

Pray at All Times

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[0:00] We are finally in our last sermon in our series through Ephesians. It's quite a feat! As I said in the weekly newsletter this week, I'm grateful that Holy Trinity is a church that values the Bible as God's word to us.

I'm thankful that we are a people of the book, and as such, we believe that it is profitable for doctrine, that is Christian teaching. And for reproof, for correction, and instruction in righteousness. And it is for this reason that we believe and highly value exposition or preaching. To preach through God's word, God's word can never be outdated or irrelevant. We know that.

In fact, there is nothing more relevant for the time we live in than to immerse ourselves in a healthy and consistent diet of Scripture.

So while we go back, while we will be going back to the lectionary during Advent, I look forward to going through, together, another book of the Bible after Advent.

[1:15] In the meantime, we are in our last verses of Ephesians this morning. In chapter 6, verse 18 to 24. If you don't have a Bible, you can grab a pew Bible in your pew there, and it's on page 1163 of your pew Bible.

Paul's call to the Ephesian church, and to us, if you remember from our last sermon, is to stand in the face of the devil's assault.

When he talks about putting on the whole armor of Christ, he calls us to stand firm in the victory of Christ our King. And it's an active stand, if you look at those verses that we went through last week. We are to take up weapons that he has provided for us for our defense. The victory Christ has secured must be defended, or Satan, the great enemy, will seek to destroy God's people.

So Paul enjoins us that we are to put on and to receive the truth of the gospel. And the breastplate of righteousness that is shown in the ethics of justice and equity.

[2:32] We are to be ready for battle with gospel shoes for our feet. And the all-important shield of faith, we are to take it up to quench the enemy's flaming darts.

And he also tells us, if you remember, that we are to put on the assurance of salvation as a helmet. And to wield the sword, that is the word of God, that comes from the spirit, which is the truth of the gospel.

We are to be clothed in this suit of armor, Paul tells us. And if we are, we will withstand the devil and his allies and all their assault.

We will persevere. We will remain standing. That is Paul's call to us. And now in these verses, he goes on in verse 18 to 20 specifically to pivot.

We were talking briefly about it last week. Pivot and talks about prayer. And he talks about persevering. He's still in the attitude of standing and persevering. But now he's talking about persevering in watchful prayer.

[3:45] And as you notice in those verses, there's an all-encompassing or sort of comprehensive aspect of prayer that he talks about. In the one verse, he used all four times in that one verse to refer to the manner in which we are to be praying.

We are to persevere against evil opposition. And in addition to that, we are to put on, in addition to putting on the suit of armor that he talks about, we must be devoted to prayer.

Paul highlights the manner and method of our prayer in these verses. Our prayer must be constant, he tells us. It must be committed, devoted, it must be a committed and devoted exercise.

And it must be done with total alertness. Constant, committed and alert in prayer. Paul says we have to be.

And his hymn, Paul's hymn in saying these is to further show us how we are to hold our ground in the warfare against the devil and his spiritual forces.

[4:52] He gives us five characteristics of prayer in these verses. One is to pray constantly. Praying at all times, it says in verse 18. With all prayer and supplication.

Our prayer must be frequent. Our prayer must attend every aspect of our lives. There is no aspect of our lives. There is no time, there is no scenario, there is no circumstance of your life and my life that should be outside the scope of our prayer.

We are to bathe every aspect of our lives in prayer. Our family, ourselves, our loved ones, our job, our soul spiritual, growth, reading God's word when we gather together.

All of those things are to be bathed in prayer. That's why Paul says praying at all times in the spirit. And he talks about this word supplication. It's not a word that we often use commonly anymore, even in our own sort of everyday parlance.

But to supplicate is imagine someone coming to the royal court before a king and begging and petitioning.

[6:09] It's not just petitioning. We use the word petition in our language. But we talk about it when you go to maybe a courthouse or you petition for something. You know, you stand within your right almost.

Like, you know, you expect them to like do whatever you ask. That's not the language. The supplication is knowing you're not worthy. And you're before someone who's infinitely more worthy than you.

And you are beseeching and begging and petitioning someone with a higher power to advocate for you. Or to advocate on your behalf.

