

The Praying Soldier (2)

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[0 : 00] Well, let's turn this evening to Ephesians chapter 6. Ephesians 6 and we'll read at verse 18 and take in verses 18 to 20.

Ephesians 6 at verse 18, praying at all times in the spirit with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints, 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.

Well, we've seen the parts of the armour, something of how they're laid together. We've seen the way in which there are two sections of three types of armour, some that are worn more permanently, others that are taken up in order to go out immediately to battle.

We looked last time at how the armour is to be used praying at all times in the spirit with all prayer and supplication. We just kind of touched then upon how that means we must do so with alertness and all perseverance.

I'd like to just expand on that and take in the final part of it down to verse 20 this evening. So we are not just to pray, we are to pray with an alertness and a perseverance in respect to prayer, which the apostle obviously sees as important.

[1 : 39] And then he goes on to specify prayer for the saints, for all the saints, but also for himself personally as an apostle and one who has a call to declare the gospel.

So the three things we want to look at briefly. Firstly, we are to pray watchfully and perseveringly. Secondly, we are to pray for all the saints.

And thirdly, we are to pray for the preaching or the preachers of the gospel. Praying watchfully and perseveringly.

Praying at all times in the spirit with all prayer and supplication. To that end, keep alert with all perseverance. In other words, he is saying, to that end of prayer and supplication, you have to keep alert with all prayer, with all alertness and perseverance.

The alertness and the perseverance are themselves required so that we will be active in prayer and supplication.

[2 : 55] That's the order of the words, that's the meaning of the words, to that end. A soldier requires to be fit, disciplined, alert, ready for the job.

The fitness of a soldier is important to more than himself or herself. A soldier doesn't act on their own. They're part of an army, just as you find other forces, whether air forces, naval forces, but all of these act as teams.

They are all together in the one fight. That's why it's important that each person regards themselves as fitting in their own way into the overall work of the army, the navy, the team, whatever it is.

That's how it is in the praying people of God as well. A soldier in bad condition, a neglectful soldier, a soldier that doesn't really bother much with discipline, with being fully involved in the routine, in the practice ground, in all the things that do with the training of the soldier.

A soldier that is lazy or not really concerned to be involved much in all of that is a danger to himself and to his colleagues.

[4 : 10] That's what the apostle has in mind as he's talking here about prayer and the need to have prayer and supplication, praying at all times in the spirit with prayer and supplication.

And to that end, so that you will be enabled to do that. Be alert, keep alert with all perseverance.

Remember in Matthew 25 in the garden of Gethsemane, when the Lord came to the disciples that he had taken with him, that this is in fact precisely what he said to them when he found them sleeping.

He did say that they could not watch with him in the form of a question. Could you not watch with me? One, watch and pray. That you enter not into temptation, for the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.

In other words, the Lord was pointing to the fact that the flesh, the human part of us in our frailty, at least, that frailness that is ours, that weakness that is ours, that inability that is ours, even when it comes to prayer, it manifests itself.

For while there may be a willingness and a desire to pray, and a recognition that prayer is so important, yet there are so many other things about us that will make us sleepy and neglectful and lazy in respect to prayer as well.

[5 : 40] Watch and pray so that you enter not into temptation. That is what he is doing himself. That is what he is doing himself. He was watching and praying while the disciples slept.

That is why this is actually put in the rounding off of this passage that has to do with the armour of God. The effective use of all of these parts of the armour that we have looked at is dependent on our praying.

It is one thing to wear the armour. It is one thing to know what these bits of the armour represent. It is one thing to be able to know spiritually that we have all of these in place ourselves.

That we have the word of God. That we have the helmet of salvation. That we are wearing the breastplate of righteousness. But the strength of your life is through prayer.

Not through the mere wearing of these as it were. But through the praying and supplication in the spirit to the end of which we have to be alert and persevering.

[6 : 45] Ongoing. In fact there is an element there actually in the word perseverance. Which really indicates something to do with devotion.

