

Missions Praying 6

2 Thessalonians 3:1

It is the Christmas season and we are still not finished with a series on missions praying that we began at the end of October. And this suits us well for there is no other time in the Christian calendar that more fully illustrates the missionary heart of God than recollections of the Christmas story. The gospel accounts of the birth of Christ are not



without record of God's interest in the gentile world. And as such even in the brief stories of the birth of Christ God makes known His intent that the Messiah should arrive in Israel to be for more than a select group of individuals; for more than just one nation. You recall the message of the angel to the shepherds? "For behold I bring you good tidings of great joy which shall be to **all** people." "Glory to God in the highest and on **earth** peace, good will toward men." And we have the history given also the account of wise men traveling from the eastern countries to find the Messiah and then we have Jesus being taken by his parents into Egypt. If you think of missions as that ministry where parents send their sons and daughters to faraway lands and strange peoples to live out their lives among them in the witness of God's wonderful gospel, then you have rightly identified missions I think. And for that matter you have struck upon the missionary heart of the Christmas story, for it is the story of God the Father sending His only begotten Son out from His heavenly home into the faraway place of our dark and ruined world so that He might bring to us the Good News of His Life given in sacrifice to redeem us from our sins. Christmas is the greatest missionary story of all and learning it we must learn to live it.

We have learned in praying for the mission broadcast of the Gospel to pray for:

- 1. New Workers - Matthew 9:36-38**
- 2. Unity between the Christians - Romans 15:30-31**
 - A. Pray for Unity in relationships –**
 - B. Pray for Unity in the task at hand –**
- 3. Deliverance from death, despair, and depression. 2 Corinthians 1:8-11**

Lord bring yourself before them as an ever-present help in the time of need. Lord grant them perseverance and endurance in the trial. Use every weakness to show them your strength. Sanctify them through their encounters with discouragement and their encounters with death.

- 4. Bold and clear proclamation - Ephesians 6:18-20.**

Most of us are not naturally courageous proclaimers of God's gospelNone of us should be. We need for supernatural boldness and supernatural clarity...God to direct our speech to the hearts of people.

- 5. New opportunities for a clear speaking of the Gospel- Colossians 4:2-4.**

Even in prison God can open doors of opportunity. God help us see them. Last week we learned that our prayers in this manner need to be steadfast, attentive what is happening, hopeful because of what God has done in the past for us...

Now we consider the sixth point of prayer...

6. Rapid spreading and acceptance of the message of the gospel - 2

Thessalonians 3:1-¹ *Finally, brothers, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may speed ahead and be honored, as happened among you,*

It is clear this is a prayer for the rapid reception of the gospel of Jesus Christ into the hearts and the lives and the societies in which it is being introduced. It is a prayer for God's word of rescue to run, to race through – and when it says be honored *the word is be crowned*. It is like a runner who wins the victory crown for his swift victory. *May the gospel rapidly win the day and crown the lives of those who receive it.*

Paul is writing to those in Thessalonica. It is the second city in which the gospel came to when it came to Europe. Philippi was the first city. There, after Paul and Silas were beaten and put into prison and then released they went on to Thessalonica.

Those in this city know that this is how the gospel came to their city. It came on fast and received a strong; and immediate positive response among many. Go to **1**

Thessalonians 1:5-10 and Paul will say, *For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance; as ye know what manner of men we were among you for your sake. ⁶ And ye became followers of us, and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost. ⁷ So that ye were ensamples to all that believe in Macedonia and Achaia. ⁸ For from you **sounded** (trumpeted) out the word of the Lord not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith to God-ward is spread abroad; so that we need not to speak anything. ⁹ For they themselves shew of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and **how ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God;** ¹⁰ And to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come....*

In **Acts 17** we learn that Paul preached Christ's suffering, death and resurrection...

here in **1 Thessalonians** Paul reveals to us that he also preached Christ return to judge in wrath and His deliverance of those following from that wrath. Also we see that Paul's application to this gospel was to turn from serving idols to serve the living and true God. This message was so securely and vigorously received and by such a number that the news of people's response spread in every direction from the city of Thessalonica.

Acts 17 would indicate that Paul was in this city for a very short while. We are told that he preached in the Synagogue of that city on three Sabbaths so we can say he was there for at least 3 weeks... likely longer but not a lot longer. The gospel shook up this community in a matter of not years or months but weeks.

