

The Agony of Victory – Part IV
Prayer Changes Things
Colossians 2:1- 4
Reality Carpinteria - Pastor Britt Merrick
February 26, 2006

Pastor Britt's Opening Prayer:

Lord, thank You so much for meeting us here in Your house this morning. Lord, You have said throughout the ages that when You ordained a place to meet with Your people, that You would speak to them and that You would be in their midst. Lord, You are here. We are so humbled to be in Your presence. We ask, Father, that You would speak to us powerfully. That You would speak to us in a life-transforming way by Your Holy Spirit; that the teaching and the preaching today would be a demonstration of the power of Your Spirit. That it wouldn't be words of men or the words of a man. But, it would be You, the living God, speaking to us through the Living Word.

Lord, I believe we are living in incredible times. That we are living in the days when we are expecting Your return at any moment. Lord, we want to be about Your business. We want to be a people who are thoroughly and completely in love with You, set on fire for You, radically used by You, to Your glory! Lord, ignite our hearts today. Move us from a place of passive, lackadaisical, lukewarm living. Move us to a fervent, on fire, passionate relationship with You, Jesus.

Holy Spirit we invite You to, by Your word, convict us, convince us of truth, rebuke, chasten, instruct and challenge. Teach and transform us, Lord. Not for us, but for Your glory. To Your name be the glory. Speak to us now, in Jesus' name. Amen.

Review:

The Lord's been moving in our church with regards to prayer. We're going through this series on prayer, called the Agony of Victory, based on the first verse of Colossians chapter 2. We are now on Part IV. The Spirit of God has us camped out on this location.

There is something that He wants to say to the church and He's not letting us go!

He's not done yet. He's not letting us get away from this message. He wants to rattle us and take us into deeper water, because the Lord wants to do some incredible things in this coastline.

- Isaiah 42, "in the coastlands the Lord will go forth like a warrior... He will prevail against His enemies."
- The Lord wants to do much, but He does not work independently of people. The Lord works through people. That is His chosen method.
- The Lord is stirring something deep within us in regards to prayer. He is pulling down the stronghold of selfishness, which is what keeps us from intercessory prayer.
- The Lord is moving powerfully in our midst. Let's not finish in the flesh what God has begun in the Spirit.

- Let's press in. Let's move into this thing that God is doing in regards to prayer. Dive in!

Don't be a spectator!

You may be in the midst of a powerful move of God and miss it!

- This can easily happen to you if you choose not to participate.
 - The men, who were accompanying Paul on the road to Damascus, were not aware of the significance of what was happening when the Lord Jesus knocked Paul down. These men didn't see it! They didn't get it!
 - The men who were by the banks of the river with Daniel, when he had an epiphany, a pre-incarnate appearance of Christ before his very eyes, didn't get it. They weren't transformed.
 - Judas walked with the Lord for three years and missed the whole point.

NOTE: Church, the Lord is moving. The Lord is doing something here. Press in!

I encourage you to read the book, "Fresh Wind, Fresh Fire" by Pastor Jim Cymbala. This book changed the course of my life several years ago. I believe that this church and every other Reality (church) that the Lord is starting, is a result of what the Lord did in my heart and other's hearts through this book. Unlike deep theological books, it is a very simple book about the Brooklyn Tabernacle and what the Lord did there through their prayers.

Colossians 2:1 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."

Review:

Struggling and Agonizing in Prayer on Behalf of Others

Colossians 2:1-4, Paul writes to the churches in the Lychnus Valley in modern day Turkey, "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."

- Even though he has never seen them, Paul is struggling in the spiritual realm, battling on their behalf for their spiritual wellbeing.
- The word struggle in the Greek is *agon*. It means strive, contention, a contest for victory, or mastery such as was used in the Greek games of running, boxing, wrestling, etc.
 - It is the picture of an athlete who is striving, competing, and giving it his all, going for the prize, the goal, first place with all that he has.
 - Paul is doing this for them even though he is in a prison cell in Rome, thousands of miles away and he's never met these people.
 - Unlike an athlete who would labor on behalf of his own selfish ambitions, Paul uses this word to describe how he is laboring on behalf of **others**, persevering in prayer for others, seeking the welfare of others.

