

Prayer and Mission

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INTRODUCTION

Prayer and Mission are bound together in the teaching and ministry of our Lord. Mission begins with the Father who sends the Son followed by the Father and the Son sending the Spirit. With the gift of the Spirit at Pentecost the sending pattern comes full circle as the Father, Son and Spirit send the church. The people of God, in this time period between Pentecost and Christ's return, are best defined as a ***people sent on a mission***. Peter informs us that once we were not God's people and we were devoid of God's mercy. But now through Christ we are God's people who have received his mercy in order to show forth the praises of him who called us out of darkness into his marvelous light.

Matthew 10 – the laborers are few

Jesus' great sermon on mission in Matthew 10 shows the Lord observing for his disciples that the harvest is plenteous but that the laborers are few. To address the scarcity of laborers the Lord does not direct his disciples to plan an enlistment campaign to add recruits to the group of disciples. On the contrary he commands his disciples to pray that the Lord of the harvest will thrust forth laborers into the fields to help bring in the harvest. Amidst all of the varied ministries of the church today, this command seems to be almost completely overlooked. Congregations who are serious about their commitment to global missions need to spend time praying the Lord of the harvest to throw out laborers into the fields. It is the Lord of the harvest, in answer to prayer, who selects, gifts, prepares and thrusts forth the laborers to bring together the people of God from every tribe, kindred, tongue and people.

THEOLOGY OF PRAYER

The church today lives in this distinctive time period between the beginning of the last days and their consummation. Christ has completed his redemptive mission and is enthroned in heaven with all authority invested in him as the last Adam. His redemptive victory is of such magnitude and scope that he has reconciled all things affected by Adam's sin to God. It is because of this that we look for new heavens and new earth wherein righteousness dwells. In the consummation the curse will be reversed for the heavens and the earth and for them that dwell in them. The ground will be productive again and all thorns and thistles will be gone. Animals will live in peace with each other and man. Man will no longer be subject to death, disease, tears and sin. It will be a great day of Salvation for All Peoples. All of these wonderful blessings are the fruit of Christ's redemptive victory.

The age of prayer and the age of the Spirit

These considerations are the basis for some observations about prayer in this present age. This is both the age of prayer and the age of the Spirit. Since Christ's redemptive victory is the basis for the reversal of the curse, it is fair to say that answered prayer today is based more on his redemptive victory than it is on his omnipotence. When we pray for someone who is sick we are really asking for the power of the age to come to be present today by healing the sick person for the name, reputation and fame of God. All prayer has both this future orientation and this focus on Christ. Answered prayer is based in the person and work of Christ. To pray in Jesus name does not mean to repeat a phrase at the end of our prayers, but rather it means to pray in harmony with his person and his work. Prayer is the link between the enthroned Christ and his people who continue his ministry in the world. No wonder **pray** appears so often in the New Testament as command. It is unthinkable to be a child in the family of God and not speak to the Father in Jesus name. Prayer has a place in the church today that it did not have in the old covenant with Israel nor will it continue to have in the future.

What is central in prayer?

Jesus' model prayer indicates clearly that our first concern in prayer is God's name, kingdom and will. When in response to prayer God thrust out workers into the harvest it will bring fame and reputation to him, it will advance his kingdom of salvation and it will cause his will to be done in more and more places on the earth. What is at stake in mission is not the name, fame, or reputation of the missionary, the church or the mission agency. What is at stake is nothing less than the centrality of the name of God on the earth. Above all else that must be our first focus in prayer. Having addressed the primary focus of God's program then we ask for bread, forgiveness that we pass on to others and help to resist succumbing to evil. For the candidate/missionary, the church and the mission agency the primary question is; have we adopted God's program as ours and will we give our best effort by the Spirit to cause his name, kingdom and will to be done in all the earth like it is in heaven? Every time a person repents and believes the gospel God's name is made central, his kingdom advances and his will done.

DISCERNMENT

The agent of mission, the Holy Spirit, gifts and identifies those the Lord would send into the harvest. The candidate needs careful discernment of the Spirit's initiatives in the same way the church does in identifying and credentialing those chosen and gifted by Christ for the harvest. Prayer plays a significant part in this

process for all those involved in decision making. It was while the Church at Antioch was at prayer that the Spirit said they should separate Paul and Barnabas for the ministry he appointed for them.

What is needed for good decisions?

Churches and missions would waste less money, make fewer personnel mistakes and avoid much conflict if the Apostles were still living and if special verbal revelation was still open. Yet, it is much too easy to excuse our bad decisions in light of the fact that the apostles are gone from the scene and special verbal revelation is complete. Scripture is our only and sufficient rule for faith and practice and with the presence of the Spirit in the church we have everything needed for such decisions.

James assures us that if we lack wisdom we can ask of God who gives liberally to all who ask without ever reprimanding us for return requests for more wisdom. This discernment/wisdom is peaceable, easily entreated and full of good works. It is found in response to prayer and the counsel of godly persons attune to the Lord's global mission. Wisdom as a gift is a shared experience in the community of the redeemed rather than an isolated endowment to the individual for confirmation of call/gifts and direction toward the harvest.

SUSTAINING PRAYER

Having petitioned the Father for workers to be thrust into the harvest is just the beginning of the relationship of prayer to global missions. Once the gifted person is identified, educated, and set apart for ministry in the harvest, there still remains the need to pray for (1) choosing a field of ministry in conjunction with the church and mission agency; (2) identification of the resources and their commitment to sustain the missionary/worker; (3) relocation of the missionary family with all of the adjustments to another culture; (4) effective ministry of the gospel; (5) continued spiritual growth and integrity in the life of the missionary and (6) faithfulness in doctrine, allocation and use of resources, and stewardship of gifts.

Much of the continued prayer for global workers is nothing but asking that they do the moral (commands) will of God in the context of their present ministry. When we do not know what to pray for Paul tells us that the Spirit helps (not removes) our weakness by his inarticulate groaning in conjunction with the will of God.

SUMMARY

Participation in the ***Global Mission of God*** is the central work of the church in the world. Praying the Lord of the harvest to send out workers forms the basis for the fulfillment of this mission. When we pray, *please cause your name to be central in the earth as it is in heaven*, we are asking the Lord to send from his church workers for the harvest. Their mission as well as that of the church is to

make his name, kingdom and will central under all skies. When in response to such prayer the Lord brings people to repentance and faith and places them into his church, then his name, kingdom and will become central. Our zeal for the name of God, his kingdom and his will along with our gratitude for his undeserved grace is what compels us the in our mission.