

# The Gathered Church (4) - Gathered for Prayer

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Date: 22 October 2023

Preacher: Rev James Maciver

[ 0 : 00 ] We're going to begin by singing in Psalm 9, as we begin our worship. Psalm number 9, and that's on page 208, the tune is Argyle. We're singing verses 1 to 9.

Lord, thee I'll praise with all my heart, thy wonders all proclaim. In thee, most high, I'll greatly joy and sing unto thy name. When back my foes were turned, they fell and perished at thy sight, for thou maintain'st my right and cause on throne sat judging right. Verses 1 to 9, in Psalm number 9, Lord, thee I'll praise with all my heart. Please stand if you're able to.

Lord, thee I'll praise with all my heart, thy wonders all proclaim.

Lord, thee I'll praise with all my heart, thy name. When back my foes were turned, they fell and and perished at thy sight. When back my foes were turned, they fell and perished at thy sight.

Lord, thee I'll praise with all my heart, thy name. When back my foes were turned, they fell and perished at thy sight.

[ 1 : 37 ] For thou may take thy light and cause on throne sat judging right.

The heathen love renewed in us, the wicked overgrown.

Thou hast to doubt there in such way, In heaven or beyond.

O heavenly love, destruction, O heavenly love, destruction, O heavenly love, destruction, O heavenly love, destruction, O heavenly love, earth, and earth.

By the heart, thy name. The heaven and earth. Thou hast to doubt there in such way, And there in such way, In heaven or heaven, Thou hast to doubt, In heaven or heaven, Thou hast to doubt there in such way, O challenger for any love, for judgment set his throne, in righteousness to judge the world, justice to give each one.

[ 3 : 40 ] God also will a refugee for those that are oppressed, a refugee shall be in times of trouble to discuss.

Let's all unite now in prayer. Let's call upon the Lord in prayer. Let's call upon the Lord in prayer. Gracious and eternal God, as we gather once more in your presence, we give thanks for the encouragement these words have given us, that you always prove to be a refuge to your people, and that you remain to be the God who is constant, who endures forevermore, who deals justly with all the circumstances that we find ourselves in, and especially with us in all our circumstances, as indeed everybody else in the creation.

And we give thanks, Lord, tonight that we gather before you as the God who is sovereign and wise and all-powerful and loving in his loving kindness continues to remember us as your people.

Lord, we thank you for every opportunity we have to gather together in your name, for every way in which we find encouragement mutually with each other, to bring before the Lord our concerns in prayer, to sing his praises and to hear his word.

[ 5 : 33 ] And we thank you tonight that we form part of a great number throughout the world, and that we indeed, O Lord, also are conjoined with those who are already in heaven, for their praise of you, their worship of you, is essentially the same as that we have for ourselves, although theirs is perfect, while ours is still flawed.

We thank you that they sing your praises as the God of redemption, as we do here, that they are conscious of you as the God whose worthiness far exceeds our ability to contemplate in its entirety, and we thank you tonight, Lord, that as you are worthy of our worship, so we are pleased to render to you this sacrifice of praise.

All power and glory belongs to you. There is none else who has the rights that you have to be praised, and there is none else to be worshipped but the Lord God.

Lord, we give thanks that you have impressed upon us these aspects of your own being as they are revealed in your word, your own sovereignty and holiness and love and affection and commitment

to your people.

Indeed, everything, Lord, that you have revealed in your word about yourself, we know is entirely true. And we ask tonight for grace to receive the teaching of your word about you and about ourselves.

[ 7 : 02 ] Help us also to read the events of our own lives and our own time in the light of your word. Help us, Lord, to once again appreciate that the principles that apply to each generation of the world as it goes on in its course until you return, that they are all opposite and all relevant to our age also.

And we thank you tonight, O Lord, for every way in which you deal with us, different to what we deserve. We give thanks that you are the God who forgives sin, who receives repentant sinners to yourself, who establishes them, Lord, in your family.

For it is one thing for us to consider that our sin is forgiven, that our guilt is no longer held against us. But it is a step further for us to admire the fact of your adoption, that you receive your people, those whom you save, into your own spiritual family, and that you continue to provide for them in that regard as their Father in heaven.

Bless us, Lord, we pray every announcement of the gospel. Help us to appreciate that through the preaching of the gospel you have promised great things, that it is through hearing of your word that faith comes.

