

SM 060720

The Church That Prays Together?

Sunday Morning Message

Text – Acts 12:1 - 19

Congregational Reading – Acts 12:4 - 7

Introduction

Read the Text

One of the characteristics of a church that is truly submissive to the Lord's will is that it prays together. In the Book of Acts, which records the history of the New Testament churches in the first century as they were endued with great power by the Holy Spirit after the Lord Jesus Christ ascended up into Heaven, is filled with examples of churches that prayed together.

There is an old saying: "The church that prays together stays together."

Jesus said, "***My house shall be called the house of prayer; but ye have made it a den of thieves.***" (Matthew 21:12-13)

Today, God's house is the local church.

"But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth." (1 Timothy 3:15)

If our church is going to be revived, and continue to stay revived in these last days, we are going to have to be committed to praying together. If we are going to be able to remain faithful in these perilous times, we need to be a praying church.

"The church that is not jealously protected by mighty intercession and sacrificial labors will before long become the abode of every evil bird and the hiding place for unsuspected corruption. The creeping wilderness will soon take over that church that trusts in its own strength and forgets to watch and pray." (A. W. Tozer)

"Prayer is of transcendent importance. Prayer is the mightiest agent to advance God's work. Praying hearts and hands only can do God's work. Prayer succeeds when all else fails." (E. M. Bounds)

"We can do nothing without prayer. All things can be done by importunate prayer. It surmounts or removes all obstacles, overcomes every resisting force and gains its ends in the face of invincible hindrances." (E. M. Bounds)

"Shall I give you yet another reason why you should pray? I have preached my very heart out. I could not say any more than I have said. Will not your prayers accomplish that which my

preaching fails to do? Is it not likely that the Church has been putting forth its preaching hand but not its praying hand? Oh dear friends! Let us agonize in prayer.” (Charles Spurgeon)

“The coming revival must begin with a great revival of prayer. It is in the closet, with the door shut, that the sound of abundance of rain will first be heard. An increase of secret prayer with ministers will be the sure harbinger of blessing.” (Andrew Murray)

“The enemy uses all his power to lead the Christian, and above all the minister, to neglect prayer. He knows that however admirable the sermon may be, however attractive the service, however faithful the pastoral visitation, none of these things can damage him or his kingdom if prayer is neglected.” (Andrew Murray)

“Jesus Christ carries on intercession for us in heaven; the Holy Ghost carries on intercession in us on earth; and we the saints have to carry on intercession for all men.” (Oswald Chambers)

As we read through the Book of Acts, we see that God was moving with great power through those early Christians, so much so that the enemies of God declared that these first century Christians had filled Jerusalem (Acts 5:28) with the doctrine of salvation, and later stated that they had turned the whole world upside-down. (Acts 17:6)

Let’s trace the practice of prayer through the Book of Acts:

“And when they were come in, they went up into an upper room, where abode both Peter, and James, and John, and Andrew, Philip, and Thomas, Bartholomew, and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon Zelotes, and Judas the brother of James. These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren.” (Acts 1:13-14)

In Acts 2, the church was praying together on the Day of Pentecost when the Holy Ghost came down, filled them, and empowered them:

“Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls. And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers. And fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles. And all that believed were together, and had all things common; And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need. And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.” (Acts 2:41-47)

In Acts 3, Peter and John go to the temple at the hour of prayer, and while they were there the Lord uses them to heal a man who was lame from his mother womb. This resulted in a large group of people gathering around to see what happened. Peter preached to these folks, and 5000 men were saved.

In Acts 6, the church prayed together in order to decide who the first deacons were going to be.

In Acts 10, Cornelius, an unsaved but searching Gentile was praying and fasting, an Italian man who was a centurion in the Roman army, was praying. God tells him to go find Peter. At the same time, Peter was praying, and God reveals to him that he needs to go talk to Cornelius, and when he sees him he says: *"Cornelius, thy prayer is heard, and thine alms are had in remembrance in the sight of God."* (Acts 10:31)

In our text, in Acts 12:1 – 19, Peter was put in jail and was sentenced by Herod to be put to death, but the church was having a cottage prayer meeting at Mary and John Mark's home. The church is praying for God to release Peter from jail and spare his life. God releases Peter from prison, and he went on to live and serve God for another twenty plus years.

In the passage, we notice that when the church first hears that Peter is out of jail, they don't believe it.

Illustration

A tale is told about a small town that had historically been "dry," but then a local businessman decided to build a tavern. A group of Christians from a local church were concerned and planned an all-night prayer meeting to ask God to intervene. It just so happened that shortly thereafter lightning struck the bar and it burned to the ground. The owner of the bar sued the church, claiming that the prayers of the congregation were responsible, but the church hired a lawyer to argue in court that they were not responsible. The presiding judge, after his initial review of the case, stated, "no matter how this case comes out, one thing is clear. The tavern owner believes in prayer and the Christians do not."

