

## PRAYING FOR COVER

### Introduction

1. Prayer is a bit of a puzzle to many when it is placed along side the sovereignty of God. If God is in total control what is the point of prayer? Is prayer an attempt to change the direction of God? We have all heard, "Prayer changes things." Is that true? In one sense prayer may not change anything except possibly the one who is praying. It certainly does not change a changeless God. Technically I suppose we could say that only God can change things, but practically, when we pray, often things do change!
2. Some see prayer's main purpose as praise. Others treat it as a therapy session for their struggles. It may not accomplish a lot, but it makes me feel better. Prayer certainly is talking to God. It does in some way involve asking and receiving. It is not just some psychological placebo to sooth our anxieties. And certainly today we must ask, how in the world do prayer and missions go together in the context of the supremacy of God in all things?
3. To get a handle on this, let's turn to the book of Ephesians and concentrate on the last chapter, chapter 6. Let's get a running start into the text. Over the past few years we have been discovering that the goal of all things – the end of all things – is the supremacy of God. God is supreme. He is over all. He is in control. He is sovereign in and over all things. And His glory is the issue. He will be glorified in all things, but right now that is not the case. Consider Psalm 72:17-19.  
**May his name endure forever, his fame continue as long as the sun! May people be blessed in him, all nations call him blessed! Blessed be the LORD, the God of Israel, who alone does wondrous things. Blessed be his glorious name forever; may the whole earth be filled with his glory! Amen and Amen!** "May the whole earth be filled with his glory." That's the goal, but it is not yet realized. That is why "missions" is necessary. "Missions" is to continue until "the whole earth is filled with His glory" becomes a reality. Then missions will no longer be necessary. Right now, it is essential.

4. The question remains, how has God, who works all things according to His own good pleasure, ordained that this will come true? What methods, what means has He put in place that will accomplish this purpose? At least part of the answer to that question is prayer. But to understand the relationship of prayer and missions to the supremacy of God, there are a few other facts we must grasp. I want to try to help us grab three of them today. Fact #1...

#### I. LIFE IS WAR (Ephesians 6:10-17)

A. The battle is life-long (2 Timothy 4:7 - ***I have fought the good fight***; 1 Timothy 6:12 - ***Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life***; 1 Timothy 1:18 - ***This charge I entrust to you, Timothy, my child...that...you may wage the good warfare***).

1. It is no coincidence that the Bible speaks of the Christian life as a battle. We are in a life and death struggle against a powerful enemy. The battle continues throughout our lifetime. We may not be aware of the enemy's presence, but we should always be on high alert.
2. In the passage before us, this is how Paul saw his life, and it reveals one of our problems. Few Christians today believe that we are in a war greater than any this world has ever seen. Few understand our enemy, Satan, to be a far greater foe than any worldly power. Further, the conflict is not restricted to any one global theater but to every town and village and city in the world. The stakes are also much higher. The casualties of war are not a wound or loss of a limb or even the loss of earthly life, but rather the loss of everything for all eternity in a place of everlasting torment. Life is war. There is never a time when we are not at war with this relentless enemy!

B. The battle is spiritual (See also 2 Corinthians 10:3-5 - ***For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ***).

1. It is not a battle of flesh and blood, and we do not use conventional weapons in the battle. Such weapons would do no good against the spiritual forces of evil.

2. Paul makes it clear that we battle against the **“cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.”** Life is not just “loving God, loving each other, making music with my friends.” That is naive and blind response to the raging spiritual battle for our souls.
3. Life is war. We may have been in the dark about that, but such naiveté does not change the truth. The battle is real. The stakes are high. The mission is clear. Whether we like it or not or realize it or not, we are in an all-out, to the death battle for the glory of God. That is where this begins. (But where does prayer come in?)

**II. TO FIGHT THE WAR THERE MUST BE PRAYER (6:18-20 - *praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints, and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak*).**

Let's begin with consideration of...

