



**Sermon Text:** Acts 4:23-31

Sermon Date: October 1, 2017

John Calvin called prayer, “the chief exercise of faith.” Prayer is how our true faith expresses itself. In prayer what we say we believe about God is stripped bare so that our actual beliefs are exposed. On Sunday, we examined what our prayers reveal about our actual beliefs as we looked at the early church’s prayer in Acts 4.

### **WHO IS GOD TO YOU? (VERSE 23)**

Immediately upon hearing the threats of the Sanhedrin, the church responds in prayer. Prayer was their first impulse, not their last resort. In their prayer we see who they knew God was.

1. **The Sovereign Lord.** They pray to the “Sovereign Lord, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them.” They rehearse the reality of God’s enormity. He is . . . GOD! So while the religious leaders threaten, the church takes their case to the highest court of appeal in the Universe.
2. **A Loving Father.** By eagerly approaching God in prayer—instead of shying away—we see they knew God was a loving father. Michael Reeves says, “Our instinct is to think of the Almighty in holy transcendence—God without Christ. But Christ has brought this holy God to be our open-armed Father.” When we pray to God as our Father (and *really* mean it) we grasp the gospel. We pray, as Calvin said, as if we are praying through Jesus’ mouth.

### **HOW DOES GOD WORK IN THE WORLD? (VERSES 25 – 28)**

Often the unspoken assumption of our prayers is that suffering and opposition should not happen. And that while God will “recalculate” to get us to the final destination, our circumstances have gone off course. Yet the church prayed knowing that God accomplishes His purposes in all things, even in opposition. While the religious leaders raged and plotted against Jesus, their sinful rebellion merely accomplished whatever God’s hand and God’s plan “had predestined to take place.” In the religious leader’s threats, God is still in control. He has a plan. Darrel Bock says, “Given the fact that God is working out his plan, the tone of the prayer is very calm.”

### **WHAT DO YOU WANT GOD TO DO? (VERSES 29 – 31)**

What are your prayer requests? Often we assume that if God really loves us, He will make our circumstances better. Yet the church at Jerusalem doesn’t pray for protection or the removal of the threat: They pray for boldness. They ask for God to keep doing what He has been doing and to embolden them to keep doing what they have been doing. Their primary desire was not security but the success of the gospel—to make disciples everywhere by exalting Christ in everything.

### **LOOK TO CHRIST ALONE**

Most Christians do not feel adequate in prayer. We feel our failures here. We must remember the good news of the gospel. I am so thankful that my right standing with God does not depend upon my prayer life. I rejoice that God’s eagerness to hear from me is not in response to my eagerness to go to Him. Our standing before God is Christ alone. In Him, even though we don’t deserve it, God delights to hear our prayers and respond for His glory.

### **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. What stood out to you from the sermon and the biblical text from this Sunday?
2. What do your prayers reveal about what you believe about God? Do you really believe He is the Sovereign Lord *and* a loving Father?
3. What do your prayers reveal about how you think God works in the world? Are your prayers calm and confident knowing that even in great difficulty God is working out his plan?
4. What do your prayer requests reveal about your priorities?