

The Agony of Victory – Part II
Moral Responsibility of Prayer
Colossians 2:1- 4
Reality Carpinteria - Pastor Britt Merrick
February 12, 2006

Colossians 2:1- 4, Paul writes, “For I want you to know how great a struggle I have on your behalf and for those who are at Laodicea, and for all those who have not personally seen my face, 2 that their hearts may be encouraged, having been knit together in love, and attaining to all the wealth that comes from the full assurance of understanding, resulting in a true knowledge of God’s mystery, that is, Christ Himself, 3 in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. 4 I say this so that no one will delude you with persuasive argument.”

Pastor Britt’s Opening Prayer:

Lord, thank You so much for what You want to instruct us in tonight. God, thank You for that wonderful truth that You love us exactly as we are. Lord, You just love us. And it’s not even dependent upon us, it’s dependent upon You and Your character and Your incredible grace and mercy and love. Lord, we also know that You are desiring and willing to instruct us, to challenge us and bless us, and to open up some treasures of wisdom and knowledge to us. Lord, do that tonight that our lives might be transformed. Lord, we would invite You tonight to rattle our cages a little bit. To wake us up. To wake us up out of the status quo and the ho-hum of life and even Christian life. Bring us to that radical place of selflessness; of being absorbed with the welfare of others; of being passionate about interceding for others and seeing others prosper in Your kingdom and grow and be blessed.

Lord, give us hearts that are after Your own heart tonight. Deal with us in the depths of our beings. Holy Spirit, I ask that You would author my thoughts, my attitude, and my words; that You would speak to us wonderful things. We ask this together in Jesus’ name, Amen.

Review of Last Week:

- Paul was struggling for a people whom he had **never** visited, never seen.
- The Greek word for struggle is **agon**. It is from this word where we get our English word agony. But, it does not bear the negative connotation of the word as used in English, such as the idea of defeat, pain, and suffering.
 - The idea of **agon** in the Bible has positive connotations.
 - Picture an athlete who is striving, contesting, working and laboring hard toward a good thing: the precious first place.
 - Paul says he is struggling on behalf of the Colossians and all who haven’t seen him.
 - He’s praying. Doing spiritual battle in the spiritual world on behalf of people that he’s never seen before.
- We learned a lot about the people in Laodicea (**Revelation 3:14-22**).
 - Jesus addresses them saying, “**So because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth.**” Jesus wanted them to be hot or cold.
 - The idea is that hot and cold are both useful. Cold water was cool and refreshing. Hot water was useful for sanitizing and preparing food.
 - When a Christian is hot or cold, he or she is in a place where they are useful in the hands of the Lord.
 - When either the hot or cold water becomes tepid or lukewarm, it loses its usefulness.
 - When Christians become contaminated and distracted with the things of the world, we start to lose our usefulness in the hands of God.
 - It does not disqualify us from ever being used again by God, but we’ve got to repent and get our lives back in line with His will, to be useful.
 - We agreed that we’re not sure what Jesus meant when He said He would spew us out, but it doesn’t sound good!
 - Jesus told them that they had become wealthy and that they thought they were in need of nothing. In previous years they had accumulated great material wealth.
 - The Lord told them that spiritually speaking they were wretched, blind, naked and poor.

- Their affluence had crept into and compromised their Christianity. Instead of being spiritually fervent and spiritually wealthy, they went after the wealth of the world and became spiritually bankrupt.
 - Paul prays in this passage in Colossians that they would attain to all the wealth of the full understanding of Christ Jesus.
 - There is nothing wrong with material things. They in themselves are morally neutral. Oftentimes, what is wrong is our heart.