A. Pray for the rapid spread and reception of the Gospel because – This is the usual way the Gospel moves –

This may not be how it always happens but it is the optimal expression and what we should want to see in the lives of others and our lives... the rapid overthrow by the power of the gospel of people's idolatries and their false worship; with the immediate surrender of the life to Christ to serve and obey Him. The gospel can come pouring in... racing into our lives and the lives of others.

Illustration: The testimonies of a number of you of the immediate impact that faith in Christ laid upon you... (One brand new Christian couple gets up at night with a thought that they must remove things from their home that are not in keeping with the presence of Christ in their hearts. They gather and throw out movies and books and magazines and records; another person throws out objects that were tokens of their past way of life; others throw off old friends; almost all begin reading their Bibles as a constant preoccupation; some rushed to tell others what Jesus had done for them; others immediately stopped certain behaviors that before had held them in bondage--swearing, drinking, lust etc.; they all very soon found their ways to churches... one person told of arranging their Sunday so that they could be in church services five hours every Sunday... parents and wives got worried that they were going through some breakdown but these same parents and wives also couldn't help noticing that they were different in a positive way... more loving, more attentive, not bitter or vindictive. – One wife soon came to Christ shortly after her husband and when asked why she said, "Cause I knew nothing could have changed my husband from what he was if it wasn't God.")

This is the way of the Gospel when it breaks out in saving faith upon the individual.

The idea that there is this slow progressive transformation is the popular notion today... but if this happens it is the exception not the rule. No, like those on the day of Pentecost we are cut to the heart by the power of the Spirit of God and there is an immediate change. This is not a slow change in opinion or a slow straddling over the fence... It is not some slow boil were a person goes from cold to cool to room temperature to lukewarm to warmer still. No, it's a soul that has the melting heat of God's Spirit break in on them in hot conviction and then all at once and the cleansing cool of Christ life floods over them in a rush of new life.

This stands in contrast to the attitude of many in the church today who have resigned themselves to a moral and spiritual development that happens slowly and incrementally. The revivalist of the late 1800's and early 1900's was right to expect the crisis of conversion to come suddenly. It is the dramatic encounter of a person with the person and work of Jesus Christ through the clear power of encountering the

person of the Holy Spirit bringing us to be reconciled with the person of God the Father. God comes rushing into the soul and it happens suddenly.

Now we have seen it happen to individuals... if you can see that happened in your life then go with Paul here. Paul says pray this will happen to many individuals all at once. Pray for many to have it happen to them.

B. Pray this way so that we don't develop habits of hesitancy and shyness in setting the gospel forward. This notion of a slow bearing in of the Gospel as slowed down the work of missions more than once.

We have decided that we must incrementally change the environment of communication before we can set upon people the gospel of Jesus Christ. That is not how it happened in Thessalonica.

Ex. (page 83 of Goforth in China) "Some months after arriving in China, an old, experienced missionary came to Goforth with the following advice: "Do not attempt to speak of Jesus the first time when preaching to a heathen audience. The Chinese have a prejudice against the name of Jesus. Confine your efforts to demolishing the false gods and if you have a second opportunity you may bring in Jesus." Later in telling his wife of the advice which had been given him, Mr. Goforth exclaimed with hot emphasis, "Never, never, never! The Gospel which saved the down and outs in the slums of Toronto, is the same Gospel which must save Chinese sinners." From the very first, when able to speak only in broken, imperfect sentences, he preached to the Chinese Jesus Christ and Him crucified, and from the first, sinners were saved from the lowest depths of depravity.

C. Pray this way as a counter to the ways of the world. This is not the way the world seems to turn... a number of things move at a slow pace and change, even positive change seems to happen slowly.

As for spiritual change, there is such a hold in so many places where people are bound by self-defeating, God denying generational patterns of behavior; habits that are hard to disrupt. We see the long entrenched patterns and bow to them as if these must always be... They don't.

But now in prayer you are facing those stubborn ways of people and long held prejudices and long resistant postures... and you are to remember how Christ changed you. How he broke in on you and quickly turned you to himself. Look at your life. If you are a born-again person you have a life that nothing but the work of God could have produced. The statement of many is, "*You wouldn't recognize me today from what I was.*" No, God radically and rapidly changed you. And there is no explanation in the programs of men and their political solutions that can explain for it.

BUT GOD! Now with that work of God in your life in view pray for others. **We need radical conversions because we need radical converts praying!**

D. Pray this way because intercessory prayer is claiming a future that no one could see except that they see it through the power and promise of the Gospel? We are to pray in defiance of the age in which we live.

