



Prayer and Farewell

Series: The Grand Plan of the Glorious God

Ephesians 6:18-24

December 5, 2010

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Today, we are going to close out this sermon series on the letter to the Ephesians by looking at Paul's call to faithful prayer and his own benediction and final wishes for the church in Ephesus. We desperately need to understand the true nature of prayer. Because communion with God is so vital and prayer so necessary to the fulfillment of God's plan, every generation of believers faces the necessity need to clear up any confusion and to truly grasp the value of prayer and to pursue its practice. For many, prayer has been replaced with practical action. In some, prayer lacks a sense of awe and respect. Some believe prayer is designed only to make demands and claims on God. And for others, prayer is nothing more than ritual. But prayer is communion with God. It is the means by which the life of God is imparted to us as we seek His face, as we dwell in His presence. The writer of Hebrews makes much of our ability to draw near to God by the blood of Christ saying: (Heb 10:19-22) Even more he writes: (Heb 4:16) The grace of prayer, of communion and intimacy with God has been purchase by a massive price – the blood of Christ – and it is of inestimable worth. Prayer is nothing short of a miracle each time that we pray.

Prayer is the absolute necessity of the redeemed soul. In prayer, we cry out to the Lord and declare Him to be the sovereign God of the universe, mighty in power and yet loving to His children. In prayer we declare our dependence upon God for His grace and His provision. In prayer we commune with our Father and come to know His heart, His works and His ways. Jesus said: (Mat 7:7-11) We must pray and so Paul calls us to prayer in this text telling us:

1) Pray for yourselves and for the saints in the heat of the battle. (v.18) Pray in the Spirit...Now what does that mean? First let me say what it does not mean. Praying in the Spirit is not praying in some ecstatic language, what is called by some – praying in tongues. There is no positive example or encouragement to do that found anywhere in Scripture. Neither is praying in the Spirit some overwhelmingly emotional experience, or shouting down the devil, or some electrically charged sort of thing. When Paul commands us to “pray in the Spirit” he means something far greater than this.

Praying in the Spirit means to pray as we are filled and led by the Spirit of God to offer prayers to Father God that are shaped and molded by the word of God and which are made acceptable by the blood of the Son of God. You remember back in chapter 5 and verse 18, when we were dealing with what it means to be filled with the Spirit, we saw in comparing this text with the Paul's companion letter to the Colossians that being filled with the Spirit is the same thing as having the Word of Christ dwelling in you richly. So, in other words, to be a Spirit-filled Christian is the same thing as being a Word-filled Christian.

Likewise, to pray in the Spirit means to pray in such a way that our minds, our thoughts, our desires, our wills are mastered and directed by the Word of God – that we pray according to the Word of God. That we worship and adore the Lord in prayer for all that we know Him to be from His Word and from our experience evaluated in light of God's Word. We pray in manner that brings glory to Christ as our Redeemer, Mediator, Savior, King, Master and Lord. We ask for those things that we know are in accordance with the will of God from a heart that has been stirred to love God and His Christ. To pray in the Spirit is to pray in the name of Christ, in accord with His nature and will, and in concert with the Spirit of God. To pray in the Spirit is to join our prayers and petitions to the Holy Spirit's and our will and desires and mind with His which are consistent with that of the Father and the Son. So Paul wants us to pray in the Spirit and to

Pray at all times...The idea that Paul is getting at here is that prayer is to be a pattern of life, a part of our natural life, a way of life -- a continual God-consciousness, where everything we see and experience becomes a kind of prayer, lived in a deep awareness of the presence and the fellowship of God. When we are tempted, we take that temptation before God and find grace to help in time of need. When we experience God's grace in large and small ways – in that which is good and beautiful, we immediately thank the Lord for it. When we see wickedness around us, we pray that God would glorify Himself in bringing righteousness to bear in the midst of that wickedness. When we meet someone who does not know Christ, we pray for God to draw that person to Himself and to use us to be a faithful witness.