And we pray that our faith tonight will be strengthened as we meet together here in your name.

Bless us, Lord, we pray, in all that we engage in as a congregation.

[ 8 : 34 ] Bless us in all our efforts to make your name known in our community. Bless us in all the activities that we engage in, that we seek, Lord, to be a means of furthering the gospel, of furthering our own knowledge of you.

And to that end, bless, we pray, all the activities and the services that we anticipate on this coming week. We pray that they be blessed to us in all ages. We pray again for our children.

We ask for them, O Lord, that you would establish them further in your ways and in the way of following you. And help them, Lord, we pray, as we pray for them to be characterized in their own lives by the fear of God, by respect for you and by faith and trust in you.

Lord, bless to them the teaching they receive in their homes, in Sunday school and Bible class and in tweenies and in other ways. And we thank you for all who give so willingly of their time to teach our young people.

We thank you for all our youth leaders and pray that you would bless them, O Lord, as they commit themselves so willingly and diligently to this work. And we ask that you bless all who contribute to the well-being of the congregation in different ways.

[ 9 : 51 ] We thank you for the variety of gifts that we represent, acknowledging that they are by your appointment, by your blessing, by your own arrangement and wisdom.

We pray that by your grace we might be able to use our individual gifts in conjunction with one another, so that we will, as we should, function as a congregation of your people in holding forth your word as the word of life.

We pray your blessing, Lord, tonight on all whom we know who belong to us as a congregation who has special needs at this time, especially in your providence, as we find many in the congregation who are ill at this time.

Bless them, Lord. We pray at home or in hospital or in hospice. Grant your blessing to them, Lord, as they wait for further developments. And bless those, we pray, who are recovering from treatment, from surgery of various kinds.

Bless those who are ill with mental health issues as well. We commit them, Lord, to you and ask us, we pray for them, that you would help them in these situations in which they find themselves in their minds, that you would grant to them, Lord, a sense of assurance in knowing yourself.

[ 11 : 11 ] We pray, too, for those who mourn loved ones, those who have lost loved ones in recent days and in times gone by. We pray that your blessing, Lord, will comfort them and establish them in the knowledge of your ways and in the grace that is able to upbind their own broken hearts.

We pray, too, for those who are nearing death, who are seriously or even terminally ill. We ask, O Lord, for your blessing to prepare them as we all must be prepared to take that great step out of time and into eternity.

We pray that you would furnish them with the necessary grace, O Lord, that that journey may be taken in peace and to the everlasting rest of the Lord and of his kingdom.

We pray for our world at this time, Lord, and the various ways in which turmoil and anxiety and distress is found in so many places.

And we pray especially tonight for those, Lord, who are beset with war and with the tragedies of war and the difficulties and the deprivations that war brings.

[12:23] We think of the situation in the Middle East and we commit that to you and ask, O God, that you would bring about a means of peace, a means by which people will be established not in hatred for each other but in the ways of peace and of righteousness.

Remember the Jewish people. We know that while all the peoples of the world to some extent have the gospel set before them, whether they be Islamic or Jewish or otherwise, Lord, we pray especially for them as a people for so many of your promises are bound up with them and in them. And we pray at this time that even the troubles that they experience as a nation, Lord, that by your blessing they might prove to be a means by which they come to recognize their Messiah in the Lord Jesus Christ.

And we ask for all who are active in mission toward them that you would be pleased to bless their efforts. Bless all the agencies, Lord, that we know of who stand for the principles and the values of the gospel and of those moral values that emanate from it.

Remember the Christian Institute. Remember Christian Concern. Remember the work of Road to Recovery here locally and in other places in the country. Remember Safe Families.

[13:44] Remember every other similar agency, Lord, that seeks to do good to those around us, to those who are in need. And to be pleased, we pray, to bless all who are engaged in that work.

And so continue with us now as we wait upon you here. And as we, Lord, seek to set these things before you in prayer, we confess our sins, we confess our unworthiness, we confess our need, we confess, O Lord, that once again we need to know the assurance of our sin forgiven and to continue in a repentant frame of spirit throughout all our days.

Hear us, we pray, for Jesus' sake. Amen. Now we're going to praise God once again, this time in Psalm 57. This time it's in the Sing Psalm, Psalm 57.

