

Place: Lurgan Baptist 4:11:2012

COMPLETE IN HIM

Reading: Colossians 1:1-12

3. A PRAYER FOR SPIRITUAL PROSPERITY

On 13th January 13, 1969, James and Dorrie Gunning, two missionaries in Brazil with Acre Gospel Mission, were traveling in a Brazilian Air Force plane that was lost at night time over the Amazonian jungle. The crew and passengers had almost given up any hope of survival. In the midst of such despair James read to Dorrie the “*Daily Light*,” for that day and claimed God’s promises given in the reading, “*Cast thy burden upon the Lord and He shall sustain thee, he shall never suffer the righteous to be moved.*” (Ps 55:22) In the providence of God they were found by another Air Force plane sent out to search for the lost plane. With only twenty minutes fuel left in the plane’s tanks, they landed on an airfield where car headlights lit up the runway. When they returned to Northern Ireland two years later and recounted this story of God’s protection, they discovered that a group of people had met to pray for them on that very date.

When Mollie Harvey, a colleague of James and Dorrie Gunning in Brazil, was attacked by an Indian who tried to assault her, she was wonderfully delivered from his evil intentions. She also traced that on that very night

people had been praying for her. Such incidents as these have happened many times and affirm the power and effect of intercessory prayer. What a man of prayer Paul was. Some of the richest portions of Paul’s writings are those containing his prayers for the saints. Paul was a man of prayer. The testimony that flowed from his pen is evidence that he not only believed in prayer, he prayed. His Christian life got started with prayer (Acts 9:10-11) He prayed for himself (2 Cor.12:7-9) and requested that others pray for him (Eph. 6: 18-20; 2 Thess. 3:1) Likewise, he also engaged in intercessory prayer for others. (2 Thess. 1:11)

Now one of the proof’s that you’re really a saved person is that you pray. My do you pray ? Paul prayed. Indeed the prayers in Paul’s prison letters are certainly unique. To begin with in these letters he prays for others and not for himself. Moreover, the requests in his prayers centre on spiritual blessings not on material or physical matters. Now is that not interesting ? I mean here is “*A Prayer for Spiritual Prosperity*,” its not a prayer for material prosperity, nor is a prayer for physical prosperity rather it’s a prayer for spiritual prosperity.

Now it’s not wrong to pray for the physical and material needs of God’s people but their spiritual state is far more important. My do you never feel that our prayer meetings are dominated by the physical ? How many people do you ever hear praying that some Christian will grow in grace and in the knowledge of

Christ ? That another believer will be enabled to resist the temptation of the flesh ? That another saint will walk worthy of the Lord ? Do you ever that kind of praying ? Seldom. Yet these were the very things that dominated Paul's prayer life. Now how would you pray for a group of people you had never seen ? (2:1) Well lets look at this “ ***Prayer for Spiritual Prosperity,***” and notice.

(1) PAUL'S PATTERN IN THIS PRAYER

A pattern is a regular recognizable way in which something is done. Now do you recall the context ? Epaphras had come from Colosse to Rome bringing news of how this fledging church was getting on. The news that Epaphras brought produced ***an upsurge of prayer.*** And this prayer teaches is how to pray well. You see, as we follow the pattern of Paul's prayers we will discover what the content of acceptable prayer is. Paul puts praying in perspective and gives the Colossians the big picture, as he lays before them the issues that really count. Now I want you to notice,

(a) ***THERE WAS A MINISTRY HERE:***

Look if you will at (1:9) Each of us has a wonderful ability to minister to each other without ever seeing each other or speaking to each other. My we can secure for others the blessing of God without any contact physically through prayer. Prayer is one of the most important ministries that we have toward one another. Do you recall Paul's words at the close of

Ephesians ? “ *Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit and watching there unto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints.*” Paul says pray for all saints. When he writes to Timothy he says, “ *I exhort therefore that first of all, supplications and prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men.*” (1 Tim 2:1) Is this not a high priority for the believer ? We are to pray for one another. The Bible is replete with examples of God's people praying for each other.

