

PRAYER



*A short series of studies by
Pastor David Legge*

*Compiled by Andrew Watkins
Transcribed by Andrew and Judith Watkins*

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David Legge is a Christian evangelist, preacher and Bible teacher. He served as Assistant Pastor at Portadown Baptist Church before receiving a call to the pastorate of the Iron Hall Assembly in Belfast, Northern Ireland. He ministered as pastor-teacher of the Iron Hall from 1998-2008, and now resides in Portadown with his wife Barbara, daughter Lydia and son Noah.

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A Short Series On Prayer - Chapter 1

"The Lord And Prayer"

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We're turning in our New Testament to the Gospel of Luke, Luke's Gospel and chapter 11. Luke's Gospel chapter 11 and reading from verse 1: "And it came to pass, that, as he" - the Lord Jesus Christ - "was praying in a certain place, when he ceased, one of his disciples said unto him, Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples. And he said unto them, When ye pray, say, Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, as in heaven, so in earth. Give us day by day our daily bread. And forgive us our sins; for we also forgive every one that is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil."

Verse 1 says: 'And it came to pass, that, as he was praying in a certain place, when he ceased, one of his disciples said unto him, Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples'. Let's just do that and come before the Lord, and ask His blessing and His unction as we come to His word this morning: Our Father in Heaven, we thank Thee for Thy truth and we know that Thy word is truth. Lord, Thy word is more powerful than we can ever imagine and therefore we bow humbly before it, not even realizing what it can do. And Lord, we know that Thy Spirit comes upon Thy word, and we pray that He would come, and He would breathe the breath of life, the breath of God, upon these pages. That He would illumine the figure of the Lord Jesus Christ to each eye here today. Lord, that we would be different believers, even if there is those that have not looked upon Christ in faith, that they would leave this place today, knowing Christ, knowing that they are born again. Lord help us, I need Thy help, fill me with that holy fire, that power of God, that pentecostal power of the Holy Spirit - Lord, that these words may be Thy words. For Christ's sake we pray. Amen.

Many people within the church of Jesus Christ today ask the question - and I'm sure all of us, if we're honest with one another, have asked this question - 'Why no blessing?'. Why no blessing? Why does God not seem to bless us the way He used to bless us? We read about it in books, we watch about it in films, we hear about it from pulpits - how God, in days gone by, God came by His Spirit, even in our land, even in our town, even in this district, up to fifty years ago: God came, and God moved, God revived, God saved, God regenerated - and it was not men that took the glory, but God took the glory because God did it.

Why are so few saved today? Why is there so little weeping within the pew? Weeping of contrition, weeping of penitence for sins that they have committed and they see God in holiness, God standing before them, that they cannot - they cannot - resist Him, and they fall on their knees in conviction of sin and they cry for mercy. Why? Why does it no longer happen? We know that it happens across the world. We were hearing from Eric even on Wednesday night how in places like Vietnam, in China, in Korea, God is moving - in South America God is moving. Now, I don't know about you, but as I see God moving all around the world it makes me - and I hope it's a holy jealousy - I covet that blessing! I long to see a day when in East Belfast, when in Iron Hall, when in Ulster, when in all of Ireland, God came again in blessing!

The question was often asked within the Old Testament, 'Where is the God of our fathers?'. The question was asked by Elisha, 'Where is the Lord God of Elijah?'. Gideon, as he stood there, he cried this prayer in Judges 6 and verse 13: 'Oh Lord, if the Lord be with us, why then is all this befallen us and where be His miracles that our fathers have told us of?'. I don't know about you, but there are times - and I'm being honest with you

this morning - there are times that I feel like that. Here is God's word, here are His promises, we can claim them as God's people but nothing, nothing seems to happen!

Now I've only been preaching much shorter a period than many people sitting before me, but in the time that I have been doing this, I have found it so hard to stand before people to preach the word of God and to watch, evening after evening, as men and women, as children walk out of the door seemingly unconvicted, seemingly untouched by the word of God, by the Spirit of God, or by the power of God. Now, I know that I cannot see into the heart of a man, and I know that I don't know what's going on in a man's mind, or a woman's heart - but my friend I hear it so often said to me to comfort me, 'As long as you sow the word of God, that is you being faithful'. You can challenge me with this afterwards: in the law of nature and the law of the harvest, it would be a strange if there was sowing continually going on but the fruit was never ever reaped. And every seed that is sown, some reaping will take place - it will either be a reaping of judgement or a reaping of justification. My friends, I believe one of the answers - you can't give a blanket answer for these problems today, and let's face it today, it is a problem. There are many answers, but one of them I believe is this, it's found in James 4 and verse 2 and it's seven simple words, where James said to that little church: 'Ye have not because ye ask not'. He went on to say, 'Ye ask and receive not because ye ask amiss that ye may consume it upon your lusts'.

Maybe you are asking for things, maybe you're asking God to bless - but you're asking with the wrong motives, you're asking because you want to squander it, you want to take pride in it, you want to make a name in it, you want it to happen in your church and not someone else's church. But something is happening brethren, something is going wrong, we are either not asking or we are asking amiss. I wonder like these disciples of old, in Luke chapter 11 and verse 1, do we need the Lord Jesus Christ to teach us to pray again, do we? Do we need Him to teach us to pray again?

You might say, 'Well, I know how to pray'. It's interesting, isn't it, that in this passage of Scripture the disciples who had sat and listened to the Lord Jesus Christ and had watched those honey, golden words drop from His lips day by day, hour by hour, they did not run to Him and say 'Lord teach us to preach!'. No, they realized that it was useless to preach, unless they knew how to pray. Isn't it interesting that within the word of God, God calls His house, God calls the place where He dwells - and today that is the church of the living God, not a building but you and I who are believers - He says 'My house shall be...', not a house of preaching. How many houses of preaching do you know? Can our churches - and this is the word that God has laid upon my heart - can our churches become preaching centres? Where we come to meet a preachers message, rather than coming to meet God, and do business with God, and find God, and look into the very face of God? He said 'My house shall be a house of prayer'!

Franz Baker, a Dutchman, said this: 'No matter who we are, if we haven't personally learned what it is to pray, we will meet an unknown God after death'. What a tragedy! To name the name of Christ, to name the name of Jehovah, but to live a life that is ignorant of who He is, of the power that He has, of what He can do in our families, what He can do in our lives, what He can do in our assembly - to not have ever tapped in to the dynamite, atomic power of God!

John chapter 13 and verse 15 says this, the Lord Jesus Christ says: 'For I have given you an example that ye should do as I have done for you'. You see, the Lord Jesus Christ, in some ways, is not our example and in other ways He is our example. He is not our example simply because we could never hope, ever, to live the way that He lived. In fact, the only life that God is pleased with today, and any day, is His life - the Lord Jesus Christ. So it must be His life that lives through us, and that practices what He practiced, to please God. His life, through His Spirit, must live through us. We can never, ever hope to emulate what Jesus Christ did. But thinking about that, when we have His Holy Spirit within us, when we know the power of God in our lives, we then have to follow Him, and follow His footsteps, and seek to emulate what He did.

And therefore, this morning, in the few minutes that remain, I want us to learn a lesson from the prayer life of the Lord Jesus Christ. And there are four questions that I want us to ask of the Lord Jesus concerning His prayer life. The first one is this: Where did He pray? The second is: When did He pray? The third thing is: How did He pray? And the fourth thing: Why did He pray? Now I want to stress that this is not an exhaustive list about the prayer life of the Lord Jesus Christ - but it is the things that I believe we need to be [reminded] of.

Christ Jesus taught His disciples how to pray. Isn't it lovely when you hear a person, who is a new born babe in Christ, not long out of the womb of God, and you hear them pray for the first time, isn't it beautiful? It's like a child that has only learnt to walk, and maybe then they learn to talk and the first words that they speak to their mother or father - isn't it beautiful? It's something that the mother or father looks out for, it's something that they remember. And oh, how beautiful it is to listen to a new born babe in Christ speak the first words to Abba Father. There's no lingo, there's no rehearsed language, there's no set sentences, sometimes they get their words muddled up and maybe we think they don't use the right words - I don't know, but God, I believe this morning, thinks it is beautiful because it is from their heart! And many of us who pride ourselves in the fact that we do not believe in a liturgy - we do not read prayers - many of us rehearse our own liturgy when we rehearse it over and over again.

My friends, this morning, I want us to look at the prayer life of the Lord Jesus Christ, but I want us to learn something. Where did He pray? Well if you were to turn with me to Matthew chapter 14 and verse 23, Matthew 14 and verse 23 we read this: 'When he had sent the multitudes away, he went up into a mountain apart to pray: and when the evening was come, he was there alone'. That's the first place that we read of the Lord Jesus Christ praying, He prayed on a mountain. Then we read, in Luke chapter 5 and verse 16, that He also prayed in a desert, it says He withdrew Himself into the wilderness and He prayed. Both Matthew 14 and Luke 5 tell us that He prayed on a mountain, in a desert - but He prayed alone.

Was it not the Lord Jesus Christ that said, it is the hypocrites that stand on the street corner, that cry and pray aloud in public because they want to be seen of men, but in their closet there is an emptiness, there is a coldness, there is a lifelessness! Could that be us? Do we pray in public? Men, do we pray in public, but we do not pray in our closets? Could there be a facade? Let me ask you the question: does the closet - in general terms today, in the Christian evangelical world - does the closet exist? Does it? Does it really happen, where there is a place - and what the Bible is trying to get across to us when it said, 'Jesus went to a mountain', 'The Lord Jesus went to the desert', is this: that the Lord Jesus Christ got alone. Because He knew that it wasn't until He cut Himself off from the rest of humanity and He got in contact, 'electrical' contact with God, that things would start to happen. Is the powerhouse of evangelical religion dead? Is it? The place in your home - do you have a place? Where you have set aside as a place where daily you go to pray before God, to seek His face, to seek His blessing, to seek His salvation for the lost? Is there? Is there a place?

You know, the reason why I believe in many households there is not a place like this is because it's extremely hard. It is extremely hard - do you know why? Because no one is watching you apart from God. We can do great things for God, can't we, when the church watches us. We can do great things for God when our family watches us, or even when the unsaved watch us - but when we are alone with God, oh, it's hard even to spend five minutes with Him!

Why is the prayer meeting the least attended meeting in the church? I believe, sincerely, it's because you can't 'tart' a prayer meeting up. The essence of a prayer meeting isn't singing, the essence of the prayer meeting isn't getting your ears tickled with some new doctrine or new way of presenting it, but the essence of a prayer meeting is: you and God, and no one else - and that's hard. My friends this morning, do we have a place where we pray? Where we intercede Almighty God?

But secondly look at this: when the Lord Jesus prayed. If you look at Mark chapter 1 and verse 35 you read there, Mark chapter 1 and verse 35, that Jesus Christ prayed in the morning. Why did He pray in the morning? Well He prayed in the morning simply because He wanted to give the best hours of His day as a steward of the time that He had - He wanted to give His best to God. Watchman Nee had a little phrase like this, 'No Bible, no breakfast'. If he didn't get to read his Bible in the morning, or to get before the face of God in prayer he put everything back in the day that was ahead, simply because this was the most important appointment that he could possibly have. The great preacher Spurgeon said, 'Let God's face be the first face that you look into in the morning, let God's voice be the first voice that you hearken to day by day.'

Do you pray in the morning? It'd be crazy to hear of someone who had a big Ulster fry for their breakfast, but they had it at evening. Wouldn't it? They're feeding their face and their body, in order to prepare them for the day, for a day, ahead yet they go to bed and they sleep on it. And then when they wake in the morning, what happens? They're not ready, they're not fit, they're not full of energy for the day that lies ahead - but so often that's what we do. We feed ourselves spiritually before we go to bed, and then we go to bed and squander it all. But the Lord Jesus Christ, He prayed in the morning. But we look in Mark 6:42 and we see that He also prayed in the evening. You see prayer, prayer is the key of the morning, it's the bolt of the night. And the day that is spent in communion before God - the word of God seems to indicate, and I believe it teaches - should be ended on your knees in prayer. What about Daniel? What about Daniel? Three times a day he prayed. Well, I believe that he didn't pray three times in the morning, but he probably spread them over the whole day, morning, afternoon and evening. David testifies to it, he says, 'Evening, morning, afternoon will I pray and cry aloud and He shall hear my voice'. Do you pray in the evening?

But this is what I'm really getting at, believers, this morning. It says in Luke chapter 6 and verse 12, that the Lord Jesus Christ - He prayed all night. It says this: 'He went into a mountain to pray, and continued in prayer all night to God'. I'm being honest with you this morning, that this is something that in the flesh seems impossible - and let me ask you today: when was the last time you heard of a fellowship of believers in Northern Ireland who met all night in prayer? When was it? Now ask yourself why the blessing doesn't come down! When was the last night I met with God all night? Personally, me, you? When was the last time, as a follower of Jesus Christ, I actually followed Him for a change and did what He did?

Charles Chinkweed (sp?) who was converted out of Roman Catholicism, and wrote that famous book 'Fifty years in the Church of Rome'. One day he preached a sermon - and the figure is unknown - but it seems that there were hundreds of people, maybe even thousands of people that day, that trusted the Lord Jesus Christ in simple faith - but do you know what the secret of that sermon was? He spent the twenty-four hours before it on his knees before God in prayer. Now listen! That is what twenty-four hours before God can do! And we can cry to God in our simple prayers, in our little prayers, in our weak prayers: 'Lord, why are You not blessing? Why are You not moving? Why do we not see people saved?'. But deep down within my heart, I'm not willing to count the cost. He prayed all night

That's where the Lord Jesus Christ prayed, He prayed alone; when He prayed, morning, afternoon, and evening and all night at some occasions. But how does the word of God say that He prayed? It says, in Matthew 26 and 39, that He prayed in the will of God. Now I'll hopefully deal with that in weeks that are still to come, about how we pray in God's will and how we get our prayers answered. It says also, in Luke 22 and verse 41, that He knelt in prayer. He got upon His knees before God and He prayed. Now, that doesn't mean that we have to kneel to pray, it says that Enoch walked with God, Enoch walked and talked with God. It says in the Psalms that David lay upon His bed and cried out to God. It says in other places that men sat and talked with God, but the point is this that their outward act signified an inward, an inward position. The Lord Jesus Christ, when He was on His knees before God, body, soul and spirit - He was in submission to Him.

But this is what I really want you to see about how He prayed. It's found in Matthew 26, if you turn with me to it, Matthew 26 and 42 - and we have there the account of the Lord Jesus Christ in the garden of Gethsemane. Matthew 26 and verse 42: 'He went away again the second time, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it, thy will be done'. It says there, 'the second time'. Then verse 44: 'And he left them, and went away again, and prayed the third time, saying the same words'. He had prayed those words once, He had prayed them twice, He prays them now the third time and the point is simply this: that the Lord Jesus Christ was a persevering pray-er.

I want you to grasp this today, this is no church father we're talking about, this is no reformer, this is no revivalist, this is the blessed Son of God - and He prays, three times, the same thing. What does persevering prayer mean? It means this, it simply speaks to God and tells God that we mean - we really mean - and want what we're praying for. See if you're willing to hold on to a thing, if you're willing to grab God, if you're willing - like the Lord Jesus Christ said in Luke 18 verse 1: 'Men ought always to pray and not to faint' - to stand there in prayer before God until the sweat drops from you, until the strength dries from your very veins, crying upon God like Jacob: 'I will not let Thee go until Thou bless me' - that is persevering prayer! To wrestle, to wrestle with God.

There's a story that's told of two monks in St. Catherine's monastery, near Mount Sinai in Egypt. And twelve centuries ago those two monks vowed a vow of silence to one another, simply for this reason: to devote their lives perpetually to adoration, and to petition to the God of heaven. They were chained to one another through a cell. Think of it! As young men they vowed this vow that they would not speak but only to God - and through this cell this chain came and it chained unto their wrists, and whenever one needed to sleep and had finished praying he would tug the chain and the other would feel it and he would begin praying. And for all their lives they spent in prayer, until they died and their last request was that they would stay in those chains. And you can go today and visit their skeletons still in chains!

Now I'm not going to analyse the morality and the theology of that - but all I want to ask you this morning is this, do you not admire their devotion? Do you not? What drives a man or a woman to give their life over to prayer in such a way - whether they do it in sincerity, or whether they do it wrongly, or whatever it may be - what makes them do it? They're persevering pray-ers. When God visited the Moravians - who were a religious organisation and community - in the early days when God came in blessing upon them, what they did was they recognized and they appointed two prayer bands, one of men and the other of women. And there were 24 women and 24 men appointed - and one man and one woman out of each of those groups was assigned to an hour of the day, and they set apart those people, and continually for 100 years, two groups of those Moravians prayed over every hour, every minute, every second of every day. That's persevering prayer! Do you know what the result of that was? The revolution that we heard this morning from Raymond - the French Revolution - it was about to spread into England but those prayers stemmed it. Why? Because those prayers gave birth to two men, John and Charles Wesley, who were used of God to revive sweepingly over England and even across into America, the breath of God. What happened? The Moravian Church, through Moravian missionaries, was multiplied three times same as their home church that they had left. Why? Because they were persevering pray-ers!

'But I can't get out of my bed in the morning, I take the extra minutes. I can't cut my social life, I can't cut the amount of hours I watch the television, the things I read, the sport I play - not that they are wrong - but they will not, and I will not let prayer encroach upon my life!'. Is that not what we are like?

My friends, I am looking smack into my own face this morning and I think that I'm looking into yours and all I'm doing is asking us to rethink this again - to look at our Lord Jesus Christ and to ask the question, ought we not to be like Him? He prayed perseveringly, He prayed earnestly, Luke 22:44 says: 'He sweat as it were great drops of blood'. Earnest prayer! Fervent prayer! Bunyan said, 'The best prayers have often more groans

than words'. Why? Because sometimes what is in our heart - if God gives us a burden - cannot be put into words, and we groan to God. And isn't it great that God loves prayers like that, simply because He is a God who searches the heart, not searches the mouth. Do we, do we pray earnestly?

