

A Monument Before God

by Jim Cymbala

Jim Cymbala's sermon emphasizes the power of sincere prayer and God's responsiveness to those who seek Him, regardless of their background or knowledge of Jesus.

Duration: 17:10

Scripture: 1 Kings 8:22-23, Matthew 6:19-20, Matthew 6:33, Matthew 10:42, Matthew 14:30, Luke 18:1, Acts 10:2-4

Topics: "Prayer"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher talks about a widow who demonstrated unwavering faith and generosity. He emphasizes the importance of acts of kindness and helping those in need, as they hold more value than worldly possessions. The preacher encourages the congregation to trust in God's provision and not give up on their prayers, using examples from the Bible to illustrate this point. He concludes by urging the congregation to persevere in their faith and continue to pray for their needs, drawing inspiration from the story of Cornelius.

Transcript

Here's a verse I want to leave you with. It's not a new verse to you, and it certainly isn't new to me, but it's like gets new meaning all the time. At the beginning of the Christian church, only Jewish people were Christians.

You know that, right? The very beginning. The 12 apostles were all what? Jewish. Paul the apostle, what was he? Jewish.

What was Jesus? Jewish. The Jewish people, some of them, that had this ethnic pride, they thought, well, Christianity's just for Jewish people because we are the chosen people in the Old Testament. In fact, the Roman government thought that Christianity was an offshoot of Judaism and that this was just some new sect of Jewish people.

But then God blew everybody's minds when a Gentile got saved. Now, to us, most Christians are Gentiles in the world. Who, what's a Gentile? Anyone who's not a Jew.

So most Christians are Gentiles, and the very small, small number of Christians are Jews, Jewish by birth. So the way this happened was God chose a Roman soldier to be the first Christian who's a Gentile. You could argue that the Ethiopian eunuch that was witnessed to by Philip the evangelist, he might have been

the first non-Jew, but it seemed like he was a convert to Judaism.

So be it as it may, here's how God chose this man and then brought the apostle Peter to him. I'm not gonna tell you the whole story. I just want you to look at the beginning of the story.

At Caesarea, there was a man named Cornelius. Everybody say Cornelius. A centurion in what was known as the Italian regiment.

He was a paisan, an Italian. He and all his family were devout and God-fearing. He gave generously to those in need, and he prayed to God regularly.

So all we know about him was he's a centurion, over 100 soldiers. That's what a centurion was. Number two, he was devout, which means he probably had rejected the many gods of the Roman Empire of his culture, and he believed in the one God of the Jewish people.

That's probably what that meant. And now we know that he prayed regularly and he gave to the poor. Next verse, one day at about three in the afternoon, he had a vision.

He distinctly saw an angel of God who came to him and said, Cornelius. Cornelius stared at him in fear. What is it, Lord, he asked.

The angel answered, your prayers and gifts to the poor have come up as a memorial offering before God. Now send men to Joppa, which wasn't that far, just south down the coast, to bring back a man named Simon, that's Simon Peter, who is called Peter. He is staying with Simon the Tanner, whose house is by the sea.

Now, he sends for Peter, Peter comes and brings the gospel to him. And while Peter's speaking to not just Cornelius and the people, his family, he invites his friends, his neighbors, other soldiers, and while Peter is speaking, they so embrace the message, simple message of Jesus, that they not only believe with their hearts, but the spirit falls on everyone who listens to Peter and they begin to speak in other tongues as the spirit gives them the ability and the kind of ecstatic utterance. And it's exactly what happened to Peter and the other apostles and 120 people in the upper room in Acts chapter two.

So then Peter baptized them because he said, how could I not baptize them? I know they're Gentiles, but how could I not baptize them when they had received the same gift that we got back in Acts chapter two, that the Lord had promised? And that's how Gentiles came into the fold. And this was fought by some of the legalists, Judaizers that were in Jerusalem. They wanted these people to start to be circumcised and follow Jewish customs, and Peter said, they're following nothing.

They don't have to do that. Look, God justified their faith, justified them by their faith, cleansed their heart by their faith in him, and he poured out the gift of the Holy Spirit. Who in the world could do that but God? And if God accepted them the way they were, how can we add other burdens to them that we can't even bear ourselves? But that's not what I wanna talk about.

That's a wonderful part that the body of Christ is made up of Jew and Gentile, black, white, every race. But here's the thing that just staggers me to this moment. The angel goes to Cornelius and says, time out.

