

Sermon
Lanier Christian Church
August 1, 2010

"I Pray for You Every Day"
(There is Power in Prayer!)
Ephesians 1:18-23

To this day I am moved when someone looks me in the eyes and says: "I'm praying for you." In the last two or three years there have been two people who have come up to me and said, "David, I pray for you every day."

What a wonderful gift! What a treasure trove of help and strength and wisdom and guidance that is provided when you know someone is praying for you! As Maxine Strickland, founding member here at LCC, said so many times through the years..."We have only scratched the surface of understanding prayer."

The apostle Paul understood the power of prayer. He knew that faithful, daily prayer was an absolute necessity if we are ever to experience the power that God provides through prayer. Let's explore that this morning by looking at this wonderful passage:

18 I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, 19 and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength, 20 which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, 21 far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. 22 And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, 23 which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.

Just before World War II in the town of Itasca, Texas, a school fire took the lives of 263 children. There was scarcely a family in town

that was not touched by this horrifying tragedy. After the war, the town built a new school, which featured what was called "the finest sprinkler system in the world." The town was very proud of their new school. Honor students were selected to guide citizens and visitors on tours of the new facility to show them the finest, most advanced sprinkler system technology. Never again would a fire disaster happen.

Many years later, the town made progress and grew. It was necessary to enlarge the school - and in adding the new wing, it was discovered that the sprinkler system had never been connected.

Story told by Dr Howard Hendricks

This is a parable of what has happened in so many Christian lives. There is untold power available for every believer in Christ, but so many never hook up. Are your lives powerless and weak? Are you connected? Are you a person of prayer? Do you pray every day?

1. THERE'S POWER AVAILABLE, PRAY TO BE ENLIGHTENED TO GOD'S PROMISES

God has revealed all the truth we need. What is needed is to have our spiritual eyes opened to it.

Watchman Nee: "Knowledge is absolutely different from light. Those who have light surely have the knowledge, but those who have knowledge do not necessarily have light."

The Pharisees and scribes knew the Scriptures but they did not recognize Jesus standing before them.

They had knowledge, but were still in darkness. We need the light.

Paul prays - that the eyes of our hearts be enlightened - so that we may know...

(v.1) the great HOPE we have...

(v.2) the RICHES of His glorious inheritance we have...

(v.2) verse 19 - the incomparably great POWER for us who believe.

There is enthusiasm in Paul's words - look at all the power synonyms he uses - incomparable, mighty, strength, exerted, raise... far above all rule, authority, power, dominion, every title, now and forever...

Apparently, our eyes can be blinded to this fact.

- We can be living in hope but feeling quite hopeless
- We can be living in the riches of God's provision, and feeling very poor
- We can be living in His power, yet feeling helpless most of the time.

It is not the lack of knowledge, but the lack of light. We just don't see it.

To the church in Laodicea - Rev 3:17-18 we read the words of Jesus: But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked. 18 I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see.

Paul has to PRAY... that the eyes of our heart be enlightened.

Ask these questions of yourself: Are you living in hope, always hopeful in Christ? Do you feel blessed, because we are rich in Christ? Do you live with confidence because of the great power God has for us?

Are we very sure of these? Or are we struggling through life most of the time?

Paul prayed for the believers – that "the eyes of your hearts" be enlightened able to see the promises of God. We must pray this same prayer... that God will help us see the light. In fact, the very act of praying draws us to the light. You come to know Him and His Word and trust in His promises.

2. THERE'S POWER AVAILABLE- PRAY TO EXPERIENCE VICTORY THROUGH CHRIST.

Look at this POWER that Paul took extra effort to explain to us: v.20 "which God exerted in Christ when He raised him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly realms." - the power that raised Jesus and brought him to a position of authority in glory.

If the cross is the highest display of God's love, the resurrection is the highest display of God's power.

This power is permanent and eternal - different from the power that raised Lazarus. It was a different power than that of Elijah when he raised the dead boy in I Kings 17. They died again. It was temporary. But when God raised Jesus - it was permanent!

This power is beyond anything on this earth.

Jesus is enthroned in heaven. And the control and power He has is unsurpassed - v.21 "far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come."

He's talking about a power greater than anything Angelic, Demonic, or Human powers...

Referring to His power over spiritual forces (esp. in Ephesus - worship of spirits, the same theme mentioned in Eph 6 about putting on the armour of God...) - Jesus is not just strong but FAR ABOVE them. He is the King of kings and Lord of lords. He reigns!

22And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything...

We are not struggling to win. We've already WON. We have victory through Christ.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a German pastor who stood up to the Nazis and died in a concentration camp just before the liberation of Germany, said: "The only fight which is lost is that which we give up."

A prison inmate scratched on the wall of his cell his philosophy of life: "Born to lose." Christians believe that they were born to win.

Do you express that confidence? We serve a reigning King - nobody is above Him, and nothing is out of His control! And He is here for you!

In the Austrian town of Waidhofen, there is an impressive clock tower with a clock that doesn't run. The tower was built in 1542 to commemorate the successful repulsion of a Turkish invasion, and the clock has been stopped at 11.45am, the exact time of the victory. For us, the cross is that sign. Whenever we look up, we see a sign of victory! It's ours. We're enjoying everything today because of that! The power is for us as believers – How do we experience it? PRAY! GET CONNECTED and then victory will flow!

We are to fight this spiritual warfare with the power He has given us. Look at Paul's concluding remarks in Eph 6:10-13

10 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. 11 Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. 12 For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

Eph 6:18 And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.