What is earnest prayer? I want to read you a story written by Dr. Wilbur Chapman, and he wrote this to a friend in a letter, he said this: 'I have learned some great lessons concerning prayer. At one of our missions in England the audience was exceedingly small, but I received a note saying that an American missionary was going to pray for God's blessing to come down upon our work, the man's name was 'Praying Hyde'. Almost instantly', he says, 'the tide was turned, the hall became packed, and at my first invitation fifty men accepted Christ as their Saviour. And as we were leading out of the building I said, 'Mr. Hyde I want you to pray for me'. He came to my room' - listen to this! - 'he turned the key in the door and he dropped to his knees. And he waited five minutes without a single syllable coming from his lips and', he says, 'I could hear my own heart thumping and his beating. I felt hot tears running down my face, I knew I was with God. Then, with upturned face, while the tears were streaming he said, 'Oh, God'. Then for five minutes, at least, he was still again. And then, when he knew that he was talking with God, there came from the depths of his heart such petitions for me as I had never heard before, and I rose from my knees to know what real prayer was'.

My question, as we close this morning, is this: Do you know what real prayer is? The fourth, and last, question. Where He prayed, when He prayed, how He prayed, why He prayed. John chapter 5 and verse 30 we read this, listen, I want you to grasp this! This is the eternal Son of God speaking, this is the second person of the blessed holy Trinity, this is the One who set the stars in space, the One who named the stars! And in John 5 and verse 30 he says this: 'I can of my own self, do nothing'. I can't enter into the magnanimity of that, I can't enter into the humility of that - that Christ could do nothing! He couldn't do anything! So much so, that He had to spend His life resting in prayer, the only break that He could get from the work was to pray to God - for He knew that if He didn't pray to God, His work, even as the Christ, would come to nothing. My friends this morning, this is the Lord Jesus Christ who did no wrong, who knew no wrong, who learned obedience in His self through the pain that He had to bear - yet we think that we can get away without prayer! I can't do it, you can't do it, because Christ couldn't do it.

There's a story that's told of African missionaries who went out to tell the Gospel to those who were dying in their sins, pagans. And there was a great revival that broke out within that little township and what happened was simply this - they didn't have a church to go to pray in - but what they used to do was they all, each individual little African Christian, used to walk to their own little 'cathedral' in the forest, and there they waited upon God. But as they walked, day by day, to their little temple - with the trees, and the flowers, and the birds of the air - each one would walk a little trail in the long grass. And day by day, morning by morning, evening by evening as they walked, continually, they trampled down this trodden path in the long grass. Do you know what used to happen? Whenever a brother was not praying, whenever he had backslidden a little, whenever he had grown cold, one brother used to say to another: 'Brother, your grass is growing'. Is our grass growing? Do we need, as we close this morning - and I'm sorry for going a few minutes over - as we close, do we need to ask: 'Lord, teach us to pray'?

Dear Lord Jesus Christ, we ask Thee today in our lives, in our homes, in our assembly here, Lord: teach us to pray. Amen.

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www.preachtheword.com

info@preachtheword.com

A Short Series On Prayer - Chapter 2

"Answers And Prayer"

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We're turning to Luke chapter 11, Luke chapter 11, and you'll remember that last Sunday morning we began a study - leading up to the week of prayer that we will be having in the first full week of September - and we were thinking on this subject of prayer. Last Sunday morning, you'll remember, we thought of 'The Lord and Prayer', and this morning we're going to think of the subject: 'Answers and Prayer', and next Sunday morning - hopefully, God willing - we will be thinking on the subject of 'Fasting and Prayer'. And then possibly, if we have time and if time permits, we will think of the subject of 'Revival and Prayer'.

Now, I said a wee prayer there because I'd lost my notes, but I've now found them and we're turning to Luke chapter 11 and verse 1: "And it came to pass, that, as he was praying in a certain place, when he ceased, one of his disciples said unto him, Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples". And you'll remember that's the verse that we thought about last Sunday morning - it was the fact that they saw Jesus praying, it was after they saw Him rise from prayer that they asked Him to teach them to pray, because they saw the way in which He prayed.

Verse 2: "And he said unto them, When ye pray, say, Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, as in heaven, so in earth. Give us day by day our daily bread. And forgive us our sins; for we also forgive every one that is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil. And he said unto them, Which of you shall have a friend, and shall go unto him at midnight, and say unto him, Friend, lend me three loaves; For a friend of mine in his journey is come to me, and I have nothing to set before him? And he from within shall answer and say, Trouble me not: the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot rise and give thee. I say unto you, Though he will not rise and give him, because he is his friend, yet because of his importunity he will rise and give him as many as he needeth. And I say unto you, Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened".

Let's come before the Lord, just as we come to His word, and ask His help in a word of prayer: Our dear Father, we come to Thee, as our Lord Jesus Christ taught us to pray, and we ask of Thee help, this morning. We seek the power of God to be in this place, we knock upon the door of God and ask that it may be opened unto us, and Lord, dear God, You would grace us with Thy presence. Help me I pray today, fill me I pray with the blessed Spirit of the living God. For Christ's sake. Amen.

'The atomic bomb will never go off, and I speak as an explosive expert'. That is what Admiral Leahey (sp?) said in 1945 - and we all know that the atomic bomb did go off. An aviation expert, Octave Chanet (sp?), predicted these words, and I quote: 'Aeroplanes will eventually go fast, they will be used for sport, but they are not to be thought of as commercial vehicles'. And we know what happens today is that thousands of people weekly, daily even, are shuttled across our world by large jumbo jets. Perhaps more significant, one man, Lieutenant Joseph Ives (sp?) in 1861, after his exploration of the Grand Canyon in the US of A, he stated abruptly: 'The Grand Canyon is of no value at all, it is altogether useless', he went on to say, 'Ours has been the first and, indeed, doubtless the last party of white people to visit this profitless location'. You all know this morning that the Grand Canyon brings in more tourists in the United States than any other scene

there. But what was this? Three seemingly experts that dictated negatively about something that has been proven today to be absolutely positive. There is, as we read their statements, a spirit of negativism. In their predictions, in what they have said, it resounds [through] it all - they think of something and they say it will never, ever happen. But if you turn with me, not just to the passage that we read together this morning, but to Mark's Gospel and chapter 11 and verse 24, we read similar words to the words that we read earlier. The Lord Jesus Christ said in chapter 11 and verse 24: 'Therefore I say unto you, What things so ever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them'.

I want to relate to you a personal story from my own life. On one occasion I preached within a church, and I preached on this verse that I've just read in Mark chapter 11. And after it, I was imploring and exhorting and encouraging the people of God to ask God for their desires according to His will, to claim His promises, to put their faith in God and His word. And after it I was pulled over by a senior gentleman in the church, and he began to go into all sorts of spiritual and theological contortions in order to show me that that verse of Scripture is not for today. Is it? Or is it not?

We read in church history of a man called George Mueller, and this man in the last century was a man who - personally speaking - he moved the obstacle of unbelief in his own life. He testified of himself that, 'God has never failed me yet'. And in seventy years of looking after young children and orphans he testified that God - as 9500 orphans had gone through his hands - God had provided every single meal for them. In his seventy years of life he testified - and remember it's last century we're talking about - that he received \$7,500,000 - that was last century! He declared that he had no committees, he had no collectors, there was no voting, there was no endowment or envelopes, all he had was faith in God. It was God answering to believing prayer.

One of the incidents that is written in his biography, is about when this man - George Mueller, this man of prayer and intercession and faith - was going on a journey to Canada, to preach in the city of Toronto. We read within the story that something awful happened on his journey, that a very dense fog fell upon the ship and the whole of the ocean. Suddenly, to the captain's door there was a great knocking. And there, as the captain opened the door, was George Mueller standing there. He said to the captain: 'Sir, I must be in Toronto to preach tomorrow'. The captain stared right into his face and he said, 'Well sir, there is simply nothing I can do about this, because I am not moving from where I am for fear of colliding with another vessel - and you will have to wait until the weather makes that possible'. George Mueller looked at him and said, 'In forty years of serving God I have never missed an appointment yet, and I will be there'. And he implored the captain to drop to his knees, and both of them fell on their knees and Mueller - he did not shout, he did not cry - he simply, in simple faith, implored God that He would lift the fog and that tomorrow he would be in Toronto. Then the captain began to pray, and as soon as he had started to pray Mueller tapped his shoulder and he says, 'You don't need to pray, sir. Because you don't believe'. The man was a little irate, a little annoyed at this wasting - as he saw it - of his time and he walked immediately out of his cabin - only to be absolutely astonished, because the fog had lifted. Mueller stood with a look upon his face as if to say, 'I knew it, I knew this would happen', because Mueller was a man who knew what it was to pray to God, but not just to pray to God, but to have God answer his prayers.

Do you know what that is this morning? Do I know what that is? Not just simply to pray generally, 'Lord, if it's Your will I pray that You'll do it'. Not just to come before God and pray for all the missionaries, and to pray for all the pastors, and preachers, and all of God's people, and all of the sick - but to actually come to God with specific requests and to get from God specific answers.

There are three things that I want to leave with you this morning in relation to answers and prayer. The first thing I want to deal with is this: some of the prophets of prayer in the Old Testament. Then I want us to look at the prayer of faith within the New Testament. And then quickly if we have time I want us to look at some practical hints concerning answers to prayer.

The first thing is this: prophets of prayer. I don't know about you this morning, but my mind goes back to John chapter 3 and verse 10, where there was a man standing there in the middle of the evening, in the middle of the night - for fear of the Jews - before the Lord Jesus Christ. And the Lord Jesus Christ turned to him concerning the new birth and He said this to him, 'Art thou a master in Israel and knowest not these things?'. As I look at answers to prayer, I feel like him. Am I a person who has been saved for many years, am I perhaps a leader within the church of Jesus Christ - and could it be that many of us do not know what it is to pray to God and be sure of His answer? I must say, and I must confess that, in over ten years of being a Christian, I have never ever heard a message on the prayer of faith. Could that be one of the reasons why, today, so little prayer we think - or we believe - is answered, but if we look at the prophets of prayer in the Old Testament we see some mighty men and mighty women.

If you were to turn to Joshua chapter 10 this morning, you would see that man of God, Joshua, in the midst of a battle - and they were almost prevailing within the battle, but the night is rapidly approaching, and therefore they realize that they need a few more hours in which to prevail in which to get the Lord's victory. And Joshua, realizing the distressing situation, he drops to his bended knees, depending upon God, and cries 'Sun, stand thou still upon Gibeon; and thou, moon, on the valley of Ajalon' - and it says that in answer to his prayers God granted it, and the sun stood still.

If you were to turn to 1 Samuel chapter 1 and verses 10 to 17, you'd see a woman staggering into the temple of God and falling on her knees - she is in absolute turmoil and anguish, so much so that Eli the priest thinks she is drunk. But then he realizes that this woman can't even find words for her prayers, her heart is breaking because her womb is barren. And then as she is before God, she cries from the depths of her soul, and Eli looks on and he asks that the God of Israel may grant thee thy petition. And as we read on in that chapter what do we find? We find that God gave to that woman, Hannah, Samuel the great man of God, in answer to her prayer.

Then, almost miraculously, more so than these events that I have been describing - if you do turn with me to Judges 15, you see here another great event, in the life of Samson. Judges 15 and beginning to read at verse 14: 'And when he came unto Lehi, the Philistines shouted against him: and the spirit of the Lord came mightily upon him, and the cords that were upon his arms became as flax that was burnt with fire, and his bands loosed from off his hands. And he found a new jawbone of an ass, and put forth his hand, and took it, and slew a thousand men therewith. And Samson said, With the jawbone of an ass, heaps upon heaps, with the jaw of an ass have I slain a thousand men. And it came to pass, when he had made an end of speaking, that he cast away the jawbone out of his hand, and called that place Ramathlehi. And he was sore athirst, and called on the Lord, and said, Thou hast given this great deliverance into the hand of thy servant: and now shall I die for thirst, and fall into the hand of the uncircumcised? But', it says, 'God clave an hollow place that was in the jaw, and there came water thereout; and when he had drunk, his spirit came again, and he was revived'.

Now if you're a rationalist this morning, and you look at that, you can't make any sense out of it. If you believe in logic today, you look at that passage of scripture and you see Samson, you can't even make head nor tail out of him slaying a thousand men with the jawbone of an ass - but the message this morning from the Lord is this: God can even use the jawbone of an ass. But more than that: Samson turns round to the God who has given him deliverance and given him victory and he says, 'I have slain all these in Thy name and now I'm going to die of thirst, what are You going to do about it?'. And God cleaves a hollow in the jawbone of that ass and gives him water to drink. My friend these are only three, three of the prophets of prayer, and simply what I want to show you quickly this morning is this: that the Old Testament saints of God knew what it was to have their prayers answered.

What was the key? This is where I want to come to the prayer of faith. What was the key? Look at Luke chapter 11 again, our passage this morning: What does the Lord Jesus say?. 'I say unto you' - now let me say this, when the Lord Jesus Christ says, 'I say unto you', that means there is no argument about it. If He said it, it is true, because it is the blessed Lord Jesus Christ speaking. And let me say, in reference to the man who asked me whether this passage of Scripture was for today and for the church of Jesus Christ today: was the Lord Jesus Christ truthful? Or was He a liar? When He said, 'When you ask, you receive what you ask for', was He true? Or did He not mean what He said? He said it, 'I say unto you', what does He say? 'Ask', that is: vocally ask with your mouth. Ask God, cry unto the God your Maker for what you need, for what is your want, for what is your heart's desire. 'Ask', and then it says 'Seek', that is not from your mouth, but that is from your heart - and you don't even need to speak to pray, you don't even need to get on your knees, you can be walking, you can be talking, you can be singing, you can be driving, but you can be seeking, you can be desiring after something in your heart, and God will answer. 'Knock', that is a loud asking, a loud imploring, where you implore God that He must, in answer to your prayers, give you what you ask. He has promised, 'I say unto you'. It is a promise, it cannot fail, he has promised, 'Ask and you shall receive', and it is heard - it is heard in heaven.

You know it's possible for Christians to ask too little, but it is impossible for the Christian to ask too much. Let me say this, this morning: that often the reason why we receive so little is because we ask for so little - and most Christians want so little today, because they are satisfied with so little. We need to learn what the prayer of faith is. There are four things that I want us to learn this morning. The prayer of faith is the prayer that God answered. And the first thing that you need within the prayer of faith is this: perseverance. You see it doesn't matter how good a pray-er you are, it doesn't matter how good a preacher you are, in fact Hoover Hodge said this: 'I am even now convinced that the difference between the saints like Wesley, Fletcher, Edwards, Brainerd, Bramwell and ourselves is energy, perseverance and the invincible determination to exceed, or die, in the attempt to get your heart's desires'.

It's not someone with great talents that God needs, it's not someone with great preaching ability or great learning that God needs, but it is men great in holiness, men great in faith, men great in fidelity, men great for God. What do we read in Luke chapter 18 and verse 7 with regards to perseverance and prayer? The Lord Jesus Christ Himself spoke and said, 'Shall not God avenge His own elect, which cry day and night unto Him?' God has to answer! God will answer! There must be perseverance, but we dealt with that last week and I don't want to go on too much about it. But you see effective prayer and effectual prayer doesn't depend on the power of the pray-er. This is the key - if you want to have your prayers answered today, tomorrow and the rest of the week remember these three things: you must claim His promises, His prophecies and His providences. His promises, His prophecies and His providences.

In James chapter 1 and verse 6 we read: 'Let him ask', let the believer, the man of God ask, 'in faith, with never a doubt'. But what is faith? What does it mean to pray in faith? I believe that many Christians today, and much of the church of Jesus Christ, has this idea that faith is something that they muster up within themselves, and they go over and over again in their mind: 'I must believe, I will believe, God will do it' - until they try to convince themselves psychologically and emotionally that God is going to answer their prayers. That is not biblical faith. What do we read in Romans and chapter 10? Verse 17 says: 'Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God'. And if you break that equation down a little this morning, what it says is this: faith comes by the word of God. Hearing is the medium, faith is the method. Faith comes by the word of God, this is our faith delivered to us, but it is the promises of God that we are to look upon, we are to read and inwardly digest that will cultivate, that will produce faith within the depths of our soul and our spirit. It is the word of God, we are to take the promises of God, we are to stand upon His promises that will not fail, as we have been singing. We are to take God at His word, we are to believe Him - but what are we to believe?

I believe that faith is not without evidence. What I mean is simply this: that I could go to anyone here in this gathering, and lay my hand upon you and say, 'You are to be healed'. Or I could go to you and tell you that you are going to get that job, or that you are going to do wondrous things for God, or that your life is going to be changed, I could say many things to you - but what is what I am saying based upon? You see, we can be sure that God answers our prayers, but we can only be sure when our prayers are based upon the word of God and are in accordance with His promises. You say to me, 'David, well how do I pray in faith?'. Simply this: you take the promises of God and you claim them! When was the last time you did that? That is faith! Taking God at His word and bringing His word to Him and saying 'Lord, I did not write this Book, I didn't make this up, I am not saying this! Lord, You have said it, and You must honour Your word! You must answer!'. That is how we get our prayers answered - when we pray in accordance to the promises of God, taking God at His word. We must believe, that when we pray to Him, that He will hear us. As the Lord Jesus Christ said, if we ask bread, will He give us a stone? And when we ask God, if we ask in faith, if we ask based upon His promises, God will give us our hearts desire - because when we ask according to His promises we are giving Him, in prayer, His desires - for God works His desires through you and through I.

What kind of promises are there? Well, there are specific promises. In other words, you don't flick through the Bible and say to yourself, 'Well, is it God's will that I should be saved?'. Sure you know that it's revealed in His word that it's His will that you should be saved - therefore what do you do? You don't pray about it, you lift the word of God and say, 'Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved', and you believe it, and that's it! Specific promises. Then there are general promises. For instance - we haven't time to look at it this morning - but in Isaiah 65 verse 24 you have a promise there, that as soon as your mouth opens in the spirit of God, to pray to God, God hears your prayer in Heaven. That's a general promise to everyone. Then there is the desire within your heart, the providences of God, when God lays a burden upon your heart, so heavy that you are driven to your knees to pray, and implore, and cry to God for those desires. Then you can take God at His word and claim the answer.

