

Prayer and Missions

By E. M. Bounds

The prophet Isaiah, looking down the centuries with the vision of a seer, thus expresses his purpose to continue in prayer and give God no rest till Christ's kingdom be established among men: **“For Zion's sake will I not hold my peace, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest till the righteousness thereof goeth forth as brightness, and the salvation thereof as a lamp that burneth.”**

Then, foretelling the final success of the Christian church, he thus speaks: **“And the Gentiles shall see thy righteousness, and all kings thy glory, and thou shalt be called by a new name, which the mouth of the Lord shall name.”**

Then the Lord, himself, by the mouth of this evangelical prophet, declares as follows: **“I have set watchmen upon thy walls, O Jerusalem, which shall never hold their peace, day nor night. Ye that make mention of the Lord, keep not silence. And give him no rest till he establish and till he make Jerusalem a praise in the earth.”**

In the margin of our Bible, it reads, **“Ye that are the Lord's remembrances.”** The idea is, that these praying ones are those who are the Lord's remembrances, those who remind him of what he has promised, and who give him no rest till God's church is established in the earth.

And one of the leading petitions in the Lord's Prayer deals with this same question of the establishing of God's kingdom and the progress of the gospel in the short, pointed petition, **“Thy kingdom come,”** with the added words, **“Thy will be done on earth as it is done in heaven.”**

The missionary movement in the apostolic church was born in an atmosphere of fasting and prayer. The very movement looking to offering the blessings of the Christian church to the Gentiles was on the housetop on the occasion when Peter went up there to pray, and God showed him his divine purpose to extend the privileges of the gospel to the Gentiles, and to break down the middle wall of partition between Jew and Gentile.

But more specifically Paul and Barnabas were definitely called and set apart to the missionary field at Antioch when the church there had fasted and prayed. It was then the Holy Spirit answered from heaven: **“Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them.”**

Please note this was not the call to the ministry of Paul and Barnabas, but more particularly their definite call to the foreign field. Paul had been called to the ministry years before this, even at his conversion. This was a subsequent call to a work born of special and continued prayer in the church at Antioch. God calls men not only to the ministry but to be missionaries. Missionary work is God's work. And it is the God-called men who are to do it. These are the kind of missionaries which have wrought well and

successfully in the foreign field in the past, and the same kind will do the work in the future, or it will not be done.

It is praying missionaries who are needed for the work, and it is a praying church who sends them out, which are prophecies of the success which is promised. The sort of religion to be exported by missionaries is of the praying sort. The religion to which the heathen world is to be converted is a religion of prayer, and a religion of prayer to the true God. The heathen world already prays to its idols and false gods. But they are to be taught by praying missionaries, sent out by a praying church, to cast away their idols and to begin to call upon the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. No prayerless church can transport to heathen lands a praying religion. No prayerless missionary can bring heathen idolaters who know not our God to their knees in true prayer until he becomes preeminently a man of prayer. As it takes praying men at home to do God's work, none the less does it take praying missionaries to bring those who sit in darkness to the light.

The most noted and most successful missionaries have been preeminently men of prayer. David Livingstone, William Taylor, Adoniram Judson, Henry Martyn, and Hudson Taylor, with many more, form a band of illustrious praying men whose impress and influence still abide where they labored. No prayerless man is wanted for this job. Above everything else, the primary qualification for every missionary is prayer. Let him be, above everything else, a man of prayer. And when the crowning day comes, and the records are made up and read at the great judgment day, then it will appear how well praying men wrought in the hard fields of heathendom, and how much was due to them in laying the foundations of Christianity in those fields.

The one only condition which is to give worldwide power to this gospel is prayer, and the spread of this gospel will depend on prayer. The energy which was to give it marvelous momentum and conquering power over all its malignant and powerful foes is the energy of prayer.

The fortunes of the kingdom of Jesus Christ are not made by the feebleness of its foes. They are strong and bitter and have ever been strong, and ever will be. But mighty prayer-this is the one great spiritual force which will enable the Lord Jesus Christ to enter into full possession of his kingdom, and secure for him the heathen as his inheritance, and the uttermost part of the earth for his possession.

It is prayer which will enable him to break his foes with a rod of iron, that will make these foes tremble in their pride and power, who are but frail potter's vessels, to be broken in pieces by one stroke of his hand. A person who can pray is the mightiest instrument Christ has in this world. A praying church is stronger than all the gates of hell.

