

Prayer--Facts and History

by E.M. Bounds

The possibilities of prayer are established by the facts and history of prayer, covering individuals, cities, and nations, and can bring us full deliverance from all care and undue anxiety.

Scripture: Philippians 4:6

Topics: "The Power of Prayer", "Overcoming Anxiety"

Description

E.M. Bounds emphasizes the profound possibilities of prayer, asserting that its effectiveness is grounded in historical facts and biblical examples. He illustrates how prayer has shaped the course of history, from the intercession of Moses to the repentance of Nineveh, demonstrating that prayer can influence both individuals and nations. Bounds highlights the necessity of prayer in overcoming anxiety and cares, urging believers to bring all their concerns to God with thanksgiving. He underscores that prayer is not limited by time or circumstance, and it is the key to experiencing God's peace and guidance. Ultimately, Bounds calls for a life of constant prayer, rejoicing, and trust in God's provision.

Transcript

THE possibilities of prayer are established by the facts and the history of prayer. Facts are stubborn things. Facts are the true things. Theories may be but speculations. Opinions may be wholly at fault. But facts must be deferred to. They cannot be ignored. What are the possibilities of prayer judged by the facts? What is the history of prayer? What does it reveal to us? Prayer has a history, written in God's Word and recorded in the experiences and lives of God's saints. History is truth teaching by example. We may miss the truth by perverting the history, but the truth is in the facts of history.

He spake with Abraham at the oak,

He called Elisha from the plough;

David he from the sheepfolds took,

Thy day, thine hour of grace, is now.

God reveals the truth by the facts. God reveals himself by the facts of religious history. God teaches us his will by the facts and examples of Bible history. God's facts, God's Word, and God's history are all in perfect harmony, and have much of God in them all. God has ruled the world by prayer; and God still rules the world by the same divinely ordained means.

The possibilities of prayer cover not only individuals but also reach to cities and nations. They take in classes and peoples. The praying of Moses was the one thing which stood between the wrath of God against the Israelites and his declared purpose to destroy them and the execution of that divine purpose, and the Hebrew nation still survived. Notwithstanding Sodom was not spared, because ten righteous men could not be found inside its limits, yet the little city of Zoar was spared because Lot prayed for it as he fled from the storm of fire and brimstone which burned up Sodom. Nineveh was saved because the king and its people repented of their evil ways and gave themselves to prayer and fasting.

Paul in his remarkable prayer in Ephesians, chapter three, honors the illimitable possibilities of prayer and glorifies the ability of God to answer prayer. Closing that memorable prayer, so far-reaching in its petitions, and setting forth the very deepest religious experience, he declares that "God is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we can ask or think." He makes prayer all-inclusive, comprehending all things, great and small. There is no time nor place which prayer does not cover and sanctify. All things in earth and in heaven, everything for time and for eternity, all are embraced in prayer. Nothing is too great and nothing is too small to be subject of prayer. Prayer reaches down to the least things of life and includes the greatest things which concern us.

If pain afflict or wrongs oppress,

If cares distract, or fears dismay;

If guilt deject, or sin distress,

In every case still watch and pray.

One of the most important, far-reaching, peace-giving, necessary, and practical prayer possibilities we have in Paul's words in Philippians, chapter four, dealing with prayer as a cure for undue care:

Be careful for nothing; but in everything, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God which passeth all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

"Cares" are the epidemic evil of mankind. They are universal in their reach. They belong to man in his fallen condition. The predisposition to undue anxiety is the natural result of sin. Care comes in all shapes, at all times, and from all sources. It comes to all of every age and station. There are the cares of the home circle, from which there is no escape save in prayer. There are the cares of business, the cares of poverty, and the cares of riches. Ours is an anxious world, and ours is an anxious race. The caution of Paul is well addressed, "In nothing be anxious." This is the divine injunction, and that we might be able to live above anxiety and freed from undue care, "In everything, by prayer and supplication, let your requests be made known unto God." This is the divinely prescribed remedy for all anxious cares, for all worry, for all inward fretting.

The word careful means to be drawn in different directions, distracted, anxious, disturbed, annoyed in spirit. Jesus had warned against this very thing in the Sermon on the Mount, where he had earnestly urged his disciples, "Take no thought for the morrow," in things concerning the needs of the body. He was endeavoring to show them the true secret of a quiet mind, freed from anxiety and unnecessary care about food and raiment. Tomorrow's evils were not to be considered. He was simply teaching the same lesson found in Psalm 37:3, "Trust in the Lord, and do good; so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt

be fed." In cautioning against the fears of tomorrow's prospective evils, and the material wants of the body, our Lord was teaching the great lesson of an implicit and childlike confidence in God. "Commit thy way unto the Lord: trust also in him, and he shall bring it to pass."