Life becomes a continually ascending prayer: all life's thoughts, deeds, and circumstances become an opportunity to commune with our Heavenly Father. That is what it is to pray, to speak to God as you would a good Father, a Father who is King, a glorious King in which is all power, but a Father nonetheless. God is not an abstract principle or proposition, but a person. God is meant to be known personally - in dynamic, living, experiential communion - and not simply through the intellect and God's greatest promise is the gift of his faithful and gracious presence. Praying at all times includes every moment of the day and the times when we are before the Lord in our prayer closet. It is all of life. I think of the prayers of David in the Psalms: Of David. (Psa 27:1-8; Psa 40:1-3; Psa 57:1-3)

David was a man who knew what it was to pray at all times and Paul was a man who knew the gracious and glorious presence of God. But this kind of life, the kind of life that God so desires for us, His children, only comes through cultivation. In one of his books on prayer, *Purpose in Prayer*, nineteenth-century pastor E.M. Bounds provides us with this reminder of how we must cultivate our fellowship with the Lord: Prayer is not a meaningless function or duty to be crowded into the busy or the weary ends of the day, and we are not obeying our Lord's command when we content ourselves with a few minutes upon our knees in the morning rush or late at night when the faculties, tired with the tasks of the day, call out for rest. God is always within call, it is true; His ear is ever attentive to the cry of His child, but we can never get to know Him if we use the vehicle of prayer as we use the telephone, for a few words of hurried conversation. Intimacy requires development. We can never know God as it is our privilege to know Him, by brief and fragmentary and unconsidered repetitions of intercessions that are requests for personal favors and nothing more. That is not the way in which we can come into communication with heaven's King. "The goal of prayer is the ear of God," a goal that can only be reached by patient and continued and continuous waiting upon Him, pouring out our heart to Him and permitting Him to speak to us. Only by so doing can we expect to know Him, and as we come to know Him better we shall spend more time in His presence and find that presence a constant and ever-increasing delight. So, in order that we might know God's empowering grace in the midst of the warfare of our lives we are to pray at all times in the Spirit, praying

With all prayer and supplication...Pray in accordance with the leading of the Spirit, pray at all times, live in the atmosphere of prayer, praying all manner of prayers. Paul's point here is that as we are praying, we should be praying all kinds of prayers. Pray prayers of adoration and praise, of worship of the Lord – (Psa 34:1) Pray prayers of repentance, confession and contrition. (Psa 41:4) Pray prayers of supplication and thanksgiving – pray to God asking Him to provide for your needs and give Him thanks for His providential care -- (Php 4:6-7) In affliction and trial or in blessing and well-being, in times of temptation or in times of spiritual strength, seek the face of the Lord in prayer. Commune with Him, cry out to Him for the souls of your friends and your loved ones. Pray for His glory. Pray for missions, for evangelism, for discipleship. Pray for faithfulness and holiness for ourselves and for others. Pray for our physical and spiritual needs. Pray earnestly, fighting for God and for His glory as we fight against the enemy of our souls, praying with

With alertness and all perseverance...In our praying, Paul says means for us to be awake and on guard, knowing what is going around us and rightly assessing the situation. The idea that Paul is getting at is that the best way that we can pray is to do so paying attention to what is going on the church and the church family, what is taking place in the church universal – the threats that the gospel is facing, to be up on what the ministries of the church are facing, what families are going through, seeing needs and praying for them – looking with the eyes of a soldier for that

for which you can pray and intercede. Be alert and persevere in prayer. Go hard at it and do not quit. Be steadfast, earnest, unrelenting, and enduring in prayer, never growing discouraged or disheartened, but realizing the greatness of what is at stake. And as you are praying he says:

Pray for all the saints...In other words, we are to realize that we are not Christians in isolation but we are Christians together, part of the body of Christ and members one of another – Ephesians 4:25. We are soldiers with one another in the same battle and our concern must be for something greater than just ourselves. We must be praying for our fellow warriors in the struggle against Satan and for God's glory and the glory of His gospel. For that reason, we are to be praying and interceding for one another – for all the saints. I read one comment on this text that said: One of the worst problems for many of us today is plain old self-centeredness. It's possible to be so focused on my health, my success, my looks, my reputation, my spiritual standing, that it makes me sick in spirit. If all I think about is me, me, me, and if all I pray about is me, me, me, that makes me spiritually unhealthy. Many individuals and churches could get beyond petty problems if only they would recognize the threat of Satan, trust the power of God, and pray for each other and all the saints and for the advance of God's kingdom rather than focusing on themselves. We need to be interceding for our brothers and sisters and their families, in their homes, at their work, in their communities, in every aspect of living so that they might shine for Christ as they fight off Satan's attack.

