

The Whole Armour of God (7) Praying Always

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Preacher: Malcolm Macdonald

- [0 : 00] Let us worship God. We shall sing to his praise from Psalm 103. Psalm 103 from the beginning.
- O thou, my soul, bless God the Lord and all that in me is. Be stood up his holy name to magnify and bless. Bless, O my soul, the Lord thy God, and not forgetful be of all his gracious benefits he hath bestowed on thee.
- All thine iniquities who doth most graciously forgive, who thy diseases all and pains doth heal and thee relieve. Who doth redeem thy life, that thou to death mayst not go down.
- Who thee with lovingkindness doth and tender mercy's crown. Who with abundance of good things doth satisfy thy mouth, so that even as the eagle's age renewed is thy youth.
- God righteous judgment executes for all oppressed ones. His ways to Moses, he his acts, made known to Israel's sons.
- [1 : 13] Let us sing these verses. Psalm 103, verses 1 to 7. O thou, my soul, bless God the Lord.
- O thou, my soul, bless God the Lord and all that in me.
- His ways to God the Lord and all that in me.
- O thou, my soul, bless God the Lord and all that in me.
- O thou, my soul, bless God the Lord and all that in me. O thou, my soul, bless God the Lord and all that in me.
- [3 : 13] You can stand. Who thou, my soul, bless God the Lord and all that in me. CHOIR SINGS
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CHOIR SINGS CHOIR SINGS CHOIR SINGS CHOIR SINGS CHOIR SINGS CHOIR SINGS and we sin in so many different ways that we may be unaware of.
- But what we are aware of brings shame to our faces and we confess it and seek forgiveness for it.
- We bless you and thank you for the words of the psalmist who reminds us that you are able to heal all our diseases. And there is no greater disease than the disease of sin.
- [6 : 16] It has been part of her existence in this world from the beginning. When her first parents fell, sin entered into their experience and all who are descendants of them.
- And even when we are created, before our being born into this world in our mother's womb, we carried these traits and characteristics that marked us out as descendants of that fallen race.
- We pray that you would remind us that you are able to continue the work of the great physician in spiritual terms as we need that more than anything.
- While we are alive at this time, we are conscious of the needs that we have as a race that are blighted by the malaise that has affected every individual within society.

The pandemic that has left its mark upon our lives is something that is paramount in our thinking and we cannot get away from the effects of it on our lives, our homes, our families, our communities.

[7 : 50] We confess that. And the needs that we have arising out of that are many and they are great. And we acknowledge that in your presence, thankful that we can bring these burdens before you.

But do not allow us to overlook the need that we have for spiritual remedies. And the need that we have as a fallen race is so apparent in the way that we forget God and ignore God, even in this time of pressing need.

So few of those who exercise leadership over us have ever acknowledged that there is a God to whom they can turn.

We pray forgiveness for that in any way that we may have encouraged it. We would ask, Lord, that you would guide us anew to the foodstool of Christ, that we may seek from him a redress for his shortcomings.

That you would stand up amongst us that desire for God, that quickening of spirit that can only come from on high, that we may know that you are God indeed.

[9 : 08] May we be in unison as an orchestra, as united to play compositions that would make no sense if every member of the orchestra were playing their own music and playing their own musical instruments without reference to any other.

Your people are guided by your spirit and the needs of the world are many, but we can be as one as we are led by you to seek that you would pour out your spirit upon us as a generation and that we would know that our needs can be met in Christ, as our greatest need of all has been met in Christ, as we have turned to him and put our trust in him by faith.

Lord, help us to believe that those who are his are assured of his protection in this world, that no matter what may befall us physically or mentally or temporarily, that we are assured of being kept by the everlasting arms of one who is eternal.

Underneath are these arms, we are told. That is a promise that belongs to all your children. We would ask this day that you would remember our congregations, remember those who preach to these congregations by the means ordained by you at this time.

May we be conscious of that. May we have that within our thinking, that this is how it is meant to be, no matter how much it is against what we would want for ourselves.

[11 : 06] And we do miss meeting with your people in public and gathering in the places of worship and benefiting from that fellowship that comes from being gathered around your word.

May we be ministered to by your spirit so that we would have a sensitivity to others meeting with us even now and that we would be able to bear one another's burdens, remembering the needs that are many.

We pray for those who are unwell amongst us, those who have succumbed to COVID. We pray that you would bring healing and aid, recovery. Those who have suffered grief and sorrow as a result of loved ones being taken from them, we would ask that you would sanctify such a grieving to them and that bereavement would be the means by which they would seek life at your hands.

We continue to remember those who are unwell with other forms of illness, some in hospitals, some confined to homes and to the care of others.

Remember the hospital, the care homes, all forms of care being delivered throughout the community by whosoever hands as you have appointed to that end.

[12 : 34] Remember all that has been done in your name. We give thanks for those whose hearts have been opened, those who have been challenged to do for others what they are not able to do for themselves.

So we pray for the housebound. We pray for those who feel solitary confinement, truly a temptation and a testing to them.

