

ST. BARTHOLOMEW'S ANGLICAN PRO-CATHEDRAL IN THE TOWN OF TONAWANDA

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Scripture: Colossians 1:3-14

"Life-Changing Prayer: The Prayers of the Apostle. Paul" (part 1)

BACK TO PRAYER

Last month we began a series on Super-charging your prayer life. You can never go wrong learning about prayer. It is the lifeblood of our relationship with the Lord. It is the starting and end point. When Bishop was here last week celebrating with us our tenth anniversary, he met with our leadership team of Vestry and Core Team. He mentioned that the call of the Christian life can be summed up by three words – praying, caring, and sharing. In other words, we need to be a people of prayer, a people who care for one another and others outside our church family and families, and a people who are sharing our faith. He also mentioned a book whose title sums up the book entirely – *Witnessing Laymen Make Living Churches*. If you truly are going to be a witnessing laymen then you will be praying, caring, and sharing with others the love of Christ.

Recall, we saw how prayer begins in our spirit, needs to be informed in our mind, and then lived out in our bodies. In other words, what we pray should be true in our lives and what we do should be reflected in our prayers. We are spirit, soul and body – prayer encompasses all three. It is why the Apostle Paul prays in **1 Thessalonians 5:23** - *Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

I want to continue this month by looking at the prayers of the Apostle Paul. How many of you have ever heard a sermon or teaching on the prayers of the Apostle Paul? That's what I thought. The prayers of Paul are some of the most important in Scripture. Like the prayers of Jesus, they form a foundation for what our prayer life should be about. In fact, they go into further detail than what Christ gave us. Recall when it comes to prayer in the Bible we have the prayers of the prophets and the Psalms in the Old Testament, the Lord's Prayer, Jesus' Final Prayer during the Last Supper, and then the prayers of the Apostle Paul.

After acknowledging and praising the Father for His holiness and Who He is, Jesus in His first prayers takes us to first praying for the will and kingdom of God to be done and experienced. Then he tells us to pray for provision, pardon, and protection. In other words, we can expect God's provision, pardon, and protection primarily if we are engaged in following His will and seeking first His kingdom.

But what is God's will and Kingdom about? Certainly all that Jesus said, taught, and did sheds light on those two fundamentally important subjects; but in His second prayer He highlights the characteristics and focal points of the Kingdom and Will of God. So we heard Him pray things like – to know God the Father and the Son is eternal life and that we grow in this relationship. He prayed that we be kept in His name and that we be one – maintain union with God and one another. We grow by being sanctified in the truth (ie. Word of God); He goes further to say that we may be perfected in unity (three times He prays for our unity), that the world would see our love for God and one another and that God's name would be made known.

The Apostle Paul goes further. We find four major prayers in Paul’s letters – two in Ephesians, one in Colossians, and one in Philippians, (what are commonly known as the prison epistles – letters that Paul wrote under house arrest). We also find a series of short prayers throughout his two letters to the Thessalonians. Of course, Paul gives a number of exhortations of the importance of prayer in several of his epistles. Let me share a few examples, which many here will recall when heard.

Philippians 4:6-7: *“Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. 7And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”*

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18: *“Rejoice always; 17pray without ceasing; 18in everything give thanks; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.”*

1 Tim. 2:1-4: *“First of all, then, I urge that entreaties and prayers, petitions and thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men, 2for kings and all who are in authority, so that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity. 3This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, 4who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.*

In our first sermon on prayer we briefly looked at an example of Paul’s prayers, specifically the one found in **Philippians 1:3-11:** *I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, 4always offering prayer with joy in my every prayer for you all, 5in view of your participation in the gospel from the first day until now. 6For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus. 7For it is only right for me to feel this way about you all, because I have you in my heart, since both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel, you all are partakers of grace with me. 8For God is my witness, how I long for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus. 9And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment, 10so that you may approve the things that are excellent, in order to be sincere and blameless until the day of Christ; 11having been filled with the fruit of righteousness which comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.*

Now let’s go back to our second lesson today, to **Colossians 1:3-12:** *“We give thanks to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, 4since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and the love which you have for all the saints; 5because of the hope laid up for you in heaven, of which you previously heard in the word of truth, the gospel 6which has come to you, just as in all the world also it is constantly bearing fruit and increasing, even as it has been doing in you also since the day you heard of it and understood the grace of God in truth; 7just as you learned it from Epaphras, our beloved fellow bond-servant, who is a faithful servant of Christ on our behalf, 8and he also informed us of your love in the Spirit.*

9For this reason also, since the day we heard of it, we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, 10so that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; 11strengthened with all power, according to His glorious

might, for the attaining of all steadfastness and patience; joyously 12giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in Light."

Did you catch the parallels between the prayers in both letters? First, notice Paul begins with thankfulness which he does in most of his prayers. Being thankful is being opposite of being selfish. Because when you are thankful you are acknowledging your dependence upon someone else. The selfish person says, "I *deserve* what comes to me! Other people *ought* to make me happy!" But the mature Christian realizes that life is a gift from God and that the blessings of life come only from His bountiful hand. The thankful person is less to take things for granted and does not blame God all the time for when bad things happen. Years ago Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois, had a life-saving squad that assisted passengers on the Lake Michigan boats. On September 8, 1860, a passenger boat, the Lady Elgin, floundered near Evanston, and a ministerial student, Edward Spencer, personally rescued seventeen persons. The exertion of that day permanently damaged his health, and he was unable to train for the ministry. When he died some years later, it was noted that not one of the seventeen persons he had saved ever came to thank him!

Second, it shouldn't surprise us that the prayers of Paul are seldom about himself. They are always for others and on occasion so that Paul can be free to preach the gospel. Finally, we will see that the prayers of Paul are not so much focused on temporal or earthly blessings but spiritual ones. Of course, it is not wrong to pray about physical or material needs. But spiritual needs are vastly more important. Let's look at what Paul emphasizes in his prayer for the believers in Colossae. Paul makes four main requests. **He prayed for spiritual wisdom (1:9). He prayed for godly character (1:10a). He prayed for godly conduct (1:10b). Finally, he prayed for spiritual power.** He concludes by once again giving thanks.

What is God first and most concerned about? What is His Kingdom all about? Answer: spiritual truth and the ability to use that truth for God's glory and demonstrating His love. And to know and share that truth and love requires spiritual wisdom. Spiritual wisdom is the ability to know right from wrong, truth from error, good from evil, and then to put such wisdom into action. And such wisdom comes from knowing, abiding, meditating, and studying God's Word in the power of the Holy Spirit. This should be the starting point for our prayer life.

Next, the Lord is also concerned about our character. Godly or good character always leads to good conduct. God wants to see both in our lives. Sometimes a person can fake it. They can have good conduct with poor character. But it won't last for long. On the other hand, good character always produces good conduct. So are we praying that for others as well as ourselves? Notice Paul prays for both. In other words, that we all walk the walk! And of course, such things can happen when we are empowered by the power of the Holy Spirit. Which begs another question: Are we being filled with the Spirit?

The prayers of the Apostle Paul provide the framework for our prayer life just as both of the Lord's prayers do. My hope and prayer for all of us is that we take time to focus on Paul's prayers so that our prayers not only reflect his but that our lives do as well! In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, Amen!