If your heart is torn between God and material goods, then you have to do some business with the Lord.
 - We learned that in his letter to the Colossians, Paul also invited them to repent.
 - Repent is a wonderful word.
 - When we repent, the Lord restores us to communion with Him. God does not make us struggle to get back into His good graces. When we repent the Lord is thrilled and would say to us, Awesome. Come right back here into My arms.
 - Peter told the nation of Israel in **Acts 3:19**, “Repent! That times of refreshing may come from being in the presence of the Lord.”
 - We learned that there were **three reasons why Paul struggled in prayer for** and spent so much spiritual energy on the people of Colossae and on **those he had never met** such as the people of Laodicea. Last week we covered two of the three reasons.
 1. His tremendous love for God.
 - a. Paul had experienced, in every sense of the word, God’s love for man.
 - i. On the road to Damascus, on his way to kill Christians, the Lord literally knocks Paul down and blinds him for a time. Paul is converted. Jesus changes his name from Saul to Paul. Paul experiences God’s forgiveness and goes from being a Christian killer to a Christian maker. Paul’s life becomes useful in the hands of the Lord. Paul purposefully positions himself to receive all the fullness, the love, and the blessings of God.
 - ii. Paul responds with a tremendous love for God. It is the same reason we love God: because God first loved us.
 - iii. The outflow of this love is that we begin to love people, even those we may never meet.
 1. Loving people always follows a sincere love of God.
 2. Poor relationships with people will reflect a poor relationship with the Lord.
 2. His great love for God’s truth.
 - a. Colossae was experiencing false teachers and Laodicea was experiencing a false sense of security. Paul’s passion for God’s truth would not allow him to see people deceived and misunderstand the Word of God. He loved and valued God’s word too much to let this happen.
 - b. Our Christianity should be marked by the same passion to correct error and reveal the truth of God’s word.
 - i. Paul prayed that their hearts might be encouraged, while he himself is in prison for his faith!
 1. He probably asked the Lord to bless them and encourage their hearts; give rest to the weary and heavy-laden; given them peace; restore to them the joy of His salvation; Lord, be the lifter of their heads; let Your countenance shine upon them; Lord, bless them today with Your peace and Your presence.
 - a. And he doesn’t even know them!

**Christians, when our hearts are downcast,
we should practice spiritual discipline by praying for others.
It will get our eyes off ourselves!**

- ii. Paul prayed that their hearts would be knitted together in love.
 1. **1 Corinthians 13**, we’re told that love is the most important thing we can have. Love is greater than any spiritual gift. All Christian activity is vain, meaningless, and futile if it’s done without love. Jesus prayed that we would be recognized as true disciples by our love for one another.
 - a. Not by our programs, music, bible studies or outreaches.

- b. The devil will always seek to attack in the area of love and unity, knowing that if he destroys this he can destroy our Christian witness in the world.
 - i. Jesus said we would be recognized by our love for one another. We need to cultivate this love.
- c. There will always be people who offend, disappoint, anger and upset us. But, we have to let the love of God reign in and exude from our hearts.
 - i. Jesus prayed in **John 17** that we would be one, just like He and the Father are one.
- iii. Paul prayed that they might attain to all the wealth that comes from the full assurance of understanding, resulting in a true knowledge of God's mystery that is Christ Jesus.
 - 1. There is a wealth in understanding the deep things of the Lord.
 - 2. The phrase "true knowledge" that Paul uses is the Greek word *epignosis*, which means clear, exact, experiential, and participatory knowledge. The idea here would be a roll-up-your-sleeves and dig into Jesus. It is not a passive knowledge.
 - a. You literally hold on to Jesus and pursue Him until His blessing comes. Waiting with full expectation that the Lord will speak to you.
 - 3. The Bible states that there is great spiritual and eternal wealth for those who seek to have this knowledge of God.
 - a. Paul tells us that wisdom and knowledge are *hidden* in Christ Jesus. It's not found on the surface. It's not easily ascertained. You have to dig in.
 - i. The Word of God promises that the seeker of Truth will attain great spiritual wealth.
 - b. The world will tell you otherwise It will tell you, "don't waste your time reading the Bible and meditating on the Lord. There is so much more to do with your time. Go out and make a name for yourself, make more money, cultivate relationships, network here and there."
 - i. Don't buy into this! Check your priorities. Don't lose your way!