God's decree for the glory of his Son's kingdom is dependent on prayer for its fulfillment: **"Ask of me, and I will give thee the heathen for thy inheritance, and the uttermost part of the earth for thy possession."** God the Father gives nothing to his Son except through prayer. And the reason why the church has not received more in the

missionary work in which it is engaged is the lack of prayer. **“Ye have not, because ye ask not.”**

Every dispensation foreshadowing the coming of Christ when the world has been evangelized, at the end of time, rests upon these constitutional provisions, God's decree, his promises and prayer. However far away that day of victory by distance or time, or remoteness of shadowy type, prayer is the essential condition on which the dispensation becomes strong, typical and representative. From Abraham, the first of the nation of the Israelites, the friend of God, down to this dispensation of the Holy Spirit, this has been true.

The nations call! from sea to sea
Extends the thrilling cry,
Come over, Christians, if there be,
And help us, ere we die.
Our hearts, O Lord, the summons feel;
Let hand with heart combine,
And answer to the world's appeal,
By giving that is thine.

Our Lord's plan for securing workers in the foreign missionary field is the same plan he set on foot for obtaining preachers. It is by the process of praying. It is the prayer plan as distinguished from all manmade plans. These mission workers are to be **“sent men.”** God must send them. They are God called, divinely moved to this great work. They are inwardly moved to enter the harvest fields of the world and gather sheaves for the heavenly garner. Men do not choose to be missionaries any more than they choose to be preachers. God sends out laborers in his harvest fields in answer to the prayers of his church.

Here is the divine plan as set forth by our Lord: **“But when he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were as sheep having no shepherd. Then saith he unto his disciples, The harvest truly is plenteous, but the laborers are few. Pray ye, therefore, the Lord of the harvest that he will send forth laborers into his harvest.”**

It is the business of the home church to do the praying, It is the Lord's business to call and send forth the laborers. The Lord does not do the praying The church does not do the calling. And just as our Lord's compassions were aroused by the sight of multitudes, weary, hungry, and scattered, exposed to evils, as sheep having no shepherd, so whenever the church has eyes to see the vast multitudes of earth's inhabitants, descendants of Adam, weary in soul, living in darkness, and wretched and sinful, will it be moved to compassion, and begin to pray the Lord of the harvest to send forth laborers into his harvest.

Missionaries, like ministers, are born of praying people. A praying church begets laborers in the harvest field of the world. The scarcity of missionaries argues a non-

praying church. It is all right to send trained men to the foreign field, but first of all they must be God-sent. The sending is the fruit of prayer. As praying men are the occasion of sending them, so in turn the workers must be praying men. And the prime mission of these praying missionaries is to convert prayerless heathen men into praying men. Prayer is the proof of their calling, their divine credentials, and their work.

He who is not a praying man at home needs the one fitness to become a mission worker abroad. He who has not the spirit which moves him toward sinners at home, will hardly have a spirit of compassion for sinners abroad. Missionaries are not made of men who are failures at home. He who will be a man of prayer abroad must, before anything else, be a man of prayer in his home church. If he be not engaged in turning sinners away from their prayerless ways at home, he will hardly succeed in turning away the heathen from their prayerless ways. In other words, it takes the same spiritual qualifications for being a home worker as it does for being a foreign worker.

God in his own way, in answer to the prayers of his church, calls men into his harvest fields. Sad will be the day when Missionary Boards and churches overlook that fundamental fact, and send out their own chosen men independent of God.

Is the harvest great? Are the laborers few? Then **“pray ye the Lord of the harvest to send forth laborers into his harvest.”** Oh, that a great wave of prayer would sweep over the church asking God to send out a great army of laborers into the needy harvest fields of the earth! No danger of the Lord of the harvest sending out too many laborers and crowding the fields. He who calls will most certainly provide the means for supporting those whom he calls and sends forth.

The one great need in the modern missionary movement is intercessors. They were scarce in the days of Isaiah. This was his complaint: **“And he saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no intercessor.”**

So today there is great need of intercessors, first, for the needy harvest fields of earth, born of a Christ-like compassion for the thousands without the gospel; and then intercessors for laborers to be sent forth by God into the needy fields of earth.