

(The Full Gospel) 10. Standing in the Gap Before the Lord

by Zac Poonen

The sermon emphasizes the importance of standing in the gap through fasting and prayer, and the role of selfless love in glorifying God's name.

Scripture: Ezekiel 22:30, Daniel 9:2

Topics: "Sacrificial Living", "Intercession"

Description

Zac Poonen emphasizes the urgent need for believers to stand in the gap through prayer and fasting, drawing parallels between the sins of ancient Israel and the current state of the church. He highlights how God sought a man to intercede for the land but found none, contrasting this with Daniel, who fervently prayed for his people and acknowledged his own sins. Poonen calls for selfless individuals who prioritize God's work over personal needs, urging the church to engage in genuine prayer and fasting to combat spiritual apathy and evil forces. He stresses that true sanctification leads to a sacrificial life, reflecting Christ's selflessness, and encourages believers to actively pray for their leaders and the church's mission. The sermon concludes with a call to action for Christians to unite in prayer against the spiritual challenges facing their communities.

Transcript

The Lord says,

"I searched for a man among them who should build up the wall and STAND IN THE GAP BEFORE ME for the land, that I should not destroy it; but I found none." (Ezekiel 22:30).

God tells Ezekiel in this chapter why the Israelites had gone into captivity to Babylon (verse 15). Jerusalem had become a city of murder, where "slandorous men were shedding blood" (verses 3, 9).

Today we find that many churches have also come into a similar state. Compare the sins listed in Ezekiel 22 with those we find among many today. Believers slay their fellow-believers - with their tongues (verse 6). Many Christian groups claim that they alone constitute the true church, and condemn other believers who don't agree with them. Many believers disrespect their parents and their spiritual fathers (verse 10). We can say that churches with such believers have indeed become cities of murder. And so they, like Israel, have gone into captivity, and failed to be effective witnesses for Christ in their localities.

In Israel, we read that God searched for one man who would stand before Him and pray for the land (verse 30). But He found none. About eight centuries earlier, when Israel had sinned, Moses had stood in the gap. And so God did not destroy the Israelites. But now there was no-one to pray. All sought their own. If they prayed at all, they prayed only for themselves and for their families. And so they went into captivity.

The Man God Finally Found

However, seventy years later, God finally did find a man to stand in the gap - Daniel. God had promised through Jeremiah that seventy years after the Israelites were taken to Babylon, they would return to Jerusalem (Jeremiah 25:12, 13). When Daniel was over 87 years old (having lived through the whole period of the captivity), he read that prophecy of Jeremiah.

Daniel was the wisest of all men who had lived up until his time - even wiser than Solomon. [We can see this from the fact that when God wanted to point out the cleverness of Satan, He compared Satan's wisdom with Daniel's, and not Solomon's - and Daniel was a young man living in Babylon when God said that (Ezekiel 28:3, 14).]

But when Daniel read what God had promised, He didn't use his clever mind and conclude that God's Word would be fulfilled automatically, without his having to do anything. No. (That type of attitude is fatalism, not Christianity). He mourned and FASTED and prayed earnestly that God's Word would be fulfilled (Daniel 9:2, 3). And that was how God's Word was fulfilled. There we see how the wisest man who ever lived, did not lean on his own wisdom or sense of logic, when reading God's Word and praying.

God does not work apart from a man standing in the gap and praying.

Daniel was also a righteous man. When God wanted to point out the three most righteous men that ever lived, He mentioned the names of Noah, Daniel and Job - and Daniel was a young man, when God said that!! (Ezekiel 14:14, 20). Just as Joseph had kept himself pure in Egypt, Daniel had also kept himself pure in Babylon (Daniel 1:8). Yet this righteous Daniel when he knelt before God, acknowledges himself as a sinner!! (Daniel 9:4-11).

One mark of a genuine man of God, is that he is more aware of his own sins than anyone else's. Like Paul, all true men of God consider themselves to be the chief of all the sinners in the world. The sins that disturb their consciences are not the dirty ones that common sinners fall into. No. Their consciences are so sensitive that they consider even prayerlessness as a sin (1 Samuel 12:23). They are also quick to identify themselves with the sins of the people with whom God has placed them. It is only the prayers of such righteous men that are effective with God (James 5:16).

It was Daniel's prayers that moved men (and even kings!) at that time to rebuild God's temple, and the city of Jerusalem itself finally - as we read in the books of Haggai, Zechariah, Ezra and Nehemiah.

Daniel himself was too old by then to go and work in Jerusalem. But God had young men like Zerubbabel, Zechariah and Joshua to do that. But these man needed the prayer-backing of Daniel to accomplish their task - just as in an earlier time, Joshua and his men needed the prayer-backing of Moses to overcome the Amalekites (Exodus 17:8-13).

Freedom from Selfishness

God is looking for men and women even today in our land, who will stand in the gap for the church - selfless people, who are not taken up with just their own needs, but who are concerned about God's work.

Many believers think that sanctification means just the refinement of their personal conduct and behaviour. But true sanctification makes a person selfless like God - or in other words, like Jesus.