Of course, we can pray for the Lord's return. We've talked about His promises and His providences, but we can pray for His return - why? Because it's prophesied that He will return. Remember, He reprimanded the hypocrites, the Jews, the Pharisees and the Sadducees because they were able to discern the signs of the weather, but they couldn't discern the signs of the times. We can, because we have the promises, we have the word of God.

C.H. Spurgeon has a book, and I would encourage you to get it: 'The Chequebook of the Bank of Faith' it's called - 366 promises of God for each day of your life to claim. Do you know what the promises of God are? Do you know what the word of God is? It's a chequebook from start to finish, for you to take to God, the Great Banker, and give to Him and say, 'This is what my cheque says that I ought to have as a believer, a child of God. You are implored to give it to me!'. You may think that that is forward. You may think that that is being pushy with God. You may even think that it's being cheeky with God - but do you know what God says in Malachi chapter 3 and verse 10? 'Prove Me now!' - God wants you to prove Him!

In the Isle of Lewis - you've heard me speak about it before, because it's burned upon my heart - a revival took place. And there was a prayer meeting on one occasion, and it's where it all seemed to start. And this young man got to his feet in this prayer meeting, and they had been meditating upon a verse of scripture, 'I will pour water upon him that is thirsty' - and listen to this! He rose to his feet and he said 'Lord, Your word says I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, are You not a Man of Your word?'. Would you say that to God? It says the building shook, and God moved through that little island like a fire, because one simple man brought, he cashed in, the promises of God for him.

Leonard Ravenhill, in his little book 'Why no revival?' he says this - and I've written it on the front of my Bible because I think it's astonishing. He said, 'We will sit one day in our fellowships and we will watch as some simple, newly converted soul will walk to the front and open the Book of God and simply believe it!'

This is not a book that is to be explained. It is not a book that is to be [torn] apart, and broken down, and talked about until we're sick - but it's a book that is to be believed! A book that is to be claimed! A book that is to be lived!

I've run out of time this morning, but I'd so much more to say to you all today - but just for a moment, Hebrews chapter 11 we read this, of men and women who claimed God's promises, who took them and stood upon them. It says of them: 'Who through faith they subdued kingdoms, they wrought righteousness, they obtained promises, they stopped the mouths of lions, they quenched the violence of fire, they escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness they were made strong, they waxed valiant in fight, they turned to flight the armies of the aliens. Women received their dead raised to life again: and others were tortured, not accepting deliverance; that they might obtain a better resurrection: And others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment: They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, they were tempted, they were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented; (Of whom the world was not worthy:) they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth. And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise!' But brethren this morning, we have received the promise - and what more can we do with it, if we claim it at the throne of grace?

In one occasion there were two bishops, Bishop Lambeth and Wainwright. And they were one of the first missionaries to China, and they had a great missionary meeting in Osaka, Japan. And on one occasion, as they were taking their meeting, there were two officials from the communist government that came in and told them that they could no longer have that meeting. And what it did was it drove those two men to their knees in prayer that evening, two of them in a little room. And the little servant girl came to call them to supper, and the power of God and the power of prayer was so great that she fell beneath it! And then his wife came up, to find out what was going on, why the little servant girl hadn't come back, and she fell underneath the power of prayer and they altogether, when they came to their senses, went to a prayer meeting in that little upper room - and through it, two of those official's sons were born again! The next day one of those officials that had come to them on a previous occasion, came and said: 'You can continue with your meetings, no one will hinder you'. Do you know what it said in the newspaper the next day? 'Last night the Christian's God visited town'.

You know that most banks close at half past three or four, but have we ever thought of the fact that the throne of grace, one day, will close? We will not pray in glory, the way we pray down here. We can not see God do the impossible in a sin sick world, see Him save multitudes, see Him change lives up in glory - it can't happen. It is a special blessing for the Christian, that can only happen down here. Therefore all the more reason why we should say: 'Lord teach us to pray, but teach us to pray to be answered'.

Our dear Father we do just that, we praise Thee for the great things that Thou hast done in the past. But Lord we acknowledge Thy word and Thy promise that Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever. And what has been done in the past, greater can be done still, if we would only believe our great and glorious God. Lord we pray now that Thou wilt take us to our homes in safety and part us with Your blessing. For Christ's sake. Amen.

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www.preachtheword.com

info@preachtheword.com

A Short Series On Prayer - Chapter 3

"Fasting And Prayer"

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We're going to turn in our Bibles to Isaiah chapter 58, Isaiah chapter 58. And you'll remember that, over the past Lord's Day mornings, we've been thinking on the subject of prayer. We began a few weeks ago with the subject of 'The Lord Jesus Christ And Prayer'. We looked at His example, we looked about how He lived, what He did in relation to prayer. Then last Sunday morning we thought on the subject of 'Answers to Prayer' - and we thought there that it is the prayer of faith that God answers. We don't just pray generally, but we pray specifically - we can't just simply pray for anything, but we must pray in the will of God, and we know the will of God by His revealed will within the word of God. So it is when God gives us a word to pray for something, when God gives us a promise to pray for something - it is only then that we can be sure that He will answer our prayers.

But this week we're going to think on the subject of 'Fasting And Prayer'. Isaiah chapter 58: "Cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet, and show my people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins. Yet they seek me daily, and delight to know my ways, as a nation that did righteousness, and forsook not the ordinance of their God: they ask of me the ordinances of justice; they take delight in approaching to God. Wherefore" - why? - "have we fasted, say they, and thou seest not? Wherefore have we afflicted our soul, and thou takest no knowledge? Behold, in the day of your fast ye find pleasure, and exact all your labours. Behold, ye fast for strife and debate, and to smite with the fist of wickedness: ye shall not fast as ye do this day, to make your voice to be heard on high. Is it such a fast that I have chosen? A day for a man to afflict his soul? Is it to bow down his head as a bulrush, and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him? Wilt thou call this a fast, and an acceptable day to the Lord? Is not this the fast that I have chosen? To loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke? Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? When thou seest the naked, that thou cover him; and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh? Then shall thy light break forth as the morning, and thine health shall spring forth speedily: and thy righteousness shall go before thee; the glory of the Lord shall be thy reward. Then shalt thou call, and the Lord shall answer; thou shalt cry, and he shall say, Here I am. If thou take away from the midst of thee the yoke, the putting forth of the finger, and speaking vanity; and if thou draw out thy soul to the hungry, and satisfy the afflicted soul; then shall thy light rise in obscurity, and thy darkness be as the noon day: And the Lord shall guide thee continually, and satisfy thy soul in drought, and make fat thy bones: and thou shalt be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters fail not. And they that shall be of thee shall build the old waste places: thou shalt raise up the foundations of many generations; and thou shalt be called, The repairer of the breach, The restorer of paths to dwell in. If thou turn away thy foot from the sabbath, from doing thy pleasure on my holy day; and call the sabbath a delight, the holy of the Lord, honourable; and shalt honour him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking thine own words: Then shalt thou delight thyself in the Lord; and I will cause thee to ride upon the high places of the earth, and feed thee with the heritage of Jacob thy father: for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it".

We're turning, just for a moment, to Matthew chapter 6, Matthew chapter 6 and we're beginning to read at verse 16. Matthew chapter 6 and verse 16 - this is recorded within the Sermon on the Mount, where the Lord Jesus Christ laid down rules - principles rather - for those who followed Him. In verse 16 He begins to talk about fasting, He's been talking about prayer and now He turns to the subject of fasting - verse 16: "Moreover when ye fast, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance: for they disfigure their faces, that

they may appear unto men to fast. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face; that thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father which is in secret: and thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly".

Matthew chapter 17, Matthew chapter 17 and verse 21 - and you'll remember here there is a story about, as the Bible calls it, a lunatic boy who was healed. You remember, the disciples came and tried to heal this young man, and they had no spiritual success - in verse 21 the Lord Jesus resounded to them, first of all He said 'You have little faith', and then in verse 21 He says: "Howbeit this kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting". And then, quickly, Hebrews chapter 11, Hebrews chapter 11 and verse 6 - the great chapter upon faith, the writer to the Hebrews says this, verse 6: "But without faith it is impossible to please him" - God - "for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him".

Last Sunday evening, and even in the morning, I alluded to a sermon* that was preached by a man called Jonathan Edwards. I don't want to repeat myself unnecessarily, but save to say this: that you remember, when this man stood - who was half blind - and read his sermon off a piece of paper, that those people felt the very presence of God in such a way, that they mounted the pews for fear that the ground would open and that hell would swallow them. What I failed to tell you last week was simply this: that before Jonathan Edwards got into that pulpit, before he preached that message, his diaries tell us that for three days before it he fasted and he prayed. He did not let a morsel of food go through his lips, in fact he had three sleepless nights - as without food, without sleep, without the normal resources of life, he got on his face before God, he sought God in answer, to answer his prayers - and the result was that men and women had the conviction of sin, the conviction of the Holy Spirit falling upon them, and they could see hell with their very mind's eye -- and many were saved. Those who witnessed that scene said that as he mounted the pulpit, as he looked in the congregation, he looked as if he was a man who had stared for days into the very face of God - and he needed not even to speak a word, because as he looked at those people with the look of God in his eyes, conviction fell upon all. He fasted and prayed.

*The sermon Pastor Legge is referring to - "Sinners In The Hands Of An Angry God" - can be read in our Book Store.

We've been thinking, these weeks, about praying - but there is a discipline that is found in the word of God, in both the Old and the New Testament, that I read and that I find, but I find that within the church of Jesus Christ, within our lives today it may well be a forgotten discipline. I wonder is it - is fasting - is it a forgotten discipline? The hunger strikers did it, that's right, they fasted. They didn't eat food, some of them didn't drink water - they did it for political reasons, I know that, but they still were fasting. And in Isaiah 58 and verse 6, that we read this morning, we read about those who do it for strife, those who do it for the wrong reason - Satanists fast - did you know that? In our land, this very week, many Satanists, on Friday gone by, would have been fasting and praying to their god - Lucifer - for the downfall of Christendom, and for the break-up of many of your marriages here today. They do it, why do they do it? They do it - and they do it error, they do it, as Isaiah 58 says, in strife, they do it for all the wrong reasons and the wrong motives - but they do it because they know that it works! There is something about fasting that works.

Matthew Henry says: 'Fasting is a laudable practice, and we have reason to lament it, that it is so generally neglected among Christians today' - and that was in his day. Martyn Lloyd-Jones says: 'I wonder whether we have ever fasted. I wonder whether it has ever occurred to us that we ought to be considering the question of fasting. The fact is, is it not, that this whole subject seems to have fallen right out of our lives, right out of our whole Christian thinking'. Now let's be honest with ourselves here this morning: how many of us, gathered here today, fast and pray? How many of us, is [it] a regular practice in our lives that we daily, perhaps one day, perhaps several days, but somehow we fast for God, we pray to God? Do you know what I find - over these past weeks as I have been studying the word of God with relation to prayer, and now in

relation to fasting, in relation to blessing - do you know what I find? You could sum it all up in one sentence: we cannot have apostolic power without apostolic practice. You cannot separate the ends from the means, with regard to prayer and blessing, with regard to this subject of fasting and blessing. And if we ignore the practices of the Apostles - the early disciples, elders and deacons, the people of God in the New Testament and Old Testament - and we look around and we wonder why God does not bless us, we charge God in our foolishness.

There are several questions that I want to ask this morning with regard to fasting. First all: what is fasting? Secondly: who is to fast? Thirdly - and I would encourage you to take notes because I can't remember all these, so I don't think you will either - thirdly: how to fast? How do we fast? Why do we fast? And finally: when do we fast? What do we fast? Who is to fast? How do we fast? Why do we fast? And when do we fast?

The first question is this: what is fasting? A simple definition of fasting, from the word of God now, is this: 'abstaining from food for spiritual purposes'. Many writers today think that fasting can be fasting from sexual relations, they think it can be fasting from things that you normally do like watching the television, or reading a book - some people think it can be fasting from sleep. But as we look at the word of God we find that that is not, specifically, what fasting is in the word of God - but fasting, specifically, is fasting, abstaining from food - food - for spiritual reasons. I wonder, men, have you ever been in the garden, or maybe you tamper with cars, and maybe you've been in the garage, or maybe you've been doing something in the workshop - and the wife has called you for tea, your dinner is ready, and you're out there, and you're in the middle something, you're engrossed in something, and you can think of nothing else but the thing that you're doing, and you wait! You wait till you have finished. It might be half an hour, it might be an hour, it might be several hours - and the wife's still calling, and still asking [you] to come for the dinner - but you have something more important on your mind! Friends today, that is what fasting is. That, in simple layman's terms, is what fasting is: that your mind is so taken up with God, or your heart and your soul is so engrossed in what you want God to do in answer to your prayers, that you cannot find time even to eat. God has burdened your heart so much that you find the necessity to leave food aside, to leave perhaps one meal aside, or a few meals aside - why? Because it maybe takes an hour of your time, that you feel that you could spend more appropriately, and profitably, in prayer before God. That is what fasting is. And do you know what it is? What we've been repeating week, after week, after week - it is showing to heaven, and it is showing to hell, that you are serious about your prayer!

What is that wee word that we have used so often? Persistent prayer, persevering prayer, insistent prayer - in other words, you're showing by the fact that you're not willing to be easily beset or laden down, even with food for a few moments, to call upon God in prayer - you are coming showing your determination, your perseverance, that you want God to answer. That is what fasting is. If we had time this morning, we would be able to look at chapter 6 of Matthew, [where] we read about fasting - and it's interesting to look that when Jesus, the Lord Jesus Christ, talks about prayer, He talks about fasting in a similar way. How do we pray? We pray individually, don't we? You pray - I hope - individually - at home you go, as the Lord said in Matthew chapter 5 and 6, into your closet. You lock away the world and, by closing the door on the world, you're opening the door to the Saviour, and you have sweet communion with Him. But of course, where else do you pray? Well, you pray with the people of God, and in this assembly we come together on a Wednesday, and then on a Friday in the winter, and we meet together to communally - together - unite and call upon God in prayer. We pray regularly, don't we? At least we should pray regularly - but there are times, [aren't] there, when there are crises that enter our lives, or enter an assembly, or enter our land, that we feel the burden that we ought to come together for a special season, for a special time of prayer. In the same light, we ought to fast individually, we ought to do it in our closets at home - but I believe that we ought to do it, and the word of God teaches, we ought to do it unitedly, together, communally, as the people of God, calling upon God for His blessing, calling upon God that we may see His hand. We ought to do it regularly, if we have to pray regularly - and we even insist on praying daily, don't we? Surely we ought to fast regularly,

individually speaking - and then there ought to be special times, like special times of prayer, when there is a need, there is a crisis, there is a burden, that we all come together with the one burden and bear it to God in fasting and prayer. That is what fasting is.

The second question is this: who is to fast? Well, I'm quite aware that there are medical reasons, and various other reasons why certain people should not fast. It is hard - in fact it is nigh impossible - for a diabetic to fast. It is hard for other people, with dietary disorders, to fast - and I'm not accusing, or I am not pointing the finger at them, or I'm not asking you to do something this morning that you can't do, medically speaking. But who is to pray and fast? Was it something for the Old Testament saints? Was it something for the apostles or the disciples - and it is not for today? Well, if you look into the Old Testament, you find that on the Day of Atonement, every person in the nation of Israel [was] to fast for that day. One day in the year - no exemptions, everyone had to do it, they didn't look at one another and say, 'Well, you're more spiritual than I am', or 'You're in the Lord's work, you're the priest, you're in the tribe of Levi', they didn't say that. Each one of them, every single one, fasted before God. We read that Moses fasted, David fasted, Elijah fasted, many of the kings fasted - and ordered fasts in the whole land, some of which went to also the beasts, that they were to fast from eating their fodder daily. We read in the New Testament, the Lord Jesus Christ fasted, the early Church in the Acts of the apostles fasted - in fact, church history teaches us, that in the early Church they fasted every Wednesday and every Friday, and many of them fasted before the Lord's Supper on the Sunday - all day Saturday they fasted. Oh, we try to emulate the early Church, don't we? We try to emulate it in its blessing, in its abundance of gifts and fruit and salvation - but if we ignore the means, we will not have the power! The apostles fasted, the early Christians fasted when they were appointing elders, when they were sending missionaries and apostles out, they fasted when they had to make important decisions, they fasted when they needed guidance. Wesley, John Wesley, would not ordain a man to the ministry unless he covenanted with him and with God to fast on a Wednesday and a Friday till 4 p.m. in the afternoon. The church fathers fasted, the reformers fasted, the revivalists fasted - what about us? Do we fast?

Who is to fast? Well, if you look quickly at Matthew chapter 9 and verse 15, you read this: 'And Jesus said unto them, Can the children of the bridechamber mourn, as long as the bridegroom is with them? But the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken from them, and then shall they fast'. The disciples were asking, perhaps, the same question that you are asking this morning: should I fast? The Lord Jesus said to them, 'You don't need to fast now because I am with you. But when I go, then you ought to fast' - when the bridegroom goes. We'll be looking this evening in the Gospel, at Matthew chapter 25 about the ten virgins - and you remember, five of them were foolish, but it says not just about the five of them but about all of them, that when the bridegroom tarried they all - all of them - slumbered and slept. I wonder was it an allusion to fasting? As the Lord says in verse 13: 'Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh' - and as we wait for Him, as we watch for Him, as we work for Him, surely it is our imperative to fast as the children and the people of God.

Thirdly: how do we fast? I wish we had more time to deal with it this morning, but how do we fast? Well, we read in Matthew 6 and verses 17 to 18, that we're not to do it before men, we're not to try and look gaunt and look smelly, as if we're fasting and we're abstaining from everything. We're not to draw attention to it, we're not to stand on the street corner and have a sign around our neck, 'I am fasting for God'. But we are to fast in quiet, in secret - and God says that those that fast in secret will be rewarded openly. That's a promise! Hebrews 11 verse 6 that we read, says that we are to fast in faith: 'He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him' - why do we fast? As I said already, like Paul said to Timothy, that a soldier that is warring can't be entangled with the things of this world. And oh, there's some men of God that I believe that if they could live without food totally, they would have done it! But you can't, so fasting is for a special time - where you come before God and all you can think about is God and the prayer that you need to be answered, and you grab upon Him, and fast.