We defy the ongoing patterns of decay in this fallen world and we hold in our prayers the vision of the Gospel bringing life where death has held sway. We are to lay hold in our prayers of a future that is unthinkable apart from that of the Gospel of Christ and the Power of God released upon the hearts of men. But is more than believable through that same power. Now pray believing it.

Ezekiel 37:1-14 *The hand of the Lord came upon me and brought me out in the Spirit of the Lord, and set me down in the midst of the valley; and it was full of bones. ²Then He caused me to pass by them all around, and behold, there were very many in the open valley; and indeed they were very dry. ³And He said to me, "Son of man, can these bones live?" So I answered, "O Lord God, You know." ⁴Again He said to me, "Prophesy to these bones, and say to them, 'O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord!' ⁵Thus says the Lord God to these bones: "Surely I will cause breath to enter into you, and you shall live. ⁶I will put sinews on you and bring flesh upon you, cover you with skin and put breath in you; and you shall live. Then you shall know that I am the Lord." ⁷So I prophesied as I was commanded; and as I prophesied, there was a noise, and suddenly a rattling; and the bones came together, bone to bone. ⁸Indeed, as I looked, the sinews and the flesh came upon them, and the skin covered them over; but there was no breath in them. ⁹Also He said to me, "Prophesy to the breath, prophesy, son of man, and say to the breath, 'Thus says the Lord God: "Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe on these slain, that they may live.'" ¹⁰So I prophesied as He commanded me, and breath came into them, and they lived, and stood upon their feet, an exceedingly great army. ¹¹Then He said to me, "Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They indeed say, 'Our bones are dry, our hope is lost, and we ourselves are cut off!' ¹²Therefore prophesy and say to them, 'Thus says the Lord God: "Behold, O My people, I will open your graves and cause you to come up from your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel. ¹³Then you shall know that I am the Lord, when I have opened your graves, O My people, and brought you up from your graves. ¹⁴I will put My Spirit in you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land. Then you shall know that I, the Lord, have spoken it and performed it," says the Lord."*

Pray in faith... God bring bones together, put flesh upon them and your breath in them... bring many now into the valley of decision and let them rise up at once from their graves. Surround countries and cities in your prayers and pray Lord bring crashing down these walls. God send forth your Word and let it race into the hearts of people and run to rush to them the Changes only you can make.

Get a vision of that person... that community... that place where the gospel is going... Pray for a rapid movement of the Gospel. (China, Cambodia, Iran)

E. Pray this way because we ourselves must live this way –

We may not want to pray this way because such a rapid movement of God in our societies might move us out of our own comfort zones. People may meet God and come around and as they are cleaning house ask why your house is so cluttered still. **If you are going to pray this way for others... might you pray this way for yourself?** *God if there is some part of my life that has become a custom for my own comfort and ease... a pattern that is retarding the advance of your life in me into deeper holiness and service and a greater knowledge of you? Break in fast upon me and tear me loose from that thing.*

The Christian and Missionary Alliance rose up in a time of expectation for the rapid movements of God's gospel and Spirit upon the person and the church. That history was reflected in the writings of many and is reflected in their doctrinal statement on the life of holiness reads as such, *"It is the will of God that each believer should be filled with the Holy Spirit and be sanctified wholly, being separated from sin and the world and fully dedicated to the will of God, thereby receiving power for holy living and effective service. This is both a crisis and a progressive experience wrought in the life of the believer subsequent to conversion."* At one time the *progressive* work of the life of holiness was not even mentioned in that statement... they looked for people to pass into a *crisis* of holiness where, as they came to Christ for Salvation, they also came to him for a turn into complete holiness. Over time the idea of a progression in our sanctification was added... we do grow sometimes slowly... but listen... there also needs to be this idea of crisis... **the rapid advance of the Spirit of God bringing us surging forward into surrender into victory into holiness.**

What are we saying... Pray for the rapid advance of the gospel... Pray for it with faith in the rapid power of the Gospel. Pray for it against the hesitancy of the flesh. Pray for it as a counter movement to the ways of the world. Pray for the rapid advance of the Gospel as a subversive vision that is defiant of the rolling ways of death in our age. Pray for it as a part of your own readiness and desire for God to break in suddenly upon you where He may to make you more and more like His Son.

This is what prayer is... it is a defiance of the slow death of the world and a cry for the quickening of the Spirit to fall upon people and lands... and while you are praying for it... expect it... and while you are praying for that... be ready and open for God's rapid work in your own life.