

The Prayer Meeting (video)

by Bob Jennings

This sermon emphasizes the importance of prayer meetings and being devoted to prayer, highlighting the significance of gathering together for prayer as a mark of true Christianity. It delves into the power of praying with others who are on 'praying ground,' using Scripture in prayer, and seeking God's hand for healing and signs and wonders in the name of Jesus. The sermon encourages boldness in speaking God's word, being filled with the Holy Spirit, and expecting spiritual impact and transformation through prayer.

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Description

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Transcript

To do whatever your hand and your purpose predestined to occur. And now, Lord, take note of their threats and grant that your bondservants may speak your word with all confidence while you extend your hand to heal and signs and wonders take place through the name of your holy servant, Jesus. When they had prayed, the place where they had gathered together was shaken and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak the word of God with boldness.

I'd like to speak to you today on prayer. I'd like to speak to you today more particularly on the prayer meeting. I'd like to speak to you today for your encouragement, to encourage you in yet more in what you're already doing.

They gathered together for prayer. We are to be devoted to prayer. Have you ever noticed that? The scripture is so bold as to call us to be devoted to prayer.

Romans 12, be devoted to prayer. Colossians 4, be devoted to prayer. Acts 2, they were continually devoting themselves to prayer.

Acts 1, they were gathered in the upper room, devoting themselves to prayer. Prayer is such a mark of true Christianity. In the divine biography, back in Genesis chapter 4, this one was born, lived, and died.

Another born, lived, and died. It's interrupted by this amazing, striking phrase, and then men began to call on the name of the Lord. As though God were impressed by that and he wanted to put that in.

It was a mark in the history of the human race when men began to call on the name of the Lord. Have you ever done that? A time in your life when you began to call on the name of the Lord. I went for 22 years, my friends, 22 years, and I never even thought about prayer except for one thing, and that is when we gathered at the family reunion, some of them were somewhat religious.

I always hoped nobody would ever ask me to pray before the meal because I had absolutely no idea what to say. When the Lord was introducing Saul of Tarsus to Ananias, what did he say? Behold, he is praying. He doesn't just say he is praying, but behold, look at that, he's praying.

That Pharisee, that religious Pharisee, for the first time, he's really praying, doing business with God. Paul writes to Timothy, he says, It is a mark of true Christianity. If you do not have a prayer life, one thing you know for sure is you're not a Christian.

Every Christian has a prayer life. He lives, he walks, he breathes in communion with God. It is a mark of true Christianity, it is a mark of a true church.

Mark chapter 11, And you've heard it said before, not singing, that's valid, but nevertheless, it doesn't say singing, it doesn't say preaching even, it doesn't say eating, but my house should be distinguished by prayer. If you see a church that is not characterized by prayer, you know one thing for sure, it's not of the house of Jesus. My house should be called the house of prayer, top on the list.

Paul writes to Timothy, chapter 2, he says, He says that first of all, I urge that in treaties, prayers, supplication and thanksgiving be made on the behalf of all men. He says, I want the men everywhere to lift up holy hands without wrath and doubting or dissimulation. Holy hands.

I want the men to do that, especially. Women too, of course. Prayer, I say, is such a mark of true Christianity and of a true church who are the elect of God.

Look at Luke 18, it says, My elect to cry unto me day and night. That's a description, a mark of the Christian. Is it valid to teach on prayer? I mean, isn't it natural when a person is born again, just like a baby crying out because his life is there, he's crying when he comes out of the womb.

Isn't it? It's natural, right, for a born again person to pray. It's his native breath, his natural air, the songwriter says. And so is it valid to teach on prayer? You know it is, right? Luke 11, Lord, teach us to pray.

Has John taught his disciples to pray? It is valid to teach on it because it is such a challenge. It is such an adventure. You remember Abraham, that man of God? He was out of the will of God, praying that Ishmael might live.

Moses was out of the will of God, asking to go into the promised land. Joshua was praying and the Lord says, Stop praying, get up, Israel has sinned. Samuel was praying out of the will of God.

The Lord said, How long are you going to pray for Saul? We don't know how to pray as we ought, do we? Even the apostle Paul, it appears in a sense, was out of the will of God, asking for that demon to be taken out of his flesh. Three times he asked the Lord for it. The Lord said, I'm not going to do it.

So here are some applications, some lessons regarding prayer. And particularly the prayer meeting. The early church, it was devoted to prayer.

