

“THE PLACE OF PRAYER IN THE N. T. CHURCH”

Acts 1:13

“These all continued with one accord in prayer.....”

The New Testament church was birthed in an atmosphere of opposition and persecution. The early Christians were hated, hunted and hounded for their loyalty to Jesus Christ. They were threatened, harassed, intimidated, ostracized and killed. How would you like to belong to such a church?

The early church not only endured this tidal wave of fury but they survived and thrived in such a setting. What was the secret of their growth? The answer is plain for us to see when we read the book of Acts, it was due to the priority of prayer in both their private and public lives. Prayer was their lifeline. Prayer was the predominate activity in the early church. Prayer is the most referred to worship activity in the Bible, occurring by word and activity more than 2,200 times!

The church was constantly on the move because it was continuously on its knees! The historical book of the New Testament is called “The Acts of the Apostles”- it could also be referred to as “The Book of Prayer” because 28 times in the 28 chapters of the book, prayer is mentioned by word or by practice.

How much importance do we attach to prayer? Listen to what some of the well-known Christian leaders have had to say about prayer:

- Graham Scraggier “Without prayer, nothing can be accomplished for God.
- John Bunyan “He who runs from God in the morning will scarcely find Him the rest of the day.
- When asked how much time he spent in prayer, George Mueller’s reply was, “Hours every day. But I live in the spirit of prayer. I pray as I walk and when I lie down and when I arise. And the answers are always coming.”
- Martin Luther “If I should neglect prayer but a single day, I should lose a great deal of the fire of faith.”
- Samuel Chadwick “The one concern of the devil is to keep Christians from praying. He fears nothing from prayerless studies, prayerless work and prayerless religion. He laughs at our toil, mocks at our wisdom, but he trembles when we pray.”
- Billy Graham “It is an insult to God not to take time for prayer. We make time for other things important to us; why not prayer?”
- W.A. Criswell “True prayer influences God. If we cannot move God on our behalf, we cannot influence the world around us.”
- Charles Swindoll “The prayer power of a church is the true measurement of it’s spiritual health. The church cannot rise higher than it’s prayer power.”
- Lehman Strauss “It is my humble opinion that a return to the biblical way of praying will bring spiritual power back to our lives and our churches.”

The New Testament church was a praying church. It was *born* in a prayer meeting in the Upper Room and it was *borne* along on the wings of prayer. It has been said that the modern day church *limps* along on the strength of human ingenuity when it could *leap* ahead on the

power of prayer. Let us take a closer look at the early church and learn how we can be powered by prayer. Let us first take note that:

I. PRAYER WAS THEIR INITIAL RESPONSE.

Let us look at several illustrations:

A. Their Response To Jesus' Departure.

The disciples of Jesus had left all to follow Him. But He had been apprehended like a common criminal, falsely condemned, crucified and buried. What was their initial response? We read that, "These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers." (Acts 1:14)

After Jesus ascended they went back to the Upper Room and had a pity party??? No, they had a prayer meeting! Their Lord, Savior and Friend had left them. What did they do? They prayed. Prayer was their initial response to Jesus departure. What do we do when dramatic and unexpected events take place in our lives?

B. The Response Of Paul And Silas When In Prison.

Another illustration of the priority of prayer in the early church is seen when Paul and Silas were in prison. How did they respond to this unjust treatment? "At midnight Paul and Silas were *praying* and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them." (Acts 16:25-26) Our initial response – phone a lawyer!

C. The Response To The Disaster.

Paul was on a ship bound for Rome when a great storm arose. The ship was about to sink and Paul panicked! Right? Wrong! He went below deck and *prayed*. The Lord told him all would be safe. He reported this to the captain and encouraged the 270 sick, sea-soaked seamen to eat. Acts 27 records that Paul: "took bread and gave thanks to God in the presence of them all; and when he had broken it he began to eat. Then they were all encouraged, and also took food themselves. And in all we were two hundred and seventy-six persons on the ship." (Acts 27:35-37)

D. The Response To Opportunity To Minister

The sea saga continues - when the ship ran aground on the island of Miletus, the father of the chief there was sick. We read that "Paul entered in, and *prayed*, and laid hands on him, and healed him." (Acts 28:8)

Here are several examples of many that could be cited, when in extreme situations that the early Christians found themselves, that their initial response was to pray! For many Christians prayer is the last recourse; for the early church prayer was the first resource!

Their lifeline was prayer! What breath is to physical life, prayer was to their spiritual life. In the First Church, praying was as natural as breathing. Let us pattern our churches and especially our praying after the example of that First Fellowship of believers.

Not only was prayer their initial response, but:

II. PRAYER WAS THEIR ESSENTIAL RESOURCE.

We hear much talk today about preserving our country's "natural resources" – meaning our forests, horticulture, water supplies, mineral deposits – i.e. coal, oil, copper, natural gas etc. – all of which can be summed up in one word: "energy."