So, we are to be praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication, keeping alert with all perseverance, and making supplication for all the saints... And it is in that vein that Paul says:

2) Pray for me. (v. 19-22) There is a battle and a warfare in preaching and in ministering in the name of Christ, for which Paul is desiring the faithful intercession of the Ephesians. He is requesting that they would pray for him, pray for his faithfulness, his boldness, his consistency and endurance in the ministry. As we look at this request for prayer by Paul, I want for us to feel the urgency with which Paul makes this request. Paul requests that the Ephesians would faithfully intercede for his ministry. That Paul would ask the church to pray for him, this apostle who was among the most gifted and highly graced human beings that had ever lived, speaks volumes of the urgency and desire of Paul for prayer to envelop and undergird the ministry that God had entrusted to him. Paul felt the weight of his calling and so he asks the Ephesians to pray for him and with him that he would be faithful and fruitful in his labor for the Lord.

Paul asks the Ephesians to pray for him to be given utterance by God. He asks them to pray: that words may be given to me in opening my mouth not to speak his own words, his own ideas, his own opinions, but the word of the living God in the hearing of all to whom he would

preach. Paul knows he must have a word from God. He feels acutely the weight of that responsibility. He knows that this task of preaching is a solemn one. It is serious and it is weighty and so as much as they can, Paul is asking the Ephesians to bear that burden with him. The weight of the preaching ministry is no small thing. It is weighty because true, biblical, gospel preaching is the heralding of the word of God to men and women. It is the means which God has ordained for the proclamation of the gospel to a lost world; the primary means of grace by which men and women are saved, by which the church is edified and strengthened and made ready to be presented to God as mature in Christ; by which men and women are brought face to face with the glory and majesty and holiness of God and they are fed with the truth that leads to godliness; they are exhorted to seek God and his saving grace through Jesus Christ and His cross; they are rebuked, corrected, exhorted and trained in righteousness. True preaching produces people that are consumed with the glory of God; true preaching is the source of true power in the church, prepares souls to stand before the judgment seat of Christ, fills the soul with a fire for evangelism, produces God-honoring worship. Preaching is essential, without it the people of God will suffer and grow weak but where faithful, biblical preaching is present the church will thrive. The weighty task of the preacher is to show the glories of God in Christ-concretely, inescapably, specifically, and compellingly from the Word of God under the unction of the Holy Spirit. And when a man preaches eternity hangs in the balance as the preacher proclaims the Word. When the Word of God is faithfully preached, either hearts are drawn to God and to Christ in saving faith or hearts are hardened against God and His gospel. It happens every time the gospel is preached. Charles Spurgeon said: Preaching is not child's play-- it is not a thing to be done without labor and anxiety; it is solemn work; it is awful work, if you view it in its relation to eternity. When we think that when we speak to you, your salvation or damnation, in some measure, depends upon what we say- when we reflect that if we are unfaithful watchmen, your blood will God require at our hands- O, good God! When I reflect that I have preached to thousands in my lifetime, and have perhaps said many things I ought not to have said, it startles me, it makes me shake and tremble. It is a tremendously sobering and solemn thing to proclaim the word of God and so Paul asks for prayer – I'm asking for prayer, for myself and for everyone who ministers the Word in this congregation. Pray for me to feel the weight of the responsibility, pray for me to be consistent and faithful and earnest in every moment that I have to open my mouth for the Lord. Pray for me that the words that I should preach would be given to me, that I would not rely upon my intellect or my wisdom or in any human ability, that I wouldn't attempt to speak with fake elegance or with sweeping and flowery but ultimately worthless phrases, but that God's words would be given to me to plainly and clearly proclaim the truth.