"Day by day," the promise reads,

Daily strength for daily needs

Cast foreboding fears away;

Take the manna of today.

Paul's direction is very specific, "Be careful for nothing." Be careful for not one thing. Be careful for not anything, for any condition, chance, or happening. Be troubled about not anything which creates one disturbing anxiety. Have a mind freed from all anxieties, all cares, all fretting, and all worries. Cares divide, distract, bewilder, and destroy unity, power, and quietness of mind. Cares are fatal to weak piety and are enfeebling to strong piety. What great need to guard against them and learn the one secret of their cure, even prayer!

What boundless possibilities there are in prayer to remedy the situation of mind of which Paul is speaking! Prayer over everything can quiet every distraction, hush every anxiety, and lift every care from care-enslaved lives and from care-bewildered hearts. The prayer specific is the perfect cure for all ills of this character which belong to anxieties, cares, and worries. Only prayer in everything can drive dull care away, relieve unnecessary heart burdens, and save from the besetting sin of worrying over things which we cannot help. Only prayer can bring into the heart and mind the "peace which passeth all understanding," and keep mind and heart at ease, free from burdensome care.

Oh, the needless heart burdens borne by fretting Christians! How few know the real secret of a happy Christian life, filled with perfect peace, hid from the storms and billows of a fretting careworn life! Prayer has a possibility of saving us from carefulness, the bane of human lives. Paul in writing to the Corinthians says, "I would have you without carefulness," and this is the will of God. Prayer has the ability to do this very thing. "Casting all your care on him, for he careth for you," is the way Peter puts it, while the psalmist says, "Fret not thyself in any wise to do evil." Oh, the blessedness of a heart at ease from all inward care, exempt from undue anxiety, in the enjoyment of the peace of God which passeth all understanding!

Paul's injunction which includes both God's promise and his purpose, and which immediately precedes his entreaty to be "careful for nothing," reads on this wise:

Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say, Rejoice. Let your moderation be made known to all men. The Lord is at hand.

In a world filled with cares of every kind, where temptation is the rule, where there are so many things to try us, how is it possible to rejoice always? We look at the naked, dry command, and we accept it and reverence it as the Word of God, but no joy comes. How are we to let our moderation, our mildness, and our gentleness be universally and always known? We resolve to be benign and gentle. We remember the nearness of the Lord, but still we are hasty, quick, hard, and salty. We listen to the divine charge, "Be careful for nothing," yet still we are anxious, care-worn, care-eaten, and care-tossed. How can we fulfill the divine word, so sweet and so large in promise, so beautiful in the eye, and yet so far from being realized? How can we enter upon the rich patrimony of being true, honest, just, pure, and possess lovely things?

The recipe is infallible, the remedy is universal, and the cure is unfailing. It is found in the words which we have so often herein referred to of Paul: "Be careful for nothing, but in everything, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God."

This joyous, care-free, peaceful experience bringing the believer into a joyousness, living simply by faith day by day, is the will of God. Writing to the Thessalonians, Paul tells them: "Rejoice evermore; pray without ceasing, and in everything give thanks, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you." So that not only is it God's will that we should find full deliverance from all care and undue anxiety, but he has also ordained prayer as the means by which we can reach that happy state of heart.

The Revised Version makes some changes in the passage of Paul, about which we have been speaking. The reading there is "In nothing be anxious," and "the peace of God shall guard your hearts and your minds." And Paul puts the antecedent in the air of prayer, which is "Rejoice in the Lord always." That is, be always glad in the Lord, and be happy with him. And that you may thus be happy, "Be careful for nothing." This rejoicing is the doorway for prayer, and its pathway, too. The sunshine and buoyancy of joy in the Lord are the strength and boldness of prayer, the means of its victory. "Moderation" makes the rainbow of prayer. The word means mildness, fairness, gentleness, sweet reasonableness. The Revised Version changes it to "forbearance," with the margin reading "gentleness." What rare ingredients and beautiful colorings! These are colorings and ingredients which make a strong and beautiful character and a wide and positive reputation. A rejoicing, gentle spirit, positive in reputation, is well fitted for prayer, rid of the distractions and unrest of care.

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