And that's the language here. It's an urgent petition, even. We are to, with praying at all times in the spirit, with all prayer and supplication. Our prayer must be as varied in the subject matter as the circumstances of our life dictates.

Our prayer must be varied. Meaning that every aspect of what we do, we ought to be, we ought to go, we ought to be at ease going to God in prayer.

[7:14] About every subject matter that has to do with us. Oftentimes, this is true of me and maybe true of you as well. We often don't think of prayer as the first resort. We think of it as a last resort.

When everything else has failed, we look to God and pray. Paul here is saying, that should be your first and your second and your third and your ongoing, ongoing life of prayer.

Going to God. Why should we go to God? You might think, oh, well, I don't want to pester God. I've heard people say that before. I don't want to pester God at all. Well, he's your father. Paul has told us that already in Ephesians.

He's your loving father. And he wants you to come to him. And prayer is as much about our disposition to God when we come to him.

Knowing that he alone is able to attend to us. And he alone is sovereign. King of the universe. King of kings and Lord of lords. And so he says, pray constantly, Paul tells us.

[8:15] And he goes on and he says, pray in the spirit. Right? Pray at all times in the spirit. This is not just heartfelt, spirited prayer.

That is, you know, sort of emotional fervor. That should be part of our prayer. But that's not really what Paul means here when he says, pray in the spirit. He really, rather, he means that we should pray.

Our prayer should be empowered by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit gives us the power to utter this prayer.

To say the prayer. Even in our weakness. Remember Romans. What Paul says in Romans. We do not know what to pray for. As we ought. In our weakness. But the Holy Spirit.

The Spirit. Helps. And empowers us. By interceding for us. Interceding for us on our behalf. So in our circumstances. Especially in moments of great trials.

[9:12] Or in moments of great temptations. We do not always have. God's. We do not always know. God's particular will.

For our circumstances. Right? Have you ever been in a particularly really tough place in your life? And you're trying to. To sort of. Disciple what God's will is.

I mean it's not a matter of. You know. It's. It's. It's. You know. Should I take this job. Or should I not? Should I. Should I move to this place. Or should I not? Right? It's not something that's. Expressly spelled out.

In. In scriptures. So you're trying to. Discern what God's will. Or maybe it's a. It's a moment of. Like great trial. Or. Or. Tragedy. In your life. And you're looking to God. And in those moments of weakness.

Sometimes you don't have the words to say. Sometimes you don't even know. How to come to God. Or what to say to God. But here. Paul assures us. That when we pray. Empowered by the spirit.

[10:09] Notice that he's not saying. He's already. He's already acknowledging that. Praying should be something we do. All the time. Right? Praying at all times. And praying in the spirit. So when we do that.

The Holy Spirit comes alongside us. And intercedes. For us. And intercedes on our behalf. So that we are coming to God.

As supplicants. But we're coming. Already. As God the Holy Spirit. Coming alongside us. To appeal to God.

The Father. On our behalf. So although we are supplicants. We already have a. A ready audience. Who's willing and ready to hear us.

So we are to pray. So much so that. In our prayer. We are emboldened. To look to Christ.

[11:07] Right? In those moments of trial. In those moments of. Of great. Turmoil of the soul. We are emboldened. If we pray in the spirit. If we pray empowered by the spirit.

We're emboldened to look to Jesus Christ. Rather than the particular problem. That we're facing. The spirit enables us. To rest in Christ.

And not be overwhelmed. By our situation. That is the. That is the. The. The import of praying. Empowered by the spirit. And then. He goes on.

He gives us a third characteristic. Of praises. First pray constantly. Pray in the spirit. Thirdly. Keep alert. In your prayer. He says to that end. In verse 19.

Keep alert. With all perseverance. Making supplication. For all the saints. The Greek verb. For alert. Alert here. Alertness. Basically means.

[12:02] To be watchful. And attentive. To be watchful. And attentive. In prayer. This. Is a constant alertness. That reminds us.

Of Jesus' word. In Luke 21. Where he said to his disciples. Keep awake at all times. Praying. That you might have the strength. To escape. All these things.

That are going to take place. All these things. That are going to. What are all these things? The things that Paul himself. Referred to in chapter 5. Of chapter 5.