There are three fasts that we find in the word of God. The first fast is the total fast. That means you don't eat bread, you don't eat food, and you don't drink water - a total fast. Moses fasted like that, Elijah fasted like that for 40 days the word of God says. In Acts chapter 9 and verse 9 we read that, after his conversion, Paul fasted like that - a total fast - for three days. Now I want to say this: that when Moses fasted like this, and when Elijah fasted like this for 40 days - if you do it tonight, and start it, you'll die. Because they were in the direct, intimate presence of God when they fasted like this. This was a supernatural fast, and unless you have a word from the Lord to do this - and I'm not ruling that out - but unless you have a special word from the Lord, you're advised only to fast like this for maybe a day. Total fast - and this type of fast does the most damage to the devil.

The second type of fast in the word of God is the partial fast. We find it in Daniel chapter 10 and verse 3, the partial fast. We read there that Daniel - you remember, he did not take of the king's delicacies, of the delicacies of the king's table - he didn't eat the meat and he didn't drink the wine. It was a partial fast, he still ate, he still drank, but he didn't eat certain foods. That may be a fast for those that have dietary problems - cutting out certain things to call upon God.

And then thirdly, and quickly, there is the most common fast within the word of God, and that is the normal fast. In Matthew 4 and verse 2 we read of the Lord Jesus Christ - Matthew 4 and verse 2 - that for 40 days in the wilderness He fasted. The normal fast is not eating, but drinking water - not eating, but drinking water. There are men - and need I say, I'm not one of them - who have stood in this pulpit and have fasted 40 days. Needless to say, they are men who have seen blessing on their ministry. How do you fast? Take your pick. How long do you fast? Well, listen: that's not really the question - and there isn't this idea that the longer you fast, the more spiritual you are, and don't get that into your head - and neither, don't get into your head the fact that you should be punishing yourself, or denying yourself something that is good - that is not what fasting is about! It's not about how long you fast, but what it is about is our attitude as we get before God, our motive, our sincerity as we beg before Him. I would advise you to fast in small amounts, and then as God leads you, you be led.

That's how to fast. But quickly: why do we fast? Why do we fast? Simply: we fast for results! Now I don't know whether that's too simplistic for some - and maybe it's too unspiritual for some - but that is why we read in the word of God that there is only one prayer, one prayer in the Bible, that does not ask God for something. Only one. Why do we pray and fast? Isaiah 58, that we read, turn to it very quickly - Isaiah 58 and if you look at verses 8 and 9, Isaiah 58 verses 8 and 9, and verses 11 and 12, you read all of these things: that if you fast the Lord's fast you will receive light, you will receive health, you will receive righteousness, you will become closer to God, you will receive the glory of God in your life, you will receive answered prayer, you will receive - listen to this! - continual guidance, you will receive satisfaction in your spiritual life, you will receive refreshment, you will receive work and fruit that endures - and finally you will receive, if you need it, restoration. What do you get if you fast? If you look at Psalm 35 and verse 13, you read this: 'I humbled my soul with fasting'. Matthew 5 and verse 4 says: 'Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted' - there is humility in fasting. You are coming before God, you are debasing yourself before Him, and you are crying in humility to God to answer your prayer. You get closer to God when you fast, for in James 4 and verse 8 we read: 'Draw near unto God, and he will draw near unto you'. Ephesians 6 and verse 18 - we see that fasting can be used for spiritual battle, for the battle with the forces of darkness - and sometimes I wonder have forgotten that they're there! For Paul says to the Ephesians: '...with all prayer...', once you've put on the armour of God you've to take all prayer, praying with all types of prayer and kinds of prayer - and one of those is praying and fasting.

Then there is guidance - this is marvellous! Ezra 8:21 says this: 'Then I proclaimed a fast there, at the river of Ahava, that we might afflict ourselves before our God, to seek of him a right way for us, and for our little ones, and for all our substance'. They sought the Lord together, fasting for guidance for the future. In Isaiah

58 and verse 8, in Matthew 17:21 [it] speaks of healing - and we read in the Gospels that, before Christ went into His ministry of healing and deliverance, He spent those 40 days fasting and praying. For crises that come into our church, or into our life, there is an intervention from God by fasting - 2 Chronicles chapter 20, we read about King Jehoshaphat and the people of Judah, and they were up against an enemy that they could not beat, and what they did was they got on their faces, they fasted and prayed, and God dealt with their enemies and they didn't need to lift one weapon.

And we can fast for others. My friend, listen to this: who has loved ones that are not saved? Who has those dying in their sins, with no thought of God - and, as far as you can see, no hope of God? And maybe you have been praying for years for them - can I ask you: could it be that prayer won't answer it? God is waiting for you to fast and pray - why? Why fast and pray? Why is that different? Because when we are weak - and don't ask me to explain all of this - but when we are weak, God is strong! And when we humble ourselves, God exalts Himself through us! And this is a doctrine, this is a teaching that is far from the philosophies and the wisdom of men in today's age - they feed the flesh, but if God wants us to hear our prayer's answers, we must starve our flesh! Can I say: are stomachs are too full, and our souls are starving, and the world around us is starving - but we need to get on our knees, we need to get before God, and before God with empty stomachs - realising our weakness, realising our physical weakness - we must cry to God, and God will answer our prayers! The flesh is debased, and when we fast before God we are made more aware of the spiritual.

Quickly, and finally: when do we fast? Matthew chapter 6 and verse 2, we read: 'Therefore when thou doest thine alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward', then verse 5, 'And when you pray, you shall not be as the hypocrites are: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the street corners...I say to you, They have their reward'. But when should we fast? Verse 16: 'When ye fast, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance: for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward...' - when ye fast, not if ye fast, not if that's your calling, or if that's your gift, or if the Lord leads you to do it - but when ye fast!

My friends, I have said all that God has given me to say today - but, God, teach us, Lord instruct us to fast and pray. Our Lord, we remember that when that immoral woman broke the alabaster box that the ointment flowed forth. And it is not until the alabaster box of our flesh is broken, our appetites, our pride, our desires are crucified - and it may be through the medium of fasting - it's not until then that the ointment, the release of the Spirit will be effective, and seen of men in our homes, in our workplace, in our fellowship and in our world. Lord, teach us to fast and pray. Amen.

Transcribed by Andrew Watkins, Preach The Word - September 2000

www.preachtheword.com

info@preachtheword.com

A Short Series On Prayer - Part 4

"Time For Prayer"

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Now if you have your Bible with you this morning, we're turning to Mark's gospel and chapter 14. You'll remember that we're going through a series, leading up to our week of prayer in the assembly here, on the subject of prayer. We began a few weeks ago with the subject of "The Lord and Prayer", then we had "Answers and Prayer", last Lord's day morning we thought of "Fasting and Prayer" and this morning we're going to meditate upon the subject of "Time For Prayer"...time for prayer. We begin reading at Mark's gospel, at chapter 14 and verse 32:

"And they came to a place which was named Gethsemane: [the Lord Jesus Christ] saith to his disciples, Sit ye here, while I shall pray. And he taketh with him Peter and James and John, and began to be sore amazed, and to be very heavy; And saith unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful unto death: tarry ye here, and watch. And he went forward a little, and fell on the ground, and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him. And he said, Abba, Father, all things are possible unto thee; take away this cup from me: nevertheless not what I will, but what thou wilt. And he cometh, and findeth them sleeping, and saith unto Peter, Simon, sleepest thou? Coudest not thou watch one hour? Watch ye and pray, lest ye enter into temptation. The spirit truly is ready, but the flesh is weak. And again he went away, and prayed, and spake the same words. And when he returned, he found them asleep again, (for their eyes were heavy), neither wist they what to answer him. And he cometh the third time, and saith unto them, Sleep on now, and take your rest: it is enough, the hour is come; behold, the Son of man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise up, let us go; lo, he that betrayeth me is at hand."

Keep your finger in that passage of Scripture and let's, for a moment, come before the Lord and ask His help this morning, as we come to what He says to us: Lord God, the Holy Ghost, in this accepted hour as on the day of Pentecost, descend in all Thy power. We meet with one accord, in our appointed place and want the promise of the Lord, the Spirit of all grace. In Jesus name. Amen.

Time for prayer. "The Lord and Prayer", "Answers and Prayer", last week "Fasting and Prayer"; but I want us to think especially this morning of "Time for Prayer". The passage of Scripture that we read today is a very famous one. It is one that we read together on Wednesday evening, where Gordon brought to us such a vivid picture of the Lord Jesus Christ there, the burden of sin that He saw of the world, and how He would bear it to Calvary. There are two people that are seen within this passage of Scripture. There are two types of people in the garden of Gethsemane; one is the Lord Jesus Christ, who is so vivid as we see Him. And the word of God seems to indicate that He was near to dying at the great burden of sin that He would bear, the hell that was ours that we should bear, that He was facing at Calvary. That is the first person we see, but the second type of person that is so vividly portrayed for us in this passage is: people. Peter, James and John, like ourselves: sinners. We read that as the Lord Jesus Christ went alone to pray, as He went to look into the very face of our sins that He would have to bear, as He was near unto death, He asked His disciples to go and watch and pray for Him at that time. You remember they went, and the three of them were watching and praying -- but what happened? It says that they fell asleep, and the Lord Jesus Christ came to them again and said, 'Could you not watch one hour? Watch and pray lest ye enter into temptation. The spirit truly is ready or willing, but the flesh is weak'. It says He went away again a second time and prayed the same words -- He came back again and they were sleeping. He went away a third time, He came back the third time and again they had fallen into temptation, they had let the flesh get the victory. He said, 'Sleep on, for the hour is come'.

There are a few words that I want us to meditate on this morning, with regards to this great subject of 'time for prayer'. It's found in verse 37: "And he cometh, and findeth them sleeping, and saith unto Peter, Simon, sleepest thou? Coudest not thou watch one hour? Watch ye and pray, lest ye enter [into] temptation. The spirit truly is ready, but the flesh is weak." The Lord Jesus came to His disciples, and remember that they, in their time and in this present moment in history, did not have the Holy Spirit in the way that the church of Jesus Christ has it today. He was not their Comforter at that time, He was not the power that He is to us in our present dispensation. But He came to Simon Peter and He looked him straight in the eyes, eyes that were burdened with sleep and tiredness, and He said these piercing words -- as I believe He says to the church of Jesus Christ today -- 'Could you not watch one hour? Even one hour? Could you not spend at least one hour with Me in prayer? Praying for Me, praying to our God, watching -- just one hour, Simon? Can you not do it?' He went on to give the reason why Simon couldn't do it. Because although Simon, maybe in the depths of his soul, and in his very spirit he was desirous to come and to spend maybe hours and nights and weeks in prayer, Jesus Christ the Son of God said to him, 'Yes, you might want that within your spirit, but your flesh is so, so weak'.

Is that your experience this morning? Is it your experience believer, that you as you have listened to these messages, as the word of God has spoken to you, you've sat and there has been a desire, a want, that has welled up within your being, that has asked 'Oh, that I could pray like that, oh that I could follow these great men of God within the word of God and within church history -- that I could emulate their example, but I can't! I'm so weak, I get so tired, I haven't the strength. I can hardly spend 5, 10 minutes before my God, yet the Lord Jesus Christ came to Simon Peter and said 'One hour, just even one hour, could you not do even this?'" I read recently about a man called Mr Payson (sp?), and it says of him that he actually wore grooves into his floorboards because he was so often on his knees in prayer, spending time in and for prayer. The history books tell us of James, and many of you know it, that he was nicknamed 'old camel knees' because his knees were calloused because he prayed so often, so frequently and so long. The Marquis of Rentre (sp?), on one occasion went up to his room, and he was in the habit of praying in half-an-hour spells, and he told his servant to come and to disturb him after half-an-hour. But he was so engrossed in prayer, that when she came up to him and she looked through the keyhole to see what he was doing, if he was ready to be disturbed -- he had such a godly look upon his face as he almost gazed into the very face of God, and she didn't disturb him - and she let three half-hours go by. And when she came at an hour-and-a-half and knocked upon the door, he opened the door and he said, 'How quickly half-an-hour goes when you're before the face of God in prayer!' Bishop Andrews -- it is said of him that he spent the greater part of five hours day-by-day before the face of God in devotions and in prayer. Luther said there were some days in his life that were too busy that he couldn't spend only but three hours in prayer.

I would recommend to you all a book that has done great things in my Christian life, it's entitled 'Power Through Prayer' by E.M. Bounds. But he, in one of the chapters of the book, talks about Dr. Adoniram Judson, who was a missionary to Burma, and it says of him -- and I'll just read it out to you, 'Dr. Judson's success in prayer is attributable to the fact that he gave much time to prayer.' He himself, Dr. Judson says this, 'Arrange thy affairs, if possible, so that thou canst leisurely devote two or three hours every day, not merely to devotional exercises, but to the very act of secret prayer and communion with God. Endeavour seven times a day to withdraw from business and company and lift up thy soul to God in private retirement. Begin the day by rising after midnight and devoting some time amid the silence and darkness of the night to this secret work. Let the hour of opening dawn find thee at the same work. Let the hours of 9, 12, 3, 6 and 9 at night witness the same. Be resolute in this cause, make all practical sacrifices to maintain it, consider that thy time is short and thy business and company must not be allowed to rob thee of thy God'. Bounds says of these words, 'Dr. Judson impressed an empire for Christ'. You might say this morning, 'This is too great! To ask of us in our generation, our busy life, to spend so much time -- even one hour -- before God in prayer'. But witness this man Judson: he shook an empire for God, he changed a continent for Him, he was

successful - one of the few men who mightily impressed the world for Christ. Many men were greater in their gifts, but they made no impression. Many men were greater orators, they were more learned, but this man made footsteps for God because he kept the iron red hot in prayer. He helped, with God's skill, to fashion it in enduring power. E.M. Bounds says, 'No man can do a great and enduring work for God, who is not a man of prayer. No man can be a man of prayer who does not give much time to it'.

We read about them in the word of God do we not - we have thought about them in days gone by - about Daniel, who three times a day (and he was locked up for it) - three times a day he called upon God. David said, 'Evening and morning and afternoon will I cry aloud and He will hear my voice'. Listen to the Lord's words, for I believe they're our words - they are for us, in a generation of apathy, in a generation of unconcern and little, if not absolute prayerlessness. Listen, it is His voice - the Saviour's voice to you - 'Couldst not thou watch one hour?' Can you imagine what would happen if just ten people in our little assembly here, ten people agreed with one another, but more importantly covenanted with God almighty, that they would not pass through a sunset or a sun-rising unless they had spent one hour with God in prayer? Can you imagine what could happen? Not what could happen, but what would happen! In answer to prayer, the effectual, fervent prayer of those who unite together and agree on a matter and come before God in such praying. Ecclesiastes 3 and verse 1 says, 'To everything there is a season'. There is [an] appointed season for many things, a time to every purpose under heaven - and you know the list that he goes through, a time to die, a time to live, so many times and so many things for time. But there is a time for this and a time for that and within the life of an assembly and a personal Christian there is time for many things, even time to preach - but now, I believe, is the time to pray. But how? How? For the spirit is willing - I want to pray, I want to do these great exploits for God because I know my God in prayer. I want all these things, my spirit is willing but my flesh is weak!

There are three things that I want to leave with you this morning. I don't know whether this is my last message on prayer in this series or not, I don't know that yet, but these three things have burned upon my soul this week - to leave with you as motivations to pray, and how you can pray. The first thing is this: redeem the time. The second thing is: deny yourself. And the third thing is: buffet your body. The first thing - let's look at it - it's found in Ephesians 5 and verse 16, Ephesians chapter 5 and verse 16 and you read these words, verse 14 says 'Wherefore he saith, Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light. See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, Redeeming the time, because the days are evil'. Redeeming the time. What does 'redeem' mean? Well, we all know what that means, don't we? To buy something back - and what Paul is saying here in Ephesians is 'Buy up the time'. Buy up the time! You hear many people talking about saving time, but you know you can't save time. You can't save it, you can't conserve it because time passes no matter what you do. But what you can do is, you can spend it or you can squander it. How do you spend your time? How do you invest your time?

The word of God says, and we know from medical [research], that people will live - average - 70 years, the three-score and ten. And if you live 70 years, we're told that 20 years of your 70 will be spent sleeping, 20 will be spent working, 6 years eating, 7 years playing, 5 years dressing (and that might be a wee bit more for the ladies), 1 year on the telephone, 2-and-a-half years smoking, 2-and-a-half years lying in bed, 3 years waiting on someone, 5 months tying your shoes and 2-and-a-half years at everything else, including going to church. Think of it! But how much time do we spend before God? 'Couldst not thou - one hour?' In one year there are 8,760 hours in the year, and without going into the moral or theological aspect of tithing, if you just take a tenth as an example, a tenth of that time would be 876 hours a year in prayer - to tithe your time. What about [if] you take a day? Well, it's almost the same - 24 hours and if you were to give God a tenth, and remember that we, I believe, as the children and the people of God of the New Testament, are to give as much as we can give - a tenth of 24 hours is 2-and-a-half hours a day before God. I know that this may be a burden that is too heavy to take or even think about, but brethren this morning, we are not just stewards of our money, we're not just stewards of the gifts that God has given us, but we are stewards of time. Do we

redeem it? Look for a few moments, because it would be amiss of us to mention this great subject without looking and pondering the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. This astounded me this week as I thought about it - that the Lord Jesus Christ was approximately 33 years of age when He died - half, almost, of the three-score and ten. He spent three years of ministry, He didn't begin 'till He was almost 30 years of age. But in that 3 years approximately, that He spent serving God, preaching the word, healing, teaching, doing mighty works - how He spent His time! Look what He got done in those three short years, how He spent them! Isaiah chapter 40 says this, 'They that wait upon the Lord'. You must redeem the time, even if it means waiting for God.

