



Listening and Prayer

Preaching is warfare. Our Lord Jesus Christ, the victorious and resurrected Saviour, batters Satan's strongholds, extending His gracious rule through the preaching of His triumph on the cross. Satan does not capitulate and lay down his arms. He fights a fierce battle against the onslaught of the conquering Christ.

Since this is spiritual warfare, Christians must be busy praying, confessing the battle is not ours, but the Lord's – looking to Him for the climactic conquest when God will throw His archenemy into the lake of burning sulphur.

Last time we reflected on how we should intercede for Christ's ambassadors. We looked at the things we pray for ministers so that preaching becomes lethal against the gates of hell. This time I want to ask, what should we request for the listeners?

Prayer for the preacher is only one half of the equation. A preacher can be diligent, preaching boldly and clearly, with love to Christ and his hearers, with fidelity to the truth, yet the gates of hell seem to stand firm. There must be prayer for the listeners as well.

The poet of Psalm 119 was sure of this. Repeatedly, he says to God, *'Teach me, instruct me, give me understanding. To profit from the Word of God, read and preached, God must open my eyes to see wonderful things from his law* (Psalm 119:18).

What shall we pray?

Firstly, we seek the presence and power of the Holy Spirit so that God's Word would be understood. Unlike *The Complete Book of Tartan*, the Bible is a Spiritual book. As the Spirit of Christ carried men along to write the Scripture, so the Holy Spirit must carry the Word and lodge it in the heart of God's people. A book written by the Spirit, must also be interpreted by the Spirit. Paul writes in (1 Corinthians 2:14) *"The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned."*

Do you remember Jesus' conversation with His disciples after God raised Him from the dead? They failed to understand the significance of Jesus' life and death even though it was written about in all the Scriptures. But then Christ opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures (Luke 24:45). Unbelievers do not understand the Word because Satan has blinded their minds (2 Cor 4:4); believers need to be filled with the Spirit to understand the Word of God. How will the Spirit come unless God's people pray for his presence and power?

Secondly, we should pray that God's Word would be our delight. We desperately need to see wonderful things in God's law. The reading and preaching of God's Word should grip us. It should fill us with astonishment and amazement.

The Bible is full of wonders; God's brilliant plan of redemption that left nothing to chance, the Saviour's willingness to become man to redeem sinners, the tender care of a heavenly Father, and the gracious work of the Holy Spirit are all heart thrilling truths. How can we be indifferent to these truths? How can we not be moved to worship and praise? We need to pray so that the wonders of God might become wonderful to us, compelling us to rejoice with inexpressible, glory-filled joy.

Thirdly, we must pray for holiness of life. Sin clouds our understanding. Like a smudged camera lens, it makes the Word indistinct. The Hebrew Christians needed to be taught the elementary truths of God's word all over again because in their immaturity they could not distinguish good from evil (Hebrews 5:12-14).

Nathan's confrontation of David after David's illicit affair with Bathsheba demonstrates this. The parallel between the rich man's actions in Nathan's parable and David's dastardly deed was clear. David should have grasped it easily. But to one who was living in unconfessed and unrepentant sin it was out of reach. We need to ask God to search our hearts and rid us of all sin so that like newborn babies we may crave pure spiritual milk so that by it we may grow up in our salvation (1 Peter 2:1-2).

Fourthly, we need to pray that we will be doers of the Word. If committing disobedience clouds our understanding, omitting obedience robs us of blessing. Blessings abound to the one who does what he has heard (James 1:25). Our holiness is one of God's designs in our redemption and if Satan's attempts to thwart God's purposes for His people are to be foiled, God must come to fight. And He comes when his people pray.

Preaching is Warfare

Preaching is warfare. It is Christ's invasion into terrain held by the Kingdom of darkness. Our chief battle strategy is prayer. Prayer, as John Piper reminds us, is not a domestic intercom, but a wartime walkie-talkie. Christians too often try to switch our walkie-talkie for an intercom in our houses – not to call in fire power for conflict with a mortal enemy, but to ask for more comforts in the home.

Prayer accesses army headquarters to advance the cause of the gospel against the forces of darkness. Let us first storm the throne room of grace for God to bless us by his Spirit in preaching and in listening. That is how the Kingdom of darkness will be destroyed and Christ acknowledged as Lord of all by all. *"May God arise, and may his enemies be scattered; may his foes flee before him"* (Psalm 61:8).

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