

COLOSSIANS
Prayer And The World
Colossians 4:2-4

INTRODUCTION

How can we make an impact for Christ in a world that is basically antagonistic to Christ? How can we see people truly saved if they will not listen to what we have to say about salvation in Christ? The answer is through a life of commitment to prayer. Someone has said, “The history of the Church’s progress is the history of prayer.”

As you remember, Colossians chapters 3 and 4 deal with practical Christianity which flows out from the fact that all Christians share the spiritual life of Christ. Because Christians are co-resurrected with Christ, we have seen it affects how we live as husbands and wives, how children obey parents and fathers discipline children, how it affects employees and employers. Now the Apostle Paul shows that our life in Christ affects how we live in this world and how we are to face and interact with people who are unbelievers.

WATCHING IN PRAYER 4:2-4

Prayer Which Perseveres (2): ***Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful.***

For a Christian to experience real life in a real world, he must be devoted to prayer. This should be translated, “Be constantly and continually devoting yourself to prayer.” It implies fervor, persistence and perseverance in prayer. We must not give up in prayer. We must stick at it: ***“Then, Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always prayer and not give up. He said: ‘In a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared about men. And there was a widow in that town who kept coming to him with the plea, ‘Grant me Justice against my adversary.’ For some time he refused. But finally he said to himself, ‘Even though I don’t fear God or care about men, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets Justice, so that she won’t eventually wear me out with her caning?’”*** (Lk. 18:1-5) One of the very first indications that our spiritual life is slipping is that we stop praying, or make excuses for prayerlessness, or begin to think that prayer is not important.

John Bunyan defined prayer as: “Prayer is a sincere, sensible, affectionate pouring out of the heart or soul to God through Christ in the strength and assistance of the Holy spirit for such things as God has promised or according to His Word for the good of the church with submission and faith to do the will of God.”

Prayer is the most important and crucial expression 'of our life in Christ. A prayerless Christian is a contradiction in kind. Without prayer, we will never mature as a Christian. With prayer, we can only grow in power and spiritual strength. Prayer is one of the basic means to resist temptations. Someone has said, "If prayer does not drive sin out of your life, sin will drive prayer out." Prayer is basic to knowing God's will. Prayer is fundamental in the reaching of the lost for Christ. Prayer is to be constant and steady. First Thessalonians 5:16 says, "Pray continually" or "Pray without ceasing." Literally this means, "Pray with the frequency of a hacking cough." Prayer to the Christian is like breathing to the human body - both are essential for life.

The poet said it well: "Satan trembles when he sees the weakest saint upon his knees."

If we are honest, we know that for the best of us there comes times when it seems our prayers get no higher than the ceiling. When this happens, we must go on praying, for the person who prays cannot stay in a spiritual pit or a dry spiritual desert. Someone has said, "When it is hardest to pray, we ought to pray hardest." We must pray our way through all spiritual valleys.

The Christian is not only told to pray but to watch. Literally "to watch" means to keep awake, suggesting constant spiritual alertness. ***"Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. "Simon," he said to Peter, "are you asleep? Could you not keep watch for one hour? Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak."*** (Mk. 14:37,38). We have all experienced a zeal to pray, sitting down, kneeling or flat on our faces. We pray for a while then our minds wander and we get drowsy and sometimes fall asleep. Paul says we must stay awake, be alert, be on guard against wandering thoughts.

A Christian can no more expect to live a normal, happy spiritual life without prayer than a person can expect to sit in a darkroom, without ever being touched by sunlight, and hope to be healthy. And when we pray, we must be careful about praying sweet, little, pet phrases, or praying mechanically, or with vain repetitions. God wants prayer, more prayer and still more prayer from the heart, and He does not care about our eloquence.

One time when I was at a very spiritual low point in my Christian life, when everything seems mechanical and distasteful to me, when I was very tired and emotionally exhausted, we had some people come to our house. When they were leaving, we all stood in the foyer. It was about 11:00 in the evening. One of the men said, "Pastor Arnold, why don't you lead us in prayer?" I bowed my head and began to pray, "Thank you Lord for this food..." I was in no way watching and alert in prayer, but running on mechanics.

We are not only to pray, but our prayers are to be filled with a spirit of thanksgiving. An attitude of thanksgiving always produces a spirit of humility and gratefulness. ***“Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”*** (Philip. 4:6,7).

We experience real life in a real world when we touch the Throne of Grace through prayer. When praying and thanking God one cannot be negative or critical.

Prayer For Open Doors (3a): ***And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message,***

Paul requests that the Colossians pray for him and the others who were ministering with him such as Epaphras and Timothy.

Paul did not feel restrained, inhibited or strained in asking other believers to pray for him. Paul did not see this as a manifestation of weakness, but he was honest and sensed he needed prayer to be effective for Christ. So often, when we ask people to pray for us we are hesitant. We don't want anyone to think we are weak or to expose our problems, but asking for prayer is an admission of need and an act of humility.

Paul's point is that while the Colossians were praying for themselves, it would be well if they would pray for him also. What Paul asked them to pray for was opportunity to declare Christ and the way of salvation to people. Paul was in prison when he wrote these words. He did not pray for release from prison, although he surely desired that to happen. He prayed that in and through the crisis of imprisonment, he would have opportunity right then to witness.

