

Living on a Prayer I Thessalonians 5:17

Introduction

Washington D.C. was abuzz the morning of June 6, 1944. Union Station was filled with its usual flow of crowds coming and going – trying to connect with their respective trains. For weeks there had been rumors of an impending D-Day when allied forces would invade Europe and seek to turn the tide of WW II. On this morning – something out of the ordinary occurred on the train platform. There was no loudspeaker announcement – there was no radio broadcast or newsboy shouting - - - but somehow news got out to the commuters that the invasion had begun – the American boys were storming the beaches of Normandy.

In the midst of the hustle and bustle – a woman suddenly decided to drop to her knees and folded her hands in prayer. Near her another man knelt down. Then another and another – until all throughout the station – people knelt in silent prayer beside the hard wooden benches. A railroad station in our nation’s capital became a house of prayer.

Then slowly – the woman rose to her feet and so did the others. Soon – Union Station – as if someone had touched a pause button - - returned back to its regular sights and sounds again. - - - All across America people were pausing to pray. The NYSE opened the day with a time of prayer. The NY Daily News ran the Lord’s Prayer on its front page.

That Night – FDR – in his radio address called upon all Americans to join him in prayer

There are times when the only appropriate thing to do is to pray

But as Paul points out here - - - we ought not reserve prayer for only special occasions!

He calls us here to

I Thessalonians 5:17 - 'Pray without ceasing.'

David Jeremiah: 'Paul's exhortation to pray without ceasing is not a charge to constantly walk around muttering prayers but rather to have a life characterized by prayer. God's people are quick to pray in all circumstances, not only when emergencies arise.'

Amazon books which sells e-books - - - keeps track of the most highlighted passages in those books. For the bible - - - they revealed the most highlighted passage: Not John 3:16 / Not Psalm 23 - - - but Philippians 4:6, 7

Philippians 4:6, 7 - 'Be anxious for nothing but in everything through prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God. And the

peace of God which surpasses all understanding shall guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.'

The most highlighted verse in the Bible – is a call to prayer

What is prayer?

The Westminster Shorter Catechism: 'Prayer is an offering up of our desires unto God for things agreeable to His will, in the name of Christ, with confession of our sins and thankful acknowledgement of His mercies.'

If Christianity is warfare – [and it is] - - - one of our weapons is that of prayer

We pray to enlist God's aid in the fight against sin – without using this weapon – we will suffer

John Owen: 'If we do not abide in prayer we will abide in temptation.'

We pray to enjoy fellowship with God

Charles Spurgeon: 'Prayer is the longing of the soul to hold communion with the Most High, the desire of the heart to obtain blessings at His hand.'

This morning we will expand off of Paul's exhortation to pray without ceasing - - - and remind ourselves of several biblical reasons to do just that

I. Prayer is Essential - Luke 18:1-8

The key to this parable is found in verse 1 and verse 8 - - - the point: continue in prayer / prayer is a primary indicator of faith

As Christians – we believe in the power of prayer

James 5:16 - 'The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much.'

Prayer is a privilege of the redeemed - - - to call upon their Father not only in their hour of need - - - but at all times and in all places

We know God has all kinds of resources and might to do what we ask

James 5:17-18 - 'Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain; and it did not rain on the earth for three years and six months. And he prayed again and the sky poured rain, and the earth produced its fruit.'

It is the people of faith who make use of prayer – because they have faith that God hears – and answers according to His will

When Nehemiah heard of the broken-down condition of Jerusalem and its walls - - - he sat down to weep and to pray

When Hezekiah was being attacked by the King of Assyria – he went to prayer

When Hannah was overwhelmed her burdens – she went to the temple to pray

When Peter was tossed in prison – the people of God went to prayer

Corrie Ten boom: 'The wonderful thing about praying is that you leave a world of not being able to do something, and enter God's realm where everything is possible. He specializes in the impossible. Nothing is too great for His almighty power. Nothing is too small for His love.'

