

INTERCESSORY PRAYER

A Meditation on Exodus 17:8-16

The outcome of the battle rises and falls on intercessory prayer. I do not believe this is an overstatement or an exaggeration. I believe it is thoroughly biblical. A case in point is found in Exodus 17:8-16.

The Amalekites attacked the Israelites, so Moses sends out Joshua to lead the troops into battle, while he, Aaron and Hur go to the top of a hill to watch the battle and intercede in prayer for Israel. “As long as Moses held up his hands (a symbol of looking to God in prayer), the Israelites were winning, but whenever he lowered his hands, the Amalekites were winning” (vs. 11). When Moses held up his hands the momentum of the battle favored the Israelites, but whenever he grew weary and lowered his hands, the momentum of the battle suddenly shifted in favor of the Amalekites. God was sending Moses, the Israelites and us today, a clear and compelling message: “Look to me and depend on me *constantly*, if you want to win the battle. Should you grow weary of petitioning me in prayer you will perish.” Is this not a sobering message?

“When Moses’ hands grew tired, they took a stone and put it under him and he sat on it. Aaron and Hur held his hands up—one on one side, one on the other—so that his hands remained steady till sun-set. So Joshua overcame the Amalekite army with the sword” (vs. 12-13). Victory came from the sword, which was empowered by prayer. We have an exact parallel of this in the spiritual battle. The apostle Paul said, “Take...the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God: Praying always with all prayer” (Eph. 6:17-18, KJV). Verse 18 does not begin a new sentence, it continues the thought of verse 17, and tells us how to wield the sword with power for victory; namely by praying.

It’s been said that when we work, *we* work; but when we pray, *God* works. When we raise our hands to God in prayer, He works on our behalf, so that supernatural activity begins to take place in our lives and ministries. Skeptics will argue that answered prayers are only coincidences, but as an English archbishop observed, “It’s amazing how many coincidences occur when one begins to pray.”

Billy Graham once said, “There are three things needed for a successful crusade: prayer, prayer and prayer.” This conviction grew out of a realization that the success of his ministry was directly related to prayer. One account from his autobiography shows the seriousness of this conviction. He wrote:

Many decades ago, just as our work was beginning to expand, one of the wealthiest men in America wanted to meet me...

“Well, Billy,” the gentleman said, “you should be able to put all your time into the type of work you’re doing—revival work and getting the Word out like you’re doing. You ought not to be spending time trying to raise money.”

Then he added, “I’ll tell you what I’ll do. I’m willing to underwrite your work so you won’t have to worry about finances. Would you like me to do that?”

“I can’t accept that,” I replied immediately. “My work is spiritual work. We are getting about fifteen to twenty thousand letters a week. Most of those letters will have a little money in them, maybe \$1, maybe \$5. But every one of those letters is saying, ‘We’re praying for you.’ If they know there’s a rich man underwriting my work, they’ll stop praying, and my work will take a nosedive. So I can’t accept it” (Billy Graham, *Just As I Am*, p. 661).

Billy Graham would sacrifice generous financial support before he would sacrifice prayer support. He understood clearly that “my work is spiritual work.” This means that prayer partners are vital to the work of ministry. Many examples could be given from church history of how prayer paved the way for a mighty work of God. C. H. Spurgeon saw this connection, which is why he said, “Whenever God determines to do a great work, He first sets His people to pray.”

A dangerous trend has been taking place in churches the last couple of decades or so—the trend to *do* more and *pray* less. Where are the prayer meetings that most Christians attended on a regular basis 30 years ago? One evangelical pastor, speaking about his own denomination, said, “In Acts 2, they prayed for ten days. Peter preached for ten minutes and 3,000 were saved. Today, churches pray for ten minutes, preach for ten days and three get saved.”

My prayer for our church is that God will “set his people to pray.” I’m asking for “prayer partners” from our church to commit to praying daily for the pastor, elders, deacons, and church body. I believe there will be a direct correlation between the response to this ministry and the effectiveness of our church, more than any other ministry. This is the ministry by which the battle rises and falls. With our collective arms reaching towards the heavens in prayer we will see the momentum of the battle shift in our favor.

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