

Prayer and the Work of Evangelization

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By H.A. Ironside

The ministry of intercession has a very large place in connection with carrying the gospel to a lost world. Far more is accomplished in secret than Christians generally realize. The preachers who have been most widely used have been men of prayer. Not only have they prayed themselves, but it will generally be found that others were linked with them in this precious service, and many of these prayer-evangelists have never been brought to public notice. Theirs are not the gifts that attract the attention of the throngs, but there are mighty men and women of prayer prevailing against the unseen enemy in the heavenlies, and by their intercession bringing down power from heaven and blessing upon the public ministry of the Word through others. An Epaphras always laboring fervently in prayer is as important in the work of evangelization as a Paul carrying the glad tidings to the regions beyond.

Paul himself was a mighty man of prayer. It is impossible to read his epistles without being struck by the prominent place that prayer had in his life. He prayed for himself and his work. He prayed for his fellow servants, in whose victories he rejoiced as much as in his own, and in this he was in marked contrast to many today. He prayed for the people of God, for his converts, and those who had been converted through the labors of others, “that they might stand perfect and complete in all the will of God.” He prayed with earnest passionate longing for Israel, his brethren after the flesh, that they might be saved and know the joys that he experienced as a believer in Christ. He prayed for the Gentiles, for kings and rulers, and for the people generally, knowing that it was God’s “desire to have all men saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.”

Though he was a man of wondrous faith and spiritual energy, he felt the need of the prayers of his weaker brethren. He solicits these most earnestly. He asked the saint at Rome to strive together with him in their prayers to God on his behalf that he might be delivered from the unbelieving Jews; that his service for the poor saints at Jerusalem might be accepted in the spirit in which it was given; and that he might eventually come to them at Rome with joy by the will of God, and with them be refreshed (Romans 15:30-33). He expressed his deep gratitude to the Corinthians because in a time of deep distress, they helped together by prayer for him, his fellow-laborers, and the work in which they were engaged (2 Corinthians 1:11). He tells the Ephesians how he bows his knees before the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ on their behalf, but he requests them on their part to pray for him “with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit” that utterance may be given unto him that he may open his mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel (Ephesians 6:18-19). From his prison cell he writes to the Philippians of the confidence he has that all his trials will turn to his salvation through their prayer

and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ (Philippians 1:19). He exhorts the Colossians to “continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving,” praying withal for him and his companions in service that God would open a door of utterance to speak the mystery of Christ, for which he was in bonds, that he might make it manifest as he ought to speak (Colossians 4:2-4). The Thessalonian believers had been saved but a few months at the most, yet he realizes there is efficacy in their childlike pleadings with God, and he writes, Brethren, pray for us” (1 Thessalonians 5:25), He would have Philemon prepare him a lodging, for he trust that through his prayers he will be delivered from prison and given unto them again (Philemon 22). To the Hebrew believers he writes, “Pray for us; for I trust we have a good conscience, in all things willing to live honestly,; and he adds, “But I beseech you the rather to do this, that I may be restored to you the sooner” (Hebrews 13:18). Who can read these many touching requests on the part of this the greatest of all preachers without realizing how dependent servants of God are on the intercession of the saints?

Our Lord Himself implied this when He taught His disciples to pray, “Thy kingdom come.” It is as we recognize that our God is set at naught by His own creatures, and that blessing can only come to earth as men submit to Him, that the heart takes up this petition with deepest fervor, and cries out for blessing on every instrumentality being used to usher in the coming kingdom.

“Let all that look for, hasten
That coming joyful day,
By earnest consecration
To walk the narrow way;
By gathering in the lost ones
For whom our Lord did die;
For the crowning day is coming
By and by.”

If we would be soul-winners, we must know how to pray. If we would prevail with men in public, we must prevail with God in secret.

Were this truth more realized, there would not be so many dry and dying prayer meetings. If it be true (and who shall question it?) that the prayer meeting is the pulse of an assembly, then it may as well be frankly confessed that most of our assemblies are in a sad condition indeed. Numbers will come to hear a gifted man, but few indeed are they who gather for prayer, and when so gathered, how often is the time frittered away praying about generalities with no real spirit of intercession, no manifestation whatever of the power of the Holy Spirit.

If we had more Holy Ghost prayer meetings, we would have more Holy Ghost preaching. If saints would start to win victories by prayer, both in secret and in fellowship with other brethren in the public gatherings, there would be a great awakening in regard to gospel testimony.

It is well to be methodical in this ministry of intercession. Many have found great help and profit in keeping regular prayer lists, to which are added from time to time the names of servants of God at home and in foreign lands in whom they become interested. By bringing such constantly before the Lord a real service is performed, and added power given to the laborers for whom they pray. Again and again this has been demonstrated in a marvelous way. Only recently a few of us felt deeply burdened about a missionary in China. He was known to several who felt impressed to come together to pray specially for him. As we prayed the burden seemed to be lifted, and we felt assured that God was working for and through him. A few weeks later a letter came across the Pacific from this particular brother. It was written a day or two after that little prayer gathering in America. He said, "I have had recently some heavy trials to bear and felt greatly discouraged, but in the last few days, there has come to me such a spiritual uplift and such a sense of the Lord's help as I have not known for a long time. I feel certain some one is praying for me." Instances like this could be multiplied without number.

We do wrong to our brethren and sisters who have devoted their lives to the spread of the gospel when we neglect to pray for them. Samuel said to Israel: "Moreover, as for me, God forbid that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you" (1 Samuel 12:23). We definitely sin against the Lord when we neglect to pray for those whom he has put in the forefront of the battle. Alas how often instead of helping them by our prayers, we hinder by our cynicism and our cold carnal criticism. Oh brethren, let us awake to the privileges and responsibilities of this great ministry in fellowship with Him who ever liveth to make intercession for us!

If in the past you have not availed yourself of this gracious opportunity to further the work of the Lord in the quiet of your own room, bow in the presence of God and confess to Him the great sin of thus having neglected a duty which might have resulted in such blessing to others; and in the coming days with purpose of heart enter into this service as a very definite and important part of the work of the Lord; and when at last the books of record are opened at the judgment seat of Christ, you will learn with delight and glad surprise how many a soul you have had a part in winning for Christ through "laboring fervently in prayer."

There is blessing as we pray for ourselves; there is rest of heart as we pour out the story of all our needs and longings into the sympathetic ear of our gracious God and Father; but he whose prayers center about himself and his blessings has never done more than to cross the threshold of the temple of prayer. It is as our hearts reach out for others, as we plead for the interests of our Lord in this poor

world, as we bear up His servants engaged in making known the exceeding riches of His grace to men and women dying in their poverty, that we really enter into communion with Him who taught us to pray, “Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.