That's on page 74 to Tune Selma. And we're singing verses 1 to 5. Have mercy on me, Lord, to you my soul holds fast.

Your covering wings will shelter me until the dangers pass. I cry to God most high, to God who answers me, for he fulfills his purposes for me most perfectly.

[14:58] Psalm 57 and verses 1 to 5. To God's praise. Amen. Have mercy on me, Lord, to you my soul holds fast.

Your covering wings will shelter me until the dangers pass.

I cry to God most high, to God who answers me, for he loses his purposes, for me most perfectly. He sends his help from heaven and saves me from the heart.

I cry to God most high, to you my life, for senses to come above.

[16:34] I live with savage peace, I dwell with thy own strong, with men whose keep with piercing words a sharp sword is their tongue.

above the highest end, O God exalted be, and over, holy and below, display your majesty.

Now let's turn to read from God's word in the book of Acts, Acts of the Apostles, in chapter 12. And let's read down through the whole of the chapter.

Acts chapter 12. About that time, Herod the king laid violent hands on some who belonged to the church.

He killed James, the brother of John, with the sword. And when he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter also. This was during the days of unleavened bread.

[18:17] And when he had seized him, he put him in prison, delivering him over to four squads of soldiers to guard him, intending after the Passover to bring him out to the people.

So Peter was kept in prison, but earnest prayer for him was made to God by the church. Now when Herod was about to bring him out, on that very night, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, and sentries before the door were guarding the prison.

And behold, an angel of the Lord stood next to him, and a light shone in the cell. He struck Peter on the side and woke him, saying, Get up quickly. And the chains fell off his hands.

And the angel said to him, Dress yourself and put on your sandals. And he did so. And he said to him, Wrap your cloak around you and follow me. And he went out and followed him.

He did not know what was being done by the angel, that what was being done by the angel was real, but thought he was seeing a vision. When they had passed the first and the second guard, they came to the iron gate leading into the city.

[ 19 : 27 ] It opened for them of its own accord. And they went out and went along one street, and immediately the angel left him. Now when Peter came to himself, he said, Now I am sure that the Lord has sent his angel and rescued me from the hand of Herod and from all that the Jewish people were expecting.

When he realized this, he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John, whose other name was Mark, where many were gathered together and were praying. And when he knocked at the door of the gateway, a servant girl named Rhoda came to answer.

Recognizing Peter's voice, in her joy, she did not open the gate, but ran in and reported that Peter was standing at the gate. They said to her, You are out of your mind.

But she kept insisting that it was so, and they kept saying, It is his angel. But Peter continued knocking, and when they opened, they saw him and were amazed.

But motioning to them with his hand to be silent, he described to them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison. And he said, Tell these things to James and to the brothers.

[ 20 : 39 ] Then he departed and went to another place. Now when day came, there was no little disturbance among the soldiers over what had become of Peter. And after Herod searched for him and did not find him, he examined the sentries and ordered that they be put to death.

Then he went down from Judea to Caesarea and spent time there. Now Herod was angry with the people of Tyre and Sidon, and they came to him with one accord, and having persuaded Blastus the king's chamberlain, they asked for peace because their country depended on the king's country for food.

On an appointed day, Herod put on his royal robes, took his seat upon the throne, and delivered an oration to them. And the people were shouting, the voice of a God and not of a man.

Immediately an angel of the Lord struck him down because he did not give glory, God the glory, and he was eaten by worms and breathed his last.

But the word of God increased and multiplied. And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem when they had completed their service, bringing with them John, whose other name was Mark.

[ 21 : 58 ] May the Lord again bless to us reading this portion of his word. Before we turn to some aspects of this passage, let's sing again, singing Psalm 142, 142, that's on page 186, singing to a tune, Finart.

I cry for mercy to the Lord, to him I lift my voice in prayer. Before the Lord I bring my plea, to him my trouble I declare.

Each time my spirit faints in me, you are the one who knows my way. For in the path on which I walk, a hidden snare for me they lay.

Singing on to the end of the Psalms, Psalm 142, I cry for mercy to the Lord. I cry for mercy to the Lord, to him I lift my voice in prayer.

Before the Lord I bring my plea, to him my trouble I declare.

[ 23 : 30 ] Each time I sit, it hints in me, You are the one who knows my way.

For in the path on which I walk, a hidden snare for me they lay.

To my right and landing note, There is not one God sent for me.