Job prayed for his friends. (Job 42:10)

Moses prayed for Aaron & Miriam (Deut 9:20 Num 12:13)

Samuel prayed for Israel. (1 Sam 7:5, 9)

Hezekiah prayed for Judah (2 Kings 19:14)

Christ prayed for His disciples. (Jn 17:9-24)

The church at Jerusalem prayed for Peter's release. (Acts 12:5)

Paul prayed for the saints. (Rom 1:9-10 Eph 1:16)

Do you remember that in the early church the apostles were being encumbered by certain physical duties that were taking away time from the study of the Word of God. So we read that they said, “ *You choose out men to handle this,*” “ *But we will give ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.*” (Acts 6:4) I mean are those not the salient aspects of apostolic ministry ? Prayer, and the ministry of the Word. Is this not what Epaphras was given to ?(4:12) He was praying and he was preaching. My Have you ever given yourself to the ministry of prayer ? Really.

E. M. Bounds in his valuable book *Power through Prayer* says,

The church is looking for better methods, God is looking for better men. What the church needs today is not more machinery or better, not new organizations or more and novel methods but men whom the Holy Ghost can use, men of prayer, men mighty in prayer. The Holy Ghost does not flow through methods but through men. He does not come on machinery but on men. He does not anoint plans but men, men of prayer. Talking to men for God is a great thing but talking to God for men is greater still. He will never talk well and with real success to me for God, who has not learned well how to talk to God for men. (a)

(b) THERE WAS CONSTANCY HERE:

For Paul says, “ *We do not cease to pray for you,*” You say “ *Well, how could you possibly pray for somebody unceasingly ?*” What does it mean ? What he means there is not that he’s praying 24 hours a day, but that when he prays he prays for them and that this thing is on his mind all the time. Do you recall what Paul says to the Thessalonians ? “ *Pray without ceasing.*” (1 Thes 5:17) Do you some of you hear this morning remember Leslie Armstrong ? I had the privilege of ministering to Leslie in his life and at his death. But I can hear him praying yet ? “ *Lord, help us not to be man conscious but God conscious ?*” I mean do we see everything in reference to God ? You see, unceasing

prayer is communion with God, unceasing communion with God. It isn’t necessarily to stop and formally go into an act or a posture of prayer but it’s to always be conscious of everything in relation to God. It’s to see something happen and relate it to the Lord. It’s to hear about something and relate it to God. It’s to watch something and relate it to God. It’s to meet a person and immediately consider how he’s related to the Lord. And so, when Paul looks around his world, everything he sees turns instantly into a prayer because he sees it in relationship to God. Now tell me, do you have this God-consciousness ? So that no matter what happens you can turn it into prayer. Is your prayer life just like breathing to you ? So that, you can go through your whole day, and relate it to the Lord. (a) (b)

(c) THERE WAS A NECESSITY HERE:

“ *For this cause we also, since the day we heard it do not cease to pray for you and to desire that,*” (1:9) Now, I want you to notice something very interesting here. Paul says, “ *Since I have heard of your faith, hope and love. Since I heard that you’re doing so well I have not ceased to pray for you.*” Is that not a little bit unnecessary ? Wouldn’t you think Paul would have said, “ *Since I’ve heard you’re doing so well, I’m spending my time praying for someone else. You’ve already arrived.*” My knowing that believers are growing, knowing that believers are being blessed, knowing that believers are progressing in the faith should never lead us to cease praying for them, but always encourage greater prayer for their progress.

I don't know about you but when I look at my own prayer life I am trying to figure out who is in trouble so that I can pray for them. I mean, is this not what we do when we come together for prayer ? Somebody says, " *What are the prayer requests ?* " " *Well, Mrs So and So not so well and Mr. So and So needs a job,* " " *and her husband has left her.* " And do you know who gets prayed for all the time ? ***All the people, in trouble.*** Now no doubt they need our prayers but are we neglecting the believers who are doing well ? Yet these are the people who will fight the greatest battles, these are the Christians who will face the greatest resistance, these are the saints who will feel the greatest Satanic power. But we are only praying for folk in the desperate category. But not Paul, " *Since I heard you're doing so well, I haven't stopped praying for you.* " (1)

(2) PAUL'S PETITION IN THIS PRAYER

What's he praying for ? Well, here there is brought before us the content of his prayer. I mean what do you pray for ? How does it compare with what Paul is praying for ? Did you notice how often the little " *all,* " appears in the context ? " *All wisdom,* " " *All pleasing,* " " *All might,* " and " *All patience.* " He is praying that these believers be complete in their Christian experience. Notice,

(a) THE REQUEST PAUL EXPRESSES:

" *And to desire that ye might be understanding,* " The word " *filled,* " carries the idea of being " *fully*

equipped. " It was used in that day to describe a ship that was ready for a long voyage. Paul is saying that our knowledge of God, and the things of God is to be so complete that it prepares us for the journey of life. The Amplified Bible puts it like this, " *that you may be filled with the deep and clear knowledge of his will, and you may have comprehensive insight into the ways and purposes of God.* " Paul is praying that they may understand the great truths of the Bible, and that they may be able to apply these truths to the tasks and decisions which affect them in everyday living. Let's break this down a little. Look at the three key words. Knowledge, wisdom and understanding.

