

# The Great Awakening

## Lesson 7—Acts 4:23-37

### PARTICIPANT'S GUIDE

This week's lesson shows two amazing beliefs of the early Christians in action: **First** is their trust in God's sovereignty expressed through prayer, and **second** is their love for one another that surpasses their love for their material possessions. Let's look at these one at a time.

**Reminder of last week's story:** Peter and John have healed a man in the temple in chapter 3. In all the excitement over that miracle, Peter takes the opportunity to proclaim the gospel of Jesus with an emphasis on the resurrection. In chapter 4, the Sadducees hear about this miracle and the subsequent sermon and decide to arrest Peter and John because they did not believe in the resurrection, let alone in Jesus. After interrogating Peter and John, they command them not to preach in Jesus' name again. Well, you know their answer: *"Whether it is right in the sight of God to give heed to you rather than to God, you be the judge; for we cannot stop speaking about what we have seen and heard."*

#### Read Acts 4:23-31

1. Immediately upon hearing about the opposition of the Jewish leadership to the Apostles and their message, the Church went directly to prayer. Is that typically our first response when life gets tough? If we are slow to pray during times like that, what could be the lies we believe about ourselves and about God that keep us from turning to Him?

2. As we come to verse 24, let's discuss two things that show us what these Jewish followers of Jesus Christ believed about their God.

➤ *Compare translations of verse 24 in regards to how they address God at the beginning of their prayer:*

NASB	O Lord
NIV	Sovereign Lord

Other translations:

The Greek word is **despoteæs**. This is where we get our word *despot*. While the 21<sup>st</sup> century meaning of this word refers to someone who is an evil dictator, the New Testament meaning does not carry that connotation. The word is used several times in the New Testament to refer to human slave owners; the word carries with it the meaning of *absolute ownership and uncontrolled power over some else*. It is used of Jesus in Jude 4 and also possibly in 2 Peter 2:1 and Revelation 6:10 (though these might be referring to the Father).

- *What can we conclude about their beliefs regarding **who they are** and **who God is** by their use of this word? Do we believe these same things?*

3. They open their prayer in verse 24 with a quote from Psalm 146:6. Read all of Psalm 146 and discuss how this psalm might inform them about **who they are** and **who God is** in the context of being oppressed by an ungodly authority.

- *There should be many responses to this psalm, but one of them should be, “**Wow, we have a great God for our master!**” Do you agree? Why or why not?*

4. Next in their prayer, they quote Psalm 2. **Read Psalm 2:1-6** to see the fuller context of this quote. Again, discuss how this psalm informed these Christians’ beliefs about who God is and who they were.

### **Reread Acts 4:27-28**

These verses show us how they applied all the above beliefs we have been discussing. That belief could simply be described as *God is sovereign over His entire creation, even over the decisions of responsible human beings*. Too often we want to soft-sell the sovereignty of God in order to protect the free will of man. As we discussed back in Acts 2:22-23, we need to allow both truths to stand—let’s not diminish one to defend the other. This passage is about as strong as it can be regarding the Sovereignty of God: **HE IS IN CONTROL OF EVERYTHING.**

5. Below, discuss the attributes of God required for Him to be a good, sovereign God. Also, discuss how these relate to God orchestrating Christ’s crucifixion and resurrection.

If God is sovereign, it means He must have:

- **All power** (omnipotence)
- **All knowledge** (omniscience)
- **Presence everywhere** (omnipresence)
- **All wisdom** (omniscience)
- **All good** (omnibenevolence)

We could go on and on. *What if God lacked one or more of these...what kind of God would He be?*

6. It is evident that these early believers completely trusted in God's sovereign control of both *Christ's life and death* **and** *their life and death*. Do we have the same faith in that sovereign God when our lives face difficulties? In sickness? Temptation? Death? Talk through these.

- *Can you now see how your belief about **who God is** is the most important thing about you? Explain.*

#### **Reread Acts 4:29-31**

7. In the midst of opposition, the Church prayed to their sovereign God to enable them to be faithful, bold witnesses. In unison, repeat the memory verse from Acts 1:8.

- *If we serve this same sovereign God, what should be our response whether we are facing opposition or we are living in peace? Share some of the experiences you have had in spreading the gospel—what kind of opposition have you faced.*

#### **Read Acts 4:32-37**

8. Look at the wording of verse 32 from the ESV:

*“Now the **full number** of those who believe were of **one heart and soul**, and **no one** said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, **but they had everything in common.**”*

This group of believers functioned as one. Their concern for one another was not simply a bumper sticker cliché; they actually lived it out. There is nothing in the text that required them to sell their property and share it. **They simply did it.** It appears it was a natural response to the grace of God in their lives.

- Do we not tend to teach this by saying, *“If God calls us to do this, we should be willing...”*? We should agree with this statement, but sometimes it is used for a reason not to share: *“God isn’t calling me to do that.”* Have you heard that before?
- Do you think maybe we rationalize away a generosity that should be natural to us? Why do you suppose we are reluctant to share our surplus?

9. If God is truly sovereign, how should this affect our fears of being generous to others? What does it say about our own selfishness?

**Close this study by reading Matthew 6:25-34; then pray for our faith in our sovereign God to be radically increased.**