Your prayers and your giving have come up as a memorial before God. Wait a minute. Almighty God who created the universe, that God, how many say amen, who has all power, who's everywhere at the same

time, and who knows everything, that God has a memorial coming up before him from a man, but there's more.

The man is not a Christian. The man's prayers and giving have come up as a memorial before God and now has pushed, I say this reverently, has pushed God over the edge where now he's gonna act on this and bring a blessing to this man and his family. If you study Roman history, the history of the Roman civilization, you'll know that many times the empire was in bad financial straits and they would throw taxes on the people and this got emperors in trouble, but many times when money went low, what they did was they cut the salaries of the soldiers.

And this caused sometimes insurrection and the soldiers would rebel against the emperor who was in Rome and the emperors were all afraid that some general would come in his army and march into Rome and throw him off the throne and become the emperor, which happened a couple times. But when they cut money, were short on money, they cut the money to the soldiers. Now this guy was only over 100 people, 100 soldiers, and he was a soldier himself.

How much money could he have had? He wasn't an Italian nobleman living in a villa outside of Rome with all kinds of money, eating grapes and all of that and drinking wine. He was a tough, rough, hard, scrabble soldier with 100 people under him. So I'm asking you, how much money could he have given that it came up before Almighty God? Could you please explain that to me? But number two, more important.

His prayers came up before God and his prayers tipped the scale. We learned something here about prayer. You pray, you pray, you see nothing happen sometime, and then there's a volume of prayer that suddenly creates a pressure and breaks through and now answers and blessing come, but God was watching every prayer.

So now here's the thing I wanna close with. He never prayed one prayer in the name of Jesus, not one, because he didn't know Jesus. The Bible says when you pray, pray in the name of Jesus to God our Father with the help of the Holy Spirit.

He never prayed one prayer in the name of Jesus. So how in the world is prayer so important? How vital is prayer? How beautiful and sacred is prayer that God keeps the prayers of a man who's not even a Christian but who's sincere and answering to the light that he has, he keeps them and now they form a memorial and then God says, angels, go. You gotta do something for him.

His prayers are too much for me. I can't take them anymore. The Bible in two places in the New Testament says when you pray, pray in the Spirit.

It's in the book of Jude right before Revelation. It's also in the book of Ephesians when it talks about spiritual warfare. Pray in the Spirit at all times and all the kinds of different prayer, praying in the Spirit.

He never prayed in the Spirit. He didn't even know who the Holy Spirit was. Here's the thing that is still amazing me today.

I thought I knew this verse some years ago. God opened this to me alone in the living room in my house that I was living in in Queens. And I thought, I've never taught about prayer the right way in my whole life.

We have a prayer band, we have prayer meetings and I've never told the people how valuable and precious prayer is to God. And then I felt the Lord remind me that in the book of Revelation, prayer, they're

kept in bowls. They never disintegrate.

They never evaporate. You know the prayers we just prayed over those cards? Those prayers will never die. They're kept by God.

Prayer is so precious that God gathers them and says, keep them in bowls. Keep them in bowls. You and me in a building in downtown Brooklyn, he's almighty God.

He says, don't let one prayer be lost. Keep them in bowls. I want them near me, close to me.

They're such a beautiful fragrance. So what I wanna leave you with tonight is every time you pray, every time you feel a prompting to pray, let's say yes to God. How many are with me? Say amen.

Let's say yes to God. Because when God is prompting you to pray, I don't care if you walk in the street, in the shower, on the number three train, or in a prayer meeting, or before you go to bed, or when you get quiet in the morning and you spend time with God, every single prayer is being registered by almighty God. Because if we're Christians, obviously our prayers are being kept.

Here was a guy who knew nothing about nothing. How powerful is prayer when he didn't pray in Jesus' name, he wasn't a believer, he just had certain light, he obeyed it. How important that God is praying, you would think every church in America would have a prayer meeting.

You would think there'd never be a Sunday service that wasn't devoted to prayer and worship and waiting on God. God doesn't keep sermons in heaven, but he keeps prayers. And every time you and I help anybody, every time we send money to Haiti, every time we send money to Dominican Republic, every time Pastor Park pushes me and says, come on, we gotta get that clinic nicer in Malawi, every time we do anything like that, God is registering it.

Could somebody please say amen, God is registering it. It's going to the credit of the Brooklyn Tabernacle or to the account of you or me, every prayer, every dime, every dollar we give. But notice this, because you might be discouraged and right near the edge.