3. The third reason why Paul struggled in prayer for the people of Colossae and those he had never met is **he had a great understanding for the way prayers work.**

A few thoughts on the workings of prayer:

- Your Father in Heaven knows what we need **before** we ask Him.
 - **Matthew 6: 7-8** "And when you are praying, do not use meaningless repetition as the Gentiles do, for they suppose that they will be heard for their many words. 8 So do not be like them; for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him."
- We are **called** to ask the Lord for all our needs.
 - God may already know what we need, but we are still called to pray, to ask the Lord!
 - **Matthew 6:9**, "Pray, then in this way."
 - Jesus taught His disciples how to pray.
 - **James 4:2b** "You do not have because you do not ask."
 - God desires that we ask Him for all our needs.
 - **Isaiah 65:24** "It will also come to pass that before they call, I will answer, And while they are still speaking, I will hear."
 - After the Second Coming, when the Lord returns, the Lord will answer our prayers before we've had a chance to ask. It is a different dispensation. It is a different time. God will be working in a different way.
 - However, until that day when Jesus returns, God has designed it that we should pray and ask Him.
- We should not use **meaningless or vain** repetition. God wants a meaningful true relationship.
 - Don't let your prayers become routine for you. Don't recite by rote your prayers and think that God will hear you because of that.

- Too many people have been sold a false bill of religiosity: “If you just repeat these words; if you just say a few Hail Marys, or Our Fathers, the Lord will respond.”
 - Don’t let your prayers become meaningless and mechanical.
- God calls us to pray to Him in a mindful, purposeful, and engaged manner. There is a Hebraic mindset that is needed in prayer called Kavanah. It literally means to concentrate or be intent. In the Jewish mind it is the minimum mindset that you need for effective and engaged prayer. If you don’t have this mindset, you are merely reading or reciting.
 - With this mindset of Kavanah, you are actually concentrating on and intent on the Lord. You **know** that you are speaking to the God of the universe. Therefore, you engage yourself with the fullness of your being.
 - In Israel you can see Orthodox Jews rocking their bodies back and forth in prayer. Mostly because they “**love the Lord their God with their whole heart, soul, mind and strength**”, but also because they are totally mindful of the fact that they are praying to the Lord. They are not just reading but are engaging in it with everything in their being. They are intent.
 - According to the American Oxford dictionary, the word intent (adjective) is to be attentive, absorbed, engrossed, fascinated, enthralled, rapt, riveted, focused, earnest, concentrating, intense, studious, preoccupied, alert, and watchful.

***Do you realize how incredible it is to talk to God?
If we did, we would also pray with intent and purpose!***

- Think about it! If we were mindful of the awesomeness of talking to God, we’d be so intent that we would be studious, rapt, riveted and enthralled.
- **Revelation 5:8** states “**each one holding a harp and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints.**”
 - Our prayers are pleasing before Him.
 - The Lord, our Father in Heaven, enjoys hearing our voice!
 - Much the same as a parent enjoys the sound of their children’s voices calling them.
 - It’s almost beyond our understanding how incredible it is that the God of the universe, the One who holds all things together, loves to hear our voice!
 - God invites you to speak to Him, ask and listen to Him.
- Paul prayed with true intent and purpose. It’s the idea of *agon*. The agony of victory. Prevailing prayer.
 - Paul knew that amazing things would happen through prayer. He labored in prayer. He was intent and intense about it.
 - Prayer is us engaging in spiritual battle. Read your Bible.
 - We can be fervent in prayer and involved in spiritual battle or we can be observers, while others engage on our behalf. But, the moment we get fed up enough, when we’ve seen:
 - Enough girls get ripped off
 - Enough kids get burned
 - Enough marriages break up
 - Enough people go down the wrong road
 - Then we’ll become engaged in the battle as we ask the Lord to deliver, save and heal. The battle is intense. We have to struggle, contest, and labor in prayer for that situation.
 - We must press into battle.