A. Prayer and wartime – how it looks and why it is necessary

1. Please remember that life is war. The prince of this world is out to thwart the advance of the Kingdom of God. The description Paul gives of our foe calls for extraordinary effort to take great precaution in arming ourselves against the fiery missiles of the evil one.
2. **“Praying at all times in the Spirit with all prayer and supplication”** is necessary precisely because we are in a war. Think of it this way. I am borrowing this from John Piper's book, ***Let the Nations Be Glad***. Prayer is our wartime walkie-talkie. We are in the trenches. The enemy has us surrounded. We need air support. We need reinforcements. We are pinned down and we are getting pummeled. The mission that has been assigned to us is to promote the supremacy of God in all things, which when accomplished will result in great joy for all of God's people, but the enemy is bent on disrupting and destroying our mission. Our walkie-talkie is our direct line to the Lord High General – if you will. When we call, He hears and answers and supplies according to His master plan in the advancement of His Kingdom for the glory of His name. If we stay true to His mission and seek first His victory, He

will always be ready to supply us with all we need. He has made that promise. **Call unto me and I will answer!**

3. Note carefully what Paul says in his instruction concerning prayer. He mentions his concern for perseverance, that believers might remain alert, that the troops might be kept together and fully outfitted for battle, that the supply line of wisdom in speech and action, along with boldness, might be unbroken, that these soldiers might represent the King as His ambassadors even though many of them would be in some sense under the harsh hand of the enemy - (Paul certainly was; he was in chains)! Such instruction on prayer is not just here in Ephesians, but scattered throughout the New Testament. Prayer is the wartime communication between God's troops and God as they battle the forces of darkness. These lines of communication are essential for our survival and for His advancement. That is the way it is to be, but that is not the way it often is. Let's consider...
- B. Prayer and the typical evangelical believer – how it looks and why its ineffective
1. Here is the problem. We have taken this wartime communication device and tried to retrofit it for the living room. The urgency, the diligence, the strategy necessary to pierce the darkness for the glory of God, has long been forgotten. Instead we call up heaven, like we would call room service, asking for another pillow or some other creature comfort!
  2. I am going to walk carefully here, taking great risk of being misunderstood, but here goes. Even prayer for the sick may be a misuse of this weapon of war for the glory of God and the advancement of His kingdom. What is the chief end of man? If God heals your diseases, if He restores your health what will you do with this gracious extension of your life or the increase of strength in your life? Will you entrench yourself in the foxholes on the frontline and fight with all you have for the glory of God, to extend His kingdom and His glory, or will you retire in leisure and comfort, living out your days, regularly calling upon God to please send you another pillow to soften some of life's bumps?
  3. If we look at this from the vantage point of the glory of God, how will the restoration of health figure into the advancement of His kingdom and

purpose? It can, but will it be so? There is an interesting Biblical example in the story of the OT king of Judah, Hezekiah. He was going to die. God told him so. He pleaded with the Lord for more time and God granted him 15 more years. Tragically Hezekiah did not use that extension of time wisely. Israel paid a price for years to come because Hezekiah stopped living for the glory of God! The nation would have fared better if he had died. Life is war. Prayer is designed to provide us with that which we need to fight that war. In the heat of the battle as we cry out to God, may we not forget that...

**III. PRAYER (LIKE EVERYTHING ELSE) IS FOR GOD'S GLORY** Let's begin with consideration of...

A. Prayer and sovereignty – God will win. God may use us.

1. **Luke 21:34-36** warns of times of great distress and opposition. ***But stay awake at all times, praying that you may have strength to escape all these things that are going to take place, and to stand before the Son of Man.*** If we follow Jesus, it will lead to war because the enemy hates Jesus and all who would identify with Him. We will be surrounded and attacked by the evil one, but we have this divine transmitter. And if we call for help in the conflict, help will come. Jesus will not permit His faithful soldiers to be denied their crown of victory before the Son of man!
2. (Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad*, p. 48) **The crying need of the hour is to put the churches on a wartime footing. Mission leaders are crying out, "Where is the church's concept of militancy, of a mighty army willing to suffer, moving ahead with exultant determination to take the world by storm? Where is the risk taking, the launching out on God alone?" The answer is that it has been swallowed up in a peacetime mentality.**
3. Whether I obey or not, God will accomplish His purposes. But I have the great privilege of fighting on the winning side and being used by God to accomplish His purposes. Some of you enjoy football. Next Sunday is the "Superbowl." When the clock says 0:00 at the end of the fourth quarter and your team is ahead, it is great. But those who are the most satisfied are the ones who played the greatest part in the victory. O, they are banged up and bruised and bleeding and practically have to be carried off the field,

but they are elated. They won! That's football. It's a game. This is life; this is war, and we are talking about our great God. No wonder after intense persecution, it is said of the apostles, "They left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were **counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name.**" God will win. He may use us. Let me be part of the battle! And may my transmitter be always on, tuned to the right frequency so that I might be wise and faithful to fight from His direction and instruction for the advancement of His kingdom.