Jesus ends this parable with a kind of challenge - - - 'When the Son of Man returns – will He find faith on the earth?'

i.e. – will He find people who call on God day and night? / who seek His mercies / who enlist His aid / who believe God is there and is a God who hears?

Owen Wilson who was a pilot – offered as a birthday present – to his friend – to take him up flying – in his 2 seater plane. The men took off after church on Sunday – they flew around hills and over gorgeous landscapes around the northern tip of New Zealand – but as they crossed a tall mountain – the engine sputtered and died. The plane began losing altitude – at that point – Wilson the pilot could see nothing but steep mountain sides descending into the sea.

Both men were Christians – and they prayed instantly and earnestly. Stubbs – who had grown up in a pastor's home prayed out loud – while Wilson handled the planes controls. When it appeared the two would fly into the side of a mountain – Stubbs cried out, 'Lord – please help us to get over this steep ledge!'

They skimmed over the ridge. Now Stubbs began praying – "Lord – we need somewhere to land!' Just when all hope seemed gone – the men saw a small strip of land almost hidden between two ridges. Wilson steered the plane in that direction. They glided into the narrow valley and touched down – bouncing to a stop. Both pilot and passenger shouted – 'Thank you Lord!'

They looked up and just in front of them was a huge twenty-foot sign that said, "Jesus is Lord"

As it turned out – the field belonged to a Christian retreat center. The owners, who ran out to greet the unexpected guests told them the field was usually full of livestock, but on this day –

all the animals were standing along the edge of the field – as though giving them room to land.

The benefit of prayer is not just in answers received – but in fellowship with God

Psalm 145:18 - 'The Lord is near to all who call upon Him, to all who call upon Him in truth.'

James 4:8 - Draw near to God and He will draw near to you.'

One way we do that is thru prayer

What is the # 1 reason people usually give for a neglect of prayer – or for not praying as much as they would like to?

Not enough time - - - we are just too busy[we need a 25 hour day!]

Charles Spurgeon: 'If we have not time we must make time, for if God has given us time for secondary duties, He must have given us time for primary ones, and to draw near to Him is a primary duty, and we must let nothing set it to the side.'

God says we do have time for prayer – if we don't pray – it is for other reasons altogether

Colossians 4:2 - 'Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with an attitude of thanksgiving.'

Prayer neglected translates into blessings forfeited

Every year Americans spend about \$35 Billion on gift cards [Wal-mart / Barnes and Noble / Starbucks]

Guess how much does not get used? [about \$1 Billion of that never gets redeemed - - - people just don't use it]

What kind of blessings get forfeited thru neglect of prayer?

Thomas Brooks says our spiritual lives suffer the most – thru neglected prayer

Thomas Brooks: 'Oh, how strong in grace! Oh, how victorious over sin! Oh, how dead to the world! Oh, how alive to Christ! Oh, how fit to live! Oh, how prepared to die! - might many a Christian have been, had they been but more

frequent, serious, and conscientious in the discharge of closet duties [prayer].'

[The Secret Key to Heaven, p. 65]

What should we pray for?

- Our nation

We should pray for our law enforcement officers

Paul asked the Thessalonians to pray

II Thessalonians 3:1- 'Brethren, pray for us that the word of the Lord may spread rapidly and be glorified, just as it did also with you; and that we may be delivered from perverse and evil men; for not all have faith.'

Pray for the gospel / our churches - - - many churches still greatly restricted

We should pray for:

- Family members
- Church members
- Unbelievers
- Missionaries / pastors
- Pray over burdens – and cast them onto the Lord
- Confess sin – ask God to wash us and remove guilt
- Pray for spiritual strength in the battle – in overcoming sin
- If you have a need / if you have a problem – take it to the Lord in prayer

Make a list / make a prayer journal – pray without ceasing

II. God's Prescription Pad - Philippians 4:6-7

There is a logical flow to the order of the exhortations of Paul in Thessalonians

v. 16 – rejoice always

v. 17 – pray without ceasing

It is relatively easy to rejoice – when things are going the way we would like them to - - - but what about when they do not?