In Acts chapter 1, they were praying together. In Acts 2, they continually were praying together. In Acts 3, they prayed together, apparently daily.

And here in Acts 4, we see they were gathered for prayer. In Acts 12, they gathered regarding Peter's imprisonment. It says, Prayer was being made fervently for him by the church to God.

In Acts 13, prayer meeting. Acts 14, prayer meeting. Acts 20, prayer meeting.

Acts 21, prayer meeting. We ought to be gathering frequently, regularly, to pray to God. So with that introduction, just look at this.

We'll be going down here phrase by phrase and making application. It says, And when they had been released, in verse 23. When they had been released, you know the story.

They were apprehended. Peter and John were apprehended because of the miracle done on this lame man. He was lame from his mother's womb and had been healed and went about walking and leaping and praising God.

And they stopped them. They apprehended them. They told them, Do not speak any more in the name of Jesus.

And they threatened them and let them go. And it says in verse 23, When they had been released, they went to their own companions. When you go to pray with others, make sure they are your own.

Make sure those that you are praying with are your own. That is, they are on praying ground themselves. Billy Graham said the other day, I would like to pray with President Obama.

That is a very wrong statement. If one thing to pray for him, another thing to pray with him, it is a statement that that man is on praying ground as well. Make sure you are praying with your own.

The prayer of the unrighteous, it says, is an abomination to God. It is very important that you are praying with others who are on praying ground. It says again, with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart.

One big thing that we see in Christian today is a smudging, a blurring of the line between the true and the false, true Christianity and false. It is the doctrine of Balaam. He taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel.

What was the teaching of Balaam? It was infiltration. Make sure that you are praying with those who are also on praying ground. He says in Psalm 119, I am a companion of all those who fear you and of those who keep your commandments.

They went to their own and reported all the chief priests and the elders had said to them. They reported. It is good to have a little report before you start praying.

But don't take too much time or you are going to kill the spirit of the prayer meeting. Reported all the chief priests had said. And verse 24, when they heard this, they lifted their voices to God.

They lifted their voices to God. It is not that God is hard of hearing, right? But there is a time where it is fitting to lift your voice to God for it reflects a desperation, a sense of seriousness. You know it says, whoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved.

I think one reason that a lot of people that pray some prayer and ask the Lord to save them and are not truly saved is because they are not calling on the name of the Lord out of desperation. It is a casual prayer. It is a weak prayer.

It is a take-it-or-leave-it thing. When it says, whoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved, it is the call of a drowning swimmer. Lord, help! Save me! I am desperate.

I am needy. I am going to be wrecked unless you come. David, he called on the Lord.

He cried to the Lord. He cast his burdens on the Lord. In one place it says he roared at the God.

In another place he cried out over and over. This poor man cried to the Lord and the Lord heard him. A parent might be sitting in a room.

There is a kid playing in the other room and all of a sudden one of the children cries out or begins crying. And the parent stays right there. But there is a cry that a child will make that will get that parent out of his seat and run to the next room.

It is sometimes very fitting. Often, I mean take notice of this, when you are desperate, when you are in a tight spot, the best thing to do is go somewhere where you can roar to God and get it all poured out. Moses cried to God.

Samuel cried to God. David cried to God. Joshua cried out to God.

The Lord Jesus prayed with strong crying and tears himself. If that was true for him, he shouldn't be surprised that we need times like that too. There is a verse in Isaiah 64.

It says that no one spurs himself up to take hold of God. One time after I graduated from high school, I went back to a high school wrestling meet, and there were two big men. It was a notorious match.

Our guy, our heavyweight, against the other guy from another community. And these big guys are pushing themselves around out there, and nothing was happening. And all of a sudden, our fellow got a bloody nose, and they wiped the blood off.

And after they had wiped the blood off, he wiped his face like a mad gorilla and reached out and took hold of that other guy and threw him down and pinned him, and the show was over. He took hold of that guy. Again, Isaiah 64, no one spurs himself up to take hold of God.

You ought to expect to do that in prayer. Expect to do that in the prayer meeting, to get a hold of God, to make contact with God. One time, Terry and I were visiting relatives, and it was a prayer meeting night.

They were quite religious, and so we went with them to the prayer meeting. And they spent 20 minutes taking so-called requests. Finally, we got down to prayer.

It was probably longer than 20. And so about five minutes had passed. There was a little mumbling going on.

And I thought, well, if nobody else is going to pray, I'll pray. And I was just about to open my mouth, and I heard the chairs rattling around, and I looked up, and people were getting up. That prayer meeting was over.

