

THE PRAYER MEETING IS DEAD!

by Greg Gordon

A Call For Renewed Dependence Upon Apostolic Prayer

APOSTOLIC PRAYING

As we look to the biblical account of the book of Acts we see the striking theme of prayer throughout its testimony. We see in it apostolic prayer that depends on God, that is desperate before God. The Church was founded in prayer; it began at a prayer meeting in the upper room in Jerusalem. The Church began in prayer, was sustained in prayer and continues in prayer to this day. If a people are not praying they are straying. If prayer is not paramount and prominent then we are paralyzed and powerless. “We live, move and have our being in God”, in communion and prayer with God. When we begin to see a drift from the success of the book of Acts in our modern day Church attempts we will also see a straying from this foundational principle of prayer.

There was prayer with unity: “these all continued with one accord.” There was praying with the Spirit: “they were all filled with the Holy Ghost.” There was praying with godly fear: “fear came upon every soul.” They prayed daily: “they continued daily with one accord.” They prayed with thanksgiving: “Praising God.” Their prayers were answered: “the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.” They prayed with authority: “but such as I have I give thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk.” They prayed in uni-

son: “they lifted up their voice to God with one accord.” They prayed with expectation: “grant unto thy servants.” They prayed with belief: “and the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and one soul.” They prayed continually: “we will give ourselves continually to prayer.” They prayed desperately: “as they stoned Stephen, calling upon God.”

Oh to realize and understand that the Church of God is a praying Church. Prayer is everything: without it we fail. Leonard Ravenhill spoke to this situation in the modern day Church in these words: “The ugly fact is that altar fires are either out or burning very low. The prayer meeting is dead or dying. By our attitude to prayer we tell God that what was begun in the Spirit we can finish in the flesh.” Never has the most important work been left to so few. There needs to be a reviving of some aspects of prayer in the Church in our day, namely, praying with urgency, prayer that is effectual and to pray persistently. All of such characterize the spirit of prayer found upon the apostolic believers in the book of Acts.

URGENT PRAYER

We are to pray with a sense urgency. God has reminded me of a quote from a book by Chuck Smith which says: “Today, we are living in desperate times. Yet, the Church is not desperate before God in prayer.”

If anyone looks at the state of the world and of our lives in the light of Scripture and church history there definitely is something wrong. We are not living with a sense of urgency for the lost, for our lives to be radically devoted to God, and for God's kingdom to come to this earth. When our Lord Jesus prayed the words: "Thy Kingdom come," they were not words that were placid, but rather they were a fervent desiring of this thing to actually happen, and for the words just prayed to actually move that reality closer.

Prior to the Welsh revival outbreak in 1904 God was moving and speaking to many hearts. One of those hearts was of Rev. Jenkins in Wales. Here is an account of this preacher: "The Rev. Joseph Jenkins had been deeply concerned about the lack of anointing in his own preaching, which compelled him to desperately seek a deeper life in Christ. Andrew Murray's book, 'With Christ in the School of Prayer' came into his possession and moved him greatly at this time. He became increasingly burdened by the indifference among the Christians around him and the apathy of the young people in his own church. He exhorted them earnestly to obey the Spirit." This preacher caught the urgency of the hour and condition of the church. This burden and urgency needs to have its outlet in prayer, praying earnestly for the moving of God's spirit.

This hunger to pray for God's working in our hearts and in the lives of others really needs to be practiced. Personally the Lord has given me these two prayers as my own heart's cry for this reality to happen: "Teach us to be praying men," and the prayer, "Kindle the altar of prayer again, Lord." Oh for a praying church, urgent to see God move on behalf of man. "And I sought for a man among them, that should make up the hedge, and stand in the gap before me for the land, that I should not destroy it: but I found none." (Ezekiel 22:30). The apostles had a sense of urgency in their prayers. They experienced distresses, troubles, persecutions, yet they prayed with urgency to God. They prayed believing it was the last hour and the night was fast coming upon them. Do you sense the urgency of the hour?