That's why Paul asks the Ephesians to pray that God would grant him to open his mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel...that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak. Paul longs to preach clearly and forthrightly the mystery of the gospel and to do it with a holy boldness. I take Paul to be saying that he desires to declare, to sound forth clearly the gospel of Christ, the glory Christ and Him crucified, that his preaching would be firmly rooted and grounded in the gospel and that the gospel would be interwoven in everything that he preached.

I also take Paul to be saying that he desires the Ephesians to pray for him that he would not be seduced away from preaching the pure gospel, seduced into preaching a message that men may consider to be more suitable or more effective or more enlightened or more practical. In this atmosphere in which we live, now more than ever, we need to be praying for pastors to preach the one, true gospel: salvation by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. We must pray for pastors to lift high the cross; to call people to lives of repentance and faith; calling people to apply the truth of the gospel in their everyday living and to reject preaching behavior modification, or spiritual-sounding self-improvement seminars or the appearance of godliness – moralism – minus the power of the gospel. Let him constantly ask himself how faithfully he is preaching Christ crucified. Remember that it was Paul who said to the Galatians: (Gal 1:8-9) Just as Paul needed intercession in that regard, so do I and so does everyone who stands to proclaim to you the Word of God. Pray that I would clearly preach the gospel and that it would be interwoven into all that I declare. Pray that I would not be seduced away from the power and sufficiency of the gospel.

Paul asked that the Ephesians would pray for him to be faithful to the gospel and to be bold in his proclamation. Why would Paul ask for prayer in that regard? Why would Paul, of all people, need prayer that he would remain bold in his preaching. This was the man who said: I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome. For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. (Rom 1:15-16) Paul asked for prayer to be bold in his proclamation of the gospel because he knew first hand the opposition and the difficulty that comes with faithfully proclaiming the Word of God. Paul knew the cost of slavery to Christ as Jesus had said: (Luk 9:23-26)

He longed to show himself an approved servant of God. After pronouncing the curse on those who would change the gospel in his letter to the Galatians, he said: (Gal 1:10) Paul sought to be faithful to Christ by preaching what men needed to hear, indifferent to the opinions or approval as long as he had the approval of God.

Al Martin, in a message that he delivered at Westminster Theological Seminary made this observation regarding the need for boldness and freedom from the fear of man: You are never free to be an instrument of blessing to your people unless you are free from the effects of their smiles and their frowns. People know when you can be bought by their smiles and beaten by their frowns. It will not take them long to discern whether or not you are a man who is not affected either by their smiles or by their frowns. Such a man is a free man in Christ. The Word of God declares, 'The fear of man bringeth a snare.' Such fear will snare your tongue, so that when those flashes of spiritual light come to you in the pulpit, and there are applications that you know will sting and wound some choice member of the church, if your eye is to men, you will be unable to give utterance to that which you know you ought to. But when you are free from your people's smiles or frowns, you are at liberty to be an instrument of blessing to them. I submit that if there is to be increased power in the pulpit, there must be a return to the purity of motivation, comprised in the fear of God. I wholeheartedly agree. Paul knew that to be true. What keeps men from boldly proclaiming the truth of God is often times self-interest and self-love. Men that will not preach the whole counsel of God for fear of offending others are self-consumed men. They are so concerned for their own feelings; they will not take the risk of offending someone and making them angry. Their hearers may perish in hell, but they will do so loving the preacher.

Beloved, if you love Christ, and you love me and you love your own souls, pray that I will boldly and in the fear of the Lord preach to you the Word of God that you need to hear and not the worthless words of human wisdom that you may want to hear. Pray that I will preach to you the words that will prepare you for eternity and not merely the words that will make you comfortable in the meantime. Pray that I would preach the entire counsel of God faithfully and freely. Paul asked that of the Ephesians and then lastly I want us to see that