Of verse 15. And Ephesians. All these things. That are in these. Present evil days. In which we live in. How are you. Able to.

To. To walk. And to stand. Firm. In the evil days around us. By being alert. But the alertness. That we are to do. Is in the place of prayer.

[12:59] To be alert in prayer. And then. Fourthly. It says. To be zealous. In our devotion to prayer. We are to give ourselves. Over to it.

Be completely. Devoted to prayer. As one who is. Completely devoted. To a trade. Or craft. Think of athletes. Or really. Virtuous.

Virtuous. Virtuous. Or musicians. Owning their craft. By countless. Hours of practice. This is the same language. That Paul uses. When he says.

Be zealous. In your devotion to prayer. This is. The language. It says. Our commitment to prayer. Should be as one. Who is. Constantly. In the place.

Of. Of. Of devotion. And zealousness. In. With his. Zeal. In our prayer. And then lastly. Paul says.

[13:55] The 15th. We are to pray. For all of God's people. So. Our constant. Urgent. And devoted prayer. Should not only focus. On ourselves.

We should remember. We should remember. Our fellow soldiers. Our brothers and sisters. Who are also engaged. In the same warfare.

That we're in. This is a wonderful reminder. Isn't it? And a wonderful picture. As well. That we are not alone. You.

Individual. Child of God. You're not alone. In the warfare. Even as a church. Or the Trinity. We are not alone. In this battle.

Christians. Throughout the city. Christians. Throughout this country. Who call on the name of God. Christians. Throughout this world. Are engaged.

[14:53] In the same battle. With the same enemy. And so. We are to give aid. To one another. Primarily. Through prayer. First and foremost.

We are to give aid. To one another. In other means as well. But Paul is first. Primarily. Pointing us to the place of prayer. How often do we lift. One another up. In prayer. I'm actually proud. To say that this is a church. That does do that. Lift one another up. In prayer. And that's something. That we ought to. Consistently. Continue. To practice. How many times. Have you felt. The prayer of the saints. On your behalf. When you're going through something. You know. Well. I just. I don't know how I got through that. But I know people were praying for me. And just the fact.

That you know people are praying for you. Emboldens you. To. To go through whatever it is. This. It's not. This is what Paul is saying here. So we ought to be mindful.

[15:51] Of one another. It also allows us to see beyond ourselves. Doesn't it. When we pray for the saints. Right. Beyond our own. Just sort of. Our sphere. To see.

God's work. In the world. Even when it's not. Have to do. With our own. Vicinity. So. Paul says. To us.

Pray constantly. Pray in the spirit. Keep alert in prayer. Be zealous. In your devotion to prayer. And pray for all of God's people. Paul's exhortation to us.

Is to stand our ground. It's still the continuation of. From. From verse 10. Of chapter 6. In this warfare. Stand your ground. By engaging in prayer.

That is constant. That is spirit empowered. That is alert. To the surrounding evil around you. That is zealous. In its devotion. And that is ecumenical.

[16:49] In its breath. And then he goes on. From. From verses 19 to 20. And he. And he actually. Tells the Ephesian church.

And also for me. That words may be given to me. In opening my mouth. Boldly. To proclaim the mystery of the gospel. For which I am an ambassador.

In chains. That I may declare it. Boldly. As I ought to speak. Paul asked. That they will remember. Him as well. In their prayer.

Now. So that you see. That Paul's. Paul's. Admonition here. He believes what he is saying. Doesn't he. Because right off.

From just telling him to pray. He says. By the way. Pray for me. And look what he asks for. That words may be given to me. In opening my mouth. Boldly.

[17:43] To proclaim the mystery of the gospel. Paul is likely referring. To his defense. Before the Roman court. Remember that. As he writes this book.

Ephesians. He's in jail. And he's. He's going to go. To defend himself. His charges brought against him. He has to defend himself. And it's a matter of life and death.

For him. Perhaps. And so he's asking. The saints. To pray for him. But look at what he's asking them. To pray for. He's not saying.

Pray for me. So that. I might get out of here. And be free. He's saying. Pray for me. That I will have boldness. Given to me.

To open my mouth. And to proclaim. The mystery of the gospel. Paul knows. That he's not wrestling against flesh and blood.