We pray for your people for whom this time has been a snare. Help them to recover from that with an eye to your glory. We would pray that a day would come when they would bless the hands of the God who has used the rod to chastise us at this time as a means by which we are to recalibrate and reconfigure our lives, lives that have gone on perhaps without any reference points and without any thought of the reality or otherwise of our relationship with yourself.

May the word of life speak to us and you through that word. We pray for the for our nations. Pray for our own United Kingdom.

We pray for the Prime Minister, the First Minister. We pray for our councillors here in the island. We pray for all who have various roles to play within our communities that are necessary for our well-being.

[14 : 06] Remember the nations of the earth, especially places where your people are being tried and for their suffering from the various means that the enemy of our souls uses to challenge faith.

We give thanks that your word reminds us that whatever faith is that it will be tested and it is that testing that will bring it on and strengthen it.

So hear our prayers and bless us together around your word, sanctifying a reading of it and reflections upon it. In Christ the Redeemer's name we would ask it.

Amen. We are going to hear the word of God as we have it in the New Testament and Paul's epistles to the Ephesians in chapter 6, reading in verse 10.

Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might. Put on the whole armour of God that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.

[15 : 16] For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.

Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God that you may be able to withstand in evil day. And having done all to stand, stand therefore having your loins girt about with truth and having on the breastplate of righteousness and your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace.

Above all take in the shield of faith wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit which is the word of God.

Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplications for all saints and for me that utterance may be given unto me.

That I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel for which I am an ambassador in bonds that therein I may speak boldly as I ought to speak but that ye also may know my affairs and how I do Tychicus a beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord shall make known to you all things whom I have sent unto you for the same purpose that you might know our affairs and that ye might comfort your hearts.

[17 : 02] Peace be to the brethren and love with faith from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace be with all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity.

Amen. And may God at his blessing to this reading of his word and to his name be the praise.

Well as many of you will know we've been looking at this passage of the scripture that comes at the end of Paul's epistle to the Ephesians which considers the whole armour of God and we've worked our way looking at each item of armour that Paul makes mention of.

But he concludes this section with reference to prayer which in reality is not part of the armour per se but without it the combatant would be in great difficulty.

When we think about the last war the last of the two world wars in fact the two world wars I think there are sufficient writings left to us of those who lived during these times and record is made of how involved the people of God were in the state of warfare that took place many of them not leaving not leaving their homes but engaged in prayer earnestly at every opportunity they remembered the soldiers and the sailors and the airmen who were engaged in battle and prayed for them constantly and it seems as far as many of us are concerned that without such prayer that the conflict may have a different conclusion conclusion some think that prayer is part of the armour or that every piece of the armour is put on with prayer but without prayer the battle or the war would possibly have a different outcome

[20 : 04] Lloyd-Jones writes in his comments the armour that is provided for us by God cannot be used except in fellowship and in communion with God and James Philip the former minister of Holyrood Abbey in Edinburgh teaches the same truth using the analogy of the battlefield if the Christian life is a battle if we are soldiers then it is of the utmost importance that we should have lines of communication established between ourselves and our great captain if communication breaks down then we will be in jeopardy and I don't think that we can ever pray too much it is certainly true that we cannot pray enough no

Christian is oblivious to the import of prayer and I'm sure every one of us is berating ourselves at how little attention we pay to it in ourselves however often I spend time thinking about prayer and wondering if I'm actually praying in so doing we I cannot over emphasise that we can never be satisfied with our prayer lives some I think there is a book somewhere with the title Too Busy Not to Pray and the the the natural way of thinking the way we sometimes think is that prayer should occupy as little time as possible to allow us to get on with the serious matters at hand whereas in reality it should be the other way round our lives should should be governed by the amount of praying that we are able to do and

I think the end product testifies to the effectiveness of it I want us to think for a short while of these words that the apostle concludes this section with prayer and to think about what it suggests to us about prayer I spent the beginning of last year looking at a number of books together and just alongside each other different eras in the church where prayer was the focus from the 17th century 18th century 19th century to the modern day and most of them because they were reformed because they were

Bible centred believers their thinking was governed by the scriptures and governed by what the scriptures said and Paul is an example of that when he talks about prayer and when he actually does prayer and some of the prayers that Paul uttered are contained within the scriptures you will understand that he is very much influenced by the scriptures and what the scriptures teach now John Stott says prayer has four universals first of all we are to pray at all times or pray always pray with all prayer and supplication pray with all perseverance and pray for all saints so we can look at his helpful consideration of this passage under these titles pray at all times and right into the

Thessalonians Paul says pray without ceasing the Lord Jesus Christ himself says men ought always to pray and not to faint and clearly this cannot mean the kind of prayer we adopt special postures for sometimes I've heard people discuss at length what is the right posture for prayer whether we should stand or sit or bow or kneel and so on but that is not what Paul is interested in he is more concerned with the attitude that the attitude of soul how we approach God in prayer and his main concern is that we should form a habit of prayer a habit of prayer both formally and informally so that when we do come we come with an awareness of where we are and who we are before and sometimes time doesn't allow us to do anything other than speak rapidly what is called ejaculatory prayer where the petition is in the heavens before you're able to organise your thoughts around it sometimes you know there's always the danger and the devil is very good at putting us in a situation where we may be doing something and a thought comes to mind something that we should pray about or someone that we should pray for and we decide at that moment that we'll take time and do that rather than instantly respond to that thought and we can do so equally effectively if we do that without taking time to sit and organise that's not to say that we can't do that at a later point but that we are able to articulate our concerns in prayer instantly and that if God wills it that we can come again and maybe formalise our thoughts in a way that we were not able to at that moment we can be driving the car or involved in our daily work whatever that work may be and we are not debarred from ushering our petitions into the presence of God pray at all times