I love no refuge, I love no refuge, No one cares for me in my adversity.

I cry for mercy to the Lord. I cry for mercy to the Lord, I cry aloud to you, O Lord.

[ 24 : 53 ] You are my hiding place in sight. You are the one sustaining me.

You keep me in the land of life. Lord, listen to my guide for help, For I am an extra strategy.

Save me from those who seek my life, Because they are too strong for me.

So that I may give thanks to you, From prison's darkness set me free, The righteous men will gather round, Because you've shown your love to me.

Well, let's turn for a short time to Acts chapter 12. Acts chapter 12, Particularly the words of verse 12, Though we can read verse 5 as well.

[ 26 : 44 ] So we'll read verse 5 and then verse 12. So Peter was kept in prison, But earnest prayer for him was made to God by the church.

In verse 12, When he realized this, He went to the house of Mary, The mother of John, Whose other name was Mark, Where many were gathered together And were praying.

You recall last time, As we continued this short series of studies On the gathered church And certain aspects of what is True about the church, As gathered together in the name of Christ. We saw last time how important it is That our gathering is in order to listen To the voice of God. One aspect among many, But an important one nonetheless, As we saw last time.

That we are gathered to listen to the voice of God Speaking to us from his word, Through the blessing of the Holy Spirit we trust, So that we hear the voice of God Preeminently not the voice of any human being, Though that of course is the means, The conveyance of the Bible's teaching.

[ 27 : 53 ] But there are other aspects of our gathering together In God's name, Such as we are this evening, That are important and mentioned for us frequently In the scriptures. There are two especially, And that these two are prayer and praise.

And we are going to look at these in turn, Looking at tonight, The importance of the church gathered together For prayer or in prayer. And we are looking at this chapter especially As the context in which we are seeing The church at prayer.

That will be our first point. The church at prayer and the circumstances In which we find the church there together praying. And then secondly we will look at a couple of the benefits That come to us from gathering together For prayer and in prayer as God's people, As God's church.

Now it is significant here, The church at prayer is significant in the chapter Twice here you find in these verses We have mentioned verses 5 and 12 That it is the church that is mentioned as praying.

It is not just individuals, Obviously the church is comprised of individuals, But the emphasis here is very firmly On the church as the church.

[ 29 : 10 ] Gathered together for prayer. And that is important in the context of Acts especially You will find it elsewhere in the Bible But Acts as you know Is the book that tells us about the development Of the early New Testament church.

The spreading out of the gospel Beyond Jerusalem into the regions around And eventually really into the world Into the Gentile world. And in the difficulties that were faced By the church at that time It was so important that prayer was emphasized As an essential element in the church's gatherings And that prayer is seen in these passages This one and others To be a feature of the church gathered together.

It wasn't enough that they would go home And pray in their own homes As they undoubtedly did. It was important that the church as it was seen And living as the church of God That it was a church engaged in prayer.

The gospel message met as it did here With much opposition, with persecution As we will see in a moment. But that was all the more a context for prayer For the church at prayer To actually engage in prayer As they sought to present the gospel And reach out with the gospel To the world around them.

And you can see this elsewhere In the book of Acts as well That prayer was so important to the church Chapter 2, verse 42 Chapter 4 from verse 24 onwards Chapter 6, verses 1 to 6 The election of what came to be known as deacons Chapter 13, verses 1 to 3 The appointment of those who were going to mission To go into a specific mission All of these activities and situations Were times not just for individuals to pray But for the church to be together in prayer The gathered church at prayer Now of course here we have a specific context As one of persecution Here is Herod exercising his authority And first of all causing James The brother of John to be put to death To be killed with the sword And then he set his sights on Peter also He was the next in line to be killed But meantime he just couldn't go through

[ 31 : 34 ] With it immediately It was a time of unleavened bread So instead of killing him on the spot Or putting him to death He put him into prison Caused him to be guarded in prison And this of course is part of the context Of the book of Acts That indeed all the way back into The time of Jesus himself as well That the figure of Jesus The teaching of Jesus The authority of Jesus The way that Jesus was attracting so many To follow him For the state That was a great challenge And here now in the days of the apostles The political world of the day Sees the church as a great threat A threat to its authority A threat to its hold on people And along with that you have An obvious spiritual hatred For the king of the church As he is presented in the gospel It is that spiritual hatred of the heart That really comes to the fore As much as anything political