[18:41] Doesn't he? This is a man who knows. That it's not flesh and blood. He's wrestling against. He sees the Roman soldiers. That he's chained to. He sees the Roman institution. Empire.

That he's putting him in jail. But he knows. That behind them. Is the devil. And the spiritual forces. Principalities and powers. This is a man who knows. His true enemy.

And he's praying. For boldness. To proclaim. The gospel. To use the weapons. At his disposal. As he has talked about. In the earlier verses. Can you imagine.

Paul. Going before. Perhaps. I don't know. Who is. Perhaps. Caesar himself. And proclaiming. The gospel of Jesus Christ. Declaring it.

Boldly. He sees himself. As an ambassador. Ambassador of what? Ambassador of the gospel. Ambassador of Jesus Christ. Christ. And then. What does an ambassador.

[19:38] What does an ambassador do? The ambassador. Says the word. Of. Of the person. Who sent him. Right? Of the country. Of the king. That sent him. It's not his words.

To say. It's the words. Of the king. That has sent him. And he knows. That King Jesus. Is his lord. And has sent him. Even in this jail. That he's in. And he's asking.

For boldness. And proclaim. He asks. For spirit. Empowered. Clarity. And boldness. In declaring the gospel. In his defense. To proclaim. The mystery. Of the gospel.

Remember what Paul has said. About the mystery. Of the gospel. Early on. In Ephesians. That it is the revelation. That God. Himself. Has brought together. People from disparate nations.

Jews and Gentiles. And as. That as the gospel. Is proclaimed. God has brought. These people. From all nations.

[20 : 32] Into one body. The body. The body of Christ. The church. Of the living God. This is the mystery. That he's meant. That he's meant to proclaim. And it's this. This unity.

This togetherness. This one body. Is cosmic. It is. We talk about. The catholic. And universal church. This is what Paul is proclaiming. And this.

Kingdom. This body. This church. Is under the rule. And lordship. Of Jesus Christ. Not Caesar. So you might see.

How. Proclaiming. Such a message. Before. Caesar. Who fashions himself. As the ruler. Of the. Of the known world. Might be a dangerous thing.

To say. But he. He knows. What he has to say. And he's saying. Saints. Pray for me. To proclaim. The mystery. Of the gospel.

[21 : 26] The truth. Of the gospel. That Christ. Is the true. King of kings. And the lord of lord. I think Paul's situation.

Is an example. For us. Isn't it? He's an ambassador. Of Christ. Task. With proclaiming. The gospel. That god. Is building. A kingdom. That is in opposition.

To the kingdoms. Of the world. God's kingdom. Is in opposition. To the kingdoms. Of the world. That is. That is the reality. And he's in a weakened.

Condition. He's a man in chains. But he still. He prays. He seeks. To be emboldened by prayer. By the prayer of the saints. And he seeks. That by that prayer. His boldness might be. To his commitment. To his lord.

[22 : 20] And king. His focus. and his desire is that he will be able to please and honor his king and lord if you were in paul's place what would you have asked to be for prayer for i i know what i would have asked for i need to go back home to the comfort of my home all right this is you know this paul was not looking at comforts he wasn't even looking at himself he was devoted to the gospel and the proclamation of the gospel and that is what he was seeking boldness in i wonder where we are in our world here we we know i think we know now that we are in our style land right maybe 50 years ago it was okay to be a christian and really not to feel any tug because the culture as it is really was largely you know a christian culture even if even even non-christians sort of comport themselves you know accordingly but we don't live in that world anymore right we are under house very much like the early christians it is not popular to be a follower of jesus christ it will cost us as it costs paul and as it costs the ephesian church as he writes to them but where would our focus be in the midst of persecution or where should our focus be in the midst of persecution what are we asking god for in the midst of when fidelity to jesus christ as king and lord means that it will cost you at your workplace or in relationships that you have are you asking god to give you boldness to stand firm this is the prayer to stand and persevere in the midst of all of that paul paul gives in this beautiful magisterial letter to the church in ephesus to the churches in ephesus he gives his final commendation he talks about this man tychicus who is a beloved brother and faithful minister in the lord this letter is sent true you know in the in the ancient world they don't have postal well they did have postal service but it was only for the empire so you know the the government alone can use the postal services if you're a private citizen you have to have a trustworthy person to take your letter from one place to the other and so this is this is a this is a huge task that's committed to this man tychicus he's actually the one given because paul wrote the letter to f to the churches in ephesus and he wrote the letter to the churches in colise and the letter philemon all three of these letters were given to tychicus were written in paul's roman imprisonment and given to this man to go to travel to these places and deliver the letter but look at even paul's thinking and paul's focus here you might say well he's in jail right he's been suffering for the gospel you might you wouldn't blame him to be inward focus you know but he's still thinking about the churches right he writes letters but he even tells them so that you also may know how i am and what i am doing tychicus the beloved brother and faithful minister in the lord will tell you everything so you can imagine that there's a lot more to say about paul's condition and paul's story than what he's even containing in the in the letters to the ephesians and he says this man will tell you everything so that