Pressing in Through Prayer – Engaging in Battle

- Israel had been exiled into Babylon. In Daniel 9:1, 550 years BC, Daniel had been reading the Book of Jeremiah, when he came to chapter 29, in which the Lord said that Israel would be in exile in Babylon for 70 years because of their disobedience. Daniel calculates this to mean that there were only 4 more years left to Israel’s exile. Daniel begins to pray and fast and seek the Lord about the future of the nation of Israel. He repents on behalf of the nation of Israel, knowing that the prophecy is coming true before his very eyes. **Daniel 10:2**, “**In those days, I, Daniel, had been mourning for three entire weeks.**”

***For three weeks Daniel is in an attitude of prayer.
Striving in agony, fasting, and repenting on behalf of Israel.
Daniel is engaged in battle in the spiritual realm.***

- **Daniel 10:12-14** an angel of the Lord comes to Daniel. "Then he (the angel) said to me, "Do not be afraid, Daniel, for from the **first** day that you set your heart on understanding this and on humbling yourself before your God, your words were heard, and I have come in response to your words."
 - From the first moment Daniel started praying his words were heard. And in response to his prayer, God had sent an angel to visit Daniel.
 - In the next verse, we read why it took the angel 3 weeks to get to Daniel.
- **Daniel 10:13a** "But the prince of the kingdom of Persia was withstanding me for twenty-one days,"
 - The "prince of the kingdom of Persia" speaks of a demonic authority, power or principality that had a territorial stronghold over the area of Persia, where Daniel is residing when he is praying.
 - The demon did not want Daniel's prayer answered.
 - The spiritual realm is the most **real** realm that there is. The flesh is real, but it will pass away. The spiritual is eternal.
 - A **very real battle** is taking place in the spiritual realm.
 - Persia is modern day Iran. Note that the current ruler of Iran wants to "wipe Israel off the map; extinguish them and push them into the Mediterranean Sea." Very interesting!

The same spiritual power that wanted to stop the future of Israel in the time of Daniel, wants to stop the future of Israel today!

- **Daniel 10:13b** ...then behold, Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, for I had been left there with the kings of Persia."
 - Michael the Archangel is a military angel. He is the military commander who fights on behalf of Israel's spiritual battles.
- **Daniel 10:14** "Now I have come to give you an understanding of what will happen to your people (the nation of Israel) in the latter days (these current days), for the vision pertains to the days yet future."

When you begin to pray, you engage in the spiritual realm and in the battle that is going on. The Lord hears and the Lord responds. If you pray and pray and pray, and it's for the right thing and for a good thing; and the answer from the Lord is not necessarily a "no", **don't give up!**

**Keep persevering in prayer.
When you pray, the battle is being waged and it will be won!**

**Don't grow weary in interceding and in doing good.
In due time you shall reap the reward.**

What if Daniel had stopped praying after twelve days? Sixteen days? Twenty days?

- Daniel persevered to the end. The battle continued and the angels did not turn back because his prayers had ceased and the battle was over.

**Are you praying for salvation or healing for someone?
Don't give up.**

There's a spiritual battle going on and we must press in.

- Is it possible that sometime between the time when Paul first prayed for the Church of Laodicea and when Jesus dictates a letter to them in the Book of Revelation, that they had slipped into a lukewarm state because Paul had stopped praying for them and no one else was doing battle on their behalf?
 - Paul the Apostle wrote Colossians around 60 AD. We know that he was praying for them around that time. But, shortly after that time Paul died. A few decades go by and where Paul prayed for their spiritual wealth, the Laodicians got materially wealthy; and where he prayed that they would be fully on fire for the Lord, and they became lukewarm.
 - **Isaiah 59:16**, "And He saw that there was no man, and was astonished that there was no one to intercede; then His own arm brought salvation to Him, and His righteousness upheld Him."
 - The Lord wanted good things for Israel, but there was no one to intercede on her behalf.

- The Lord wanted **someone** to come before His throne of grace, but there was no one. **No one stood in the gap to pray.**
 - **2 Chronicles 7:14**, If my people who are called by My name humble themselves and pray and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, will forgive their sin and will heal their land.