The word has a relation to the idea of being devoted to someone or devoted to something. And what is saying to us here that prayer and supplication is something to which the Christian soldier is to be devoted.

And because you are devoted to it. You are alert and you are persevering in regard to it. Whatever you are devoted to and have a devotion about.

You are going to be careful that you actually do not neglect that. Whether it is a person or something else. Here is prayer that you are devoted to. And therefore it has to be with alertness and perseverance.

Like a soldier on guard. The enemy of our souls. Just like you find a soldier on guard. One of the strategies of the enemies is going to try to distract that person that is on guard.

[7 : 54] And there are so many ways in which a security guard or a soldier can be distracted. Think of a security guard in a large building for example. Let's say it is a large block of flats where people are depending on the security guard down below.

In the security centre. He has got all these monitors. And he has got folks with him as well that share in the task of security. Well it is not at all rare to actually hear that they actually get involved in some pastimes that may in fact be dubious.

And they might actually leave their post and get the other person to cover for them. And the monitors aren't really watched the way they should be. And they shall break in. And perhaps some disaster occurs.

Somebody's life is taken or something serious happens. It's all to do with the fact that they were not alert and persevering in the task of securing that place.

And that's why the devil, as we've said, that's why this is placed in a passage dealing with the devil's strategy. With the fact that we don't wrestle merely against flesh and blood.

[9 : 03] But these rulers, authorities and cosmic powers. The darkness of spiritual forces of evil. Headed up by the devil. One of the things that he will constantly be at in your life.

Is to distract you from alertness and perseverance from prayers. You know that as a Christian. It's already happened in your life.

Possibly many times if you've been long on the journey of the Christian life. And for those who are beginning the Christian life. For the ones who are early or have not yet progressed much in the faith.

It's one of the things that this passage is telling you. That from the time that you come to know the Lord. And especially from the time that you come out on the side of the Lord. One of the things you can be sure of.

Is that he's going to in different ways. Try and get you to drop your guard. Try and get you to forget that you're part of this important team of Christian people in the world.

[10:06] And focus on yourself. And distract you from the task of alertness. And watching unto prayers. You and I must watch that every day.

The devil knows. That the power to use your armor against him. Is largely through prayer. And that's why he will do his utmost.

To get you to. If not to cease praying. Certainly to deal with it seriously. To weaken it. To not be really earnest about it.

And so it's praying. Watchfully. And perseveringly. Every time you get on your knees. Or even at other times. If it's just a briefer time of prayer.

Remind yourself of who you are. Remind yourself of your relationship. To the army of God. To the people of God. As we'll see in a minute. To the saints. Remind yourself that you don't stand alone.

[11:06] And therefore your responsibilities are more than to yourself. And when you pray. Remember that you're praying. For all of God's people.

For the cause of God. For the way in which. That cause must progress. And pray watchfully. And perseveringly.

And keep alert. Keep on the lookout. For every evidence of distraction. From the business of prayer. It is so important.

It is too important. To be distracted from. Secondly. It's praying for all the saints. Praying with all prayer and supplication.

Keep alert to that end. With all perseverance. Making supplication. For all the saints. Now who are these people? These saints of course are.

[12:03] Not those who have gone to heaven. Though they are saints. In the state of perfection. The Bible. Paul especially calls. The saints. The people of God. That's why. He calls.

If you just cast your mind forward. To the next book. You'll find the. Introduction there. Says that it's Paul and Timothy. The servants of Christ. To all. The saints.

In Christ Jesus. Who are at Philippi. You are all saints. Because God. Has. Separated you. He has consecrated you. He sanctified your life. He set you apart.

For himself. That's what sainthood means. You don't confine it. To the way that. Some church traditions. Regards sainthood. As something that is. Administered by the Pope.

Or the papacy. In order that people. When they get to heaven. Are actually then. Beatified. By an act. Of such a person. God. Sanctifies. Every one of his people.