The second thing I want you to notice is this: you are to deny yourself. Deny yourself, Mark chapter 8, Mark chapter 8 and verse 34, 'And when [the Lord Jesus Christ] had called the people unto him with his disciples also, he said unto them, Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me'. Deny yourself - what does that mean? It's alright talking about it, but practically speaking - almost into the 21st century - for you and I as believers and followers of the Lord Jesus Christ, when we hear His first words to His disciples 'Deny yourself', what does it mean? It means simply this, I believe, that there are some things in our lives, everyday things, mundane things that we like - some of which we don't like, but they are legitimate things, they are not sinful, the word of God does not convey them, some of them may at times even be necessary - but we may need to sacrifice them. Do you get what I'm saying? We thought about it last week, we took the subject of food - and how when it comes to biblical fasting, that at times in our lives when we are faced with crises, or when we want to get near to God, or for some unknown reason that we are praying perhaps for a loved one, we think that there is something so important that we need to hold God so tightly that we have to forget about food. We sacrifice something that is necessary, something that is legitimate, for a greater purpose and need. Do we do that for prayer? My friends, how long do we spend in front of the television? How long do we spend at the table? How long do we spend - and these things are not wrong - in our recreation, in shaping our body, in shaping our mind, in shaping our appearance - how long do we spend? But how long do we spend shaping our soul? Do we deny ourselves?

There's three scriptures that I want us just to quickly look at that speak of that, one of them is 1 Corinthians 6 and verse 12, and this is a great fundamental law of the Christian life - 1 Corinthians 6 and verse 12 and Paul says, 'All things are lawful unto me - because of the grace I have in Christ, because I am set free from the law of sin and death - all things are lawful unto me, but not all things are expedient, or helpful'. Not all things are helpful for me. We turn to Mark, that we were at, Mark chapter 8 and verse 35, you know the verse well, where He says again carrying on from talking about denying yourself, He says 'For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel's, the same shall save it'. For those saints, and I know that there are some here this morning, who give up some of the legitimate things in their life - that there is nothing wrong with, but they sacrifice them to serve and to get before God in a way that is not possible unless we sacrifice - oh, there's a special blessing. There's a special reward in the glory, I believe, for them - for God's unknown who will be at the front line to get the prizes, to get the rewards wherewith to worship their Saviour because they denied themselves. Second Timothy, where Paul says to him, in chapter 2 and verses 3 and 4 'Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier'. The soldier that puts his armour on and chooses not to please his own soul, to please his own flesh, to please his own life, and perhaps at times to please his own family - his kith and kin - for that man who pleases his God, who denies himself, who takes up his cross for his body to be crucified, for his body to bleed and to die and to have that miraculous resurrection in the full life of the Holy Spirit - for that child of God, oh there is a blessing for pleasing Him. Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus that you redeem the time, but also that you deny yourself. That's how you will get time to pray.

But thirdly: buffet your body. We find this in 1 Corinthians chapter 9, if you wish to turn to it - 1 Corinthians chapter 9 and verse 24 - and I'm reading this passage of scripture from the American Standard Version, and it

translates it in such a beautiful way - verse 23: 'I do all things for the gospel's sake', says Paul, 'that I may be a joint partaker thereof. Know ye not that they that run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? Even so run, that ye may attain. And every man that striveth in the games exerciseth self-control in all things. Now they do it to receive a corruptible crown, but we an incorruptible. I therefore so run: as not uncertainly. So fight I: not as beating the air. But I buffet my body and bring it into bondage, lest, by any means after that I have preached to others, I myself should be rejected'. -- The word is: 'disqualified'. Athletes - and he uses this illustration that he uses so often - of the athlete who is training, weight-training, aerobic-training, running, jogging, so many things that he is doing for the day where the race will take place, so that when he runs that race, and when he calls upon his muscles, and when he calls upon his lungs within his body, and his heart, and his pulse and his feet -- when he calls upon them to perform, they will answer.

Watchman Nee says this about the soul, 'The soul is the organ of man's freewill. The organ in which the spirit and body are completely merged.' - now listen to this - 'If man's soul wills to obey God, it will allow the spirit to rule over it'. As ordered by God - God will dictate what you do, because your spirit is ruling in your life. But on the other hand: 'The soul, if it chooses, also can suppress the spirit and take some other delight as its Lord'. My friends this morning, the body is not sinful - that's not what I'm saying, that is not what Paul's saying - because the body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, but what Paul is saying [is] that the body needs to be exercised, not physically, it needs to be disciplined, not physically - but spiritually. What does an athlete undergo? He undergoes strict training, he is not allowed to go into excesses or liberties of eating, or clothing, or smoking, or drinking, or sleeping - he must be as verse 27 says, 'Temperate in all things'. For if he indulges, the time will come when he is in that race and he calls upon the muscles that he needs, or he calls upon the breath that he needs, and he finds - because he has been filling his lungs with smoke - that he can't find it! His body is to be yielded to him. My friends this morning, listen! If you don't listen to anything I say today, listen to this! 'I beseech you therefore brethren by the mercies of God that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, for it's what's expected of you'. Does God have our body? We could dwell so much on the spirit and the soul - but does God have our body? To serve God there's an extra demand upon the body, and Paul says it's this: that you buffet the body. The Greek word 'buffet' simply means this - a strong blow, a punch - it's not a light pat, it's not a slap, but the word literally means 'to make below the eye black and blue'.

What did the Lord Jesus say? 'The spirit truly is willing but the flesh is weak'. You know this morning, if He had said, 'The spirit is weak and unwilling and the flesh is unwilling' it wouldn't have made any difference. Because unless the body is yielded to God, it doesn't matter what the spirit feels - the whole man must be God's. Do you buffet your body? What do I mean? Simply this: that your flesh, your body does not dictate to your spirit whether you get off your knees, or whether you go to sleep rather than talk to Him, or whether you lie on in your bed in the morning before you go to work, and forget about God because you're tired, because you're not strong enough, because you don't feel like it. But if you buffet your body, what you do is you put your body underneath your spirit - and when God breathes upon your spirit it doesn't matter what your body thinks. Who controls you? Does your body control your spirit or does your spirit control your body? Look at the Lord: a man came to Jesus by night and said unto Him - who was he? Nicodemus - he came in the middle of the night! And the Lord Jesus - because of the need - He sacrificed His sleep to point that soul to Himself. We read that He spent nights in prayer, He denied Himself sleep for the necessary need - the pre-ultimate thing that was necessary at that moment of time. If we turn to Mark and chapter 3 and verses 20 to 21, we find there that the crowd were coming in so close to Him that they couldn't even eat their meal. And of course the Lord Jesus Christ, who was so compassionate, who was so loving to the need of the people, who could see their need - what did He do? He sacrificed His meal for them - and what did the disciples say? 'He's beside Himself! He's doing too much! He's sacrificing too much. If He just took a moment out and just took that meal and then went to them...', but because the need was greater at that moment, He followed the need.

I'm finished this morning, but I want to conclude by just simply saying this: that we today need to redeem the time, we need to deny ourselves, we need to buffet the body and as Colossians 3:23 says, 'And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men'. And what does that say? 'Whatsoever ye do - do it!' Do it! We can preach about it, we can talk about it, we can listen to tapes and watch videos, and listen to conference speakers about prayer, and write poems about it, and sing hymns about it - but there comes a time when we do it! Will we do it? Will we spend nights in prayer? Will we get answers to prayer by claiming the promises of God in His word? Will we fast and pray? Will we spend time in prayer? My friends, I don't want to preach these messages and get a pat on the back, I want to see you in the prayer meeting. I want you to come with me and say, 'David I'm uniting in prayer with you all. We're going to claim this blessing, we're going to bring God down with our prayers'. That's what I want. There's a story that's told of Fletcher of Madley (sp?) and he was a great teacher of theology in the 18th century, he used to lecture young theological students. He was a friend of John Wesley. He lectured many times on the great subjects of prayer and fasting, the fullness of the Spirit, how to have the power and blessing of God in your life. And often, in fact every time he touched on a sacred subject as this, he would say these words: 'That is the theory, now will those who want the practice come along to my room'. And again and again they closed those books and shut the door behind them in his room and they spent hours practising the theory of prayer. Let me say, in closing, we have spent hours on Lord's Day mornings on the theory of prayer, on the theory of fasting, on the theory of promises, on the theory of time and I am asking you today: come with me, and let us practice.

Our dear Father, we ask Thee this morning, for we indeed acknowledge and confess to Thee that our spirit is willing, but oh our flesh is so weak. And we pray that as in the beginning the breath of God was breathed into the nostrils of Adam, the very breath of God would be breathed into our flesh again - and that we would serve Thee not with our words, not with our thoughts, but with our lives. For Christ's sake. Amen.

Transcribed by Andrew Watkins, Preach The Word - May 2000

www.preachtheword.com

info@preachtheword.com

*Appendix A:****"A Refreshing Prayer"***

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The passage of the word of God that we're turning to this morning is found in Isaiah's prophecy, Isaiah and chapter 64. Isaiah 64, this is the great reviving prayer of the word of God, of the prophet Isaiah. Let us read it as a prayer together, beginning at verse 1:

"Oh that thou wouldest rend the heavens, that thou wouldest come down, that the mountains might flow down at thy presence. As when the melting fire burneth, the fire causeth the waters to boil, to make thy name known to thine adversaries, that the nations may tremble at thy presence! When thou didst terrible things which we looked not for, thou camest down, the mountains flowed down at thy presence. For since the beginning of the world men have not heard, nor perceived by the ear, neither hath the eye seen, O God, beside thee, what he hath prepared for him that waiteth for him. Thou meetest him that rejoiceth and worketh righteousness, those that remember thee in thy ways: behold, thou art wroth; for we have sinned: in those is continuance, and we shall be saved. But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away. And there is none that calleth upon thy name, that stirreth up himself to take hold of thee: for thou hast hid thy face from us, and hast consumed us, because of our iniquities. But now, O Lord, thou art our father; we are the clay, and thou our potter; and we all are the work of thy hand. Be not wroth very sore, O Lord, neither remember iniquity for ever: behold, see, we beseech thee, we are all thy people. Thy holy cities are a wilderness, Zion is a wilderness, Jerusalem a desolation. Our holy and our beautiful house, where our fathers praised thee, is burned up with fire: and all our pleasant things are laid waste. Wilt thou refrain thyself for these things, O Lord? Wilt thou hold thy peace, and afflict us very sore?"

Let us pray: Our Father, we come and bow in deep need before Thee as a people that are seeking Thee - some of us, perhaps, as we have never sought Thee before. We are coming to Thy word empty that Thou shouldst fill us. We are looking for a word from God. Lord, surely Thou wilt not leave us desolate, surely Thou wilt not deafen our ear to Thy voice. So we pray that, by the Spirit's still small voice, that Thou mayest speak to our hearts, that Thou mayest come down, that Thy presence may flow upon us in this very place this very day. Oh Lord, that Thy people may rejoice in Thee and glorify Thy name once more. Amen.

I've entitled my message: 'A Refreshing Prayer' - a refreshing prayer. This is a refreshing prayer simply because it is a prayer for refreshing. A prayer for refreshing is always a refreshing prayer, it is always refreshing to the one who prays it, it is refreshing to the one who listens to that prayer - but I would go as far as to say that it is refreshing to God. God is refreshed when He sees His people pray for the showers of blessing. What a blessing it must be to God to look down and to see within His church - beyond all the 'shopping list' praying, beyond the praying that says 'Bless Mummy and bless Daddy', beyond the prayers that plead God for the things that we want - what a blessing, what a refreshing it must be to God to see men and women who want to be real with Him! Men and women who have a heart thirsty for the living waters. Men and women who are hungering and thirsting after righteousness. Men and women who are coming to God and saying: 'As the deer panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after Thee O God'.

What a blessing it is for God to see men and women following hard after Him. What a blessing it is for God to see this, to see men and women diligently seeking Him, because God loves it! God is the rewarder of them

who diligently seek Him. Out of all the prayers of the Bible this is one we ought to look at to see how we ought to pray to God, and how we ought to seek God for His presence. The one theme throughout this whole prayer of Isaiah is this: the prophet evokes the past blessings of God in order to see God bless again in his present day. In other words, he looks back at what God has done, and he lets it infuse his own soul and spirit to let him see with the eye of faith and foresight what God can do - the fact that God can do it again, only God can do better!

I say this categorically: throughout the word of God there was not a man or a woman who God used or lifted a finger with who did not have that prayer in their bosom. My friend, if you don't have a thirst after God to move in the Iron Hall, God will never use you - never! Old Gideon, when things were bad, and every man was doing that which was right in his own eyes, and there was no king in Israel, there was no leadership, there was no godliness - it says in Judges chapter 6 and verse 13: 'Gideon said unto God', he prayed a prayer like Isaiah's, 'Oh my Lord, if the Lord be with us, why then is all this befallen us? And where be all his miracles which our fathers told us of, saying, Did not the Lord bring us up from Egypt? But now the Lord hath forsaken us, and delivered us into the hands of the Midianites'.

Do you see his prayer? Do you see how similar it is to Isaiah's? He is invoking the past blessings of God and saying: 'If this is the God that is with us, why is His power not with us?'. It is the spirit of the Psalmist that we looked at a fortnight ago in Psalm 74: 'O God, why hast thou cast us off for ever? Why doth thine anger smoke against the sheep of thy pasture? Remember thy congregation, which thou hast purchased of old; the rod of thine inheritance, which thou hast redeemed; this mount Zion, wherein thou hast dwelt...We see not our signs: there is no more any prophet: neither is there among us any that knoweth how long'. 'The God that our fathers told us of seems to have cast us off!'

Today some of us in this assembly pray and fast - do you know why? To see God bless us again! This passage speaks to many of us, do you know why? Because I believe God has put into our breast a deep aching, a deep dryness that nothing will satisfy - whether it be sin or self, and let me tell you I have tried to satisfy myself with both of those. I have tried the broken cisterns, but ah! the waters failed! You know this: as you stoop to drink, they flee and mock you! As you wail with that deep dry aching void that only the presence of God can refresh.

I ask you: is there not a need for refreshing? Oh, is there not a need for God to open the windows of heaven and pour a blessing out upon us here, now, this very day? Is there not a need for refreshing in your own heart? In the Iron Hall? In Northern Ireland? In the island of Ireland? In the whole of United Kingdom? Is there not a need for God to come down and God to bless us again? Do you not long to see it? Is your appetite not whet to see souls saved once again here, on a regular basis people weeping their way to the rugged cross? Is your appetite not whet to see young men and women following in Biblical paths, rather than following their academic career, and following pop groups and fashions and everything but God? Is there not an appetite to see our young being built up as the people of God? Is there not an appetite for you to see this district saturated with the power of God? Imagine! Drunken homes, adulterous homes, children that are growing up and haven't a hope - is there not a desire in your breast that God would break in and do what we seem to be powerless to do?

I have come to the conclusion that this will never happen through preaching the truth. That might sound heretical to you, but do you see when you're doing it for a little while? You begin to see that you are preaching the truth, you're preaching the truth to the lost, but they aren't saved. You're preaching the truth to the young people, but they have no desire for the prayer meeting, or for the Breaking of Bread, or for following after God. You preach the truth in the Open Air and there seems to be nothing happens at times. The reason being: preaching is not enough, because we need the presence of God in our lives! We need God to come, and He will only come when we seek Him.

Oh, this is an encouraging portion of Scripture - because I know, for me, it encourages me, it infuses me with faith to pray on and to believe that God can, and God will, bless us if we seek after Him. Just like Isaiah did, if we come to God and plead and cry, and seek His face until He comes and until He avenges us - what a thrill to think that God will come if we truly seek Him! Oh, that encourages me, that He is the rewarder of them that diligently seek Him, that He will avenge the cry of His elect that cry unto Him day and night without ceasing. 'Him that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out', for 'If you call upon the name of the Lord, you shall be saved' - and that's not just salvation, for we need saved from the presence of sin here and now!

I want you to see how we ought to pray this day from Isaiah's prayer. The first thing is this: this was a prayer for God's presence, a prayer for God's presence. Verses 1 to 3, look at the very first word of this prayer: 'Oh!' 'Oh that thou wouldest rend the heavens'. True praying is always characterised by that word: 'Oh', for it's the expression of longing, it's the expression of a deep thirst and desire after something that one has not got hitherto. It is the expression of a depraved - whether they be following after God or not - the expression of a depraved man at the end of his resources, who knows there is nothing in himself or of himself to help, there is nothing in himself that can overwhelm the power of the devil, and the power of the world, and temptation that has come into his life. It is the expression that this dark cloud that is coming over the people of God, he is helpless to do anything about it, so he cries at the end of himself: 'Oh God!'.

He is looking and longing after God. You see, that's what true praying is. You see in verse 7, the prophet says there is none that looketh or takes hold upon God: 'There is none that stirreth up himself to take hold of thee'. That is what praying is: taking hold upon God, laying hold upon Him! Not a half-hearted prayer! I vouch to say today: God does not hear cold-blooded prayers! He hears prayers that lay hold upon Him - prayers that are prayers of a full, broken heart after God!

Jacob, wrestling with that angelic figure, and that angelic figure told him: 'I must go', and Jacob said: 'I will not let thee go! You are not going anywhere until I am blessed!'. That might seem a bit far-fetched for us to say to God, but I believe that God wants us to say it to Him. I believe that God would want us to lay hold upon Him, that God should answer us in a peculiar way. He wants us to look to the past, like Isaiah did. He wants us to look to His mercies of old. In other words, in verse 1 what Isaiah really says, the tense is this: 'Oh that You had come down'. In other words, 'If You had been among us, and if You had come down, this all wouldn't have happened! If we had been seeking God the way we ought to be, none of this would happen!'.

His mere presence would have changed everything. In chapter 63 and verse 15 the prayer of the prophet is this: 'Look down'. Oh, he's just satisfied with God looking down. But, my friend, he moves from chapter 63 to 64, and he is no longer satisfied with God looking down, he wants God to come down! 'Oh that Thou wouldst come down'. Do you see the picture? Isn't it an awful picture? 'Oh that thou wouldest rend the heavens'. Do you see it in your mind's eye? The heavens and the clouds being rent in a cleft, and the very foot of God stepping down into time! Imagine God opening heaven and coming down. Imagine God coming down and melting the mountains. The mountains speak to us of permanence, they've always been there, they were there before we were there and before our forefathers were. There they are, the spirit and the image of the ancients, the creation that has always been, but God comes and all that was permanent for us disappears!