No-one knew what God was like until Jesus came to earth, and explained Him (John 1:18). And what do we learn of the nature of God, when we look at Jesus? We see that the Divine nature is one that is willing to give up everything, and to be inconvenienced to any extent, if as a result, sinners can be saved from their sin and brought back to God.

Jesus did not come down from heaven because He wanted to gain something for Himself. No. He came to earth totally for the benefit of others. He lived for others. He fasted and prayed and gave Himself - all so that others might partake of God's salvation. It is this spirit that is so rare to find even among the leaders in the church today. Although many speak of partaking of God's nature, very few actually partake of this selfless love for others.

Many are willing to deny themselves and take up the cross if that will bring them some benefit - perhaps some spiritual benefit such as a place in the Bride of Christ, but still something for themselves. But if we were to ask ourselves, what we have denied ourselves purely for the benefit of others, we may discover that the answer is, 'Almost nothing'.

There are many in our midst who despise full-time Christian workers, feeling that such people don't have the fullest light. But before you criticise them, it may be good to ask yourself whether YOU would be willing to resign your job in order to preach the gospel to the heathen. It is easy to despise others who don't have as much light as we have. But despite all the light that we have received, we may still be loving our comforts and unwilling to give up anything costly for the Lord.

Jesus gave up His place in heaven in order to come and live on this earth for 33½ years, without any of the comforts of modern civilization - only so that others might hear the gospel and be saved. He also resigned His job as a carpenter, so that He might devote all His time to be a 'full-time worker' to preach the gospel to others.

It is this Spirit of Christ that has urged missionaries through the years, to suffer hardship and loss, so as to take the gospel to heathen lands, where the Name of Jesus had never been heard, to bring others to Christ. Those on the other hand, who travel and stay in 5-star comfort these days, and preach the gospel, are all tourists, by comparison.

It is good for us to read the biographies of saintly missionaries who gave up everything for the Lord, so that we too can be challenged by their sacrifice and their devotion to the Lord. A holiness that does not lead to a sacrificial life is a deception - for true holiness is not just being free from sin, but being free from Self-love too.

The fire of God does not fall on many today, because they have not placed everything on the altar. They are willing to give up everything for the Lord, except their jobs and their comforts. If anything on this earth is still valuable and precious to you, then you are not a disciple of Jesus.

Inward and Outward Sacrifices

It is true that many in Christendom have placed a greater emphasis on the external sacrifices, than on the inner sacrifice of taking up the cross, that the New Testament calls us to. But it is possible for us, in an over-reaction to that error, to go to the other extreme of living a life where all our sacrifices are only inward - and sometimes imaginary!!.

If Jesus had made only inward sacrifices, He would never have left heaven and come to this earth. And if His apostles had made only inward sacrifices, the gospel would have never gone further than Jerusalem!! Jesus and the apostles were balanced, and knew that God wanted them to make inward as well as outward sacrifices for the gospel's sake.

It is only those who are willing, like Jesus and the apostles, to go through hardship and inconvenience in order to bless others, who will be able to carry the burdens of others in prayer and to stand in the gap in prayer in the church today.

It is a great deception to imagine that we are walking in the footsteps of Jesus, or that we are sanctified and spiritual, if we are occupied only with our own needs and hardly ever take time to pray for others.

Jesus lived in such a way that others might be blessed and brought near to God. This is the new and living way that He has inaugurated for us.

That which we give priority to in our lives is invariably a clear indication of what we really worship. If, for example, we never forget to eat or sleep or go to work, every single day of the year, but find ourselves having forgotten to pray on many days, then food and sleep and money must certainly have become our gods.

How much of our time and energy and money are we willing to sacrifice for the Lord? We may find a false comfort in the fact that under the new covenant, we are not commanded to set apart one day in the week and 10% of our income for the Lord. Many who used to give 10% of their income to God when they were in the denominations, have now backslidden to the point where they give God almost nothing at all. This is certainly not the way that Jesus walked. Such a state of affairs has come about, because comfort and prosperity have become their gods.

Perhaps we don't lose our temper or lust after women now. That's good. But these can never be a substitute for the external sacrifices that should also be found in our lives, if we are to follow the Lord.

Many of us have now come to the place where we are able to explain the doctrine of 'victory over sin' better than the apostles themselves!! But we need to get a little more light on the utter selfishness that characterises our way of life. Spiritual instability is often caused by the fact that a person's 'knowledge' leg is over 3 feet long while his 'life' leg is only about 1 or 2 inches long!! And he still spends his time seeking to stretch his 'knowledge'-leg!!! Despite the purest revelation of God's truth that he may have, his selfishness still remains uncrucified.

Men with a Burden and a Concern

The whole movement of Israel FROM BABYLON TO JERUSALEM was born and carried forward by men who were selflessly concerned for the furtherance of God's work. For this they fasted and prayed.

This is how it is going to be in the church in our day too. Those who seek the honour of God's Name, the coming of His kingdom and the fulfilment of His will on earth as it is in heaven, will fast and pray and bind

the workings of evil spirits, and thus accomplish God's purposes.

Daniel was a man who frequently fasted and prayed.