Now, that kind of a prayer meeting is not going to scare the devil. They've got to get a hold of God. They lifted their voices.

It says, Epaphros labors fervently for you in prayer, you Colossians. Fervently. Ha! They lifted their voices.

To whom? To God. When we come to pray to God, we ought to be very mindful of who we're really addressing. We're addressing the living God.

Forget about men. Concentrate on God. I've got to get through to God.

This God who is there, this God who is there, who what? Who made the heaven and the earth and the sea, verse 24. This God who is the creator of the ends of the earth, this God who is so big, even bigger than all emergencies and exigencies and extremities, even bigger than everything. We're not a victim of circumstances.

We're coming to a King. Large petitions with us bring. We're coming to the God who is able to swallow up the heavens and the earth and there's not a molecule out of His control where it can come without confidence.

We're coming to the living God to ask our requests. This God who made the heavens and the earth and also verse 25, or rather 28, this God who has predestined everything. It says whatever your hand and purpose predestined to occur.

That's how big God is. He lined out everything. He predestinated the biggest crime that has ever been committed on the face of the earth.

That's what they're talking about here, the crucifixion of Christ. I mean, He's that big on top of the most wicked fowl and men even. Come with that confidence to the living God.

It says He lifted their voices to God with one accord. When you come to pray with others, it's good. It's very helpful to have agreement ahead of time.

You know, we're going to pray for five minutes, then let it be settled. You want that agreement, you know. It helps to be totally of one accord as best you can.

How long? Whether it's an open-ended prayer meeting or five minutes or whatever. And especially to have your hearts in one accord. How good and pleasant it is when the brethren build together in unity.

There the Lord commands the blessing. If you've got something against your brother, forget your sacrifice. Go and make it right.

And then come and worship. One accord. You don't want anything between.

No little grudges and all of that stuff going on. Boy, it's better to meet two or three in one accord than two or three hundred if there's not one accord. That's where the Lord commands the blessing.

Where two or three are gathered in my name, there I am. One shall chase a thousand, and two will put ten thousand to flight. One accord.

And said, verse 24, what did they say? One accord and said. What did they say? They quoted Scripture. They quoted Scripture.

It's all over the place, of course, regarding the creatorship of God, verse 24. But also, in verse 25, they quoted Scripture again. In verse 25, why did the heathen rage and so on? They quoted Psalm 2. What is my point? My point is this.

Brothers and sisters, when you come to pray, it will help you to use the Scriptures. It will help you to quote the Scriptures. It will help you to know the Bible.

Get to know the Bible very well, like the back of your hand. Memorize the Bible. Meditate on the Bible.

Have Bible all over your mind. It will help you to pray. Holding up the Word of God.

You might ask a warrior, what do you use in your battle? He says, well, I use a gun. Next fellow, what do you use? I use a battle axe. You come to the Holy Spirit.

What do you use? I use a sword, the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. Yes, the Word of God in prayer. That's the Spirit sword.

It's ammunition against the hosts of hell. Use it in prayer. It will help you to sustain in prayer.

It will help you to carry on, to press through, to press through, if you can use the Word of God. Memorize all the Scripture you can. Be mighty in the Scripture, like old Apollos.

That is the foreword of this prayer meeting. This is what they were saying to God. In verse 25, why do the heathen rage and so on? Now we come down to verse 29.

That was their acknowledgement. And now verse 29, here is their request. Now, Lord, take note of their threats.

It's all right to tell the omniscient God, to ask the omniscient God to take notice. He knows, but He wants you to tell Him anyhow. Take notice of this.

Take notice of that. Cast your burden upon the Lord. What peace you'll often forfeit because you don't go and cast everything to God in prayer.

I remember one time where I was in the midst of a terrible struggle, and it was a big turning point in my life. As I mentioned the other night, I wondered if I'd made the right decision. And it was weighing upon me, and I was a janitor at a nursing home.

And I took every break I could in a men's bathroom to cast the burden upon the Lord. Sometimes it can get real heavy, right? It can get very oppressive. And all you can do is continually throw your burden on the Lord.

Lord, take notice of this. Take notice of their threats and grant that your bondservants may speak your word. Bondservants, when you come to prayer to God, remember that you're nothing but a bondservant.

Is that right? Are you? Have you presented yourself to the Lord as a servant Lord? Here I am, not my will from here on out, but your will be done. My life is yours. I'm your servant.