1. Knowledge is the Acquisition of God's Truth:

Now, what is it that he says we're to be filled with ? Totally controlled by what ? We are to be controlled by what ? Knowledge. I heard about a Christian who said that when he went to church he felt like unscrewing his head and setting it on the seat beside him because all that was happening in that church was emotion. *Now what does the Lord want ?* Emotionalism or knowledge ? Do you know that knowledge is a central theme in Paul's writings ? He says to the Corinthian believers " *In everything ye are enriched by Him in all utterance and in all knowledge.* " 1 Cor 1:5) To the Philippians he writes, " *And this I pray that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment.* " (Phil 1:9) Why in this very letter we learn that in Christ are hid all treasures of wisdom and knowledge. (Col 2:3) The believer must gain

knowledge. And the word that Paul uses means to have a deep, thorough knowledge. Now what are we to know ? Well, look at the verse “ *His will.* ” My, the will of God is the grandest thing that could ever happen in your life and in my life, to know the will of God, to be in the will of God. Is this not what prayer is all about ? To know God’s will. Now a lot of times we think just the opposite, we think that that prayer is, kind of twisting God’s arm to get Him to knuckle under, to say yes to our will. But Paul is praying that these believers will know God’s will. But how does a person know God’s will ? Through, a study of God’s Word. My this is the revelation of God’s will. Do you want to know God’s will ? Then saturate your mind with the Word of God. 1.

2. Wisdom is the Apprehension of God’s Truth:

You see, it’s one thing to gather facts out of the Bible, It’s another thing to apprehend those facts. I study the Bible, all the knowledge comes in and out of that knowledge comes wisdom. That’s the ability to take Scripture, to make principles out of it, so that it isn’t just a whole conglomeration of fact, but all of a sudden it begins to form principles in my mind and I apprehend them. But don’t stop there. 1. 2.

3. Understanding is the Application of God’s Truth:

So with knowledge you acquire Bible facts, with wisdom you apprehend Bible facts, and then with

spiritual understanding you apply Bible facts to your daily life. Now that’s (a) But notice,

(b) THE RESULTS PAUL EXPECTS:

You see, out of doctrine flows godly living. What I believe affects how I behave. I mean what is the purpose of a believer knowing the will of God ? Well Paul says, “ *That ye might walk worthy with joyfulness.* ” (1:10-11) In other words it will affect,

1. OUR WALK:

Walk is used in the Bible to refer to one’s pattern of daily conduct. “ *That ye might walk,* ” This concerns, “ *our outward lives which men see.* ” My if discipleship isn’t demonstrated, it is devastated. If Christian holiness isn’t ethical, it is empty. Dr. Harold Cooke Phillips, in his “ *Yale Lectures,* ” recalls a story that his mother told about a very pious grocer whose living quarters were above his place of business. One morning he was known to call down to his young clerk and say, “ *James.* ” “ *Yes, sir.* ” “ *Have you watered the milk ?* ” “ *Yes, sir.* ” “ *Have you pumpkined the butter ?* ” “ *Yes, sir.* ” “ *And put chicory in the coffee ?* ” “ *Yes, sir.* ” “ *Then come up to worship.* ” My that is piety divorced from practice. It’s worse than a pity, it’s a travesty. Over against it is the example of the missionary concerning whom one of the observant nationals said, “ *He walks as he talks.* ” What about you walk ? Is it pleasing to God ?