Why pray? God is sovereign over the doors of evangelism. He alone opens and closes these doors. ***“Now when I went to Troas to preach the gospel of Christ and found that the Lord had opened a door for me...”*** (II Cor. 2:12). No matter how bad our circumstances, we are to pray for God to give us opportunity to witness for Christ. We often make up excuses such as, “The timing is not right” or “The circumstances are too difficult.” Yet, Paul witnessed, taking every opportunity God gave him even when he was in jail and chained to a Roman guard. Actually, Paul was guarded by members of the Praetorian Guard who were the Emperor's personal guardians and the most elite troops in the Roman legends. Every six hours a new guard was chained to Paul and Paul would witness to these soldiers. They would see and hear him praying, writing letters, reading the Bible, witnessing to visitors, encouraging Christians, and then he would engage in a direct conversation with these soldiers about Christ. Some of these soldiers would become Christians who in turn would witness to superiors. Some of these superiors would become Christians. Then these high ranking military men would witness to Caesar's household, and some of Caesar's household believed. ***“All the saints send you greetings, especially those who belong to Caesar's household.”*** (Philip. 4:22). Paul was in chains but the

gospel was not chained. ***“This is my gospel, for which I am suffering even to the point of being chained like a criminal. But God’s word is not chained. Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they too may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory.”*** (II Tim. 2:8b-10).

Since May 1, we have seen an amazing example of practical, living faith in Doug and Julie Sayers. From the very beginning of Luke’s near drowning, they have faithfully witnessed for Christ in the deepest kind of crisis. Only time will show how many people will be brought to Christ through Luke’s condition and the testimony of his parents.

Prayer For Boldness To Proclaim The Gospel (3b): ***So that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains.***

Paul is asking for boldness to proclaim the gospel of Christ to all men without compromise. The “mystery of Christ” is that now in the New Covenant era, the gospel is freely offered to Jews and Gentiles alike and when they respond to Christ both Jews and Gentiles have equal spiritual privileges in the New Covenant Church.

The mighty Paul, the greatest evangelist ever, the most brilliant theologian in the history of the Christian Church requested prayer to speak the gospel boldly. ***“Pray also for me, that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should.”*** (Eph. 6:19,20). Why did Paul make this request? Because he was at times afraid to proclaim Christ. His knees shook like ours do some times when we speak of Christ. He hated rejection just like we do. He was tempted to sugar coat the gospel to be liked or for numbers just like we are at times. That is why he asked for their prayers. He admitted his weakness and need for prayer.

Because Paul fearlessly preached the truth of Christ to men, because he said Jews and Gentiles were on equal footing in Christ, because he dared to tell the world of heaven, hell and Christ, he was put in chains. That doesn’t seem fair! That doesn’t seem right! True,. but God is sovereign and often has higher purposes for His servants. Had not Paul been in prison, the high Roman officials and even Caesar would never have heard the gospel, nor would the universal church have Paul’s Prison Epistles, nor would the universal church have the brilliant testimony of Paul that Christ is sufficient in the worst kinds of circumstances. God’s children suffer for many hidden reasons, and all they can say is what Job said centuries before: “Though He slay me. yet I will trust Him.”

Prayer For Clarity To Proclaim The Gospel (4): Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should. - Paul not only needed boldness but. he needed to speak Christ to men in a clear, concise and poignant manner. A good message proclaimed in a bad way can do more harm than good. Zeal without, knowledge is dangerous. Boldness without an accurate way to present Christ can be disastrous. If we go all around Robin's Barn trying to explain to people the greatest, the most exciting, the most satisfying message in the world, then we have not been effective. You see. Paul in his dealings with Roman officials may have had hours or only minutes to present his case, and he had to present what he had to say about Christ clearly and accurately, so men would clearly understand and believe, receiving the forgiveness of sins, escape from judgment, eternal life, and the Holy Spirit for dynamic living.

WINNING THROUGH PRAY?

Prayer Is Important. Prayer may seem to us like a little thing but in the eyes of God, it is a big thing. Prayer is not to be taken lightly or abused by mechanical and perfunctory habits (Col. 4:12). The church needs more agonizing in prayer and less organizing to go forward. We can only win in Christ if we persevere in prayer.

Prayer Is Not Selfish. Prayer is to be offered up for others and not just for ourselves. Prayers that are always. "Lord, I want this: I desire that: I need those things" can produce very self-centered Christians. God wants Christians to pray for one another.

Prayer Is Humbling. We must humble ourselves and admit to our fellow Christians we have temptations, weaknesses in our personalities and shortcomings in our Christian walk, and dare to ask for prayer. IF we do this, people will begin to prayer for us and we will see changes begin to come in our lives.

Prayer Is Evangelistic. We see how Paul's request for prayer was not to get out of jail or to have an easier prison situation, but that the gospel would be proclaimed. The prayers Paul wanted were not so much for himself as for his work. It is God who opens doors of opportunity and He does it through prayer. It is God who saves people but He works through our prayers. The biggest lie the Devil has every propagated is that God's elect will come to faith in Christ no matter what Christians do. That is not true. It is true that God has His elect (we do not know who they are) and the elect come to faith in Christ through our witnessing and through our prayers. God has appointed prayer as a means to the salvation of His people and the continual help of Christians.

Prayer is Real. It is obvious that Paul would not have requested prayer for-himself and others if he did not believe prayer was valid and really worked on God to move in behalf of Christians. If Paul believed in prayer, surely we can also. We cannot read Paul's letters and not realize he was sold out to the concept of a supernatural working God.

J. Sidlow Baxter says, “Men may spurn our appeals, reject our message, oppose our arguments, despise our persons, but they are helpless against our prayers.”

CONCLUSION

Are you a non-Christian? Are you not a believer in Christ? I have news for you. Undoubtedly someone has and is praying for you that you might come to Christ. The prayer is that God may convict you of your sin and lost condition, that God may draw you to Christ, that God may remove the blindness from your eye so you can see Christ in all His glory, that God will supernaturally work in you so that you will receive Jesus Christ as your Savior and Lord.

What must you do to be saved? You must believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved.