
XIV. Paul and His Praying - Part 2

William Law has this very pertinent word in his "Devout Life": "When you begin your petitions use such various expressions of the attributes of God as may make you most sensible of the greatness and power of the Divine nature?" And then William Law gives various examples, which I am bound to say would not be helpful to me, as they would imprison my spirit in a coat of mail. But I want to emphasize and commend the principle of it, which is, that our fellowship should begin with the primary elements of adoration and praise.--Rev. J. H. Jowett

There are two occasions with wonderful results where the statement is not explicit that Paul was in prayer, but the circumstances and the results, and Paul's universal and intense praying habit, make it most evident that the key to the results of both occasions is prayer. The first occasion is when Paul sailed away from Philippi and came to Troas, where he abode seven days. On the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them, expecting to depart on the morrow, and continued his preaching till late in the night.

There was sitting in the window a young man named Eutychus, who naturally fell asleep, and as Paul was rather long in speaking, the young man fell out of the high window, and was taken up for dead. Paul went down to the place where the young man had fallen, and embracing him, told the people about him that they need not be troubled, for life was still in the body. Paul returned to the upper room, where he had been preaching, and talked with the disciples till break of day. And the young man was brought alive, and as a consequence all were greatly comforted.

The very natural conclusion without the fact being specially stated is that Paul must have prayed for the young man when he embraced him, and his prayer was answered in the quick recovery of the young man.

The second occasion was in the perilous and protracted storm which overtook the vessel in which Paul was being carried as a prisoner to Rome. They were being exceedingly tossed about with the great tempest, and neither sun nor stars appeared as they were beset and struggled against wind and storm. All hope that they would be saved seemed gone. But after long abstinence, Paul stood in the midst of those on board, and speaking more particularly to the officers of the vessel, said, "Sirs, ye should have hearkened unto me, and not have loosed from Crete, and to have gained this harm and loss. And now I exhort you, to be of good cheer, for there shall be no loss of any man's life among you, but of the ship. For there stood by this night the angel of God, whose I am and whom I serve, saying, Fear not, Paul; thou must be brought before Caesar, and lo, God hath given thee all them that sail with thee. Wherefore, sirs, be of good cheer; for I believe God, that it shall be even as God hath told me."

It requires no strained interpretation to read into this simple record the fact that Paul must have been praying when the angel appeared unto him with that message of encouragement and assurance of safety. Paul's habit of prayer and his strong belief in prayer must have driven him to his knees. Such an emergency with him would necessarily move him to

pray under such crucial circumstances.

After the shipwreck, while on the island of Melita, we have another representation of Paul at prayer. He is at his work of praying for a very ill man. While a fire was being made, a deadly poisonous viper fastened itself on his hand, and the barbarians immediately concluded it was a case of retribution for some crime Paul had committed, but they soon discovered that Paul did not die, and changed their minds and concluded that he was a sort of god.

In the same quarter at the time, was the father of Publius, who was very ill of a fever, and bloody flux, approaching seemingly his end. Paul went to him, and laid his hands upon him, and with simple confidence in God he prayed, and immediately the disease was rebuked, and the man was healed. When the natives of the island beheld this remarkable incident, they brought others to Paul, and they were healed, after the same fashion, by Paul's praying.

Turning back in Paul's life to the time he was at Ephesus on his way to Jerusalem, we find him stopping at Tyre after he departed from Ephesus. Before leaving Ephesus he had prayed with them all. But he did not trust in his words howsoever strong, fitting and solemn they might have been. God must be recognized, invoked and sought. Paul did not take it for granted, after he had done his best, that God as a master of course would bless his efforts to do good, but he sought God. God does not do things in a matter-of-course sort of way. God must be invoked, sought unto, and put into things by prayer.

Following his visit to Ephesus, he arrived at Tyre, where he stopped a few days. Here he found some disciples, who begged Paul not to go to Jerusalem, saying through the Spirit that he should not go up to that city. But Paul adhered to his original purpose to go to Jerusalem. The account says:

"And when we had accomplished those days, we departed, and went our way; and they all brought us on our way with their wives and children, till we were out of the city; and we kneeled down on the shore and prayed."

What a sight to behold on that seashore! Here is a family picture of love and devotion, where husbands, wives and even children are present, and prayer is made out in the open air. What an impression it must have made upon those children! The vessel was ready to depart, but prayer must cement their affections and sanctify wives and children, and bless their parting--a parting which was to be final so far as this world was concerned. The scene is beautiful and does honor to the head and heart of Paul, to his person and his piety, and shows the tender affection in which he was held. His devoted habit of sanctifying all things by prayer comes directly to the light. "We kneeled down on the shore and prayed." Never did sea strand see a grander picture or witness a lovelier sight--Paul on his knees on the sands of that shore, invoking God's blessing upon these men, women and children.

When Paul was arraigned at Jerusalem, in making his public defense, he refers to two instances of his praying. One was when he was in the house of Judas, in Damascus, after he had been stricken to the earth and brought under conviction. He was there three days, and to him was Ananias sent, to lay his hand upon him, at the time of his blindness and darkness. It was during those three days of prayer. This is the

Scriptural record, and the words are those of Ananias addressed to him:

"And now why tarriest thou? Arise and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord."

The Lord had emboldened the timid Ananias to go and minister to Paul, by telling him, "Behold he prayeth." And so we have in this reference Paul's prayerfulness intensified by the exhortation of Ananias. Prayer precedes pardon of sins. Prayer becomes those who seek God. Prayer belongs to the earnest, sincere inquirer after God. Pardon of sin and acceptance with God always come at the end of earnest praying. The evidence of sincerity in a true seeker of religion is that it can be said of him, "Behold he prayeth."

The other reference in his defense lets us into the prayerful intenseness into which his whole religious life had been fashioned and shows us how in the absorbing ecstasy of prayer, the vision came and directions were received by which his toilsome life was to be guided. Also we see the familiar terms on which he stood and talked with his Lord:

"And it came to pass when I was come again to Jerusalem, even while I prayed in the temple, I was in a trance;

"And saw him saying unto me, Make haste and get thee quickly out of Jerusalem, for they will not receive thy testimony concerning me.

"And I said, Lord, they know that I imprisoned and beat in every synagogue them that believed on thee.

"And when the blood of thy martyr Stephen was shed, I also was standing by, and consenting to his death, and kept the raiment of them that slew him.

"And he said unto me, Depart, for I will send thee far hence unto the Gentiles."

Prayer always brings directions from heaven as to what God would have us to do. If we prayed more and more directly, we should make fewer mistakes in life as to duty. God's will concerning us is revealed in answer to prayer. If we prayed more and prayed better and sweeter, then clearer and more entrancing visions would be given us, and our intercourse with God, would be of the most intimate, free, and bold order.

It is difficult to itemize or classify Paul's praying. It is so comprehensive, so discursive, and so minute, that it is no easy task to do so. Paul teaches much about prayer in his didactics. He specifically enforces the duty and necessity of prayer upon the Church, but that which was better for Paul and better for us is that he himself prayed much and illustrated his own teaching. He practiced what he preached. He put to the test the exercise of prayer which he urged upon the people of his day.

To the Church at Rome he plainly and specifically asseverated with solemnity his habit of praying. This he wrote to those Roman believers:

"For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the Gospel of His Son, that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my

prayers."

Paul not only prayed for himself. He made a practice of praying for others. He was preeminently an intercessor. As he urged intercessory prayer on others, so he interceded himself for others beside himself.

He begins that remarkable Epistle to the Romans in the spirit of prayer: He closes it with this solemn charge: "Now I beseech you, brethren, for the Lord Jesus Christ's sake, and for the love of the Spirit, that ye strive with me in your prayers to God for me."

But this is not all. In the very heart of that Epistle, he commands "Continuing instant in prayer." That is, give constant attention to prayer. Make it the business of life. Be devoted to it. Just what he did himself, for Paul was a standing example of the doctrine of prayer which he advocated and pressed upon the people.

In his Epistles to the Thessalonians, how all-inclusive and wonderful the praying! Says he in writing his First Epistle to this Church:

"We give thanks to God always for you, making mention of you in my prayers; remembering without ceasing your work of faith, and labor of love, and patience of hope."

Not to quote all he says, it is worth while to read his words to this same Church of true believers further on:

"Night and day praying exceedingly that we might see your face, and might perfect that which is lacking in your faith. Now God himself direct our way unto you. And the Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another, even as we do toward you, to the end he may establish your hearts unblameable in holiness before God, even our Father."

And this sort of praying for these Thessalonian Christians is in direct line with that closing prayer for these same believers in this Epistle, where he records that striking prayer for their entire sanctification:

"And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit, and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ."

How Paul did pray for those early Christians! They were in his mind and on his heart, and he was continually at it, "night and day praying exceedingly." Oh, if we had a legion of preachers in these days of superficial piety and these times of prayerlessness, who were given to praying for their churches as Paul did for those to whom he ministered in his day! Praying men are needed. Likewise praying preachers are demanded in this age.

At the conclusion of that remarkable prayer in the third chapter of Ephesians, he declared that "God was able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we could ask or think," now he declares he is praying exceeding abundantly, striving after the most earnest order, to have his prayers run parallel with God's power, and that they may not limit that power nor exhaust that power, but get all there is in it to bless and greatly enrich His Church.

Paul and his compeers prayed for the saints everywhere. It may be

referred to again. With what solemnity does Paul call the attention of the Roman Christians to the important fact of praying for them, believers whom he had never seen! "God is my witness that without ceasing, I make mention of you in my prayers." To the churches he says, "Praying always for you."

Again on the same line, we hear him articulating dearly, "Always in every prayer of mine for you all, making request with joy." Again he writes thus: "I do not cease to pray for you." Once more we read the record, "Wherefore we pray always for you." And again it is written, "Cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers." And then he says, "Remembrance of thee in my prayers night and day."

His declaration, "night and day praying exceedingly," is a condensed record of the engrossing nature of the praying done by this praying apostle. It shows conclusively how important prayer was in his estimate and in his ministry, and further shows how to him prayer was an agony of earnest striving in seeking from God blessings which could be secured in no other way.

The unselfishness of his praying is seen in his writing to the Romans where he tells them, "Making request if by any means I might have a prosperous journey to come to you. For I long to see you that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to the end ye may be established." The object of his desire to visit Rome was not for selfish gratification, the pleasure of a trip, or for other reasons, but that he might be the means under God of "imparting to them some spiritual gift," in order that they "might be established" in their hearts, unblameably in love. It was that his visit might give to them some spiritual gift which they had not received and that they might be established at those points where they needed to be rooted, and grounded in faith, in love, and in all that made up Christian life and character.