I thought about it with this woman. Remember the woman had the issue of blood, she was hemorrhaging and she couldn't stop the hemorrhaging. She spent all her money, went to doctors and it just got worse in the time of Jesus.

And then she said to herself, I see him walking by, I'm too embarrassed, I'm too shy to go and ask him to pray for me. But if I just touch the hem of his garment, I just know faith tells me I'm gonna be made well. See, brothers and sisters, she had to fight through the crowd.

There was no clear, easy path to Jesus. That's the way it is with many blessings. You have to fight through every demonic thing that the devil throws in your way.

But listen, she pressed through. Once she broke through, she didn't have to yank at his garment, she didn't have to scream at him. She just touched it and immediately he stopped.

Who touched me? And they went, what do you mean, who touched you? Everybody's jostling you, everyone's bringing babies in front of you. No, someone touched me. I felt virtue go out of me.

See, if she would have stopped just two steps away and said, you know what, this will never work. There's too many discouragements, too many people. I gotta press through these two big guys.

How am I gonna get to him? But she fought through, pressed through, and just touched and received. There came a moment where God was watching all those prayers and giving of Cornelius, and then there came a moment, I don't understand these moments, but obviously there came a moment and a day where God said, enough, I have heard him. I have seen Angel go.

We are now gonna bring blessing to his house. So if you're here tonight, you might be just one prayer, one more day, one more week. God's registering every prayer.

Don't you think he sees what you're praying about? If he saw an unbeliever and kept them as a memorial before God, don't you think, how many know that he's listening to every prayer we pray tonight? Short prayer, long prayer. And by the way, one last thing. You don't have to pray long prayers.

I'm doing a study about this. The most powerful prayers in the Bible, most of them are very short. Some of them are one sentence.

When Peter was sinking, walking on the water, he said, Lord, save me. Boom, Jesus saved him. He didn't say, dear Heavenly Father, which dwells in the corridors of eternity.

By then, he would have drowned and been gone. He would have never got help. Except for Solomon praying in the dedication of the temple.

That's a long prayer. Look at these great prayers. They won great victories for people of God.

To the point. God, this is what I need. You think he doesn't know what we need? You think you gotta tell him in 1,000 words? No, now, other times we pray and we take hours worshiping, waiting, listening, letting God stir up our heart to ask new things.

So time is very valuable in prayer. But you don't have to be embarrassed today if you just got just a one sentence prayer. What in the world was Cornelius praying about? How devout could he have been? What did he know about anything? He didn't know anything.

Didn't know the name of Jesus, didn't know the Holy Spirit, and yet his prayers finally got to a place where just the pressure broke right through. And you're here tonight, the enemy's trying to just block you. Don't quit.

You never know when you're one prayer away from the answer. Anybody say amen to me for that? One, just, you never know. It's the last one.

I've had that happen in my life. And I've had godly people around me like our associate pastors and former pastors, Pastor Ware, Pastor Burr, they used to encourage me. Pastor, don't give up.

I know it looks bad. Where are we gonna get those million dollars, whatever we needed back then? Don't worry, God's gonna do it. Just come on, let's keep going, come on.

Keep at it. Just keep punching. Just keep praying.

Close your eyes. Anybody been praying? It hasn't happened yet, but I've encouraged you by this verse. We're gonna close this meeting within five minutes, God helping us.

But I want you to stand up. Pastor, that spoke to me. I'm not gonna quit.

I'm gonna keep praying for that need that I have. Cornelius is my new inspiration. Just stand right where you are.

Come out of your seat quick. Come on, it's a rainy Tuesday night. You wouldn't be here unless you believed in God.

Lord, thank you for this meeting. We have enjoyed your presence so much. Thank you that you helped us to worship you.

Thank you for your word. Make us people of prayer. Make us a church of prayer.

Store up everything you heard tonight, Lord. Let the pressure build so the breakthrough can come. We don't understand that, but we know it's true.

You kept telling people not to pray and not give up. Told us about a widow who wouldn't let go. Every time we give even a glass of water to somebody because they're in need, help us to remember that that's more important than the Dow Jones average for that day.

Because you don't store the things of this world in heaven, but every act of kindness, every gift, every prayer. Thank you, Jesus, that we all can store up riches in heaven. We might not be so wealthy here, but we can be wealthy in heaven just by calling on your name and being kind to others.

Get us home safely. Bring us back this Sunday full of joy and peace and maybe with a visitor on the arm, Lord.

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