EFFECTUAL PRAYER

We are to pray believing that it is effectual. "But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him." Does that

smart? Are you seeing answers to prayer? or are you not "diligently" seeking Him? Jesus gives the edict out to his disciples, "Seek, knock, ask and ye shall!" Not you might, but "ye shall." What comfort that gives us that we serve a God that if we call out to Him, He will hear and answer. God is waiting for His church to call upon Him with faith, believing that He will answer and effectually work on behalf of the prayers of the church. God has not left the church to work on its own but rather that we are



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to depend wholly on Him and that dependence is to be through the agent of prayer in the life of the church.

"The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much. Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit." In simple vernacular it was said that Elijah was just like us in every aspect and if we pray we can have the same results as Elijah. Notice that the prayers of the righteous man availeth much, not the prayers of the backslidden Christian or the unbeliever. Praying "fervently" shows to God that the prayers and things prayed for matter to us and that we believe they can be answered. To show affection and emotion in prayer is somewhat required if we are

looking to this text as our guide-map to effectual prayer. Ah, for one hundred praying Elijahs again to shake a city for God to be glorified. Are we just seeking for prayer that avails or “avails much”? Aren’t we criminal, brethren, having such a small conception of what God can and wants to do in our generation? Oh Lord, allow our praying to be effectual!

PERSISTENT PRAYER

We are to pray persistently. The radically sold out brother Singh in India declared many years ago to a sleepy church: “Some people become tired at the end of ten minutes or half an hour of prayer. What will they do when they have to spend eternity in the presence of God? We must begin the habit here and become used to being with God.” The Church of God was making persistent petitions to God on behalf of the Apostle Peter who was in jail. The Scriptures are recorded as saying: “but prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him.” All-night prayer meeting to God for their beloved pastor! Not relenting till God moves and does the miraculous. Our prayers are not near to these. When is the last time you heard of a group of people covenanting to pray till they see God answer? Oh for persistent praying, for Holy Ghost men filled with a holy stubborn persistence.

How much depends on this type of prayer and how lost it seems amongst us! Hear the saintly Samuel Brengle on this much needed type of prayer: “The great battles, the battles that decide our destiny and the destiny of generations yet unborn, are not fought on public platforms, but in the lonely hours of the night and in moments of agony. All great soul-winners have been men of much and mighty prayer, and all great revivals have been preceded and carried out by persevering, prevailing knee-work in the closet.” Oh, dear reader, will you answer this call to “work”? Yes prayer is work and only those that are willing to soil their knees will be in the apostolic category with God. Consider the tradition of

the Apostle James praying till his knees were like camels with massive calluses and lumps. Oh he ruined his knees for God, he died to his ambitions to be the next sport athlete or marathon runner. He ran on his knees in prayer counting the cost.

THE SACRIFICE OF TIME

John Mott gave this challenge before a student convention: “The men that will change the colleges and seminaries here represented are the men that will spend the most time alone with God... It takes time for the fires to burn. It takes time for God to draw near and for us to know that He is there. It takes time to assimilate His truth. You ask me, How much time? I do not know. I know it means time enough to forget time.” Are we going to count

this cost or are we so busy with the things of the world that we cannot afford the time for God? Leonard Ravenhill stated in his old age: “The one thing I know I can say is I gave God my time.” Hear the admonition from the scholarly Horatius Bonar: “Up, then, with speed, and work; Fling ease and self away—This is no time for thee to sleep—Up, watch, and work, and pray!”

“A young man in Bible school offered to help David Wilkerson years ago when he was ministering on the streets of New York City. Wilkerson asked him how much time he spent in prayer. The young student estimated about 20 minutes a day. Wilkerson told him, “Go back, young man. Go back for a month and pray two hours a day, every day for 30 days. When you’ve done that, come back. Come back, and I might consider turning you loose on the streets where there

is murder, rape, violence and danger...If I sent you out now on 20 minutes a day, I’d be sending a soldier into battle without any weapons, and you would get killed.” And herein is where the reading stops and we “go forward on our knees.” May God give each one that reads this a sense of the divine responsibility to pray aright and fully as that which pleases God. Apostolic praying needs to be our possession in these terrible days. □



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