[12:58] The moment. He comes into their life. It is he. Who makes. Saints. And he makes. Saints. By. Setting them apart.

By bringing them. Out of the world. To himself. And setting them out. As his people. And we have to pray. For all. Saints.

You see. He is not. Suggesting. For one moment. That we pray. For some saints. And not others. That we pray. Only for those. Who are most like. Ourselves.

In the way. That we live. As the saints of God. Every single. Person. Every single. Time. We know of saints. Wherever they are. Whatever their background.

Wherever they live. However different from us. They are. As they are saints of God. They belong. Within our prayers. Praying. For all.

[13:51] The saints. That is why it is important. To find out. About the saints. That is why it is important. To. Take stock. Of what is happening. In the church. And in the church. Not just locally.

Or nationally. But internationally. That is why it is important. That we. Make efforts. To. To. Find out. For ourselves.

About. What is happening. To the people of God. That is why it is important. That we. Use the. Facilities. That are given to us.

By way of. For example. Prayer notes. Of different kinds. Uh. Uh. I know that. We come across. Some people. Who don't really like. Prayer notes. Who don't like to be.

Uh. Given things. That are sent out. Before them. And. Uh. Asked to pray about. Such and such a thing. Well. There is of course. In prayer. An element of waiting.

[14:45] Upon God. And seeking. That it be praying. In the spirit. That the spirit. Will guide you in prayer. But what is wrong. With pointing to things. To pray for. The apostle himself. Did that.

All through his letters. He actually says. To the Philippians. To the Ephesians. This is what I am praying for. This is what you should be praying for. This is what your prayer. Should be about. And one of the great things. About. Uh. The. Prayer notes. That we get. From our own central offices. Or the prayer notes. From Barnabas. Or the prayer notes. From Slavic Gospel Association. Wherever they are from. They are setting out. For us things. About the saints. They are telling us. About the saints. They are setting out. Details. Where. The life of the saints. The church of God. The people of God. In different parts of the world. Are set before us. In their need. And we are asked to. [15:42] Pray for them. That is so important. For all the saints. But we do. Of course. Sometimes. Single out. Um. Understandably. The saints. That are being persecuted.

The Bible itself. Does that. Those that are really. Suffering. For their faith. And that is why we. Uh. Actually come. At times. To mention. Specifically. People in Nigeria. People in. South Sudan. People in China. People in. Pakistan. Wherever they are. As the people of God. Where they are suffering. Grievously. Because they are the people of God. God. The Lord is saying to us. Here is something. Not just in regard to. Using your armor. Well for yourself. And for your local needs. Praying. For all. The saints. And it is a sign. Of a healthy. [16:37] Spiritual people. When their prayers. Show. That they take account. Out of the needs. Of the saints. Elsewhere. And even to the ends. Of the earth.

Because. We are all. In the same war. And whether we are living. In Pakistan. Or Scotland. Or Lewis. It is the same war. That all of the saints. Are engaged in. The war against evil. The war against sin. The war against the devil. The war against worldliness. The war against everything. That opposes the gospel. That is where our warfare is. And we are all. All the saints. Together in that war. Just think back to. The second world war. For example. It is one of the ways. In which you can perhaps illustrate this. The second world war. [17:35] At its height. Had battlefields. All over the world. On the high seas. In the Pacific. In the far east. The continent of Europe.

In Russia. In the Atlantic. Right across to. South and North America. At least to the. Far side of the Atlantic there. The whole of that. Had all of these different. Battle fields. At fronts. In which soldiers. And airmen. And naval personnel. Were engaged. But they were all. Fighting the same enemy. And fighting the same war. And all involved. In the same cause. Those who were. On the seas. In the Atlantic. Could never say. That the war was confined. To the work. That they were involved in. They were interested. In what was happening. In Europe. The ones in Europe. Were interested. And concerned. For what was happening. In the far east. Or in North Africa. [18:34] Because if there was defeat. There then. It had an impact. On where the soldiers. Went elsewhere. And so it is. With the Christian people. Of God. With the church of God.