And you can translate that Into the world in which you and I Are living today Because that same threat Or at least is perceived as a threat By the state When the state becomes The controlling factor over people's lives And we are not against actually Complying with the state When that is biblical to do so The powers that be As Paul says in Romans 13 Are ordained of God And we have to give due place To the state To those powers that God In the civil and political world Has appointed But then the state Very often steps out of line It is not true to God Sometimes it is a persecuting state Sometimes it comes to express It is hated for the church And for the gospel And for what the church stands for Even to the extent Sometimes of persecution And you will find it very difficult In our own context today As a nation In some places at least To actually stand out rightly For the gospel It is going to meet

Not just with hostility But what really Amount to persecution And some people Have ended up being imprisoned And some people find That even authorities Like the powers of law and order And the police service Sometimes overstep the mark And actually cause That kind of difficulty For people who are simply Being through Without in any way Being violent Or seeking to press People into decisions They don't want to take Still it is the gospel It is Jesus It is the voice of God It is the church Presenting the claims of Christ And the world does not like that And never will As long as it is the world And there are of course Thousands throughout the world Today in prison Because they are Christians Because they are true to Jesus Because they want The message of Christ proclaimed Because they are concerned That people will come To know him for themselves That they will come to have him

As their saviour too And that of course Is met with great hostility Especially as a secularist view Of life increases in our own nation as well Well that is in a sense by the way But that is the world That is the context In which you find this chapter set And these incidents But you see here in verse 5 Peter was kept in prison But earnest prayer for him Was made to God by the church The church made it its business And exercised its privilege To pray to God You see the contrast very clearly In that verse Peter was kept in prison The state had the power Of closing the gates of the prison Of keeping Peter imprisoned Of actually shutting him up So he couldn't speak publicly at all So the prison was closed The gates were shut It was firmly held fast But the gates of heaven were open And the church knew That the gates of heaven were open

And how did the church exercise Its knowledge Of knowing that the gates of heaven Were open By praying By coming to exercise Their right and their privilege of prayer They gathered together For earnest prayer Specifically for Peter At that point That is what the church did That is what the whole Of the church at the time did And so you find the same in verse 12 When Peter had By the agency of the angel Come to be released from prison He went to the house of Mary The mother of John Whose other name was marked And then notice Where many were gathered together And were praying Where many were gathered together And were praying It's obvious from the way it's put there That that meeting That that meeting was specifically for prayer That that gathering was for prayer For Peter particularly But I'm sure they prayed for other things as well

[ 36 : 40 ] But it's a meeting specifically for prayer They were gathered together And were praying They were in the act of praying They were busy praying They were praying together as a church As a people Collectively They were praying They were praying They were praying They were praying I remember one of my Most wonderful experiences Was in Korea At the time of attending An early morning prayer meeting And that early morning prayer meeting Is a prayer meeting They have every single day In the congregations in Seoul in Korea And the congregation that we went to Had something like 90 or 100 people If I remember rightly That had gathered at that time in the morning At half past five in the morning It was still dark And they all gathered in the church there And the pastor led them For the opening prayer Then he knelt down himself

Behind a lectern Or a pulspot at the beginning At the one end of the church And as he knelt down All the lights in the church Were then switched off And prayer started And everybody prayed Where they were It seemed strange to us Who were there Because we don't normally pray Where everybody prays at the same time And for a start It sounds a little bit disorganized But actually you get used to it And what really strikes you Is the fervency of the prayer That's going on around you And we of course ourselves Attempted to be engaged in prayer as well And prayed for various things Before the Lord But the remarkable thing is That at that time in the morning These people had a burden To gather together for prayer It was their practice It was their custom It was the church in prayer And that's all that went on For that whole hour Or however long it was When

people finished prayer Their own prayer They went out quietly But the meeting carried on Until the last person Finished praying If we set a prayer meeting For 5.30 in the morning From tomorrow onwards Would you and I Be burdened enough to attend? Would we come to that meeting That meeting That regularly? There's a question But this church here In the days of the apostles They were gathered together And were praying And it appears from All that you read in this chapter of Acts That this was not something They did every month And it wasn't even something That they did with regard To a specific need Such as the imprisonment of Peter It was something That regularly They engaged in As time went on Week by week Day by day And that's the kind of thing We must attend to ourselves I'm absolutely persuaded That it's a mark Of the health of any church As to how frequently They come together to pray Not just how frequently People pray in their own homes Or individually As I hope we all do But how often And how much Do we come together to pray? We have meetings Specifically for prayer Set on the first Monday Of each month We have one each Saturday On a weekly basis But we need to actually attend To how many attend Why we don't have so many attending As we should Why is there just a few Out of the membership Of the church That you have less than 20 people At a monthly prayer meeting Even when it's conveniently Held on Zoom?