As Christians we're challenged to put on the armor and fight - fight against evil, against the devil in all his deceptive ways in causing doubt, unbelief, apathy... The battle has already been won; we're just claiming it.

Charles R. Swindoll: "Surrendering to despair is man's favorite pastime. God offers a better plan, but it takes effort to grab it and faith to claim it."

There's power available – pray every day for yourself and for others – to experience victory in Christ and to overcome the evil one.

3. There is Power Available - Pray to see through eyes of faith.

Refuse to doubt! This same power is for us WHO BELIEVE (v.19). It is not for anybody else, but those who BELIEVE.

The lost person will never experience the victorious life available to Christians. There is always a void in his/her life, which can only be filled by Jesus. Without Him, life is never at its best.

We all could use more faith...that's what I talked about last week...we need to trust God and follow Him, not ask Him to follow us!

We need to look at life more through eyes of faith. How often do you say to yourself and others: "I trust in Christ...or I believe in God...or I have faith in my Savior? Are you near sighted? Far sighted? Perfect vision? What about faith vision? Is your belief in the power of Almighty God to work in and through your life so strong that your faith vision test would say you are 20/20?

All the power we need can be found in CHRIST – don't try to live in your own strength.

Many today live a discouraged, dry, defeated life – they are making futile attempts to make things work. This is a roller-coaster ride. Only in Christ can we experience a permanent, victorious and a fulfilled life. We have to put our trust completely in Christ.

Our faith in God releases His divine power in our lives.

After the death of their brother Lazarus, Mary and Martha were in despair. All they saw was despair, death and a decaying body. Jesus entered the scene and said (John 11:25-26):

"I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; 26 and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?"

In just a few sentences Jesus challenges them to believe. No matter what the circumstances are, no matter how bleak they may seem, Jesus challenges us to trust Him. The key is...Do you believe Him?

Don't focus on human efforts - Nothing man can do will change God's ways. (See Matt 27:62-66). Do you remember after the crucifixion of Jesus, the Pharisees wanted to secure the tomb? Pilate told them to "make the tomb as secure as you know how."

65 "Take a guard," Pilate answered. "Go, make the tomb as secure as you know how." 66 So they went and made the tomb secure by putting a seal on the stone and posting the guard.

In spite of all their human efforts, the Jewish leaders were unable to prevent Jesus from accomplishing what had already been determined and promised: "After three days I will rise again" (Matt 27:63).

Nothing can hinder God and His ways. The power that was at work then, is the same power at work in your life and mine today. Can you imagine that?

And the Bible talks about "his incomparably great power for us who believe." If you deliberately choose to put your trust in a powerful God, you'll experience the "working of His mighty strength" in life. But, you have to be a person of faith.

We need to see with eyes of faith.

Whatever is revealed through the God's Word to us, we believe it. "We don't interpret the Word through the lens of experience, but our experience through the lens of the Word."

Under attack and surrounded by the army of Aram, Elisha saw with eyes of faith - He was able to see the whole host of horses and chariots of fire all around his house, protecting him. His servants saw nothing of this - except the enemies.

Elisha first said to his servant: ¹⁶ "Don't be afraid," the prophet answered. "Those who are with us are more than those who are with them." And Elisha prayed, "O LORD, open his eyes so he may see." Then the LORD opened the servant's eyes, and he looked and saw the hills full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha. (2 Kings 6:16,17)

Christians, we live by faith, not by sight. We need to pray that the Lord would open our eyes. There is power in prayer. There is power in faith. We need to pray every day that the enemy not overwhelm us. We need to know that God is greater than anything

we are dealing with and will overcome is we keep praying and believing!

Usually - We talked about how God can help us and then usually add, "But...."

Why don't we turn it around? Look at the circumstances and then say, "But our God is great and good... He can help us!"

For the Christian, to trust is to triumph. Choose to believe what God has already revealed to us. We can believe that God has everything under control, that He knows what He is doing - and that it is, for our good. Even when I don't fully understand everything whether its pain, a tremendous challenge, a serious problem, every type of suffering and loss... I choose to believe God is good (like Job) and is doing His great work, and all will make sense one day. I have to align my life with His Word, not the other way around.

There is power available through prayer. That's why daily prayer is such a necessity. When we don't pray it's like not turning on the lights when it's dark. You have to make an effort. You have to communicate with God. You have to speak with Him to engage this power he wants to instill in your life.

CONCLUSION

Growing up I had a dear neighbor – Miss Laurie. As a child, I would walk over to her house sit on her front porch and she would listen to my stories and I would listen to hers. She was a faithful Christian lady and played the piano for First Baptist Church in Milledgeville. She became a part of our family and was at family events and holiday celebrations. In her latter years she became unable to care for herself and was placed in a nursing home. On one of my last visits with her, she told me that she read our monthly newsletter over and over. I thought she was just being nice until she reached over to her bedside table, opened the drawer, and there was a stack of several years of our church newsletters bound by a rubber band. Then she held my hand, looked me in the eyes and said lovingly: "I pray for you every day."

Many times I have felt God's hand on my life, even when I was struggling to walk through a valley of difficulty. The feeling I had was so strong that I said to myself: Someone is praying for me. I received a power to keep going because of prayer. People like Miss Laurie impacted my life spiritually...forever. All because she took the time to pray. What about you? Are you praying? Are you praying depending on God's promises, expecting victory, and seeing life through eyes of faith? Why not begin a stronger prayer life today?

Adapted from Christian Cheong with outline and additions by D. Simpson