'Oh that thou wouldest rend the heavens, that thou wouldest come down, that the mountains might flow down at thy presence. As when the melting fire burneth, the fire causeth the waters to boil, to make thy name known to thine adversaries, that the nations may tremble at thy presence!'. There is the picture of fire, the picture of fire just like in Exodus 19 when God gave them the law there on Mount Sinai. There was the thunder, there was the lightning, there was the smoke, there was the shaking of the earth - and let me tell you

this: the people of Israel always looked back to that, because when they saw the power of God demonstrated to them all they could do when they were in spiritual backsliding was to look back.

'Lord, we remember when we saw Thee in fire, we saw Thee in thunder and earthquake and in lightning. We saw the pillar of fire and the cloud of smoke, we remember! We can look back and see when God's presence was among us, but Lord it's not here!'. So they looked back and they pleaded. Like the hymnwriter said: 'Oh rend the heavens, come quickly down, and make a thousand hearts Thine own'. Oh, is that not what we long for? Is that not what we long for in our families, that God would rend the heavens and come quickly down and make a thousand hearts His own? That's what's revival is, that's what an awakening is: when God comes down!

Like verse 2, when He comes like the boiling of water, that the nations would tremble like a kettle filled with water over 100 degrees centigrade, moving and shaken by the very presence of God! Oh, we know nothing of this. George Whitefield knew about it and in his journals, one day as he preached in the open air in Cheltenham, he wrote on Wednesday the 18th April - listen to this record: 'I preached this morning with power to a much larger congregation than we had last night. Several servants of God said they never saw the like before'. On another occasion he records: 'Suddenly God the Lord came down among us'. Oh, that we would see something that we have never seen the like before, and that God would come down among us.

Their memory recalls when God intervened, when God came to them. It's a good thing to remind ourselves, isn't it, of God's past interventions in the life and in the church of God - looking back at the Reformation, looking back at the great revivals, looking back at when God opened the windows of heaven and poured out a blessing literally, if you look at it, when they looked not for Him! This is when God came - they weren't looking for God, but God came and delivered them. They weren't looking for His presence, they weren't looking for His blessing, but yet He came and intervened.

In Egypt He sent the plagues to Pharaoh and all his house and all the nation, and God said: 'Let my people go!' - and they went! They came to the Red Sea and God intervened again. They didn't look for it, He intervened of His own free will - He opened up that sea and He delivered them right across. In the wilderness they're starving to death, and it is God who feeds them with the bread of heaven, with the manna come down from above, the angel food. They didn't look for it, but God came and God gave it to them. He gave them the water from the rock, He led them into the conquest of the promised land, and He defeated all their enemies and gave them a land flowing with milk and honey. Oh, how they are surprised - and that causes them to look back, and to look to God for another day like that when God would surprise them again!

Oh would you remind yourself today, as you fast and pray, of the power of God. Will you begin to pray as Isaiah did, realising the great power of God. What an encouragement it is to pray, but let me say this: we have a greater encouragement than Isaiah did! For when we look back we can see that when the fullness of time was come, God sent forth His Son made of a woman, made under the law. He couldn't look back to that, he couldn't look back to an old bloody cross where he could say:

'My sin, oh the bliss of this glorious thought,
My sin, not in part but the whole,
Is nailed to His cross and I bear it no more.
Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord, oh my soul!'

He couldn't say it. He couldn't look to an empty tomb and say: 'As He liveth, so we also shall live'. He couldn't look to a rent heaven at Pentecost, to a little number of believers in the Upper Room waiting and waiting until the promise of God from on high came, and they were empowered for service. But friends, we are post-Pentecost, we are post-resurrection, we are post-Calvary, and we can look back at it all

and we can say to God upon the authority of His word: 'Lord, do it again! Rend the heavens again, as You rent it when you sent Your Son! Rend the heavens again, as You raised Him from the dead! Rend the heavens again, as You sent the Holy Ghost in power!'

Do you believe this? Do you believe that the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds? You look all around you, look at the Labour government - what is their majority? 146, or something like that, and the house is 160? You see that, the majority that they have. You see what's going on in our land. You see what's happening in the church. I was talking to a believer yesterday, and do you know what they said to me? They were up at David Lloyd's gym in Dundonald, and his remarks to me were this: 'You know, I saw it, and I thought myself that's the way a church ought to be' - that's the way a church ought to be. We look at it all, don't we, and we think that's it - it's finished. But my friend, if you want to deny the word of God like that, that's fine - but God says the weapons of our warfare are mighty to the pulling down of strongholds. In other words we could pull down the Labour government if we put our minds to it! We can pull down anything, for the mountains melt at the presence of Almighty God! 'Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ!' Oh, what power there is!

There was a prayer for God's presence, and secondly there was a prize for those who waited on God. In verse 4, look: 'For since the beginning of the world men have not heard, nor perceived by the ear, neither hath the eye seen, O God, beside thee, what he hath prepared for him that waiteth for him'. Now, look, you remember what God did when they weren't looking for Him? Now Isaiah is saying: 'Look what God can do when people are looking for it!'. People who are seeking God - oh, what a thought, to 'look for'. That word 'wait' is the same word as 'look for' in verse 3 - 'we looked not for it'. It's the same sense as 'wait'. In other words, if we're going to wait on God that means we have to look for God. It means an expectation, literally 'to exercise a patient, confident and expectant faith'.

That is what God requires: expectant faith. He doesn't want a Christian sitting around waiting for the second coming, waiting for the Lord coming again! He wants a Christian looking for the Lord in his own life! Don't you forget that! The heaven and the earth will be dissolved with a fervent heat, oh, that's coming - and the rapture is coming, praise God for it. All these things are coming - but don't you forget, don't you cut out of the word of God what Peter said: 'Seeing all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of men ought we to be?'. The waxing worse and worse, and the great falling away and the apostasy, ought not to be in the heart of a believer - and you ought not to be satisfied with it!

Oh, but what a thought: if we look after God, if we seek after Him. You know, Paul quoted this verse, you know it in 1 Corinthians 2 and 9. Do you know how he quoted it? This is one of the most badly quoted verses in the whole of the word of God, he says: 'As it is written', looking back to Isaiah, 'Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him'. Now, that's not heaven. Heaven is part of it, but that's not what it means primarily - heaven. If anything it means the here and now, it means the Christian life, what God has prepared for us now! Verse 10 of this passage tells you that: 'But God hath revealed these things to us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God'. God has revealed to us - we have it now!

Isn't it astonishing: there's no limiting God. People say to me sometimes: 'Och, you're asking too much of God you know. You're aiming too high. Do you actually expect God to come as He did in the past, and do what He did, and people to come in contrition and in confession, weeping before God? Do you expect there to be a move?'. Yes! Do you know why? He is able to do exceeding abundantly more than I ask, or more than I even think, according to His riches and according to His power that works in us. Oh, John Newton, we sing him so much and we make liars of ourselves:

'Thou art coming to a King,
Large petitions with thee bring,
For His grace and power are such
You can never ask too much'.

We believe we can ask too much, don't we? There was a prize for those who waited on God, and there's the prayer for the presence of God. Thirdly there's a penalty for the people's sins. Verse 5 to 8, it's amazing, isn't it, that the request is that God come down to defeat their enemies, but when God does come down what happens is they begin to fall down in His presence, trembling and hiding because of their sin. That is what the problem is - their sin - in verse 5: 'Thou meetest him that rejoiceth and worketh righteousness, those that remember thee in thy ways: behold, thou art wroth; for we have sinned'. Sin! He says in verse 5 that God delights in those who live in practical righteousness, but the people were not living like that. They were not living holy lives and the wrath of God was incurred upon them. Verse 6, their sins are described - they're an unclean thing. Literally that's the word that's used in Leviticus where a leper was to cry when anybody came near him: 'Unclean! Unclean!'. Personal unfitness for fellowship with God.

Their righteousnesses, verse 6 says, are like filthy rags. Do you know what that literally is in the Hebrew? 'A garment of menstruation', a stained cloth with menstrual blood - and in Judaism anything to do with the reproductive system and procreation was seen and considered to be defiled. Do you know why? Because all human life is fallen. In other words, we are born in sin and shapen in iniquity, and the point that Isaiah is making is this: even our righteous acts flow out of our fallen nature! Even the good things that we do flow from our fallenness!

In verse 6 he says that we fade like a leaf, we're dead. Like a leaf in autumn that falls down, we have the name that we live but we are dead - and our sins blow us away like the wind. God abandons us to the consequences of our sin, and the penalty - what is the penalty of our sin? What is the penalty of my sin? It is the absence of God! Oh, that I would realise that. Verse 7 says: 'There is none that calleth upon thy name, that stirreth up himself to take hold of thee'. It's amazing - no-one seeking God, no-one stirring themselves, literally, rousing themselves. The idea is waking up from sleep. In other words, can I put it in the contemporary vernacular: nobody can be bothered!

You go to the young people: 'Oh, I'm too young, I'm getting on with my life. I haven't time for all that'. You go to the old people: 'I'm too old, I've seen enough blessing. I'm quite satisfied in my lifetime, I'm willing just to die peacefully without any upheaval of blessing'. You go to the middle aged, the young marrieds as well, and they say: 'I'm trying to rear a family. I'm trying to pay bills. I'm trying to please my boss. I don't have time'. So, if you go to the young, middle-aged, and old - who's going to seek after God? If the truth be told, there are times none of us can be bothered!

That is exactly what hides God's face from us, verse 7 says. It is our iniquity. God allows sin to take its course, and sin takes its course in death - and that is why some of us feel this deadness in our spiritual life, because God has let sin take its course! But I want to bring to you today a message of hope - and I need that message, because I'm exactly what I'm talking about here in this book. Don't think I've arrived, for I haven't - far from it! Verse 8 is the hope - oh, what a hope: 'But now, O Lord, thou art our father'. Isn't it wonderful that God is changeless? Although He is changeless in His requirements of us - in other words He requires holiness, He requires repentance - He is also changeless in His mercy and in His grace.

Do you know what Isaiah is saying? He is the potter, and you are the clay. He is the Father, and you are the children. Like Jeremiah 18, the potter and the clay - in other words, He has the power to change us. Oh, we sing:

'Spirit of the Living God, fall afresh on me.
Break me, melt me, mould me, fill me'.

Another of our hymns was written by A.A. Pollard:

Have Thine own way, oh Lord, have Thine own way.
Thou art the Potter, I am the clay.
Mould me and make me after Thy will,
While I am waiting, yielded, and still.

Have Thine own way, oh Lord, have Thine own way.
Search me and try me, Master today.
Whiter than snow, Lord, wash me just now,
As in Thy presence humbly I bow.

Have Thine own way, oh Lord, have Thine own way.
Wounded and weary, help me I pray.
Power, all power, surely is Thine,
Touch me and heal me, Saviour divine.

Have Thine own way, oh Lord, have Thine own way.
Hold o'er my being absolute sway.
Fill with Thy Spirit till all shall see,
Christ only, always, living in me'.

Oh, there's a plea for God to avenge Himself fourthly - and that is because, in verses 9 to 12, God is implored not to be angry any more. 'Lord, don't be angry - for, Lord, You're also unchangeable in Your relationship to us. You are still our Father. You are still the potter, we are still Thy people'. The point is this: we are always in this state and, oh, that we would come to God as His own people. Oh, that we would look into His face as a child to a Father, and ask God that He'll lift us! Ask God that He'll have mercy! To ask the Potter that He'll mould us the way that He would want us to be!

In verse 10 and 11 he asked God to look down at the desolation of the temple, and the brokenness of Jerusalem, and everything that had been burnt with fire. God's place is a desert, it's desolate, and he's saying to Him: 'Things are in a bad way. God's house, where our founding fathers once sung Your praise as the church of God, is burnt to the ground'. Are you jealous for the glory of God? Are you jealous that the church once more would be a brilliant light, not a brilliant organisation? The church, in the last 50 years, has had brilliant organisation - and yet things decline more and more. They've had brilliant buildings, but things don't get any better. They've had brilliant preachers - but, my friend, what we need is the presence of God!

Will you be jealous for the glory of God? Will you repent as these people repented? They repented, they became right with God, they exposed their sin - and the wonderful thing about repentance is this: it works with God! When you wait for God, it works! When you work righteousness, it works! When you draw near to God, He draws near to you! When you seek Him with all your heart, you find Him!

I believe that if we truly seek the Lord, the Lord will leap into action and deal with the enemy, and create a new situation that transcends all the ruins of the past that we have known. He will do a new thing! I believe He will do it if we pray for His presence, if we wait on His prize, if we proclaim to Him our sin, and if we plead that He avenge Himself. We must pray today, rejoicing in the God that we have, for a touch of power

from heaven to be among us. Oh that Thou wouldest rend the heavens. Oh, that Thou wouldest come down, that the mountains might flow down at Thy presence.

As we close, don't forget that after this service - straight after - there'll be some folk coming upstairs. You can stay for as long as you can, but there'll be folk here all afternoon seeking God's face, and praying to Him: 'Oh that thou wouldest rend the heavens'.

Oh, that Thou wouldest rend the heavens. Oh, that Thou wouldest come down, and make a thousand hearts Thy home. Lord, You did it at Pentecost. Because You've given the Spirit once and for all to the church, we appeal to Thee, our Father, to fill us - and if it takes it, to break us and melt us and mould us - but Lord, whatever You do, fill us and come down. Amen.

Transcribed by Andrew Watkins, Preach The Word - June 2001

www.preachtheword.com

info@preachtheword.com

*Appendix B:**"The Church And Prayer"*

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Matthew chapter 18 is our reading, Matthew chapter 18. As I intimated in the announcements: in the week that lies ahead, tomorrow night at eight o'clock, we will enter perhaps what is the most important week in the life of this church - because it's the week whereby we store up, in the eyes of God, preparation for the year that lies ahead - the week of prayer. Now I want to think of that this morning from this passage of Scripture, from the words of the Lord Jesus Christ and His teaching in Matthew chapter 18.

Beginning to read at verse 15, and these are the words of our Lord: "Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as a heathen man and a publican. Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Again I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them".

The church and prayer - I wonder have you ever pondered what is the purpose of a week of prayer? We could narrow that down even further and say: what is the purpose to a day of prayer, or what is the purpose of the prayer meeting that we have weekly here within the life of the assembly? Many have the mentality, I think maybe consciously: 'If I pray at home, why do I need to pray in the church?'. I think it's probably the reverse, that if you're praying in the church you will be praying at home, and if you're not in the church praying the likelihood is you're not praying at home. But is it not enough to have a personal prayer life? Is it not enough to have your quiet time at home? I have known in the past, approaching people over their lack of attendance at the prayer meeting and indeed to all of the meetings, having the reply from them: 'Well, I decided I would just have a little quiet time with the Lord here at home myself'.

That sounds ever so spiritual, and we may look at that and say: 'Well, perhaps they have a point, maybe that's what they needed at that specific time'. Is there anything different between personal prayer, personal devotions in your life, and the prayer meeting and the life of prayer within the assembly? I believe there is, and I would like to lay down for you a thesis this morning, a proposition, that the declension of spiritual power in the church can be traced to the demise of prayer gatherings. I deliberately don't say 'prayer meeting', because we get the mentality that as long as you're along on a Thursday night from eight until nine the Lord will bless the church. That's not what I'm talking about - a specific meeting - but the demise of spiritual power within the church today can be traced to the demise of prayer gatherings within the church.

Now if you look at verse 15 for a moment, through to verse 17, you will see a specific case that the Lord Jesus is speaking of. This is a foundational passage to do with church discipline and the way we should behave towards those who will not abide by the ruling of the church, and indeed the ruling of the elders. The Lord is giving a specific case here about someone who will not walk in ways that are pleasing to the Lord.

But in verses 18 to 20 I believe the Lord gives us not a specific case, but a general principle that outflows from that specific case. Verses 18 to 20 are the foundation of why we discipline within the church.

The procedures that we find in verses 15 to 17 are simply this: that if someone has anything against you - and I would go further to say that if you have anything against them - you are to go to your brother, you're to sort it out between you and them. If they do not hear you, the Lord Jesus says you're to go with two or three other brethren and approach them again in front of them - in the mouth of two or three witnesses the matter of truth shall be established. If they'll not hear you then, you're duty bound to bring it to the church. If, after that, the person will not listen to the church - and mark you well that these are the words of the Lord Jesus Christ - they are to be counted as a publican and a Gentile. One author I was reading this week decided that these were not the words of the Lord Jesus Christ, they couldn't be. He could not say such harsh things! Well, you either believe the Bible or you don't, and we choose to believe the Bible here in the Iron Hall, and that's why we practice these truths found in this passage.

But the Lord goes further than this, for in verses 18 to 20 He lays down the principle of why we do this. There is a reason why you follow spiritual church discipline within the local assembly. Indeed, the Lord Jesus begins to outline what that is to us by beginning in these words, verse 18: 'Verily I say unto you'. 'You do this because this is true. What I am about to tell you is a true principle that is bound up within church discipline'. Now I do not believe that the Lord was meaning that these spiritual principles that I am about to lay down to you are only used when you discipline someone in the church, but rather these principles can be implemented in more than one way. Indeed, I believe that you can see from these principles what the importance of the prayer ministry of the church really is today in our generation and in our assembly.

Now, prayer is a matter of control, isn't it? We want God to be in control. If we were asking the question: 'Who is in control?', with regards to prayer, we probably would side on the area that God is in control. But you know, if you look at this passage of scripture in verse 18 - look at it with me - the Lord says, and mark please that I want to keep to the text not putting in any of my own suppositions or my own pet doctrines, I want to see what the Lord has to say: 'Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven'. Now mark the direction that the Lord is speaking of, He is saying that the earth governs heaven! In this specific realm - the one case, individually, of church discipline, and then the principle on the whole of the prayer life of the church - the Lord is saying that where this is concerned the earth governs heaven.

Now look at the verse, because you'll see that there is action on earth before there is action taken in heaven. 'Whatsoever you bind on earth then shall be bound in heaven...whatsoever you loose on earth shall then be loosed in heaven'. Here is a principle, that whatever things on the earth oppose God and reject God's rule and reign and sovereignty must be bound, whatever things on earth agree with God - i.e. the spiritual truths held within the church - they must be released in order that God's glory may be proclaimed. But the point of the Lord is this: all of these things, the loosing and the binding, begins on earth. So please see that: the earth governs heaven.