Tonight. You. Are with so many. Millions of saints. In very different. Circumstances. But involved. In the same. War. For God. On the side of Christ. Christ. That is why. He is saying. It is important. That we. Pray for all the saints. And again. The strategy. Of the devil. And that is important. To note. We live. In days. When. Individualism. Is one of the things. That continues. To be so emphasized. And so promoted. That. You have it. In various forms. But it really comes. Pretty much. To saying. You look after yourself. [19:29] First. Never mind the rest. The devil's aim. Is. To individualize. Your outlook.

On life. So that you end up saying. Well these are my problems. And these are my difficulties. And you don't. Get outside. The little cocoon. Of your own life. If the devil. Will have his way. Because the more. You do that. And the more you. Individualize. And the more you. Internalize. Your own problems. And keep them separate. The more.

You're actually. Going to cut yourself off. From being. A soldier. Of Christ. The more. You will actually. Not contribute.

To the overall. Needs. Of God's people. That's what the devil. Sought to do. With Peter. That's why. Jesus.

[20 : 24] Actually. Forewarned him. Simon. Simon. Satan. Has desired. To have. You. You. The individual. So that through you.

He'll get in amongst the rest. And sift you all. Like wheat. That's what he's still about. That you will be taken up. So much.

With your own things. That you will neglect. The things of others. That's why. In Philippians 2. The apostle. The apostle. Really does emphasize. Although it's not.

Prayer. That's mentioned there. Specifically. But it is saying that. Do nothing from rivalry. Or in conceit. But in humility. Count others. More significant. More significant. Than yourselves.

Let each of you. Look not only. To his own interests. But also. To the interests. Of others. And then he brings in. That great passage. About Jesus. And that is the very essence.

[21 : 18] Of the life. He lived. Not a selfish life. Not an individualistic life. Not a mindset. That was taken up with himself. Though he had so much to be taken up with.

His regard was for his people. For others. And that's how he lived. You remember back. Some time ago. We looked at Nehemiah.

And we noticed how. In the book of Nehemiah. You find. A list of. Families. Or. Names of families. Particularly. That said about. The building. Of. The wall. Of Jerusalem. And. You remember. When we looked at that passage. That we. Did say. That the. Building of the wall.

By these people. It seemed just to be a list. With not much. Really to do with. Anything. Particular. In chapter 3. But we noticed there. Remember that. The fact.

[22 : 15] That they are all recorded. In such detail. Is one of the ways. In which Nehemiah's. Recording of that event. In his book. Showed the unity. Of the people.

And how important. That unity was. For the building up. Of the walls. In Jerusalem. Every single family. Stood alongside. Or between other families. And all the way.

Around the wall. Of Jerusalem. There were no gaps. Left. And where there was a gap. Where there weren't enough. People to go around. Others did. Twice the amount.

Of work. Of whatever. That's how the wall. Came to be finished. Because. Each did their own part. Each family. Had their own space.

Their own contribution. Their own slot. In the work. They were part of. The whole. Work of building. That's who it is. In prayer as well. That's how it is.

[23 : 07] With regard to our contribution. To the church of Christ. We don't exist. For ourselves. We don't exist. Isolated from other people. One of the great privileges. We have. Is that when God converts you.

He doesn't leave you out. Of your own. He puts you into the fellowship. Of God's people. The saints. And that carries. Responsibilities. As well.

As privileges. That especially has to do with. Praying. For all. The saints. So there's praying. Watchfully. And perseveringly. There's praying.

For all the saints. And then there's praying. For the preacher. And also. For me. He says. 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. In other words.

[24 : 02] When Paul wrote. This letter. To the Ephesians. He was in prison. He was facing hardship. He was suffering. Because he was kept. Imprisoned. Actually chained.

And unable. To go freely. Freely about. As he would. Himself. Prefer to be. But he's not asking. For prayer. In regard. To his hardships.