And when you come to God in prayer, yes, take the position of a servant. You're not trying to manipulate anything. You've got no agenda to promote.

I'm just a servant of God. Lord, here I am. I want to do your will.

I've done everything at your will. Here I am, your bondservant. And what did they ask for? That they might be able to speak the word with confidence.

Let us speak your word. Now, the devil does not want us to speak the word. He hinders.

He does not like that. I mean, up here it says they commanded them, they threatened them, they told them, they warned them. Don't speak any more in this man's name.

Don't speak. Paul says, he says the Jews, they hinder us from speaking to the Gentiles, that they might be saved. One time I remember going, I pulled into a filling station and there somebody else pulled in on the other side, filling up with gas.

We were standing there. I struck up a conversation with him and when I got done and pulled away, the thought came to me, he realized that you just talked to this fellow about gardening, about blister beetles, and you didn't talk to him about Christ. What am I thinking? What's going on? I'll tell you, the devil does not want us to speak the word.

We can sanctify opportunities. We can sanctify conversations. Why not? Grant to thy servants that we may speak your word.

Speak the word, not the newspaper, not the comics, not politics, not whether Paul didn't talk to Felix about those things. He spoke to him about faith in Christ, righteousness, self-control, the judgment to come, that we may speak your word, the word of God. What news, what topic, what content, what matter we have to speak the infallible word of God, the only thing in this world that is eternal except for the souls of men, that we may speak your word, not sing your word, but speak your word.

It's all right to sing the word too, but especially preach the word. Paul says to Timothy, I charge you. I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus who is going to judge the living and the dead when he comes.

Preach the word. That's how important it is. Preach the word.

And so they were asking for God's help that they might preach the word with all confidence. Are you following it in verse 29? With all boldness? With all boldness? Old John Piper, he says, that a casual description of the Alps by a tour guide betrays their majesty. With all boldness.

We've got the book. It deserves to be preached with boldness, with urgency, with power, with boldness. Why should we be ashamed? Why should we apologize? Why should we try to beat around the bush? We go up to the campus and preach open air, and you know what? They not only hate the message, they hate

the method.

They don't like preaching because it comes across with too much urgency and authority. They don't like it. Oh, tenderly, warmly, but firmly, let us dispense the word of God.

And then he says, while you extend, verse 30, extend your hand to heal. We want the hand of God, don't we? The hand of God was upon that poor false prophet, and he was blinded. The hand of God was on Ezra, and they were helped against the enemy in the way.

The hand of God was on the early church, and many were added. We want the hand of God. Would you give me a hand? We say to somebody else, and so we say to God, would you give us a hand? Let the hand of God be upon us.

The hand of God for what? For healing. When Jesus was here, he went about doing good, healing those who were oppressed by the devil. Maybe not, maybe not physical healing, not necessarily in this time.

It will come. But for sheer spiritual healing, we can come to the Lord, asking for that. Spiritual healing, the healing of hearts, hearts that have been ravaged by sin, and bruised by the fall.

By his stripes we are healed, healed of all manner of lies and envies and addictions, healed of these things. Just Wednesday night at the church in Sedalia, there was a fellow by the name of Walid from Lebanon. He came over here in the 80s with \$147,000 in his pocket.

And he came over here, you know, to get yet more, the land of prosperity. And he fell into drugs and addiction and he lost it all. And in his poorest state, some humble fellow came and said, you know, if you die today, you're going to go to hell.

God used it as a sword, an arrow in his heart, and he cried out to the Lord, if you heal me of this addiction and of the ravages of my addiction, I will follow you all the days of my life and I will teach your word. And immediately he was healed. And that signs and wonders may be done.

What is the greatest wonder, brethren, that we see on earth? The greatest wonder of God. Is it, you know, is it a rain to break the drought? What is the greatest wonder? The greatest wonder is when somebody is saved from their sins by the grace of God. When a life is transformed and made a new creature in Christ.

That is the greatest wonder. Back home there, there is a family that has attended for years, Ray and Kelly Hargrave, and they have one of their sons, Daniel. When he got to be about 20, why, he left home.

And he went his own way. He quit coming to church and ran with the world. Well, about four months ago, he was stopped.

Got stopped on a speeding charge. And he temporarily tried to get away, but then his conscience bothered him and he stopped. Well, it made the officer so mad he threw him down, handcuffed him, threw him in the jail and put a felony on him.

Well, God used all that. Let me say this. His brother, who was a Christian and also an officer, came in and said, Daniel, look at your life.

