

THE PRAYER LIFE

Ezekiel 22:23-31 (NASB)

²³ “And the word of the LORD came to me, saying,

²⁴ Son of man, say to her, ‘You are a land that is not cleansed or rained on in the day of indignation.’

²⁵ There is a conspiracy of her prophets in her midst like a roaring lion tearing the prey. They have devoured lives; they have taken treasure and precious things; they have made many widows in the midst of her.

²⁶ Her priests have done violence to My law and have profaned My holy things; they have made no distinction between the holy and the profane, and they have not taught the difference between the unclean and the clean; and they hide their eyes from My sabbaths, and I am profaned among them.

²⁷ Her princes within her are like wolves tearing the prey, by shedding blood *and* destroying lives in order to get dishonest gain.

²⁸ Her prophets have smeared whitewash for them, seeing false visions and divining lies for them, saying, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD,’ when the LORD has not spoken.

²⁹ 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.”

The Fight Against Prayerlessness

As soon as the Christian becomes convinced of his sin in this matter, his first thought is that he must begin to strive, with God’s help, to gain the victory over it. But alas, he soon experiences that his striving is worth little, and the discouraging thought comes over him, like a wave that such a life is not for him—he cannot continue faithful! At conferences on the subject of prayer, held during the past years, many a minister has openly said that it seemed impossible for him to attain such a strict life.

Recently I received a letter from a pastor, well known for his ability and devotion, in which he writes, “As far as I am concerned, it does not seem to help me to hear too much about the life of prayer, about the strenuous exertion for which we must prepare ourselves, and about all the time and trouble and endless effort it will cost us. These things discourage me—I have so often heard them. I have time after time put them to the

test, and the result has always been sadly disappointing. It does not help me to be told: “You must pray more, and hold a closer watch over yourself, and become altogether a more earnest Christian.”

My reply to him was as follows: “I think in all I spoke at the conference or elsewhere, I have never mentioned exertion or struggle, because I am so entirely convinced that our efforts are futile unless we first learn how to abide in Christ by a simple faith.”

My correspondent said further: “The message I need is this: see that your relationship to your living Savior is what it ought to be. Live in his presence, rejoice in his love, rest in him.—A better message could not be given, if it is only rightly understood. See that your relationship to the living Savior is what it ought to be.” But this is just what will certainly make it possible for one to live the life of prayer.

We must not comfort ourselves with the thought of standing in a right relationship to the Lord Jesus while the sin of prayerlessness has power over us, and while we, along with the whole Church, have to complain about our feeble life which makes us unfit to pray for ourselves, for the Church, or for missions, as we ought. But if we recognize, in the first place, that a right relationship to the Lord Jesus, above all else, includes prayer, with both the desire and power to pray according to God’s will, then we have something which gives us the right to rejoice in Him and to rest in Him.

I have related this incident to point out how naturally discouragement will be the result of self-effort and will so shut out all hope of improvement or victory. And this indeed is the condition of many Christians when called on to persevere in prayer as intercessors. They feel it is certainly something entirely beyond their reach—they have not the power for the self-sacrifice and consecration necessary for such prayer; they shrink from the effort and struggle which will, as they suppose, make them unhappy. They have tried in the power of the flesh to conquer the flesh—a wholly impossible thing. They have endeavored by Beelzebub to cast out Beelzebub and this can never happen. It is Jesus alone who can subdue the flesh and the devil.

We have spoken of a struggle which will certainly result in disappointment and discouragement. This is the effort made in our own strength. But there is another struggle which will certainly lead to victory. The Scripture speaks of **“the good fight of faith”**, that is to say, a fight which springs from and is carried on by faith. We must get right conceptions about faith and stand fast in our faith.

Jesus Christ is ever the author and finisher of faith. It is when we come into right relationship with him that we can be sure of the help and power he bestows. Just, then, as earnestly as we must, in the first place, say: **“Do not strive in your own strength; cast yourself at the feet of the Lord Jesus, and wait upon Him in the sure confidence that He is with you, and works in you”**; so do we, in the second place, say: **“strive in prayer; let faith fill your heart—so will you be strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might.”**

An illustration will help us to understand this. A devoted Christian woman who conducted a large Bible class with zeal and success once came in trouble to her minister. In her earlier years she had enjoyed much blessing in the inner chamber, in fellowship with the Lord and His word. But these had gradually been lost and, do what she would, she could not get right. The Lord had blessed her work, but the joy had gone out of her life. The minister asked what she had done to regain the lost blessedness. "I have done everything," said she, "that I can think of, but all in vain."

He then questioned her about her experience in connection with her conversion. She gave an immediate and clear answer: "At first I spared no pains in my attempt to become better, and to free myself from sin, but it was all useless. At last I began to understand that I must lay aside all my efforts, and simply trust the Lord Jesus to bestow on me His life and peace, and He did it."

"Why then," said the minister, "do you not try this again? As you go to your inner chamber, however cold and dark your heart may be, do not try in your own might to force yourself into the right attitude. Bow before Him, and tell Him that He sees in what a sad state you are in and that your only hope is in Him. Trust Him with a childlike trust to have mercy upon you, and wait upon Him. In such a trust you are in a right relationship to Him. You have nothing He has everything." Sometime later she told the minister that his advice had helped her; she had learned that faith in the love of the Lord Jesus is the only method of getting into fellowship with God in prayer.

Do you not begin to see, my brothers and sisters, that there are two kinds of warfare—the first when we seek to conquer prayerlessness in our own strength. In that case, my advice to you is: "Give over your restlessness and effort; fall helpless at the feet of the Lord Jesus; He will speak the word, and your soul will live." If you have done this, then, secondly comes the message: "This is but the beginning of everything. It will require deep earnestness, and the exercise of all your power, and a watchfulness of the entire heart—eager to detect the least backsliding. Above all, it will require surrender to a life of self-sacrifice that God really desires to see in us and which He will work out for us."