He's not asking. These Ephesians. To pray for him. To be released. Stephen. He's not asking.

These Ephesians. To pray. That the Lord. Will actually. Bring an alleviation. Or some relief.

To him. In his predicament. In the hardships. That's not why. He's saying. To pray for him. Because. You notice that word. Ambassador. He's an ambassador.

In chains. And what he wants them. To pray. About. Is that. They will pray. For his ambassadorship. He's an ambassador. Of Christ. He's a conveyor.

[25 : 00] Of the truth. Of the gospel. He's somebody. That God. Is commissioned. To declare. His truth. In the world. Against all. That he will meet. That's really.

Why he's saying. Praying for me. The focus is not. On him. As a mere individual. Or as a sufferer. The focus is on him. As an ambassador. His concern.

Is for the gospel. Not for himself. That's why he's praying. That. They will pray. For him. That I. He says. That I may speak.

Boldly. That I may open my mouth. Boldly. To proclaim. The mystery. Of the gospel. Now when he says. Boldly. He mentions it twice. He doesn't mean.

By that. To speak. Arrogantly. To speak. With pride. To speak. Tactlessly. What he means.

[25 : 59] By boldly. Is that he will speak. The truth. Irrespective. Of whatever. The consequences. Will be. In terms of. Reaction. And suffering.

Again. On his part. Speaking. Boldly. Really is. As he says. Speaking. The truth. As he ought. To speak it. Speaking the truth. As God has given it.

To him. To convey it. It means. Not being afraid. Of the consequences. Of proclaiming. The truth. In other words. You link this up.

With what Paul calls. Elsewhere. Especially in Galatians. And Galatians. Chapter 5. Verse 11. A wonderful phrase. Which. Is often. Has often been used. A phrase.

The offense. Of the cross. The offense. Of the cross. And the offense. Of the cross. Really reminds.

[26 : 55] Those who are preaching. The gospel. That. The ambassador's task. Is not. To make the gospel. Palatable.

To the world. It's not going to be. Palatable. To the world. Was it palatable. To yourself. Before God came to see.

To open your heart. To the truth of it. Was it palatable. To me. Before. He took me to. Realize. What my needs were. As a lost sinner. Of course. It wasn't palatable. It was distasteful.

That was something. That we wanted to reject. That we didn't want to accept. Why? Because there's an offense. About it. What is the offense. Of the cross.

The offense. Of the cross. Is not in the kind of language. That's used. It's the truth. That it conveys. That's offensive. And what is. The truth. That it's conveyed. What is the offense.

[27 : 50] Of the cross. What is this. That salvation. Lies. With a crucified. Jew. And that salvation.

Comes to us. Through that crucified. Jew. By his being crucified. On the cross. Of Calvary. And. In addition. To that. That.

God. Is involved. Directly. In that. Indeed. It's the scandal. And the offense. Of the cross. Not merely. That it's a cross. And not merely. That it's a Jew.

But that God himself. Is on the cross. And the person. Of his son. That's the scandal. That's the offense. That's what's.

Impalatable. Or unpalatable. About. The gospel. To the natural mind. And it's not our business. Either as Christians. In our witness. And particularly. In the business.

[28 : 47] Of preaching the gospel. It is not our business. To make that palatable. Because the moment. You make the message. Of the gospel. Palatable. To the natural mind.

You've lost the gospel. It's not going to be palatable. Until God. Opens people's hearts. To receive it. And you don't get.

To that point. By actually taking out. The things that are. Of most offense. That's. The essence of the gospel. What is most offensive. That's why Paul is saying.

Pray. Also for me. Not for him. As a mere. Suffering individual. Or a mere human being. But for him. As an ambassador.

For him. As a preacher. Of the gospel. For him. As one that God. Has commissioned. To declare. The truth. Boldly. Without fear. Of the consequences.

[29 : 44] That's why. We who preach. The gospel. I as dear minister. Tonight. Can say. Without. It being in any way. Presenting myself.