Praying for yourself is not a bad thing. There is nothing wrong with this and scripture does not condemn it. However, the Bible has numerous commands for us to pray for others. Most of the examples of prayers that we have in the Scriptures are generally prayers for others. Most often our prayers tend to be for and about ourselves. We tend to be self-absorbed, self-concerned and selfish.

- Paul could have prayed for deliverance from his Roman jail cell, but his focus was not on himself. Instead, he labors for the spiritual wellbeing of others.

There is something freeing about getting over our self.
- Jesus told us in **Matt 16:24** "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me."
 - Denying oneself is a core component of Christianity. But one place where this becomes extremely potent is within the realm of prayer, especially when it moves us beyond selfish, me-centered prayers.
 - Yes, there is nothing wrong in praying for yourself, but you will find that when you pray for others, God will take care of your needs.
 - There is a freedom that comes with praying for others.
 - Christianity is about two things: God and others.
 - We are the stewards of His grace. We can stand in the gap for others.

Last week I asked you, "Are you passionate about anyone other than yourself?"

- Passion is what we see in the lives of Paul, Jesus and Moses. The three towers that cast the furthest shadows in scripture. Each of them was passionate for others.
- Passion requires that somewhere in our heart we have compassion for people.
 - Compassion comes from the Latin word *Com*, which means together, and *Pati*, which means to suffer. In other words, to *suffer together*.
 - Not many are willing to do this, but it is biblical. The Bible says that when one rejoices, all should rejoice. And when one suffers, all should suffer with him.
 - When we have compassion, we become more passionate and persevere in prayer.
 - There will be **severe** times where we need to press in and **persevere**!

If you lack compassion in your life, the answer is: fall more in love with Jesus!

- Get to know Jesus' character, His grace, His compassion, His kindness, His goodness and His faithfulness. As you become face to face with the living God, and you fall more and more in love with Him, the outflow and fruit of your life will be love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Compassion!
- If you lack compassion, don't feel condemned. But, be spurred on! The Word says that we are to spur one another on to good works (**Hebrews 10:24**).

The Compassion of Christ Connects with Our Prayers

Matthew 9:35-38, Jesus was going through all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness. 36 Seeing the people, He felt compassion for them, because they were distressed and dispirited like sheep without a shepherd.

- This is the perfect picture of humanity: downcast, harassed, beat up, abused, wounded, ripped off, and messed up.
- Every time Jesus feels compassion in the gospels, He is moved to action.
 - Jesus has at His fingertips all the resources of heaven. He can instantly heal them or call down a legion of angels to come on their behalf. But in the wisdom of God, Jesus does the most absolutely perfect and correct thing.

37 Then He said to His disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. 38 "Therefore beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest."

- Jesus saw that there was a problem and wanting to meet their needs, He turned to His disciples (and to you and me!)
 - We are His chosen instruments of grace in this world.
 - **1 Peter 4:10**, "As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God."
 - This is a perfect example of how God works through people, not independent of them.
- Jesus commanded His disciples to pray, to "beseech the Lord of the harvest to send laborers into the harvest field."

Jesus believed that prayer changes things!

- Prayer moves the hand of God. Not **against** the will of God, but **according** to the will of God.
- **1 John 5:14-15**, "This is the confidence which we have before Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. 15 And if we know that He hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests which we have asked from Him."
 - Note that in this passage there is an "if" before the word "ask".
 - We know that it is the Lord's will, but will you **ask** according to His will?
 - In the **Book of 1 Kings** in the opening verses, the Lord said it was His will to send rain upon the land. But, in **1 Kings 18**, Elijah has to pray fervently seven times for that rain!
 - And so, we too have to ask, even if we know that it is according to His will.
 - "You have not, because you ask not." (**James 4:2**)
 - "Ask and it will be given to you." (**Luke 11:9**)
 - Why should we ask for something that is fully in accordance with God's will?
 - Why ask that people receive salvation, since it's God's will that they be saved?
 - Why ask that people receive blessings, since God's wants to bless them?
 - These questions sound well and logical, but **they are not** biblical!
 - Scripture always presents the primary purpose of prayer as changing the way things are!
 - Ask and you shall receive.
 - Knock and it shall be opened.
 - Seek and you shall find.
 - You have not because you ask not.

