

The Old-Time Evangelistic News

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What Shall We Do Now? (Part 4)

Luke 3:10; II Timothy 3:14

We continue now this month with the message, What Shall We Do Now? The first answer to that question was **Keep Preaching**. But that is not all that we are to do. We must also **Keep Praying**. Prayer is something that we all admit that we do not practice enough. Often we say “prayers,” but we do not spend time “in prayer.” By that I mean that we will say something briefly to the Lord, almost in passing, when we are concerned about someone or something, but most of us never spend time with the Lord. We will spend 30 seconds in prayer, and hope that the Lord is satisfied with that. It is not because we do not have time, although that is the excuse that we most often make. We say that we do not have time, but then we will watch TV or read a book or do something else, while neglecting spending time in prayer with the Lord. As a result, we as individuals are suffering. Our homes and churches are suffering and dying as well. We must return to praying.

Prayer is mentioned many times in the Bible. Some of the most glorious passages in all of Scripture are prayers that men and women made to God. Abraham in Genesis 18:23-33, Joshua in Joshua 10:12, Hannah in I Samuel 2:1-10, Elijah in I Kings 18:36-37, and Jeremiah in Jeremiah 32:16-25 are just a few of the many prayers that are recorded in the Old Testament. In the New Testament we read many times of Jesus spending time in prayer, sometimes even all night (Luke 6:12). The apostles were men of prayer. We can read about them praying all through the book of Acts. Many of Paul’s prayers for his fellow believers are recorded in his epistles. The examples abound in Scripture, and commands are given. We must pray. But what are we to pray about?

I mention this often, and I will mention it again, but I do not mean to sound harsh and uncaring. In most churches, our prayer time sounds like a hospital as we spend time talking about our own physical needs and the physical needs of others. There is a time and place to pray for physical healing and strength, but to be honest, we spend too much time talking about our physical problems and too little time talking about our spiritual needs. Perhaps we carry too much pride. Perhaps we do not want others to think less of us, so we forsake the request concerning our spiritual problem, but we do not mind mentioning our physical problems. As you read through the prayers in the Bible, the vast majority of them deal with spiritual needs. Even the ones that deal with pleas for God to help in time of war (such as Hezekiah in II Kings 19:14-19) have a great spiritual application. May the Lord help us to be more burdened about our own spiritual needs than our physical needs. May the spiritual plight of others be more real to us than their physical needs.

But what should we pray about? First, we should pray For the Power of God. Acts 1:8 says, “*But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.*” Jesus made this promise to the apostles right before His ascension. But was the power that came from the Holy Ghost automatic, or did the apostles have to pray for it? Based upon Scripture, they had to pray for it. In Luke 11:13, Jesus said, “*If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?*” In this verse Jesus is talking about the person of the Holy Ghost. In the Old Testament, the Holy Ghost did not continually indwell believers. He would come upon them for a certain amount of time, so that they could accomplish a certain task, and then leave. In the New Testament, the Holy Ghost would continually indwell believers, and Jesus is preparing His apostles for the time when the Holy Ghost would indwell them. Some writers think that this indwelling was fulfilled in John 20:22 when Jesus breathed upon the apostles and said, “*Receive ye the Holy Ghost.*” Others think that they were indwelt at Pentecost. The exact time as

to when the apostles were indwelt really does not matter. I want to focus on what Jesus told them to do.

As we see in Luke 11:13, Jesus told the apostles to pray. What were they doing when they left the Mount of Olives after the ascension of Jesus? Acts 1:12-14 records what they were doing. Verse 14 says, *“These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren.”* Exactly what were they praying about? Scripture does not record verbatim what they prayed, but I do not think it is much of a stretch to say that they were praying for the Holy Ghost to come upon them just like Jesus exhorted them to do in Luke 11:13. I do not believe the power of Pentecost in chapter 2 would have happened if the apostles had not prayed in chapter 1.

But notice some other verses. In Acts 2:4, they were filled with the Holy Ghost. As I said earlier, some commentators see this as a combination indwelling and filling. Others think that the apostles were already indwelt from John 20:22, and this was simply and only a filling. Regardless of how this is interpreted as to what actually happened, the Holy Ghost came upon them in a mighty way. What Jesus promised in Acts 1:8 was fulfilled. But again, the power was unleashed because they prayed. Notice also Acts 4:31. The apostles clearly by this time had been indwelt. They also had enjoyed the filling described in Acts 2. One could debate about the indwelling taking place in John 20 and the filling taking place in Acts 2, or the indwelling and filling both taking place in Acts 2. But by Acts 4, it is settled. They had been indwelt (and the Holy Ghost would remain in them permanently), and they had been filled for the first time. But in Acts 4:31 they were praying again. It says, *“And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness.”* What were they praying for this time? I do not think that it is too much to say that they were praying to be filled—to be empowered to serve God.

Can we not see what we are to pray for when we look at what

Jesus said and what the apostles did? We have the Holy Ghost indwelling us at the moment of salvation, so we do not need to pray for Him to come into us. We need to pray for His power to be poured out upon us. Jesus gave the admonition to pray for the Holy Ghost—by application we should pray for His power to be poured out upon us. The apostles give us the example—in the two passages we looked at, they prayed, and the power of the Holy Ghost was poured out upon them. Notice how the results of experiencing the power of God are described. The end of Acts 4:13 says, *“And they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus.”* In Thessalonica, Paul and Silas are accused with these words, *“These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also”* (Acts 17:6). What mighty statements of the power of God these are! Do we desire for that same power to be unleashed today? Do we want others to come to Christ? Do we long for mighty convicting power to be poured out upon the unsaved and for them to come to Christ? Do we long for our pastors and evangelists to have God’s power upon them? The only way for the power to be seen is for us to pray. Jesus proclaimed it; the apostles practiced it. We must practice it too. We must PRAY FOR THE POWER OF GOD!

Secondly, we must pray For the Propagation of the Gospel. Paul writes in II Thessalonians 3:1, *“Finally, brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may have free course, and be glorified, even as it is with you.”* The words free course are used to describe the running of a warrior in battle; they mean to run; they talk about the swift progress of the Word; the idea is that the Word not be hindered, that there be no obstacles in the way (Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament, p. 611). Here is a Scriptural command describing how we should pray for pastors, evangelists, and missionaries. Notice that Paul did not ask that they pray for his health. The thing that was most important to Paul was the propagation of the Gospel. Do we consider that when we pray for preachers? Do we even pray for them? I would hate to take a survey and ask church members how often they pray for their missionaries. How often do you pray for your pastor? How often do you pray for evangelists? Do you have some missionaries that you pray for every day?

So often we hear that people are not being saved in large numbers like they were years ago. Often it is blamed on the thought that we are in the “last days.” The problem with that philosophy is that the last days began with the ascension of Christ. Pentecost took place in the “last days.” Paul’s journeys and the great revivals of the past took place in the “last days.” The problem is not the time period in which we live. The problem is us. We are not obedient to the command to pray that the Gospel might have “free course.” Paul knew about hindrances to the Gospel. He had experienced hindrances with Elymas in Acts 13, with the damsel and her masters in Acts 16, and many other times. He knew that he was in a battle. We must realize that too. We are at war! The devil desires to hinder our ministry for Christ. He desires to hinder pastors, evangelists, and missionaries. The only resource we have is prayer. If we do not pray, the Gospel will be hindered. It will not have free course. We must pray! Lay aside the physical desires and pray for the propagation of the Gospel. It is our command. Obey it!