council. Verses 19 and 20 record the response to the Sanhedrin.

Reese's commentary on Acts quotes Don DeWalt's adaptation on verses 19 and 20:

"Put yourselves in our place: suppose God told you to do one thing, and man told you to do another – which one would you obey? Well, that is exactly our situation. Jesus Christ whom we beheld risen from the dead, commissioned us to tell of his resurrection and saving power; now you tell us not to speak the very thing the risen Lord told us to speak. You be the judge. To whom should we hearken?"

Unable to come up with a way to punish Peter and John without losing face with the people, the Sanhedrin made further threats, and then let them go.

Beginning with verse 23: **On their release, Peter and John went back to their own people and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said to them.** ²⁴ **When they heard this, they raised their voices together in prayer to God. "Sovereign Lord," they said, "you made the heaven and the earth and the sea, and everything in them.** ²⁵ **You spoke by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of your servant, our father David:**

"Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? ²⁶ The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against the Lord and against his Anointed One."^{[c]»[d]}

²⁷ **Indeed Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people^[e] of Israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed. ²⁸ They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen. ²⁹ Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. ³⁰ Stretch out your hand to heal and perform miraculous signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus."**

³¹ **After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and**

spoke the word of God boldly. (Acts 4:23-31)

Before we get to the prayer, there are a couple of questions we have to consider. Where is Luke telling us that Peter and John went after their release? Back to the temple or back to the place where they were staying? Who would be included in the group 'own people' or 'own companions' depending on your translation? Who received the report concerning the threats?

If the reference to 'own people' now included as many as five thousand believers, the temple area would be the place to where they likely returned. The other choice for own people or own companions is the Twelve or possibly the group of one-hundred and twenty mentioned in Acts 1:15.

My thinking would be that they went home – that is, the place where they were staying in the city. And here is why I think that. If I had just spent the night in a jail that most likely was void of any amenities, I think that I would want to go where I could freshen up a bit.

However, Luke is not specific, so each of us can make up our own mind who 'own people' or 'own companions' would include.

Moving to the prayer, a couple of things to note:

Remember that the book of Acts is the history of how the faith spread; how the Spirit of God directed the church as a whole as well as empowering the individual believer.

Luke writes an account that follows his Gospel record of Jesus' ministry being passed on to his disciples. They were to glorify God, proclaim the resurrection of Jesus and fulfill the Great Commission.

And, they would not have to rely on their own ability or man-made programs and schemes. They would be given power.

The Greek word for Spirit comes from a word that means 'to breathe' or 'to blow.' It can refer to wind or life itself. Throughout Luke's Gospel and Acts, the relationship between Jesus, the Spirit, the Church, and the individual believer is made known.

During Jesus earthly ministry, the disciples were taught and directed by Jesus; now, after his resurrection and return home, the disciples are directed by the Holy Spirit, which today also includes His 'God-breathed' written Word.

Now, to the prayer: in verse 24 - Luke indicates that this is a group, audible prayer. And they begin with an unusual word.

O Lord or Sovereign Lord – in the original language, this is not the most commonly used word for Lord, which would be *kurios*. The word used here is *despota*; in English despot. This refers to the highest magistrate or officer with absolute ruling power.

The Sanhedrin tried to make Peter and John believe that they were *despota*, but Peter and John knew better. And, so does this group of believers.

The next thing to note is the acknowledgment by the group that God has foreseen everything that had just happened. Through David, in Psalm 2, the Holy Spirit spoke of the intense resistance to Messiah.

**Why do the nations rage
and the peoples plot in vain?**

Our word rage translates a word that literally means, "to neigh like a horse, to prance or stamp the ground, to put on lofty airs."

The group then, in their prayer and praise, makes application of Psalm 2 by the actions of Herod Antipas, Pontius Pilate, the Gentiles, and the people of Israel. What God spoke by the Holy Spirit through David and then came to pass, we can call a divine appointment.

In their praise of God, the group acknowledged His sovereign rule; His plan overrules the plan of man. God rules absolutely. In the scheme of things, God

planned, and then orchestrated this event involving Peter and John, just as He planned Messiah's Life and death.

Peter and John placed their faith, and therefore their lives, in the hands of Jesus, making themselves available for this divine appointment. They didn't have to keep the appointment. It was their choice.

Divine appointment is not a Biblical term. But, here are some scriptures that help define the idea behind a divine appointment.

⁹ In his heart a man plans his course, but the Lord determines his steps. (Proverbs 16:9)

Now listen, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money." ¹⁴ Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. ¹⁵ Instead, you ought to say, "If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that." ¹⁶ As it is, you boast and brag. All such boasting is evil. ¹⁷ Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, sins. (James 4:13-17)

Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; ⁶ in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight. (Proverbs 3:5-6)

These passages, and others, teach us that God can and will direct our path, if we allow him – divine appointments.