you may know so that you may be comforted and so that you may continue to pray so he's sent him for that very purpose so you may know how i am doing and then paul continues

um he continues by saying to them um in his in his last words in in ephesians he talks about the peace remember what he had said earlier about peace or paul has said earlier about peace he says peace to be to the brothers in verse 23 ancestors and love with faith from god the father and the lord jesus christ and grace be with all who love our lord jesus christ with love and corrupt in these two verses paul sort of summarizes the first two chapters of ephesians remember he talks about people actually the first all the chapters of ephesians in chapter four of ephesians paul talks about peace as the glue that holds the church together in his in in his uh exhortation in chapter four he says i urge you when he's when he's urging for you church of christ to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you've been called with all humility and gentleness with patience bearing one another love that's what he's urging us eager to maintain the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace our risen and ascended lord himself jesus christ secured this peace for us through his death on the cross so he's not saying work out make peace say just maintain the peace and he says the peace of god be upon you brothers and sisters that's what he's proclaiming the peace that's already there is upon them because christ has secured the peace he set aside the demands of the mosaic law remember and made peace with between man and god jesus christ has also made peace between jew and gentile between black and white and asian and all tribes and languages within the body of christ the peace of god is meant to remain and to be with us this peace is the glue the peace of god is the glue that binds us to god himself and the binds us to one another and he says love with faith as as one commentator puts it paul hopes that their knowledge of god's love for them and the love for each other that flows from this knowledge might flourish in the fertile soil of their faith in the gospel so that their love will flourish in their faith in the gospel of jesus christ and he says grace be with all of you who love our lord jesus christ with love incorruptible love incorruptible that is an undying love within a love that is a love of integrity and sincerity that's what paul has been talking about in chapter 4 and 5 and even 6 of ephesians the manner in which you walk the manner in which you love god is with with integrity and sincerity and he's saying that this grace of god might be grace might be on all of you who love jesus christ we love incorruptible having experienced brothers and sisters god's grace and love having known his love lavished upon you in the great salvation bringing you from death to life from darkness into his marvelous light having experienced all of this having known that god had planned before the foundation of the world to save you having been lavished with all the spiritual blessings from god in christ having peace even with god after you've received and accepted the gospel we are called then to turn in love to our god we are called to love jesus christ from a pure heart

the love is a response to what christ has already done note that and even the love is empowered by the spirit the holy spirit himself but our love should be one that is untainted by the futility of the world around us it's a love that is untainted by the darkness and the alienation of the fallen world this is what this is the manner in which we are to love christ it's appropriate on this sunday that we're ending here in ephesians to see christ as our king i want us to see all the truth that even in this evil days that we're in even in this hostile and falling generation that we inhabit we are children of the king we are members of christ's holy sacred church we are brothers and sisters together in christ and christ himself is what who fastens us and binds us together and it is in it is to him that we respond in love and it's out of that love then that we relate to one another in christ it is out of that love that we're able to serve one another and it's out of that love that we're able to serve the world at large so may god empower us to love him with a pure and sincere heart may the holy spirit continue to empower us to stand firm and persevere in the calling that he has given us as his church may we proclaim jesus christ as lord and king over all over our lives and over every situation of our lives and over the world that we live in may we be people of the cross in the name of the father and of the son and of the holy spirit amen amen