Now, maybe you find that difficult to believe, so I want to take a little bit of time over this - I think it's fundamental for the week of prayer that lies ahead of us. This is a principle that you find in the Old Testament Scriptures, turn with me to Exodus chapter 17 beginning to read at verse 9: 'And Moses said unto Joshua, Choose us out men, and go out, fight with Amalek: to morrow I will stand on the top of the hill with the rod of God in mine hand. So Joshua did as Moses had said to him, and fought with Amalek: and Moses, Aaron, and Hur went up to the top of the hill. And it came to pass, when Moses held up his hand, that Israel prevailed: and when he let down his hand, Amalek prevailed'. Now note that: 'It came to pass, when Moses held up his hand, that Israel prevailed: and when he let down his hand, Amalek prevailed'. That is the principle of God's working. Of course, in heaven, the issue was decided with God already in the sense that

God wanted Israel to win - of course God wanted Israel to win! But before it could actually happen and Israel could have the victory, that matter had to be decided by Moses. In heaven, God had a desire, but God was not prepared to implement that desire. You see it as clearly as your eye can see, that if Moses didn't hold up his hands Amalek would win - isn't that right? Heaven, at this moment, was being governed by earth.

If you turn to Ezekiel, another text in the Old Testament where this principle is enshrined, Ezekiel chapter 36 - and remember we're asking the question: who is in control? Ezekiel 36 and verse 37, these are the words of the Lord God: 'Thus saith the Lord GOD; I will yet for this be inquired of by the house of Israel, to do it for them; I will increase them with men like a flock'. 'I will yet for this be inquired of by the house of Israel, to do it for them; I will increase them with men like a flock'. You might look at that and say: 'God's wanting to increase the children of Israel', and you think to yourself: 'Well, why doesn't He just do it? I mean, if He's the Almighty God, and if He wants to do this for them, why doesn't He just do it then?'. I'll tell you why He doesn't just do it then, because He has a principle of working, and His word declares this: if He is inquired of the people, He will do it. If He isn't inquired of the people, He will not do it!

The foundational, fundamental principle concerning prayer here in the Old Testament in these two verses is: God wants earth to govern heaven. It's not the fact that He has to have that, it's that He wants it, it is His desire! Now, lest you don't believe me, turn to Isaiah chapter 45 finally in the Old Testament, before we go back to Matthew 18. Isaiah chapter 45 and verse 11: 'Thus saith the LORD, the Holy One of Israel, and his Maker, Ask me of things to come concerning my sons, and concerning the work of my hands command ye me'. 'Concerning the works of my hands command ye me' - that's a staggering statement, isn't it? In fact, if it wasn't there we would probably think it was heresy if a man stood up on a platform and said that we can command God to do something. We know that we should never, as we come into the presence of the Lord, be presumptuous with God - of course we ought not to be presumptuous! We should never be rude or arrogantly demanding to Almighty God, we must be humble and remember who it is we're coming to. But let us say this: the Lord gives us the words here, 'Command ye me according to the works of my hands'. Why does He say it? This is why: because He wants earth to govern heaven.

Now we do not mean that we can make God do what He doesn't want to do, that is not what we are saying. But rather, when God commands us to command Him, He wants us to ask Him to do what He desires to do. Those of us who have been Christians for years must know that this is the foundation of prayer. Prayer is to know the will of God, to come to the throne of God, and then through prayer to ask God for His will to be done on earth as it is in heaven. Prayer - is it not coming simply to the Lord and saying: 'Lord, we want You to do this'? Is that not what prayer is? 'Lord, we want You to do this, we are determined that You do it. Lord, You cannot but do it, because it is Your will!'

God's work in this dispensation is done upon this ground. Of course heaven desires to do, heaven has a desire, heaven has a will, but heaven will not do its will until earth does it first! The word of the Lord Jesus is: 'Whatsoever ye bind on earth' - first - 'shall be bound in heaven...whatsoever ye loose on earth' - first - 'shall be loosed in heaven'. God wills to have the earth govern heaven. Who is in control? Of course, in a general sense, God is in control - but in the realm of prayer, can I say, we are in control!

Secondly, I want to ask: how then does this control work? How does it work? The Lord says in verse 19: 'If two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst'. How does it work? Well, the Lord tells us, He enshrines for us this fundamental principle that the church of Jesus Christ stands on earth for the will of God. The church is here for the will of God. That means that if the church fails to rise to do the will of God, the will of God will be restricted on earth. God wills to do whatever He desires to do through the church, not through individual believers, but through the church. What a position the church has before God! What a position of importance God has given it! The way in which He

manifests Himself today in power and in His will is through the church of Jesus Christ, through the body of Christ.

That must mean that the church, therefore, must be under the authority and under the subjection of God. This is what I've been pushing at from the beginning of my message: we should not relegate the church to meetings of people who trust in Christ. That's an awful poverty to give the church! The church is much more than this, it's more than a mere meeting, it's more than a mere get-together and sing-song and little meditation around the word of God. Oh yes, we are a group of sinners, we've been saved by grace, we've been redeemed by the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ, regenerated by the Holy Spirit of God - but we have been a people and are a people committed to God's hand. We are to be given gladly over to God to accept His will, to do His will, and to stand on earth to maintain God's testimony among men. He must have our will in harmony with His.

How does this control take place? Who's in control? The church is in control in the realm of prayer. How does this control take place? We must be in harmony. The Lord says: 'If two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven'. That is the way that God works today, He has principles, He has laws that He has set down in which He works. God doesn't overwhelm us - get that out of your head! If you don't want to follow God, He's not going to make you! Not a bit of it! But God longs from His heart of love to have harmony with us, to be one with us, and God will not ignore your will if it's against Him. If the will on earth is against heaven, God will not break it down and work independently of the church. He must have our will in harmony with His.

An illustration of that can be found again in the Old Testament in Psalm 78 and verse 41, where the children of Israel were to enter into the promised land. Of course they would not enter in, they refused to enter in in their stubbornness. The Psalmist comments on it, and says: 'Yea, they turned back and tempted God, and limited the Holy One of Israel'. Earth governs heaven! Now, let's pause for a moment because this astounds me - I can limit the Holy One of Israel! How does this control work? It works through the church. Now please grasp hold of this: the prayer ministry of the church is the way that God brings His will among men on the earth. I'm not just talking about worship prayer, I'm not talking about simply devotional prayer, I'm talking about when the people of God, as the assembly of God, come together - the Lord is teaching that they bring down to earth the will of God that is in heaven.

It happens by prayer! I know that for some prayer is a small thing, it's an insignificant non-essential thing, but let me say that prayer is a work - and it's the greatest work that you can do! It's a better work than evangelism, it's a better work than preaching. Prayer is the work that is foundational to evangelism and foundational to preaching. It is a work, and let me say it is the work, of the church on the earth today. Prayer is the church coming to God and saying: 'Lord, we want Your will. Lord, we know Your will, we want Your will, we're prepared to open our mouths and ask for Your will'. If this is the church's ministry and she is not fulfilling it today, the church will not be much use on earth.

My friends, there are three things laid down here and I want us to take them up in the week that lies ahead and indeed in the future of the Iron Hall, and use them to bring down to earth the will of heaven. Three ways in which we must be in harmony. The first is in verse 18, we must be agreeing with God. Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven - God chooses not just to do what He desires, but rather He does it through the church. So what does God do? He puts Himself in the church, and the manifestation of God in the church will only be seen as to how our lives are in harmony with Him.

Have you got that? Let me give you an illustration. You've got a reservoir, say Silent Valley, and all of the water, tonnes of water in that reservoir. The water travels through the pipes and then goes into your home

and goes into your sink and into the tap, you open the tap and the water comes out. But the amount of water that you will have will relate specifically to the diameter of the pipe that is running to your tap into your sink - isn't that right? The capacity of God within the church being manifested is specifically, directly, correlated and related to the capacity of the church to hold it. The capacity of the church to hold it is the prayer ministry of the church. It's very simple: the more of God you want, the more of prayer you need. If God is to work in the church we must pray according to His will, but the more we pray the more we will have God's will among us.

Let me illustrate it again through our lovely Lord Jesus. Let's think about this for a moment: when God wanted to manifest Himself in the flesh He came as the Lord Jesus Christ, and we know that His manifestation was as large as the capacity of our Lord Jesus. Isn't that right? Listen to Paul in Colossians: 'For it pleased the Father that in him', Christ, 'should all fullness dwell...for in him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily'. The manifestation of God in Christ was great because of the capacity of Christ to manifest it! My friend, God's presence in the world today is limited only by the capacity of the church to pray for it. Now don't get me wrong, I'm not saying that God is not Almighty, but this is the way that God chooses to work.

I'll prove to you - look at the specific case in verses 15 to 18 that the Lord gives, this item of church discipline. If a man will not listen to his brother, if then when two or three come with this man offended, and bring the case before him, and they still don't listen, and then it's brought before the church, and the offended or rebellious person still doesn't listen - the Lord says that to be counted as a publican or Gentile, and He goes as far as to say: 'When you count him as a Gentile and a publican, and then when you pray that he'll be delivered over to Satan, for the destruction of the flesh that his spirit may be saved on the last day, I will bind that in heaven when you bind it on earth'.

Let us not underestimate these words. This is not just a principle for church discipline, but I believe it's a principle as we come to God in every area of prayer as the assembly. If God encounters difficulty in this world in bringing His will today, it is because the church is not able to accomplish it. We come to God not asking what we want, but what He wants! We need to agree with God, verse 18.

The second thing we need harmony in is agreeing with each other. Look at verse 19: 'If two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven'. Now this is not simply agreeing on asking for one specific thing, that's not what that verse means - that if you want a certain person to be saved, and I happen to want that same person to be saved, if we agree on that one thing it'll be done. The Lord is speaking here of something much more than this, He is speaking of oneness of spirit. 'If you, two of you, agree together in your spirit, and indeed in harmony with the Holy Spirit that binds together the body of Christ - that oneness of spirit will come to Me, and ask anything, indeed ask everything, and all your desires will be given you'. Don't think it's the one thing you're asking - 'if two of you shall agree together'.

My friend, if we need anything today it's harmony in the Holy Spirit - for when that happens we'll not ask what I want, and what you want, and your specific desire, and what you would long for to happen in the Iron Hall. If we are in the Holy Spirit, our desires - Romans 6 - are put to death and buried. We are given the desires of Christ, and we ask for His desires - there'll be no bickering, there'll be no fighting about silly nonsense - but we will be coming to God, upon the will God, as the church of God, and we will see His will implemented in the earth! That will not happen until our flesh dies and until we are all asking it together.

Let me give you an illustration: two men could pray for one man who is not saved - I mean, how many of us don't want people to be saved? I would say there's very few of us, if any of us! So why aren't they being saved? You see, two men can agree on people being saved, but they could be looking daggers at one another

across the church! They're not agreeing! You have to be in harmony with the Holy Spirit, and asking everything, God will do it.

There's something to be done before praying, and that is dealing with our flesh. Watchman Nee says this: 'Many matters are piled up in heaven, many transactions remain undone, simply because God is not able to find an outlet on earth. The degree of God's working in the church today is governed by the degree of prayer in the church. The manifestation of God's power may not exceed the prayer of the church'. Listen to that: 'The manifestation of God's power may not exceed the prayer of the church'. This can't be done by an individual, it takes two of you. This is something specific - why is it? You're agreeing with God, you're agreeing with each other, and finally - as we close - you're agreeing on our gathering.

Verse 20: 'Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst'. Why does the earth govern heaven? Maybe you're saying: 'David, you're attributing far too much to men today' - well, I'm not, because the Lord says it. But why does it happen? Why does the earth govern heaven? I'll tell you why: because of the presence of the Lord. When two of us or three of us meet together in His name - and that means call together in His name, not of ourselves as this denomination, that denomination, or the Iron Hall, but as we are called not to ourselves but to the Lord - there's power. Can I ask you: why do you come to the meeting? Why are you going to come this week to the week of prayer? Is it to fulfil an obligation? Is it because somebody will talk about you? You think you should be there and you're not there? My friend, it must be to gather to the name of the Lord Jesus, for if we are agreeing with God; if we are in harmony in the Spirit with one another, nothing hindering our prayers; and then if we recognise that we are meeting to the Lord and it is the power of the Lord as two or three of us are gathered together in His name - God's will will be wrought on earth! 'There am I in the midst' - how could anything fail if He is in the midst?

Earth governs heaven. As we come to prayer this week, and the rest of the year, let us keep that in mind and in our hearts as we implore God: 'Command ye me concerning my will'. Let's bow our heads together. Can I ask you individually, why some of you don't come to our prayer meeting? Why do you not come? Will you be at the week of prayer? But more important than all of that, will you be in harmony with us? That must be dealt with first - friends, will we believe the Lord Jesus Christ and His word? Will we take the field, and as earth will we govern heaven and bring down His will among men?

Our Father, we pray that we will be found in such a place - in harmony with the Holy Spirit, and that will mean being in harmony with one another, that we will be vessels meet for the Master's use, and clean enough and pure enough and humble enough to be used to implement Your will in the church in these evil days. Lord, make this house a house of prayer, make us a people that will seek Thy face with all our hearts, and allow us in the days that lie ahead to see with our eyes the blessing that You would have in Your heart for us. Let us see it, Lord, as we pray to Thee for it, for Christ's sake, Amen.

Transcribed by Andrew Watkins, Preach The Word - September 2001

www.preachtheword.com

info@preachtheword.com

Appendix C:

"Prayer Meeting Practicalities"

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I want you to turn in your Bibles to Matthew's gospel chapter 18, and we have another two portions of Scripture to read - brief ones - but I want to speak to you this morning, because it is the beginning of our week of prayer, on the subject 'Prayer Meeting Practicalities', prayer meeting practicalities. I want to deal with, first and foremost, a challenge as to why you are at the prayer meeting, or perhaps, as the case may be, why you are not at the prayer meeting. Then moving on, I hope quite quickly, from the challenge; I want to come to not only the importance of the prayer meeting, but the practicalities of a prayer meeting - and some points, hopefully being as practical as I possibly can, and as biblical as I can, bringing some practical points that may help us this week even in our week of prayer, and right throughout the year in the prayer meetings that we have within the assembly.

The first portion is Matthew 18 verses 19 and 20 - and let me say that people often misunderstand and confuse the promises of Scripture with the facts of Scripture, and I believe there is a subtle - not a great, but a subtle - difference. A promise is something that God says He will do for you, and the inference is that you may have to claim it by faith. But there are certain things in the Scriptures which are fact, whether you believe it or not, or how much, to what extent you believe it is irrelevant - it is still a fact. Now this is not a promise, as we often hear in prayer, it is a fact: 'Again I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven' - here's the fact - 'For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them'.

It is one thing to know the consciousness of the presence of the Lord, but the fact of it is certain: He is here - if only two of us were here in His name, He is here. What a fact that is! Acts chapter 1, our second verse, just the one verse, telling us of the practice of the early church with regards to prayer meetings, Acts 1 and verse 14. Speaking of the early disciples and Christians: 'These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren'. Then in Hebrews chapter 10 and verse 25, telling us that this practice continued within the church, of meeting for prayer: 'Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is', or as some people do, 'but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching'.

There's a couple of things that we need to lay down as a foundation when we consider prayer meeting practicalities. The first is the prominent place that the prayer meeting had in the primitive church, the prominent place that the prayer meeting had in the primitive church, the early church that we find recorded for us in the Acts of the Apostles. If we were to turn back to the Acts and chapter 2 this time, we would see in verse 42 again the prominent place that prayer had: 'they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine', that's teaching, 'and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers'. We've broke bread this morning, we're fellowshiping now, we will be praying right throughout this week, and this is the practice right from the very beginning - the inception and birth - of the church. Whenever there were problems that arose in the early church, the first and foremost thing they did was to pray. They didn't have a committee meeting, they didn't even have an elder's meeting, they prayed.

In Acts chapter 12 and verse 5 we see that Peter was shut up in prison, and we read there that this is what the church resorted to: 'Peter therefore was kept in prison', verse 5 of chapter 12, 'but prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him', and if you know the subsequent story, you will know that the Lord miraculously delivered Peter and he was let go from prison. In Acts chapter 2 we have the account of the Holy Spirit of God coming in pentecostal power on the church, as the Lord Jesus promised that He would come - and it is no coincidence, I believe, that it happened in a prayer meeting. Pentecost, the birthday of the church, happened during a prayer meeting in that upper room where the disciples were met together.

So I want you to see first and foremost, very clearly, that there is a prominent place given to the prayer meeting in the primitive church. Also, if you're familiar at all, no matter how casually, with church history and even secular history, you will know that there has been a prominent place for the prayer meeting in the histories of revival right throughout our world. When God moved in blessing, He moved his people to pray to bring down a blessing. I haven't got time to go into all the instances, but many of you will have heard me mention frequently the Moravians, who were a community in Hernhutt in Germany and Saxony, and when the Spirit of God came powerfully upon them in August 1727, they evolved this prayer fellowship where adults covenanted to cover each of 24 hours of every day in prayer. They did it for a month, and then they held it on even more, until they held this prayer meeting for almost 100 years, 24 hours a day! Even the children prayed, they met in their own fashion in prayer meetings, the account is that there was praying, singing and weeping. In our own land of Ulster in 1859, that great revival we enjoyed, the fact of the matter is that the beginning of it all, the embryo seed, was found in four men that agreed in a country house in Kells to meet together and to pray for God's blessing. Prayer meetings are always found where revival is.

So we see that a prominent place is given to the prayer meeting in the primitive church, there is a prominent place for prayer meetings in periods of revival in this world, but what I want you to notice is the lack of prominence of prayer meetings in the present day church in our modern age. The prayer meeting is not seen as the most, or at least one of the most important works of the church of Jesus Christ today in our contemporary modern age. I want to bring an inference from that, which I believe is logical and reasonable, and I hope that you will agree with me, that the lack of prominence of prayer meetings in the present day church subsequently and directly is related to the demise of spiritual power and spiritual blessing experienced today in the church.