NOTE: The Lord has chosen to partner with you and me. He works through us; not independent of us, although I wish He would! There are certain blessings that fall upon the Christian and the non-Christian alike. But, there are other blessings for which we need to take hold of the trunk of the tree and shake it until they come down!

1 Corinthians 3:9, "For we are God's fellow workers..."

Matthew 9:38, "Therefore beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest."

- It's the Lord's harvest, but people work in it.
- He chooses and sends the workers, but we must pray, beseech, and ask Him to do so.
 - This is an absolute perfect partnership.
 - The word *beseech* can be translated from the Greek as: ask, pray, implore, or beg. In the Oxford English Dictionary it means to ask someone urgently and fervently to do something.

The Lord does not ask us to pray once in a while

**Or, when we feel like it and it doesn't hinder our personal agenda.
Jesus said, "Beseech the Lord."**

- Ask God continually, fervently, and with *importunity*.

We are to be persistent with insistence in our prayers!

- The Lord is the one that had the compassion, but the disciples had the command to pray!
 - Compassion for others did not come easy to the disciples (nor to us). They were naturally selfish people. Up until the last evening with Jesus, they were arguing with each other about who would be the greatest in the kingdom of God.
 - As they became obedient to this command, God saw to it that there was birthed in their hearts compassion.
 - God will not overwrite your will. He asks you to submit your will to His.
 - In obedience to God's word, a heart of compassion for others will manifest itself; a heart like God's heart will take root in your heart.

Pray with Persistence: Character Development

There are two reasons to persist in prayer.

First, there is a battle going on in the spiritual realm. (See last week's message, where we referenced Daniel 10 and Ephesians 6.)

Second, it produces character development. The biblical term for this is sanctification!

- When we pray we are cognizant of the fact that we are speaking to the Lord of the Universe. Thus, when we repeatedly come to the Lord in prayer, we position ourselves in a place where He can begin to transform us.
 - It doesn't matter what our prayer is about. What matters is that you are consistently coming to the Lord for all your needs.
 - The Lord will smooth down our rough edges, which are contrary to His holiness. He fortifies us with what we need to strengthen our character.
 - God will birth in us a compassionate heart.

Paul the Apostle

- Struggled in prayer for people he'd never met (**Colossians 2:1**).
- His daily life was filled with concern for all the churches (**2 Corinthians 11:29**, "Who is led into sin without my intense concern?").
- **Romans 9: 1-3** "I am telling the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience testifies with me in the Holy Spirit, 2 that I have great sorrow and unceasing grief in my heart. 3 For I could wish that I myself were accursed, separated from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh, who are Israelites."
 - Paul prefaces this passage by saying, "what I'm about to tell you is so unbelievable, that I want you to know I'M NOT LYING!"
 - Paul had so much compassion for the Jews, who had not yet recognized Jesus as the Messiah, that he was willing to give up his own salvation and spend eternity in hell, if their eyes would be opened!
 - Can we relate to this, or should we be asking God to forgive us for not loving the lost in this manner and for our selfishness?
 - Paul's reaction is a product of his persistent prayer life.

The Prophet Moses

Exodus 32:31-32 "Then Moses returned to the Lord and said, "Alas, this people has committed a great sin and they have made a god of gold for themselves. But now, if You will, forgive their sin -- and if not, please blot me out from Your book which You have written!"