Paul's request comes in light of the tribulation that he is undergoing for his faithfulness to the gospel. While it is not an explicit prayer request, Paul casts a light on the cost of his faithful preaching of the gospel – preaching which has left him as an ambassador for Christ in chains, under arrest for his bold preaching of the faith. It is a reminder that faithful preaching will always result in opposition, in persecution. Obedience to the calling of God, a determination to preach the word; (to) be ready in season and out of season; (to) reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching (2Ti 4:2) always has a cost attached to it. There are trials; there are emotionally and spiritually draining times; losses and even betrayals associated with faithfulness to Christ. There is the heaviness of preaching with passion and earnestness and wrestling with the feeling of it falling on deaf ears. There is the weight of bearing burdens with the body, of earnestly seeking to protect the flock. There are indescribable joys but also great weights. Please pray for me that I would bear up under the weight of the ministry and not only bear up but find great strength and hope through greater and greater dependence upon God.

Someone once asked Spurgeon the secret of the success of his ministry and his response was, "My people pray for me." Certainly there were other factors involved in God's use of Spurgeon, but there is no doubt that the prayers of his congregation for a fruitful ministry were heard and answered by God and were the foundation of the gracious move of God's Spirit in Spurgeon's ministry.

Paul knew the value of the prayers of the saints on his behalf, so much so that he sent Tychicus both to deliver the letter and to deliver a report. Paul finishes by sharing his heart for their well-being with the Ephesians, basically saying:

3) I'm praying for you. (v.23-24) Peace be to the brothers... Paul's first wish for the Ephesians is that they would know by experience the fullness of the peace of God which comes through peace with God. They were a church that had been reconciled to God through the blood of Christ, made to be at peace with the Lord by His glorious work of reconciliation. God's wrath had been turned away from them by the blood of Christ, the hostility between them and God killed by the work of Christ, the great mediator between God and man. They now knew God as Father, they were experiencing the wonder of a growing relationship of love and obedience to Christ. They knew the peace of God that passes all understanding and Paul is praying that they would know by experience that peace more and more and pursue it constantly. Peace be to the brothers...and love... Paul desired for them to know a deepening love for one another and a deepening love for God, a love that was the result of the love of God poured out upon them...with faith... Paul prays for "love with faith," because the two are closely related to one another. As Paul wrote to his beloved son in the faith, Timothy, (1Ti 1:5) Paul is praying for and longing for a deeper and truer and stronger faith for the Ephesians. They already had saving faith, but Paul's desire here is faith that shows itself in love, faith that shows itself in obedience, faith that shows itself in intimate fellowship both with God and with the brothers and sisters in Christ. And all of this, Paul knows comes from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. He closes then by saying:

Grace be with all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with love incorruptible... The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with you! These are his final words. Paul's desire is that the grace of God in Jesus Christ would permeate the entirety of their lives. He wants them to be immersed, all of their lives in the fullness of God's grace -- God's saving, sanctifying, transforming, powerful, infinite, eternal, sufficient, abundant, inexhaustible and unchangeable grace. Paul's prayer is that this grace would fill the lives of the church in Ephesus. Grace be to all who love the Lord Jesus Christ with a pure, undivided heart; without hypocrisy. Paul's prays "grace" for all such sincere and faithful lovers of Christ. He prays for them a fresh discovery of the grace and love

of God in Christ to them; a larger measure of the grace of the Spirit to carry on the good work begun in them; and a pouring out of his favor and blessing in abundance.

That is my prayer for you beloved – that the good work which God has begun in you would be brought to completion, that you would know the peace of God, the love of God and of the brethren, that you would have a ever-deepening faith and that the grace of God would be lavished upon you. Do you see all God has done for you? God, by His grace, has made you his people, he has lavished His love upon you in eternity past, he has chosen you to be own people. He knows you by name and has sent His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, to suffer and bleed and die, enduring God’s just wrath against your sin so that you might be redeemed from the slavery to sin and Satan and be made slaves of God for the sake of righteousness...He has broken down the walls of hostility that separated you from Him and from your brothers and sisters in Christ...He has given you a new heart and a new mind and renewed you after his own image, after true holiness and righteousness. He has transformed your life, transformed your marriage and home, transformed everything...He has fit you for the battle, giving you the gospel armor necessary to prevail for all of eternity...all this he has given you by His grace – rejoice and live in that grace.

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