Here are a few illustrations:

Remember the ten lepers in Luke 17? They called out to Jesus and ask to be healed. ¹⁴ **When he saw them, he said, “Go, show yourselves to the priests.” And as they went, they were cleansed. (Luke 17:14)**

They were there; Jesus was there; divine appointment or luck? What if they had not ask, or not headed for the priests when told to do so?

How about the two blind men in Matthew 20? They shouted for mercy. ³¹ **The crowd rebuked them and told them to be quiet, but they shouted all the louder, “Lord, Son of David, have mercy on us!” (Matthew 20:13)**

They were there; Jesus was there; divine appointment or luck? What if they would have listened to the crowd and stopped shouting? Would Jesus have healed them anyway?

Would you consider the instruction that we have in scripture *‘to ask boldly’* a divine appointment?

Do you remember the woman who risked criticism from the religious leaders by anointing Jesus’ feet with perfume and tears, then drying them with her hair?

³⁹ **When the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, “If this man were a prophet, he would know who is touching him and what kind of woman she is—that she is a sinner.” (Luke 7:39)**

If being a sinner disqualifies us from service and divine appointments, we are all in trouble, aren’t we?

There are divine appointments to bless and be blessed; to witness; to grow from mistakes and avoid future mistakes.

So, how do we recognize divine appointments and not miss the opportunities that they offer? The following illustration might help.

One day a woman was rushing home from a doctor’s appointment. The doctor had been somewhat delayed at the hospital, and the lab work took a little longer than usual so by the time she left the clinic she was running quite a bit behind schedule. She still had to pick up her prescription, pick up the children from the baby-sitter, and get home and make supper, all in time to make it to the prayer meeting at her church that evening.

As she began to circle the busy Wal-Mart parking lot, looking for a space, the windows of heaven were opened and a downpour began. While she wasn’t usually the type to bother God with small problems, she began to pray as she turned down the row closest to the front door. “Lord, you know what kind of a day I’ve had, and there’s still an awful lot to do.

Could you please grant me a parking space right away, oh, and close to the building so I don’t get soaked.”

The words weren’t even completely out of her mouth when she saw the backup lights of a car come on at the end of the row. It was the best space in the whole parking lot, right next to the handicap spots and straight out from the front door. She made straight for it and as she pulled in, she said, “never mind God, something just opened up.”

Divine appointments: they can be the little things we often overlook.

Dave, that’s silly. A parking place at Wal-Mart a divine appointment? Really?

Well, does God direct your steps or not? Wednesday evening Bible study was about how deeply Jesus cared about Mary, Martha, and Lazarus.

Does God only care about the big picture, or is he in the small details of your life?

Let’s consider our ultimate example; Jesus’ relationship with the Father and Holy Spirit.

John 12:49-50, Jesus said; **For I did not speak of my own accord, but the Father who sent me commanded me what to say and how to say it. ⁵⁰ I know that his command leads to eternal life. So whatever I say is just what the Father has told me to say.” (John 12:49-50)**

In John 14, Philip said, “Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us.”

⁹ Jesus answered: “Don’t you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. (John 14:8-9)

Just before his arrest, concerning the work of the Holy Spirit, in John 16, Jesus told his disciples; **But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come.** ¹⁴ He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you. ¹⁵ All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will take from what is mine and make it known to you. (John 16:13-15)

Reading passages like these, I ask myself the question: is the relationship Jesus described just for the Twelve, a select few, or for all believers? I believe Luke answers that question in Acts.

I believe that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit want to have a deep, detailed, step-by-step, decision-by-decision, relationship with all who come to faith in Jesus.

This does not mean that we become a robot or mindless zombie. We still have our freedom of choice.

I understand if you have a problem with ‘divine appointment’ since it is not a

Biblical term. I also understand if you think that it is silly to believe that a parking spot on a rainy afternoon in a Wal-Mart parking lot could be a divine appointment. That comes under freedom of choice.

The more we live in an awareness of how deeply Jesus cares about each of us, our perspective may change as to what we may consider insignificant details of everyday life.

We are certain that a divine appointment awaits everyone: resurrection of the dead and judgment. But, how about here and now? How about this afternoon, or this week? Will God have divine appointments waiting for us that could bring him glory, proclaim the resurrection of Jesus and fulfill the Great Commission if we just pay attention and make ourselves available?

I believe that these appointments will come if we pray, make ourselves available, and are willing to speak the word of God boldly.