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**THE FIRST COMMUNITY PRAYER. AN EXEGETICAL STUDY OF ACTS 4:23-31**

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## Abstract

The study on “The first community prayer. An exegetical study of Acts 4:23-31” establishes that the first prayer of the Christian community in Acts 4:23-31 is a prayer of Lamentation. After the death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus the faithful eleven, confident women and some of Jesus’ immediate relatives were constantly devoting themselves to prayer. People witnessed the miraculous works performed by the disciples through the Holy Spirit. These works came to the notice of the authority especially when Peter healed the lame man in the name of Jesus at the temple gate.

The authorities were feared because of the attention they got and the amazement among the crowds. They arrested Peter and John out of that fear and presented them before the Sanhedrin. Peter saw it as an opportunity and preached about Jesus’ death, resurrection and ascension. They attributed the healing of the lame man from birth to the name of Jesus. This further threatened the power structure of the earthly authority. That is why they reprimanded them for using the name of Jesus. Even though the apostles were not compliant with their orders, the authorities could not take action due to the public support they had and the miracle was evident as the healed man was standing with them. Finally, the Sanhedrin had to release Peter and John with a stern warning not to speak or teach in the name of Jesus. If they do, they will invoke persecution.

After their release, they went back to their own people and narrated the ordeal they had endured. They keenly felt the severity of the first persecution. The life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus were weighing heavily on their minds. During all these events, Jesus prayed and gained strength from His prayer. Especially, Jesus prayed the prayer of lamentation at Gethsemane (Lk 22:39-46) and on the cross (Lk 23:34, 46).

The first Christian community imitated Jesus and they too prayed in a similar manner. Their prayer pattern resembled that of the Old Testament prayer of lamentation. As with any prayer of lamentation, their prayer does not question whether God is with them but presupposes it and has a rhetorical force to persuade God to help them. They tried to persuade in such a way that together they prayed to invoke God as Δέσποτα, they described their problems before God, they said the motive why God should hear their prayer, they asserted their innocence, they put forward their petition asking strength to proclaim the word of God and perform signs and wonders in the name of Jesus. Finally their prayer was answered with the sign of earthquake and they filled with the Holy Spirit and received the strength to continue to preach the Gospel.

Just like Tobit (3:1-17), Susanna (Dan 13:42-44), Ruth (1:20-21), Esther (14:1-19), Jeremiah (1:4-10 and 15:15-21) and the Psalmist (6, 13, 22, 31, 42, 51, 69, 77, 102, 130) were under dire stress and prayed the prayer of lamentation, so too does the early Christian community pray the prayer of lamentation in the face of persecution. This is the first instance of persecution in Acts of the Apostles that highlights this dreadful situation, necessitating a prayer of lamentation.

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