Ezra too was a man who knew how to fast and pray when leading a group of Israelites from Babylon to Jerusalem (Ezra 8:21).

Nehemiah wept and fasted and prayed when he heard that Jerusalem was broken down and its walls burnt with fire (Nehemiah 1:4). He didn't criticise the Israelites in Jerusalem for being lazy or selfish. No. He fasted and prayed for them. He was so burdened that even his boss (the king) noticed his grief. Finally, Nehemiah gave up his position and his comfort in the palace in order to go and rebuild the walls of Jerusalem.

Have we ever been grieved like Nehemiah, because the work of the Lord is not progressing? Have we ever fasted and prayed like he did, because we saw that things were not going well in the church? Do we ever pray for those who preach God's Word to us?

I wonder if we realise that those who serve God and preach His Word faithfully (and their families) are targets of Satan's wrath. They are high on Satan's hit-list. Let me recommend that you stop criticising them, for Satan can do that job quite well, without your help! Instead pray for them a little more in the coming days, that they will be preserved from the attacks of the enemy.

As in Israel 2000 years ago, so in India today, many of the Lord's sheep are scattered here and there, without shepherds to care for them. Many are the hirelings in our land who work for pay. Few are the shepherds who are willing to lay down their lives for the flock. No-one has the right to preach God's Word to God's flock if he has no burden for the sheep, and if he does not pray for them regularly.

Pray that the Lord of the harvest will thrust forth shepherds after His own heart into the harvest at this time (Matthew 9:36-38; Jeremiah 3:15).

Fasting and Prayer

Fasting is not popular among this generation of believers.

But Jesus said that once He (the Bridegroom) left the earth, His disciples WOULD fast. He did not say that His disciples might fast. No. What He said was that "in those days MY DISCIPLES WILL FAST" (Luke 5:35). All who fast and pray are not necessarily disciples of Jesus. But all who ARE true disciples of Jesus will certainly fast.

It was when the apostles were fasting and worshipping the Lord, that the Holy Spirit spoke to them to send Paul and Barnabas out to preach to the Gentiles. Thus began the first great missionary movement of the early church into Gentile lands (Acts 13:2, 3). Paul and Barnabas went out and established churches, and then fasted and prayed again before handing those churches over to local elders (Acts 14:23).

Even husbands and wives are exhorted by the Holy Spirit to fast from a sexual relationship at times for the purpose of prayer (1 Corinthians 7:5).

God told Israel that Sodom was their sister, because, like Sodom, they were proud, lazy and selfish, and fond of good food (Ezekiel 16:49). From this we see that the sexual sins (that Sodom became famous for) were closely related to their gluttony and their love for fine, tasty foods. There is a very close connection

between lack of self-control in the sexual area and a life characterised by laziness and overeating.

Don't let God call Sodom your sister too.

Binding the Workings of Satanic Powers

At one time when Daniel had finished a season of 21 days of prayer and partial fasting, God revealed to him that through his prayers the evil spirit ruling over Persia had been overcome (Daniel 10:2, 3, 13).

In a similar way, in our day, the hold that evil spirit-forces had over Communist lands for nearly 75 years, was broken, because God's people in many parts of the world had fasted and prayed and wrestled against them. As a result, these lands have now been opened up for the gospel.

Jesus said that certain categories of demons could be cast out only through fasting and prayer (Matthew 17:21 - KJV).

We who are living in India now have a great responsibility to fast and pray and wrestle against the evil spirit-rulers that have such a strong hold over many believers and unbelievers in our land. There is so much of compromise in Christianity in India; and there is no country in the world that has as many heathen temples, or whose people are more in bondage to idolatry, than India. We have all seen during the past few months especially, how these evil religious spirits have stirred up millions of our countrymen to such unbelievable violence and religious frenzy.

Now is the time for God's people in India to stand together and bind the workings of these Satanic forces. If God can find a remnant in our land who are free from prejudices and grudges, and from laziness and selfishness, and who are determined never to fight against human beings, but only with evil principalities and powers, then the evil spirits that influence India's millions will begin to tremble.

Our calling as a church is to enforce the victory that Christ won on Calvary's cross, over all the forces of Satan hovering over India.

God is looking for men and women in the church today who will stand in the gap and pray - who will fast and pray - and bind the workings of these evil religious spirits that have blinded and led astray so many in our land, for so many years. Thus the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ will be glorified and honoured in India.

You don't have to feel guilty, if you don't feel burdened to pray like this, for God does not give the same burdens to all His people. But if you are burdened that there should be A PURE TESTIMONY for the Name of the Lord Jesus in India, then let us stand together in fasting and prayer in these days, so that God's purpose will be fulfilled.

If your heart responds to this call, then begin by praying every day that the workings of these evil spirit-rulers in India will be bound and restrained. Then proceed to fasting and prayer. And then pray with others who have a similar burden. And if you want your prayers to be answered, be careful at all times to keep yourself pure, and free from the sins of judging others around you and being a busybody in their matters. Preserve yourself at all costs as a sharp instrument for God, and don't allow your effectiveness to be neutralised by any kind of sin.

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