- Incredible! Moses had the same heart for the people, as did Paul.
- Earlier in the passage, Moses had just returned after having spent a great deal of time in the presence of God on Mt. Sinai. He had been gone so long that the people became concerned. Aaron, Moses' brother, let them fashion a golden calf that they could see and worship. They began to have a sexually perverted celebration around their newly fashioned idol. **Exodus 32:7-10** Then the LORD spoke to Moses, "Go down at once, for your people, whom you brought up from the land of Egypt, have corrupted themselves. 8 "They have quickly turned aside from the way which I commanded them. They have made for themselves a molten calf, and have worshiped it and have sacrificed to it and said, 'This

is your god, O Israel, who brought you up from the land of Egypt!" 9 The LORD said to Moses, "I have seen this people, and behold, they are an obstinate people. 10 "Now then let Me alone, that My anger may burn against them and that I may destroy them; and I will make of you a great nation."

- The Lord was ready to kill every single one of them. The Lord would have been 100% justified in what He wanted to do. According to the Bible, the wages of sin is death. The people had sinned grievously. The Lord was justified in the judgment that He wanted to put upon the nation of Israel.
- Moses began to pray with importunity to the Lord. **Exodus 32:11-12** Then Moses entreated the LORD his God, and said, "O LORD, why does Your anger burn against Your people whom You have brought out from the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand? 12 "Why should the Egyptians speak, saying, 'With evil intent He brought them out to kill them in the mountains and to destroy them from the face of the earth'? Turn from Your burning anger and change Your mind about doing harm to Your people."
 - This is one of the most incredible interchanges in the whole Bible. The Lord referred to Israel as "**your** people whom **you** took out of Egypt" to Moses. And Moses immediately begins to stand in the gap, between the people and the Lord, and clarifies things by saying to the Lord, they are "**Your** people whom You have brought out from the land of Egypt."
 - Moses brings up the issue of God's standing and reputation in Egypt. Egypt would think that the God, who rescued the Jews, had now brought them to the wilderness only to slay them! Moses believed that God's reputation and glory would be questioned.
- **Exodus 32:13** "Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, Your servants to whom You swore by Yourself, and said to them, 'I will multiply your descendants as the stars of the heavens, and all this land of which I have spoken I will give to your descendants, and they shall inherit it forever.'"
 - Moses reminds the Lord of His promises - - - not because the Lord forgot! Moses is interceding and pleading a case for Israel.
 - This is what God wants Moses to do! He wanted Moses to ask, knock, and seek mercy for Israel!

What Happens When No One Stands In the Gap?

Ezekiel 22: 29-31, Ezekiel tells the people of Israel what the Lord has decreed against them, "The people of the land have practiced oppression and committed robbery, and they have wronged the poor and needy and have oppressed the sojourner without justice. 30 I searched for a man among them who would build up the wall and stand in the gap before Me for the land, so that I would not destroy it; but I found no one. 31 Thus I have poured out My indignation on them; I have consumed them with the fire of My wrath; their way I have brought upon their heads,' declares the Lord GOD."

- Once again the people of Israel were in trouble. God was going to bring His wrath upon them. Then the Lord searched for someone to stand in the gap. He found none. So He brought His judgment on Israel.

Moses Stood in the Gap and God Showed His Mercy

- **Exodus 32:14**, "So the LORD changed His mind about the harm which He said He would do to His people."
 - The Lord took a different course of action, all because Moses **asked!**
 - This phrase "changed His mind..." can also be translated as "relented" or "repented". The Lord changed His course of action all because Moses asked Him to!
 - **Psalms 106:23** "Therefore He (**God**) said that He would destroy them, had not Moses His chosen one stood in the breach before Him, to turn away His wrath from destroying them."
 - God spared the Israelites because Moses asked Him!

NOTE: Church, do you see the power of prayer!!

It is only powerful because God has ordained it to be so. It doesn't work against God. It is not a contradiction of the will of God. God has ordained that prayer changes things! God has said that when we come to Him and pray, he will listen to us.

Moses asked the Lord and the Lord showed His mercy.

Exodus 34:6 states, "...The Lord, The Lord God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in loving-kindness and truth."

