

The Culture of Prayer in the Early Church

I. INTRODUCTION

- A. Currently we are witnessing the emergence of the greatest expression of prayer in all of Church history. And it will not plateau or wane before the return of the Lord. Before Jesus splits the sky the Church in the nations will be a praying Church (Rev. 5:8; 8:1-5; 22:17). The prayers of the saints will rise from every tribe and tongue, from the rising of the sun to its going down (Malachi 1:11).
- B. With that said, it's important that we understand that this is not a new idea or foreign to the pages of Church history. Far from being an exclusively modern phenomenon the call to corporate prayer was intended by the Lord to be foundational to the ethos of the people of the covenant from the Garden of Eden.
- C. In this session I want to give an overview of the role of prayer in the book of Acts to demonstrate the fact that the Lord has always desired the Church to be a praying Church.
- D. Observing the historical precedent of corporate prayer in the life of the early Church gives us boldness to give ourselves to this critical ministry now at the end of the Age as we approach the Lord's return.

II. THE CULTURE OF PRAYER IN THE EARLY CHURCH: ACTS 1-13

- A. Jesus' parting words to the disciples: "Go" and "Stay" (Luke 24; Acts 1)

"...repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. 48 You are witnesses of these things. 49 And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high." (Luke 24:47-49)

4 And while staying with them he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, "you heard from me; 5 for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now." (Acts 1:4-5)

- B. Prayer and Pentecost: Prayer for power, power for prayer (Acts 2)

1 When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. 2 And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. 3 And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. 4 And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance. (Acts 2:1-4)

- C. The Culture of the Early Church: Teaching, fellowship, prayer, & power (Acts 2)

42 And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and times of prayer [literal translation]. 43 And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. 44 And all who believed were together and had all things in common. 45 And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. 46 And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, 47 praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved. (Acts 2:42-47)

- D. The priority and overflow of corporate prayer (Acts 3)

1 Now Peter and John were going up to the temple at the hour of prayer, the ninth hour. 2 And a man lame from birth was being carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple that is called the Beautiful Gate to ask alms of those entering the temple. 3 Seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple, he asked to receive alms. 4 And Peter directed his gaze at him, as did John, and said, "Look at us." 5 And he fixed his attention on them, expecting to receive something from them. 6 But Peter said, "I have no silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk!" (Acts 3:1-6)

- E. Persecution, prayer, and power (Act 4)

23 When they were released, they went to their friends and reported what the chief priests and the elders had said to them. 24 And when they heard it, they lifted their voices together to God and said, "Sovereign Lord, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them, 25 who through the mouth of our father David, your servant, said by the Holy Spirit, "Why did the

Gentiles rage, and the peoples plot in vain? 26 The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers were gathered together, against the Lord and against his Anointed’—27 for truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, 28 to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place. 29 And now, Lord, look upon their threats and grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness, 30 while you stretch out your hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of your holy servant Jesus.” 31 And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness. (Acts 4:23-31)

- F. Power as the overflow of corporate prayer (Acts 5)

12 Now many signs and wonders were regularly done among the people by the hands of the apostles. And they were all together in Solomon's Portico. 13 None of the rest dared join them, but the people held them in high esteem. 14 And more than ever believers were added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women, 15 so that they even carried out the sick into the streets and laid them on cots and mats, that as Peter came by at least his shadow might fall on some of them. 16 The people also gathered from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing the sick and those afflicted with unclean spirits, and they were all healed. (Acts 5:12-16)

- G. The primacy of prayer in the life and ministry of the apostles (Acts 6)

1 Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint by the Hellenists arose against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution. 2 And the twelve summoned the full number of the disciples and said, “It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables. 3 Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty. 4 But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.... 7 And the word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith. ” (Acts 6:1-7)

- H. Prayer, uprising, dispersion, outpouring, multiplication (Acts 8)

1 And Saul approved of [Stephen's] execution. And there arose on that day a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. 2 Devout men buried Stephen and made great lamentation over him. 3 But Saul was ravaging the church, and entering house after house, he dragged off men and women and committed them to prison. 4 Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word. 5 Philip went down to the city of Samaria and proclaimed to them the Christ. 6 And the crowds with one accord paid attention to what was being said by Philip when they heard him and saw the signs that he did. 7 For unclean spirits came out of many who were possessed, crying with a loud voice, and many who were paralyzed or lame were healed. 8 So there was much joy in that city. (Acts 8:1-8)

I. Prayer as revelation, direction, and communication to leaders (Acts 10)

1 At Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion of what was known as the Italian Cohort, 2 a devout man who feared God with all his household, gave alms generously to the people, and prayed continually to God. 3 About the ninth hour of the day he saw clearly in a vision an angel of God come in and say to him, "Cornelius." 4 And he stared at him in terror and said, "What is it, Lord?" And he said to him, "Your prayers and your alms have ascended as a memorial before God. 5 And now send men to Joppa and bring one Simon who is called Peter. 6 He is lodging with one Simon, a tanner, whose house is by the seaside." 7 When the angel who spoke to him had departed, he called two of his servants and a devout soldier from among those who attended him, 8 and having related everything to them, he sent them to Joppa. 9 The next day, as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the housetop about the sixth hour to pray. 10 And he became hungry and wanted something to eat, but while they were preparing it, he fell into a trance... (Acts 10:1-10)

J. The shift from Jerusalem to Antioch (Acts 13)

1 Now there were in the church at Antioch prophets and teachers, Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen a member of the court of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. 2 While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." 3 Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off. 4 So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went... (Acts 13:1-4)