What is the church's source of energy? Not natural resources but The Supernatural Resource, God Himself. How do we utilize our energy source? Through prayer! Prayer was:

A. Their Resource When Seeking Direction.

Before they voted on Judas' replacement they prayed: "And they prayed and said, "You, Lord, who know the hearts of all men, show which one of these two You have chosen.." (Acts 1:24)

B. Their Resource In Times Of Danger.

When they were threatened they prayed. Acts 4 records: "Now, Lord, look on their threats, and grant to Your servants that with all boldness they may speak Your word" – and v.31 --- "And when they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word of God with boldness." (Acts 4:29 & 31)

C. Their Resource In The Presence Of Death.

When a lady named Dorcas had died they called for The Apostle Peter and we read in Acts 9:40 that "*Peter....knelt down and prayed.*"

On and on the record goes showing that prayer was their essential resource. God has said, "Thou shalt have no other gods before me" (Exodus 20:3) So, the question is: to which resource do we turn first? Natural resources such as the bank, lawyers, the City Council, etc. or our singular, supreme Supernatural Resource? Human resources or Divine resources?

ILLUST.: Dr. A.C. Dixon, American pastor and later pastor of the famous Metropolitan Tabernacle in London, England, which was previously pastored by Charles Haddon Spurgeon, wrote: "When we rely upon organization, we get what organization can do; when we rely upon education, we get what education can do; when we rely upon eloquence, we get what eloquence can do, and so on. I am not disposed to undervalue

any of these things in their proper place. But when we rely upon prayer, we get what God can do.” Prayer was the New Testament church’s essential resource. Is it ours?

Furthermore

III. PRAYER WAS THEIR RATIONAL RECOURSE.

Some say prayer is irrational. Is it irrational for the creature to commune with Creator? Is it irrational for children to commune with their Father; the saved to commune with their Savior?

What do I mean by prayer being their rational recourse? Just this: here were children of the Most High God who had the sanctified audacity to believe that when they prayed the prayer that Jesus taught them: “Our Father which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come; thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil”, THAT HE WOULD DO IT! THIS WAS THEIR MOST RATIONAL RECOURSE ! It would have been irrational not to pray like that when He had told them to do it!

Like the early Christians, we Christians 2,000 years later have the privilege of Prayer as *our* most rational recourse, for we too have the same heavenly Father. Why was prayer their most rational recourse? Here are two of the many reasons I could give:

A. Their Prayer Practice Was Based Upon The Example Of Jesus.

Do you remember reading Hebrews 5:7 ? Here is a very interesting and revealing statement: “During the days of Jesus’ life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions.”

And Luke 5:16 says: “Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.” As a direct result of Jesus’ example, we read, “One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he finished, one of his disciples said to him, “Lord, teach us to pray.” (Luke 11:1)

Prayer was their rational recourse because they had observed Jesus praying many times and the rational and reasonable response would be that if Jesus needed to pray, they needed to pray – and so do we! How can we survive spiritually without this kind of prayer life when the Author of our faith made prayer His regular practice?

B. Their Prayer Practice Was Based Upon The Exhortations Of Jesus.

The exhortation by Jesus to “watch and pray” occurs 4 times in the New Testament. Furthermore, there are many prayer prompters scattered throughout the New Testament, some of which are:

- “ask and you shall receive” – (John 16:24)
- “pray without ceasing” – (I Thess. 5:17)
- “pray everywhere lifting up holy hands” – (I Tim.2:8)
- “pray for one another” – (James 5:16)

- “by prayer and supplications let your requests be made known to God” – (Phil. 4:6)

What was the place of prayer in the early church? It was the number one priority. The average church today is organized for about everything except to agonize in prayer.

SUMMATION

Prayer was the priority in the early church. Prayer was their Initial Response, their Essential Resource and their Rational Recourse. Is prayer a priority in our lives? Prayer is not the only thing, but it is the chief thing.

ILLUST. S.D. Gordon in his classic book “Quiet Talks On Prayer” writes: “The greatest thing anyone can do for God and for man is to pray. The great people of the earth today are the people who pray. I do not mean those who talk about prayer; or those who say that believe in prayer; nor yet those who can explain about prayer; but I mean those people who take time to pray. These are the people who are doing the most for God; in winning souls; in solving problems; in awakening churches.”

CONCLUSION

ILLUST. Archimedes, the ancient Greek inventor said, in illustrating the principle of the lever, “Give me a lever and a place to stand and I will move the earth.” We have a place to stand – it is before the throne of God! We have a lever – prayer! And by prayer the early church moved the hand of God Who moved the earth!!

“Teach me to pray, Lord, teach me to pray,
This is my heart-cry, day unto day;
I long to know Thy will and Thy way,
Teach me to pray, Lord, teach me to pray.”

JdonJ