2. OUR WORK:

“ Being fruitful in every good work,” (1:10) The phrase *“ being fruitful,”* is used in the active voice. It denotes a continual progress. It speaks of the believer who is progressing in their faith, and consistently, continuously, constantly yielding fruit in their spiritual walk. Homer Kent, Jr. observed that, *“ The verb form depicts a fruit tree which yields its fruit and keeps on growing, in contrast to grain which produces its harvest and then dies.”* My is your life marked by fruitfulness ? In the New Testament converts are referred to as fruit. (1 Cor 16:15) Character is referred to as fruit. (Gal 5: 22-23) Stewardship is referred to as fruit. (Rom 15:26-28) Praise is referred to as fruit. (Heb 13:15) My are you still growing ? I heard about a young teenager, during World War II, who tried to enlist in the Navy. He was only 15, but extremely big for his age. He walked into the recruiting office and told the office that he was sixteen. The officer looked at him, shook his head, and said, *“ Sorry, son, you’re not old enough.”* Two months later, he returned to the recruiting office. The recruiter didn’t seem to remember him, so this time he listed his age as 17. Again the answer was, *“ Sorry, son, you’re not old enough.”*

He waited a few weeks and returned again. This time, in reply to the recruiter’s question, he said that he was 18. The man looked at the teenager, smiled and said, *“ Young man, we would really like to have you in our navy. The only trouble is, you’re aging so fast that I’m afraid we’d have to put you on Social Security before the war was over.”* My are you making strides in the things of God ?

3. OUR WEALTH:

Spiritually speaking *“ And increasing in the knowledge of God.”* My Are you growing in this respect ? How well do you know the Lord ?

4. OUR WORLD:

For look at (1:11) You see, knowing God’s will results in spiritual strength.

“ All might,” that covers all weakness.

“ According to His glorious power,” that removes all excuses.

“ Unto all patience,” that rebukes all failures

“ Longsuffering with joyfulness,” that cures all complaining. I think of a pastor who visited a young man who had been badly burned. The young man had to lie still for hours, and it was difficult for him to perform even the basic functions of life. The young man said, *“ I wish God would do a miracle and heal me.”* The wise old pastor replied, *“ Son, God is doing a miracle, but not the one you’re looking for. I have watched you grow in patience and kindness during these weeks. And, to me that is a greater miracle than the healing of your body.”* My ... we are often misled to believe that God only works through supernatural and spectacular things. But, my the power of God is at work in our lives at the factory, on the assembly line, behind the desk, in the car, at the school. He is constantly at work in our lives to produce His character in us, such as *“ patience, longsuffering, and joyfulness.”* Now do you see (1)(2)

(3) PAUL'S PRAISE IN THIS PRAYER

Is praise not often demoted to a secondary place in the prayers of God's people ? So often our attitude in prayer is like the leech's daughters, " *Give, give.* " (Prov 30:15) My we are so quick to make our requests and so slow to offer our thanks. But not Paul for this little Colossian letter is filled with thanksgiving. (1:3, 1:12, 2:7, 3:15, 4:2) My do you know why the Father is worthy of our praise this ? Because of,

(a) ***OUR INHERITANCE:***

In Christ, believers are granted to live with the Lord who is light forever.

(b) ***OUR DELIVERANCE:***

God drew us out of Satan's kingdom to Himself and that event was the new birth.

(c) ***OUR TRANSFERENCE:***

" *And hath translated us,* " We have passed from death to life, from despair to hope, from danger to safety, from uncertainty to peace.

(d) ***OUR ACCEPTANCE:***

" *In whom sins,* " My would you those four reasons not motivate you to praise God ? Would they not compel you to sit at His table and say " *Thank you*

Lord for saving my soul. " ***A Prayer for Spiritual Prosperity.*** Are you prospering spiritually ? Is your life well pleasing to Him ? A minister tells the story is told of a college commencement in Missouri many years ago. Among the graduates was a farmer boy who plainly was from a poor home. He wore blue jeans, and a coat with patched sleeves. There came that tense moment when the scholarship award was to be given to the unknown student who stood first in his grades. The sealed envelope containing the name of the winner and the medal which was to be awarded was opened. When the name was read it proved to be that of the farmer boy. The applause died away, the exercises were concluded, and the recessional begun. The minister said that he fell in line behind the boy. They came down the aisle to a point where there sat a man with a heavy beard not too closely shaven and a suit of clothes that looked as if it had never seen the iron.. Next to him sat a little lady in a simple dress and a sunbonnet.

The lad stopped, dropped the medal in his mother's lap, and pressed a kiss against her cheek. As he withdrew, the minister saw the little mother reach over a small hand and put it around the fingers of her husband's big callous hand and squeeze it, as, looking up into his face, she said, " ***It's worth all it cost, isn't it ?*** " They looked upon each other like when they were first in love. Their son was a pleasure to them. What about you ? Is this prayer being fulfilled in your life ? Like Enoch can it be said of you, " **he pleased God.** "