[27 : 56] I think that's one thing that that we can think of that is important the second thing that we have here is we pray with all prayer and supplication it may appear to us to be a strange thing to say but what it really does is remind us of the many expressions of prayer that there are there are words of our mouth orally we can speak aloud we can spend time in contemplation and reflection we can as we said make a make a spontaneous ejaculatory prayer which is before God before before the the minions of hell have been able to take it away

James Montgomery Boyce speaks of an acrostic or a mnemonic a means by which to remember forms of prayer that we can follow steps that we can take in prayer the words are acts I'm sure they're familiar to you adoration confession thanksgiving and supplications and that's just a very loose form of an aid memoir our prayer should have at least these elements supplication is emphasised by Paul because it speaks of a sense of need and urgent desire for its relief the theologian Charles George refers to the way some people understood prayer that prayer is something for the attaining of good and supplication for the avoidance or deliverance from evil whether you agree with that assessment or not it is certainly possible for us to come with into the presence of

God acknowledging who he is and identifying the place that he occupies in our worship and the more we reflect upon his glory his personal glory his glory as the father of our lord and saviour Jesus Christ the glory of his son our redeemer the glory of the spirit who has visited us and is resident in our hearts and minds and souls as we are the temple of the spirit we are able to adore him in that sense there is confession there is contrition there is an acknowledgement that we are sinners coming to this God whatever else we are we're always that we come with our hearts rent our hearts bent our hearts broken if we are aware of our sin as we ought to be we come with thanksgiving thankful that we can praise praise a God who is able to hear and answer prayer in way a way that no other can and does the third thing we have here is we pray with all perseverance and this

I suppose is something that that is something that tests every one of us we we often hear it said that I prayed and my prayer was not answered but we are told and we are taught in the scripture and Christ makes example of it for example an importunate woman widow who comes constantly bombarding as it were seeking a relief from from from a debt someone that she was indebted to and how much we need to follow the example of those who who need who need to come again and again so I need for perseverance I need for watchfulness I need for vigilance something that the Lord frequently brought before us and before the disciples watch I say to you he says watch in revelations three be watchful and strengthen the things that remain that are ready to die if therefore thou shalt not watch

I will come on thee as a thief and thou shalt not know what hour I will come I shall come on thee it's a story which springs to mind I've told it often I'm not sure where I heard it but it comes from I think either one of the McEever who was in Shawbust or McEever who was in Calwet Reverend John McEever and Mordor McEever it was the Shawbust McEever details of battle during the war the first war and the person who was in the battle was on watch and the battle had been fought furiously for a long time and he was exhausted on the brink of exhaustion but he kept watch as he was commanded to and he was asked after the conflict how he was able to do that and he said three things kept me away he said my own reputation and the regiment's reputation and the reputation of the king not necessarily in that order but his watchfulness was stimulated by the desire that what he was engaged in that he would not succumb to temptation or weaken because of the trial and testings that he was under we know that there are great prayer warriors and you just have to accept that maybe you might not be like them but that does not mean to say that you cannot strive to be like them and if that is the case then we cannot do so without persevering and seeking to persevere until we hear pray until you pray pray until you pray until you you your prayer is heard and then pray until your prayer is answered and certainly that can't be so without perseverance pray for all saints he says prayer can be a selfish thing especially the wrong cried we can all be overcome with selfish desires personal desire

[36 : 07] I need and something I want but we are to bear one another's burdens we are told and so fulfill the law of Christ is Paul selfish when he says pray for me not me but the gospel and to Thessalonians pray for us that the word of the Lord may have free course and be glorified even as it is with you pray for us in the work and that's what is important Paul not that he himself would be glorified but that the work of God would go on and be blessed pray pray pray pray that I may have courage pray that I may have confidence pray that I have boldness and fearlessness we need to understand that there are many things that we should be praying for and these many things are always with us and we cannot but expand our horizons so that our prayers would be crescent that our prayers would intensify and we confess that that is far from the way they should be well may

God encourage us to don the whole armour of God and to be always ready to give an answer and give a reason for the hope that is in us to be ready to confront the enemy of our souls whenever he comes with whatever devices that he chooses to attack and destroy us but that we would look to him always the glory of his name Christ who is our God and our saviour may he bless to us these few thoughts let us pray Lord God help us to come before you with prayer and with thanksgiving to come with supplication and prayer for others ourselves that your name would be blessed and that your name would be on the lips of many hear us and go before us we ask blessing your word cleansing from sin in the redeemer's name we would ask it all may grace mercy and peace from

God Father Son and Holy Spirit be with you all now and always Amen Amen