With Prayer Comes Responsibility

- As long as Daniel was praying, the battle raged and was won!
- God blessed Elijah and sent rain to Israel, but Elijah had to pray for rain.
- Samuel had to pray for the nation of Israel to prosper.
- Daniel had to pray for the Jews to be delivered.
- God would bless Paul and the nations would be converted through him, but Paul had to pray.
 - Paul prayed without ceasing. His epistles show that Paul expected nothing except by asking for it in prayer.

**There is an unavoidable, inescapable reality that is found in the Bible:
if we want to see God move in radical ways, we've got to pray!**

- Galatians 6:2, **"Bear one another's burdens and thereby fulfill the law of Christ."**
 - The best way we can bear each other's burdens is through prayer. Prayer changes things!
 - Prayer can save a nation (**Exodus 32:10-14**) and the lack of prayer can destroy it (**Ezekiel 22:30**).
 - Faith-filled prayer moves God to bless and the lack of prayer moves God to curse (**2 Chronicles 30:18-20**).
 - Prayer can cause God to save cities that He had previously prophesied would be destroyed (**Jeremiah 18:6-10; Jonah 3:7-10**).
 - Prayer can add years to a person whom God had previously said would soon die (**Isaiah 38:1-8**).

**It sounds very religious and humble to say,
"Prayer does not move God, prayer changes you."
*This is a false teaching and all together unbiblical!***

The primary purpose of prayer is to change situations, nations, relationships and lives by the power of God in response to prayer.

- **Matthew 7**, "Ask and it will be given to you."
- **Matthew 21:21**, "...if you have faith and do not doubt, you will not only do what was done to the fig tree, but even if you say to this mountain, 'Be cast into the sea, it will happen.'"
- **2 Chronicles 7:14**, "and My people who are called by My name humble themselves and pray and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, will forgive their sin and will heal their land."
- **James 5:15-16**, "and the prayer offered in faith will restore the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up...Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of the righteous man can accomplish much."

**To some degree,
We are responsible to pray for one another
So that we can see lives transformed!**

- In **Mark 9**, a distraught father brought his son to the disciples, asking them to cast the demon out of his son. Although they had seen the Lord do it, and they themselves had done it before (**Mark 6**), they had been given authority over it (**Mark 3**), but now they were unable to do it. Then Jesus comes and He casts out the demon. The disciples ask the Lord why weren't they able to do it and the Lord answered in **verse 29**, **"This kind cannot come out by anything but prayer (and fasting)."**
 - It doesn't mean that they were to start fasting right then, but they should have been cultivating a lifestyle of prayer and fasting. They needed to be walking in the Spirit and seeing the value of prayer; having a great love for God and His people; loving God's truth; and wanting to see people set free from the lies of Satan. But because they weren't prayed up, they couldn't help this child.
 - We should be walking in an attitude of prayer from a place of power, authority and effectiveness.

- It is very apparent from the Bible that the welfare of people depends on what we do and don't do in the spiritual realm.
 - This is why Paul was able to sit in a prison and agonize, pray, and struggle for people he had never seen. He knew that truth!
 - If someone was being assaulted, you would have a choice to respond or not.
 - It is the same in the spiritual realm. ***You have a choice!***

**If we could grasp these biblical truths, we would be become a people that prays!
We would see a community transformed to the glory of God and people set free!
Amen!**

Pastor Britt's closing prayer:

Lord, thank You for this incredible privilege and gift that is called prayer. We confess right now, Lord, that we don't understand it fully. It doesn't totally make sense to us and yet, it's very clear. You've called us to pray, You've invited us, You've gifted us with it. And so, Lord, I pray that You would take our hearts, and the areas in them that are stoney and hard and selfish, that You would break up that hard ground. Thank You that Your word is like a hammer and fire. Lord, let Your word deal with our hearts by Your Holy Spirit tonight. Purge from us selfishness, that we might become selfless. That we would be passionate for someone other than ourselves. Lord, You've got to birth this in our hearts. Do this work in us, Lord. That we would see You do radical, miraculous, powerful, life-transforming things in the world around us and through us. Lord, we desire more of You. So we've got to get rid of a bit of "self". Help us, Lord. Show us where we need to repent, where we need to press in, how to pray and how to receive prayer. We want to see some radical transformation.