In Acts 13, the Church at Antioch prayed together and fasted before they placed their hands of approval on Paul and Barnabas.

In Acts 16, Paul and Silas are in Philippi, and they went to a prayer meeting, which resulted in the salvation of Lydia and her family, and another woman who was a fortuneteller. Later they were beaten and thrown in jail where they prayed some more and praised God, and the result was the salvation of other prisoners as well as the Philippian jailor and his family.

In Acts 20:36 – Paul prays with the elders of the Church at Ephesus before returning to Jerusalem.

We see throughout this Book of Acts a foundational truth: God works mightily through a praying church.

Now more than ever before, Jersey Shore Baptist Church needs to be a praying church. We are living in very stressful times. The cure for anxiety is prayer:

"Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God." (Philippians 4:6)

Conclusion

1. Get a Prayer Closet

"And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly." (Matthew 6:5-6 KJV)

Set aside time at the beginning of your day for Bible reading and prayer.

Develop a prayer journal and make a list of people that you will pray for regularly. Record specific prayer requests, and keep a section for answered prayer.

Pray over the church prayer list. Pray for people to be saved. Pray for opportunities to witness to people. Pray for me and the other leaders and teachers here at the church.

2. Get a Prayer Companion

Find someone that you can trust that you can meet with regularly for prayer. You may not reveal everything to them, but you will trust that person with some things that are private. Husbands should pray with their wives, but may want to also enlist another man to pray with.

3. Get a Prayer Community (Corporate Prayer)

Come to the church prayer meetings. Participate in the "Noon Zoom" when you are available. Find out what the needs of the church are; find out what your brothers and sisters in Christ need.

More than ever, our church needs prayer. If we are going to stay together as a church we need to be a praying church. Let's pray together in these crazy, perilous days that we are living in that God would give us the strength that we need to serve Him.

Illustration – Article from Christianity.com

Jeremiah Lanphier had hoped for more. But six people were six people. And did not scripture say, "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of you"? So on this day, September 23, 1857, at lunchtime, he did not moan about the small number who turned out in response to his advertisement. Instead, he knelt with the others in the rented hall in Fulton Street, New York.

America sure needed prayer. The United States was in spiritual, political, and economic decline. Many people were disillusioned with spiritual things because of preachers who had repeatedly predicted the end of the world in the 1840's. Agitation over slavery was breeding political unrest, and civil war seemed near. Just this year, financial panic had hit. Banks failed, railroads went bankrupt, factories closed, unemployment increased.

In lower Manhattan, a Dutch Reformed church had been steadily losing members, largely because of population changes owing to immigration; they hired the layman Jeremiah to reverse the trend with an active visitation program. Despite his visits, church members were listless. So he rented the hall on Fulton Street and advertised prayer meetings. He himself enjoyed close fellowship with the Lord and thought others might, too. Conditions in the United States got worse; maybe that was a good thing. Sometimes trouble makes people turn to God. The Bank of Philadelphia failed. The third week of Jeremiah's program, his prayer meeting had forty participants and they asked for daily meetings.

On October 10, the stock market crashed. Suddenly people were flocking to the prayer meetings. Within six months 10,000 people were gathering daily for prayer in New York City alone.

Other cities experienced a renewed interest in prayer, too. In Chicago, the Metropolitan Theater was filled every day with 2,000 praying people. In Louisville, several thousand came for prayer each morning. 2,000 assembled for daily prayer in Cleveland, and St. Louis churches were filled for months at a time. In many places tents were set up for prayer. The newly formed YMCA also played an important role in holding prayer meetings and spreading the revival throughout the country.

In February 1858, Gordon Bennett of the *New York Herald* gave extensive coverage to the prayer revival. Not to be outdone, the *New York Tribune* devoted an entire issue in April 1858 to news of the revival. News of the revival traveled west by telegraph. This was the first revival which the media played an important role in spreading.

Lay people, not church leaders led. Prayer, rather than preaching, was the main focus. The meetings themselves were informal -- any person might pray, speak, lead in a song, or give a word of testimony, with a five-minute limit placed on each speaker. In spite of loose organization, the prayer meetings avoided the emotionalism displayed in earlier revivals.

Thus the small prayer meeting of Jeremiah Lanphier on this day led to the Third Great Awakening. This was the first revival beginning in America with a worldwide impact. The revival spread to Ireland, Scotland, Wales, England, Europe, South Africa, India, Australia, and the Pacific islands.

All classes became interested in salvation, backsliders returned, conversions increased, and Christians desired a deeper instruction in spiritual truths. Families established daily devotions, and entire communities underwent a noticeable change in morals. Preaching, which in many places had become intellectual and lifeless, now concentrated on the truths of the gospel of Christ and His cross. As James Buchanan of Scotland summarized, it was a time when "new spiritual life was imparted to the dead, and new spiritual health imparted to the living." (Article taken from christianity.com)