We can't really experience true joy if we are carrying burdens in our hearts

Warren Wiersbe: 'Worry is the greatest thief of joy.'

Prayer is the divinely ordained way of releasing burdens unto God

Psalm 55:22 - 'Cast your burdens on the Lord and He shall sustain you.'

I Peter 5:7 - 'casting all your anxiety upon Him because He cares for you.'

Prayer is a way of leaning on God / leaning on the everlasting arms

Anxiety is something that only exists in a fallen world

Before Adam and Eve sinned - - - they knew no cares / burdens

In our world - - - we know what it is like to have cares and burdens

Prayer is God's divine prescription for worry / anxiety

Robert Morgan: 'According to the New York Times, Americans are among the most anxious people on earth . . . we spend billions of dollars every year on anti-anxiety medications and additional millions to fund research into the causes and cures for anxiety disorders.'

Where does all this worry come from?

We live in anxious times

Morgan: 'Still, even those of us who know the Lord, who love our Bibles, and who have a grasp on our sure and certain hope struggle with anxious hearts . . . We're anxious people because we have a lot to be anxious about. We're spinning on a planet filled with a million dangers. We face scores of daily stresses and distresses, which often come uninvited and unanticipated. We have multiplied fears for our children, our loved ones, our families, our churches, our nation, our world, and ourselves. We have valid concerns about our health and finances, about our safety and security. None of us knows what the next day will bring. All of us are subject to debilitating accidents or sudden death at any moment.' [p. xx]

When you put it that way – it sounds like we should be worried!

Robert Morgan: 'While there are good reasons to be worried in today's world, there are better reasons not to be.' [p. xxiv]

What reasons might those be?

Our God reigns over all – and He is intimately involved in our lives - - - so that not one thing enters into our existence by chance or the carelessness of God – He is faithful

He has given us a divine resource – in which to cast our cares and concerns upon Him thru prayer

When we face anxious times - we need to ramp up our prayer

Satan uses anxious times to sow evil

All the stress statistics are going thru the roof in today's world

Anxiety / depression / divorce / suicide / violent crime - - all on the rise thru the pandemic – add to that the riots / protests / businesses hurt by the shutdowns – people told to not meet with family and friends – or instructed to wear masks at family gatherings

In many places – church gatherings are still being restricted - - - the one place of sanity and refuge for many

Andy Stanley – a pastor in the Atlanta area recently – made the statement: ‘We keep hearing – “The Lord commands us to meet – The Lord commands us to meet - - - He does not.”

This was played for MacArthur by Todd Starnes of Fox - - to get his response

MacArthur after chuckling - said that's absurd - - we are commanded to not forsake the assembling of ourselves together / etc. [Heb. 10:24-25]

People are up against the wall in this current climate

This world has always had times of great stress

And - - - the people of God have always found that no matter what is going on in the world - God is our refuge and strength – we turn to Him

Prayer is seen as the antidote to worry - - - leads to peace of mind

Phil. 4:6, 7

Prayer instead of anxiety

Life comes to us with its challenges / unpleasant realities / distressing circumstances / trials / worries / etc.

Can we still rejoice? - - - or should we be anxious / fearful / afraid of what might be outside our front door?

Is it possible to break free of anxiety and the stress factors pressing in?

Yes – stop / push pause - - - get on your knees and pray to your Heavenly Father in the name of Jesus – ask him to remove your fear – ask him to give you peace in your soul - - - wisdom and courage to equal the tasks He has for you this day

Conclusion

O what peace we often forfeit

O what needless pain we bear

All because we do not carry

Everything to God in prayer

We come to the Lord's Table this morning

The Lord's Table is one of the ways the church down thru the centuries has demonstrated their faith in the redemptive work of Christ on the cross

We believe that He died for our sins - - so that we could be forgiven -- - granted new life in Christ

I Cor. 11:26 - 'As often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes.'