The verse "So the Lord changed His mind..." is not a contradiction to the verse we find in **Numbers 23:19**, in which we read, "God is not a man that He should lie, nor a son of man that He should repent." Or the

verse in **1 Samuel 15:29**, which reads, “Also the Glory of Israel (God) will not lie or change His mind; for He is not a man that He should change His mind.”

- When it speaks of the Lord changing His mind in **Exodus 32:14**, it is Anthropomorphic Language.
 - Attributing human characteristics or behavior to something else, like an object, animal or, in this case God.
 - An example of this is found in the verse **Isaiah 41:10** “Surely I will uphold you with My righteous right hand.” He doesn’t have a “righteous right hand” for the Bible says that God is spirit and that those who worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth.
 - It is an attempt to describe the infinite wisdom and actions of God in human (finite) terms. It attributes human characteristics to God that we might comprehend His action.
- Since God is without sin, this word repent is a different word than the one used to signify when people repent for their actions.

When a person changes his or her mind, or repents, it is the Hebrew word **shub**. This word is used when they’ve failed in wisdom, or made a wrong decision and sinned.

When God “repented”, the Hebrew word **naham** is used. The inherent meaning of the word suggests relief or comfort from a planned undesirable course of action. God would have taken the right course, if He had wanted to justifiably pass judgment on Israel. He would have also taken the right course if He had wanted to extend them His mercy. Both were right courses. And both would have been according to His will. The Lord did not want to pour judgment upon His people, but because He is Righteous, Just and Holy, He had to take some action - - unless somebody would stand in the gap and ask for mercy. Someone like Moses! Mercy triumphed over justice!

Who Stood in the Gap for Us When Judgment Was Coming Our Way?

Jesus Christ! He is our intercessor.

- We deserved the judgment of God, but Jesus took the wrath and stands as our Intercessor, that we might receive the mercy of God.

Read the following passages to help you understand what we’ve just discussed.

- **Jeremiah 18: 1-12** - the conditional nature of God’s judgment and blessings
- **1 Samuel 12** - the interplay between a prophet’s prayer and the people’s repentance. They need to go hand in hand.
- **2 Chronicles 7:14** – ties it all together for you and will make application.

We’ve seen today that great compassion is what drives intercession: Someone willing to stand in the gap for others.

1. We see it in Jesus, who because of His compassion, told His disciples to pray.
2. We see it in Paul, who labored on behalf of others and wished himself accursed because of his compassion.
3. We see it in Moses, who asked the Lord to blot him out of His Book if it would save his people.

**Prayer is the most incredible privilege available to man.
It is the most powerful resource we can ever imagine.
Every one of us is invited into prayer by the Lord Himself.**

Pastor Britt’s Closing Prayer:

Thank You, Lord, for Your word. We ask that according to Your word, Your Spirit would transform our hearts. That You would draw us individually into Your presence; that You would reveal Yourself. Lord, we want a fresh revelation of who You are; that you would reveal Yourself in Your glory, love, righteousness, mercy, compassion and goodness; that Lord, we would just fall madly in love with You. Lord, teach us to love You more. And, in that, birth in us this heart. Lord, make us a church and a people that pray; that Your house would be a house of prayer for all the nations. Lord, You’ve got to do that by Your Spirit and God, I believe You are doing that. But, we would say, “More, Lord!” I would ask that nobody would miss out on what You want to do, but that we would press in! Show us what we need to do for that, Lord. Spirit of God, move on this coastline. Go forth like a warrior on this coastline, Lord; for Your people, for Your glory, because of Your covenants and promises, Lord.

Church worship and praise the Lord. I invite you to pray! Maybe there’s something on your heart, which you’re passionate about and feel compassion. Grab someone and ask them to pray with you about it. Maybe you’re heartbroken about something. Ask someone for their compassion to pray with you and for you.

Maybe you want to cry out for your generation. Maybe you want to come before the Lord, tell Him you love Him, or ask Him to help your lack of love. Ask God to teach you to love Him more and more, to see Him face to face, to fall in love with Him and that He might birth in you that glorious thing called intercession.

Do business with the King!