E.M. Bounds, whose writings I encourage you to read regarding prayer, said these words - very simple but very true: 'Much prayer, much blessing; little prayer, little blessing; no prayer, no blessing'. It is the same today as it has ever been - now we never want to oversimplify the matters of spiritual blessing or in the spiritual realm, because we believe that God is sovereign and God's ways are not always our ways, and at times God's ways are beyond understanding. But even the casual observer of Scripture, and of history, and of today's church will have to agree and witness that the health of the prayer meeting is directly related to the testimony of power and experience of blessing in the church in any age. C. H. Spurgeon, who enjoyed great blessing in the Metropolitan Tabernacle in London during the 1800s, was showing some guests around the Tabernacle. After taking them to the main part of the building, the sanctuary if you like, he said: 'Come with me, and I'll show you the heating apparatus'. Imagine the surprise of the people when he took them down to a room where there were 400 people gathered at that moment in prayer, praying to the Lord for God's blessing - and that was the secret of the ministry of the prince of preachers, not any gifts that he may have had, but the power of God that was upon him in his own prayer life and the prayer life of the believers in his church. We ignore this to our peril in this modern age, where we have everything at our fingertips in a time of technological foresight - we can almost do anything! But we need to pray, because the prayer meeting is in ill-repute today, it is the Cinderella of the church!

I've said it before, and I'll say it again: look at the number in the morning service this morning, and you'll see how popular the church is; look at the evening service and you'll see how popular the preacher is; but look at

the prayer meeting and you will see how popular the Lord is! People who really want to get down to business with God. There was once a preacher who laboriously read his sermons verbatim, word for word, he was tied to his manuscript. One night, as he was in full flight preaching, the lights went out - and he thought that somebody at the back, knowing his ailment of not being able to preach without words in front of him, thought that they were playing a joke on him. He said: 'Turn the lights on right away!', and the voice came back: 'No sir, the lights are really out!'. When he contemplated this, and couldn't preach extempore, he decided: 'Well, there's only one thing for it', and this is what he said, 'If the power is off, it's time to pray'. If the power is off it's time to pray!

Now listen friends, if we lack spiritual power in our private personal worlds, and in the corporate existence of our local assembly, the witness of Jesus Christ in this area and in this land, in this particular nation and continent, we need to pray! It's time to pray! You can plan, you can have all the programmes you like, you can have the projects that you want and dream of - but if there's no prayer, there's nothing! We will go forward only on our knees! The question is: are you at the prayer meeting? It's not just your - excuse the expression - bum on the seat that we're looking for, it is your heart with you - a heart filled with passion and prayer! If you have a heart for prayer, at all costs, reasonable costs, you will be at the prayer meeting.

A crowded gathering of distinguished scientists on one occasion were listening spellbound to the masterly explanations of a scientist - many of you will have heard of him, Michael Faraday. They all were sitting in this theatre for an hour, and he held all these brilliant scientists in their own right enthralled as he demonstrated the nature and properties of the magnet. As he brought the lecture to a close with an experiment so novel, so bewildering, so triumphant, that some of the people just had to sit in awe and wonder, and there was a time of exuberant praise afterwards, clapping and standing upon their feet - he didn't realise that there was the Prince of Wales present, that is the Prince of Wales who afterward became King Edward VII. After the great applause, the Prince of Wales stood to his feet and proposed a motion of congratulations to Faraday - the resolution having been seconded, it was duly passed, and renewed with thunderous applause from the audience around. Suddenly the uproar ceased, and there was a deadly silence settled over the audience, and the assembly waited for Faraday's response to the Prince of Wales, but he wasn't there. He didn't appear. Now some may have thought that it was rude, but only his intimate friends knew what had become of him - because he was an elder in a Sandemanian church that had only 20 members, and the hour at which he concluded his presentation to all and sundry in the scientific world and the Prince of Wales was also the commencement of the hour of prayer in that assembly - he was gone.

Can I ask you: what's your excuse for not being at the prayer meeting? Let me go on further and say: lack of attendance is not the only problem with prayer meetings today, because many of you who will remember great days of blessing in our past can remember prayer meetings that were just electric - and I use that statement advisedly. You would have to admit that it is not just attendance that is our problem today, but the actual standards of prayer in our prayer meetings, it is greatly declined. Now that I've challenged you upon the subject of the importance of the prayer meeting, and I hope to see all of you this week, but apart from that let's consider some practicalities of the prayer meeting - and I want to be absolutely, maybe more practical than some would like in a Sunday morning service, but we have to be practical if there are problems within our prayer meeting and with some of our prayers. Hopefully this is going to benefit our week of prayer, and benefit our prayer meetings in the days that lie ahead.

I want to give these practicalities for the prayer meeting to you under four points: one, brevity; two, reality; three, clarity; and four, positivity. Now if you have a pen, write those down, and if you don't get the tape - because these are important. First of all: brevity. The briefness of your prayers, now let's think about that for a moment. I remember a few months ago, I think it was, maybe even after the week of prayer last year, I give out sheets of what C.H. Spurgeon had to say on how prayer meetings were and how prayer meetings had become in his day, and the way prayer meetings needed to be. One of the chief points, I'll be bringing out

some of his points this morning, but one of the main ones was the need for brevity among those who were praying. We're not just talking about our normal prayer meeting, but even when the women meet to pray together, brevity is so important.

Spurgeon speaks of what used to happen in his day, and I quote: 'A brother would fix himself against the table pew, and pray for 20 minutes or half an hour, and then conclude by asking forgiveness for his shortcomings, a petition', he says, 'which was heartily sanctioned by those who had undergone the penance of endeavouring to join in his long-winded discourse'. He goes on to say: 'Let us many as possible take part in the utterance of the church's desires, the change of voice will prevent weariness' - ever been wearied by long praying? 'The variety of subjects will excite attention, better to have six pleading earnestly than two drowsily. Far better for the whole meeting that the many wants should be represented experimentally by many intercessors, than formally by two or three'. In other words, six people that are praying short, but praying real and praying to God, and pouring out their heart and touching the throne of God experimentally; rather than two or three formally. I'll tell you, formal prayers are the bane of any prayer meeting.

On one occasion D. L. Moody, that great evangelist, felt so blessed of God and encouraged by the blessings that God had lavished upon him; he was walking down, I think it was a street in New York, one day, and he just was so overwhelmed by the great volume of God's blessings in his life that he had to cry out to the Lord after falling into a hotel room: 'Stop Lord! Stop Lord! Your blessings are too much! Can I ask you: when was the last time you heard a prayer like that in any prayer meeting? I'm talking about the brevity of it, but not just the length of it, the weight of it! That is spontaneous praying, isn't it? It's a beautiful change from: 'Our loving God and eternal heavenly Father...' - now don't think I'm poking fun for the sake of poking fun, I'm not. Some people who pray the same prayers all the time, are the very same people who would fault the liturgy of the Church of England and the prayer book. It would do us all good, and them good as well, if they took the prayer book of the Church of England - and I'm not agreeing with written prayers, but there's a lot more variety in it than there is in some of our prayers!

My friends, we need to realise, as Proverbs chapter 10 verse 19 says: 'In the multitude of words there wanteth not sin; but he that refraineth his lips is wise'. Do you ever walk away from a prayer meeting and ask the question: 'I really enjoyed that prayer meeting, I wonder what was so special or so different about it'? Can I tell you, it's not rocket science, you don't have to have the gift of prophecy or speak in tongues to understand what the reason is, it's as simple as this: as a general rule, if no one exceeds praying more than 10 minutes, and most of those prayers are under five minutes, and those prayers under five minutes exhibit fervour and life; in that hour of prayer if there have been ten men praying, and intermittently singing songs unto God and psalms and prayers, we will be in the Spirit's blessing - and it's so practical! Giving way - if you want a verse for it, 'forbearing', giving way to one another in love and allowing others to pray, and only praying things that are on your heart not in your head, and pouring out until the burden is discharged, and until you know that God has answered. That might be only a few words. Brevity in our prayers is needed.

I hope you're getting all this: reality is required. Reality from two perspectives, first of all from our perspective and also from God's perspective. Reality in prayer is important because there are some people who preach in their prayers. Praying is not preaching, but in a roundabout way they're telling others, maybe, how spiritual they are. This is how you can do it: you can recite your own spiritual experience. You can be saying: 'Lord, I was up this morning at half past two', or 'Lord, I've been fasting now for 120 days', or 'Lord, I spoke to five people this week, and this is what I told them, and this is what they said to me' - and really what you're doing is, let's be honest, you're telling other people how spiritual you think you are. That is not prayer, reciting your own experiences, neither is prayer preaching in order to expound or propound your particular basis of belief. I hear people almost debating in prayer meetings! Maybe you believe this particular truth about salvation, and another person believes the other, and it's almost as if they're in conversation with one another trying to get one over another. I'll tell you, there's nothing that will confound a prayer meeting and

spoil it more than controversy - because one of the reasons why God's Holy Spirit has ordained us to meet together in prayer is for unity, and if you bring disunity into the prayer meeting the blessing will not come.

Do not preach in your prayers, even though some engage in an exposition of a Psalm or a passage from the Gospels, as if God didn't know why He inspired it in the first place - it's ridiculous, isn't it? The fact of the matter is, the only reason you could possibly be telling others of your spiritual experiences, or propounding your particular basis of belief or spiritual hobbyhorse, or in any way preaching upon the word of God in your prayers, is not for the ears of God but for the ears of men! It's the only reason.

Then there is the use in prayer of insincere religious cliches. Now we're talking about reality here from our perspective: insincere religious cliches. Now I'm not going to go through a list of them, but here is a principle for us all, and I believe this - and you can argue this with me if you like - but we shouldn't pray in any different language publicly than we pray to God privately, because if we are we're a bunch of hypocrites. That's what the Pharisees did - I'm not talking about over familiarity with God, I'm not talking about bringing God down to our level - I hope you don't do that in your private prayers - but what I am talking about is a different standard when you're before men than when you're alone with God! Are God's ears different in the prayer meeting than they are in the closet? I'll tell you, God's ears aren't different - but whose ears are different? The other people that are listening to you!

I hope that you don't preach in your prayers, I hope that you don't use insincere religious cliches - Spurgeon, in that article that I mentioned to you, said that in his day this, as well, was the bane of his prayer meetings. One of the favourite expressions in his day was this one: 'Thy poor unworthy dust, I am coming to Thee, Lord, as Thy poor unworthy dust', based on the words of Abraham in the Old Testament. This is what he said: 'We have heard of a good man who, in pleading for his children and grandchildren, was so completely beclouded in the blinding influence of this expression 'Thy poor unworthy dust', that he exclaimed in the prayer meeting 'Lord, save Thy dust, and Thy dust's dust, and Thy dust's dust's dust' - you're allowed to laugh you know! There are times in an attempt to be more holy and to make our prayers more special, and more special than the last prayer, do you know what happens to some of us? We get tongue tied! We forget what we've said, and we trip over our words. We end up offering up what is nothing but absolute - and I say this cautiously - absolute nonsense!

Exodus 33 verse 11 is a verse for our consideration: 'The LORD spake unto Moses face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend'. Now I know you'll all come and say, 'The Lord spoke to him as He speaks to a friend, he didn't speak to the Lord as a man speaks to his friend' - I know that, but the fact of the matter is that he was talking to God in an intimate fashion because he knew God as his friend. What did the Lord Jesus say? We are to come unto God as young children! Little children aren't engaged in this exercise of trying to impress other men, they're real, they pour out their hearts. From our perspective we need reality, but also from God's perspective we need reality - we need to realise the God that we're coming to. Now that will give reverence, but there's a few other things it will give as well. 'Daddy', said one boy on one occasion, 'does the Lord know everything?'. 'Yes son', replied the father, 'Why do you ask such a question?'. 'Because', replied the boy, 'our preacher, when he prays, is so long telling God everything that I thought he wasn't posted'. Telling God of things that He already knows! He is the all-knowing God!

I heard a story a long time ago that a man was up praying in a particular fellowship that needed a new hall because the train kept going up and down outside the building, and he stood to his feet and said: 'Lord, we need another hall to meet in, the noise of the train is really disturbing our meetings - and Lord, if You just wait a minute, You'll be able to hear it Yourself!'

A good rule that Watchman Nee gives, and none of these people are modern, in fact all of them are probably dead, a good rule for prayer is this: 'Say only as much as is in your heart, and not to stretch what you do pray

beyond reality'. Isn't that wonderful? Pray only as much as is in your heart, and do not stretch what you do pray beyond reality. Brevity, be short and to the point; secondly, reality from your perspective, don't preach, don't recite your own experiences, don't give your basis of belief, don't expound a passage, don't use all these insincere religious cliches, and from God's perspective realise that the One who you have come to knows what you're going to ask before you ask it!

Then thirdly, clarity. Now clarity in speech is important as some will tell us, but the fact of the matter is: clarity from the heart is what is really important. It's important that we are honest with God, and straightforward with God when we speak, and simple - not simplistic, but simple with God - because that will encourage other believers, particularly the lambs among us, to pray to God. One has said: 'The cries of the lambs must mingle with the bleating of the sheep, or the flock will lack much of its natural music'. Beecher said these words, listen carefully: 'Humble prayers, timid prayers, half inaudible prayers, the utterances of uncultured lips, may cut a poor figure as lecture room literature; but are they to be scornfully disdained? If a child may not talk at all, till it can speak fluent English, will it ever learn to speak well? There should be a process of education going on continually by which all the members of the church shall be able to contribute of their experiences and gifts, and in such a course of development the first hesitating stumbling ungrammatical prayer of a confused Christian may be worth more to the church than the best prayer of the most eloquent pastor' - because it's from the heart!

Now we need to speak up, there's no doubt about that, and we need to be clear in what we say - but the fact of the matter is this: if we're not brief, brethren, in our prayers, and if we're not real in our prayers, do you know what we could be doing? Discouraging others from praying, and the lambs among us starting to pray! We need clarity also in the specific nature of our requests. One of the reasons I arrange the week of prayer the way I do, taking a specific subject each night, is because you're better concentrating on fewer things than on many things, and then missing the mark completely. Spurgeon put it like this: 'It would be better for a petitioner to drive one nail home with repeated blows, than to deal one ineffectual tap to them one after another'. Driving the point home, driving the prayer home - in the old prayer meetings, do you know what they used to do? They used to take one thing, one specific thing, and drive it home until, as they put it, the burden had been discharged and they felt that God had answered prayer - and if it took 15 minutes they all went home, and if it took two hours they stayed.

We know nothing of this today: brevity, reality, clarity - but fourthly and finally: positivity. I love that Psalm, because sometimes I get downhearted and it speaks to yourself, in fact the Psalmist is speaking to himself in it. It goes like this: 'Why art thou downcast, O my soul? Hope thou in God, for thou shalt yet praise Him'. He's saying: 'Would you wise up? Why are you so downcast? You've so many blessings in God, hope in God, because there's going to come a day when you will praise Him'. I was thinking as I was reading this Psalm recently, 'Why art thou downcast, O my soul?', and I have to be honest with you - and I'm not being facetious, though I am being a bit mischievous - but I had to answer: 'Sometimes my soul is cast down from attending the prayer meeting'. Criticise me if you like, but I'm just being honest - because all we get at times are prayers that would depress you about the sick! We've got to pray about the sick, but we're praying about the sick to a God who can heal the sick, or a God who can give grace to those who are sick to bring them home to glory - and we all sound so depressed, so dejected! There's not a spirit nor an attitude of prayer or praise, and there's nothing that will pull down a prayer meeting like that! Negativity never gives way to faith, never!

We need to study some hymns, as well as the word of God, hymns that I quoted during the week and last week:

'When all Thy mercies, O my God,
My rising soul surveys,

Transported with the view, I'm lost
In wonder, love and praise'.

Another one is:

'Come, my soul, thy suit prepare:
Jesus loves to answer prayer;
He Himself has bid thee pray,
Therefore will not say thee nay.

Thou art coming to a King,
Large petitions with thee bring;
For His grace and power are such,
Thou canst never ask too much'.

I know that some of your hearts are breaking, and some of the burdens that you have weighing on you are massive at this moment, and I'm not underestimating them, and I'm not saying we shouldn't pray - we should pray for these things - but what I am saying is this: if you don't pray for them from a heart of praise and faith, you might as well not bother at all!

Prayer meeting practicalities: do you value the prayer meeting? Are you at the prayer meeting? If you're not, why are you not? Because there is little else more important in the life of the Christian and in the life of the church than prayer, but listen to these practicalities: brevity, reality, clarity, and positivity.

Can I finish with a little somewhat sarcastic allegory that illustrates for us the state of the health of the prayer meeting today in general? Maybe you've heard it before, but listen anyway: it's an obituary. 'Mrs. Prayer Meeting died recently at the First Neglected Church on Worldly Avenue. Born many years ago in the midst of great revivals, she was a strong, healthy child, fed largely on testimony and spiritual holiness, soon growing into world-wide prominence. She was one of the most influential members of the famous Church family. But for the past several years, Sister Prayer Meeting has been failing in health, gradually wasting away until rendered helpless by stiffness of knees, until her death was caused through lukewarmness and coldness of heart. Lack of spiritual food, coupled with the lack of faith, shameless desertion of her friends and non-support, were contributing causes of her death. Only a few were present at her funeral, sobbing over memories of her past beauty and power. Carefully selected pallbearers were asked to bear the remains tenderly away, but failed to appear. Her body rests in a beautiful cemetery of bygone memories and glories, awaiting the summer from above'.

Can I tell you, as I close this morning, we don't have anything that any other generation didn't have. We've got a Bible and we've got the Holy Spirit, but we need to pray. We can have all the mod cons and best facilities that you like and we can buy, but if we don't have prayer and the God of prayer we have nothing. I hope to see you at the prayer meeting this week.

Lord, we love Thy word and we love to preach it. Lord, we love music, and we love to sing the songs and the Psalms of Zion - but Lord, the disciples came to the Saviour and asked: 'Teach us to pray' - not 'teach us to preach', or 'teach us to study'. Lord we come to you today as an assembly embarking on a week of intercession, and we pray: 'Teach us to pray as the Saviour prayed', for His sake, Amen.

Transcribed by: Andrew Watkins, Preach The Word - September 2004
www.preachtheword.com
info@preachtheword.com

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*www.preachtheword.com
info@preachtheword.com*