For the sake of it. Or giving any impression. Of focusing on me. As a person. Or pride. Or anything like that. Pray.

Because. One of the big. Temptations. That I face. Weekly. If not daily. Is that I will. Listen.

To the devil. And try. To make the gospel. Palatable. That I will take out.

Some of the things. That I know. Are most offensive. To people. In their natural state. A real temptation. Believing. And the devil.

[30 : 39] Knows full well. That that is a hugely. Successful way. Towards the damnation. Of souls. That's why.

There are many people. In the world. Who tonight. And today. And in these days. And it's not new. It's always been the case. But it's no less the case. In our day.

That there are people. Who give a message. Purporting to be the gospel. And it will change. Nobody's lives. Because there's no offense in it. To the natural mind.

It's an easy. Cozy. Comforting message. It doesn't disturb. Anyone's soul. It doesn't set out. To convert. Anyone. It's just. A nice. Message. The gospel is not. A nice message. Not to the sinner.

[31 : 39] Lost in their sins. Until God. Takes them out of it. That's why. This man. Was so concerned. That they pray. For him.

That's why. Every preacher. Of the gospel. Must be concerned. That his people. Pray for him. And this. Believe me. One of the most. Supportive things. You can do. I know some ministers.

Who don't like. Hearing themselves. Pray for. In public prayer. I don't know. Why that is. Maybe they've got good reason. But I'm not one of them.

I know that you don't do it. Just for the sake of doing it. I know that you do it. Because your concern. Is for the gospel. And for the preaching. Of the gospel.

And for people. To be saved. Through the gospel. And for sinners. To be awakened. Under the gospel. And in order to do that. You pray. That I will speak. Boldly.

[32 : 38] As I ought. To speak. Because that ought. Is the ought. Of God's will. And God's instruction. To speak boldly.

As I ought. To speak. That's why he's saying this. Because. There's such a great danger. That. We as preachers. Of the gospel. Will actually give way.

In some way or other. In some. To some degree or other. Give way. To the temptation. That wants us to. Slacken in that. Preaching of the gospel.

And try and make it palatable. As we've said. So these are the three things. Praying. With all watchfulness. And perseverance. Praying for all the saints.

Praying. Also. For the preaching. Or the preacher. Of the gospel. So that we will. Set about the business. Of preaching. In the way that we ought.

[33 : 38] The way that God himself. Would have us to do it. Friends. It's all about. What in military terms. We're looking at it. As a military passage. It's all about.

What in military terms. Would be called. Devotion. To duty. Devotion. To duty. That's our privilege. To be devoted. To the duty. Of serving. Our master. As well. As we possibly can. And to do that.

We do it. Prayerfully. And perseveringly. With all alertness.

And the great bonus. For us is. That at the end. Of the fight. We get. We get the DSM. The distinguished.

Service. Service. Medal. It's not. A medal. Of course. In the normal sense. It's far more than that. It is being.

[34 : 36] Glorified. With Christ. That's your distinguished. Service. Medal. And it's for all those. Who serve him.

Let's pray. Lord. Our gracious God. We thank you for prayer. And for the avenue. That you give us. In prayer. And for the way. In which.

Through prayer. We know your strength. Made perfect. In our weakness. We pray. That you bless to us. This passage of your word. But especially Lord.

We pray. That it might be. A means. By which. We will be alert. And persevering. In our prayer. Yes. That we will pray. With all prayer. And supplication. In the spirit.

That we will pray. For all the saints. For your cause. At large. Teach us Lord. We pray. To. Seek. That information. We need. And the spirit of prayer.

[35 : 30] For your people. Help us to pray. For the preaching. Of the gospel. Wherever we know. It takes place. Grant us. Thankful hearts. O Lord. That in our service.

For you. We are upheld. By the prayers. Of your people. Go before us. We pray now. And forgive our sin. For Jesus sake. Amen.