Look what sin is getting you. What a wasted life. Here you are in jail.

God used that exhortation. And when he got out, when he was bailed out, that night he went to the cemetery and he wrestled with God. He sought the Lord and got nothing.

He went back to the cemetery the next night and again wrestled with God, cried out to God for salvation. Before that night was over, he had had a meeting with God. He went home and told his parents, I have peace.

I've been saved. He is totally different. He used to hate church.

Now he loves it. He hates the Bible. Now he loves it.

That is wonderful. That wonders may take place in the name of your holy servant, in his name, the name of Jesus. One time Terry and I were invited by a commander at the Air Force Base to come and have supper with him that night.

We got to the gate and the man stopped us, of course. The guard stopped us. And we said, we have been invited by Commander Chan.

He got on the phone and the commander said, yes, I have invited him. Let him in. We would never have got in apart from the name of that commander.

And so we come to God in the name of Jesus and a gate is wide open, a throne of grace, for mercy and grace to help in our time of need. What is your mighty sin? Isn't Jesus big enough? Can he handle it? His name should be called Jesus racial. Save his people, not only in their sins, but from their sins.

In the name of your holy servant, Jesus. And when they had prayed, verse 31, I like that phrase, when they had prayed. There ought to be some results from prayer.

When you leave the prayer meeting, when you leave the place of prayer, you ought to be able to say, when I had prayed, it was different. Come to the prayer meeting expecting to have a meeting with God. Let me share one example with you.

I was up in Canada. Some of you have heard it before. Bear with me.

I was with a man named McLeod and this man was an evangelist. He had been invited to preach a series of meetings at a big evangelical Mennonite church. And so we began to pray every day, every day, open-ended prayer meetings.

I think for about four months we prayed for these meetings that were coming up. When the meetings began, it was scheduled for Sunday through Sunday, when the meetings began, God came right away with power and he came every meeting in a great measure of power. McLeod, the preacher, he never gave invitations or altar calls, didn't believe in it, didn't need it.

People came, maybe 40 people I suppose, every night up to the front asking for help. Sometimes they came before the sermon was over. They were in such desperation that they were crying out to God, sometimes asking somebody across the aisle, would you forgive me for what I did against you? They could not take it anymore.

I've got to get free. I've got to get this burden off. Ah yes, they'd take them downstairs and try to deal with them.

Sometimes it sounded like a pig going to the slaughter, squealing. It was terrifying, but this was God coming on the scene with power, convicting men and women of sin. Church doors, hiding sin in their hearts.

They couldn't take it anymore. Often the meetings lasted until 2 o'clock at night, counseling people and so on. It was a wonderful time when they had prayed.

Oh, may God bless you and give you effectual prayer meetings that the wolves come tumbling down all the more in San Antonio, this great and wicked city. May God just pack this place out to where you've got to find somewhere else. Another man named McCloud.

It was this man's brother, Bill McCloud. He had tried every trick in the book, all the evangelistic tricks in the book to get them to come in, to get the people, you know. The sins of Jeroboam.

What was it? Lower the standards to get the people. Well, he got his belly full of all these tricks and devices and went to prayer. And the church went to prayer.

It was something like a year or two. And God came. God came and in a matter of a few days, they could not contain the people.

In a matter of a few days, the biggest building in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan could not hold all the people. God had come when they had prayed. Take courage.

Let us pray. Pray for us up there that we might pray better effectually. The place where they had gathered was shaken.

I've heard of the house being shaken. The revival in Congo, 1950. The revival in South Africa, 1966.

The revival in the Hebrides in 1949. In a prayer meeting, the place where they were gathered was shaken, physically shaken. Well, maybe not always physically, but we ought to expect it spiritually that hearts would be moved, hearts would be shaken when we have prayed and have touched with God.

And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit. You know, this is the third time that Peter was all filled with the Spirit already in the book of Acts. Every day, ask God in prayer, fill me again with your Spirit.

Fill my cup, Lord. Fill me again. I can't do a thing without you.

It's the full cup that spills over. Ask God for fresh fillings. Expect to leave the prayer meeting with a fresh filling from God.

Noah filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak the Word of God with boldness. He embounds. He says that what the church needs is not better machinery, not better methods, but better men, men that are filled with the Spirit of God, men who are mighty in prayer.

May God help us. One man said evangelism, or rather soul winning, is nothing more than gathering up the fruits of prayer. I love you all.

Thank you for just the fellowship you've given to me, Mary and me. That's all.

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