4. Consider the life of the Apostle Paul. He was downcast in Corinth. The battle had been hard and the results appeared to be minimal. The Lord spoke encouragement to Paul (Acts 18:9-10) reminding him that God had many people in Corinth. In other words, God had chosen many in Corinth and Paul was to remain there and keep on preaching, keep on battling the powers of darkness. The Lord would call many through Paul's preaching and they would come! They would believe the Gospel. God will build His church. That's His promise! He might use us. That's a great blessing! But we will have to be engaged in the battle for the spread of the supremacy of God in all things. And when we are, there is great joy for all who are in Christ Jesus who are part of that battle! Consider Paul's prayers in Ephesians 1 and 3!
- B. Prayer and purpose – God will be glorified. And in the process of God being glorified, our joy will be made full! Prayer is an open admission that without Christ we can do nothing. Prayer is turning from ourselves toward God with the confidence that whatever we lack He will supply. That is what Jesus said in John 15:7-8 "**ask whatever you will ... by this my Father is glorified.**" Prayer says we are needy and destitute but God is all-sufficient to meet every need. Let's begin with...
1. Prayer and the power of God revealed – The first century church prayed that the Gospel would triumph in the world so that the name of Christ would be exalted and the kingdom of God would be established and extended. They prayed that God would vindicate His people in their cause, and that He would save unbelievers. They prayed that God would direct the use of His Word, the sword of the Spirit, in bold proclamation. They prayed for power

for the healing of wounded comrades. They prayed against the forces of darkness, for miraculous deliverance, to supply an increase of workers – reinforcements for the battle, for strategic wisdom, for adequate leadership, for the success of other missionaries, for unity and harmony in the ranks; for encouragement of togetherness; for the knowledge of God's will, to comprehend the love of Christ, for a deeper sense of assured hope, for strength and endurance, so that their faith would not be destroyed, that they would not fall into temptation, but that God might grant the victory through Christ – resulting in great glory for Him. The early church made much of God and He made much of them by using them to advance His kingdom for His glory! God reveals His power through prayer and releases His power through prayer as well!

2. Prayer and the power of God released – I need to remind us that though prayer is necessary, it is not the main work of missions. The proclamation of the Gospel is the main work of missions (Romans 1:16), but it has been ordained by God that He would in some way release the power of the Gospel through prayer. Consider Paul's prayer request to the Colossians (4:3 - ***pray also for us, that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ, on account of which I am in prison...***). Though in prison, Paul was praying that he might give a clear declaration of the Gospel – which in turn would release the power of God to save those who would hear the Gospel and believe. Paul never mentions release or creature comforts in his prayers, just the advancement of the glory of God. O that we would take note and so respond!

## Conclusion

1. John Piper writes, ***“God has made the accomplishment of His purposes hang on the preaching of the word. He has also made the success of that preaching hang on prayer. God's goal to be glorified will not succeed without the powerful proclamation of the gospel. And that gospel will not be proclaimed in power to all the nations without the prevailing, earnest, faith-filled prayers of God's people. This is the awesome place of prayer in the purpose of God for the world. That purpose will not happen without prayer.”***

2. Prayer is the church's walkie-talkie to God on the battlefield of the world in the service of the word. It is not a domestic intercom to increase the temporal comforts of the saints. It malfunctions in the hands of soldiers who have gone AWOL. It is for those on active duty. And in their hands it proves the supremacy of God in the pursuit of the nations. When mission ministry moves forward by prayer, God's power is magnified. When mission ministry moves by human management, only man is magnified. God is robbed of His glory.
3. It is God's plan that His glory covers the whole earth as the waters cover the sea. He is supreme and His supremacy will extend to all things. Nothing will thwart His plan and purpose. But to accomplish His purposes He has chosen to use us. We are engaged against a powerful, ruthless enemy with the mission to extend the boundaries of God's kingdom for the glory of His name. The battle is intense but we are assured victory if we will cry out of His provision in believing prayer!