



+ **YOU**

Fall 2023

Staying True in a World Far From God

Sermon Title: The Glorious Power of Prayer

To be used with Session 2: Pray with Passion

Scripture: Ephesians 1:15-23

Connection with Bible Study: To complement the Bible study “Pray with Passion,” this sermon will build upon the study’s main point that our prayers really do make a difference.

Introduction: During my third year of seminary, I took a class on sermon delivery. Each student was scheduled to deliver one sermon during the term, and his entire grade for the term rode on that one sermon. Needless to say, we students were pretty nervous when our turn came! I taught a Sunday School class at my church that consisted mostly of senior adults. The Sunday before my turn came, I told my class that I was scheduled to preach the following Wednesday, and I asked them to pray for me that day because that sermon would determine my grade for the entire term. When I went to church the following Wednesday evening, a man from my class asked me how it went. I told him I got an “A” on my sermon, and he said, “Mrs. Martin called everyone in the Sunday School class this morning to remind us to pray for you today.” Naturally, I was touched that they would go to such lengths for me, and the experience taught me an important lesson in the power of prayer. Since then, I have learned to be thankful for those who pray for me regularly.

The apostle Paul was a great prayer warrior. He was in prison when he wrote many of these letters, including this letter to the Ephesians. He couldn’t go and preach to the churches in person, but he could still pray for them, and he did. Paul knew full well the power of prayer. Do we believe in the power of prayer today? If we truly believe in the power of prayer, then why don’t we pray more? Why is prayer such a struggle for many followers of Jesus? I often ask myself that question. Adrian Rogers used to say, “Prayer is the greatest Christian privilege, it is the greatest Christian service, and it is the greatest Christian failure.”

1. The content of his prayer (Eph. 1:15-18)

a. Why did Paul lift up this prayer? (vv. 15-16)

Paul expressed appreciation for their faith and their love. Unfortunately, things did not stay that way. Many years later, the apostle John wrote to many of these same churches, including the church at Ephesus. (Actually, it was the Lord Jesus who wrote to them; John was merely the secretary!) Some of the churches had strayed from the truth or had grown self-satisfied. The church at Ephesus was still preaching the truth, but the

Lifeway

Lord rebuked them for leaving their first love. At the time Paul wrote this letter, things were evidently going well in the churches, but he still wanted them to be on guard.

b. What did Paul pray for them? (v. 17)

Paul spoke of “the Spirit of wisdom and revelation.” God imparts wisdom and revelation to us through the Holy Spirit, so I don’t disagree with those who believe Paul was talking about the Holy Spirit. If you have trusted in Jesus as your Lord and Savior, then God’s Holy Spirit lives in you. God reveals Himself to us through the Holy Spirit. As God reveals Himself to us, He imparts His wisdom to us. That’s not to downplay or ignore His written Word. After all, God has already revealed Himself through Scripture.

c. Paul also prayed that their understanding would be enlightened (v. 18).

“The eyes of your heart” is a more literal translation from the Greek. In our society, we tend to equate the brain with the intellect, and the heart with emotions. In Paul’s day, people often thought of the heart as the seat of one’s understanding, so the King James Version is not inaccurate when it translates it as “understanding.” Paul wanted his readers to know who they were in Jesus Christ. When he spoke of “hope,” he was referring to confident assurance. God Almighty has saved us and prepared for us an eternal home in heaven. That’s not just a blind dream on our part. We can count on it!

2. The confidence of his prayer (Eph. 1:19-23).

a. Paul knew he served a mighty God (vv. 19-20).

Have you ever noticed that when Paul talked about the greatness of God, he almost inevitably brought up the death and resurrection of Jesus? And why not? Jesus reminds us just how great our God truly is. If you want to see the greatness of God, look at Jesus! You’ll notice that Paul focused on Jesus’s resurrection. The resurrection proved Jesus was really who He claimed to be. Paul said God has “set Him at his right hand in the heavens.” When the Bible says Jesus sits at the right hand of God, it means He holds the highest place of honor in God’s kingdom. He reigns over everyone who has ever lived and everyone who ever will live.

b. Even Satan and his demons are subject to Jesus (v. 21).

We talk about all the evil forces and demonic powers of this world. Such powers are real, but none of them are any match for the Lord Jesus. In the end, they will all bow before Him. If the fate of this world were in the hands of people, we’d have good reason to be gloomy about the future! Aren’t you glad to know that the future is ultimately in the hands of our Lord and Savior? He reigns over all principalities and powers, and that means no weapon devised by man will ever destroy Him. People all over the world are plotting all kinds of wickedness, but our Lord Jesus will have the last word.

c. If anyone should recognize Jesus as Lord, it should be the church (vv. 22-23).

Sadly, many churches have forgotten that Jesus is Lord. They proclaim a Jesus who was nothing more than an easygoing teacher and do-gooder who never did anything to

upset anybody. It doesn't matter because Jesus reigns over the church whether they believe Him or not. Since Jesus reigns over the church, then we don't need to worry about the church's future. People today want you to believe that the church is dying out. Worldwide, though, the church is alive and well. The gospel is being proclaimed, and people are coming to Christ. We don't have to worry about the church because Jesus is Lord of the church.

Conclusion: In the year 1857, things had reached a crisis point in our nation. Tensions between the North and South had greatly increased, and violence was breaking out in different sections of the country. The Supreme Court issued its infamous Dred Scott decision, which only added fuel to the fire. To make matters worse, the Panic of 1857 had sent the country into an economic downturn. A polarized nation, rising violence, controversial court decisions, an uncertain economy—does any of that sound familiar? In September of that year, a man named Jeremiah Lanphier began hosting a weekly prayer meeting at the North Dutch Reformed Church in New York City. Only six people attended the first meeting, but as word spread about the meetings, the attendance quickly increased. By March of the following year, they met in a local theater, and the attendance was in the thousands. It wasn't long before prayer meetings were organized in other cities around the country. Sadly, these meetings did not prevent our nation from going to war with itself, but they did pave the way for the great revival movements that occurred during and after the war.

Friends, our country is desperately in need of spiritual awakening today. I'm convinced it's the only thing that will save America. Will such an awakening come? That's in God's hands. I do know this: no spiritual awakening has ever come without the prayers of God's people. If we want to see people saved, if we want to see genuine growth in our church, and if we want to see real, lasting change in our country, then let us unleash the glorious power of prayer.

Ken Jones is the pastor of Worsham Baptist Church in Farmville, Virginia. He holds a B.S. in history from the University of Tennessee at Martin and an MDiv. from Mid-America Baptist Theological Seminary.