[ 40 : 27 ] Is it because it's not the right time For most people? Is it because the time Isn't just suitable? Or is it that we don't have In our hearts A sufficient burden To be together To pray?

To pray I'm putting that as a challenge To myself But it's a challenge To us as a congregation Isn't it? That we really need To focus More than we're doing On being gathered together Specifically to pray I know that our Wednesday meeting Has a limited time for prayer Because there's also Bible exposition Which in its own right Is important But the meetings we have Specifically for prayer only And for people to be together To pray To pray Whether it's in person Or by means of Zoom Or whatever The point I'm making is This friends We will not go very far Unless we have this desire This burden To be gathered together To pray To pray as a people To pray congregationally To pray With corporate prayer As much as we do In gathered prayer In individual prayer as well So there's something

To consider from this passage tonight Where is my own desire In relation to what I find In this passage Of this church In the days of the apostles The days of the apostles Actually burdened to be together Specifically to pray The more we do that And it's not a matter of just doing it For its own sake We have to pray that the Lord Will give us the burden to be there We have to pray that the Lord Will impress upon us How important a feature that is Of the life of the church It's basic to our spiritual health It's basic to our growth As a congregation Growth not just numerically But especially growth spiritually And as we'll see later That's such an important issue In the book of Acts itself So there's the first thing The church at prayer Is it a specific situation?

Yes It's specific to the needs of that time But all of that impresses upon us How much we ourselves should Have this as a principle And as a practice That as a church We come together Not just to praise the Lord In singing Not just to hear and listen To the voice of God But also specifically To pray to Him To let our voice be heard in heaven And to come to place before the Lord As is our privilege The things the Lord lays on our hearts To pray for To put before Him The church at prayer then So what are the benefits Of the church being gathered together for prayer?

Well I'm going to mention two That are more than that as well First of all It contributes to our unity in the faith It contributes to our unity in the faith We read in Ephesians chapter 4 From the beginning of the chapter Again there's Paul as a prisoner of the Lord And saying Bear with one another in love Eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit In the bond of peace And so on He says there to maintain the unity of the Spirit The Spirit of God creates the unity that God's people enjoy But we are charged to maintain to look after that unity The unity that the Spirit creates The unity certainly that we are dependent on the Spirit for the maintaining of But it's not without prayer And one of the beauties of prayer is that we urge the Lord We pray to the Lord To maintain that unity

[ 44 : 31 ] To bless us as a people As a corporate body of people As witnesses to Christ in the world So you see as we come together to pray Yes we pray As I keep saying individually At home that's a great privilege for us as well We pray at times when we are gathered virtually And I know that that's a means by which people are able to Take part in meetings that they can't otherwise physically be at For good reason and of course we accept that But wherever we can and whenever we can be gathered together physically for prayer Here is one great advantage of it That it actually contributes

to our unity in the faith Because there is where we pray together As we pray together What are we praying for?

We're praying for growth We're praying for others besides ourselves We're praying together for specific needs of the church Or of the congregation We're praying for the advance of the gospel We're praying for the church at large We're praying for the congregation in its settings We're praying in confession of our sins We're listening to others And joining with them as they confess their sins And we confess our individual sins to God We pray for our children We pray for the blessing of God on our children We pray as we collectively gather together It's a wonderful thing to hear together of people Actually engage together in prayer Even if it's just one person that's actually speaking We're collectively engaged in our minds along with that And setting out our desires and putting out amen to that We're praying for the nation We pray for all the things God lays upon our hearts What a great privilege it is for us To gather together specifically to pray

To be able, as God has enabled us To give that time To give that time And it's Amongst all our other burdens Amongst all our other duties in the world It's not A large portion of our time That we are to give to prayer collectively It's only an hour Or at the most Or at the most two hours a week Or at the beginning of each month Where is that in relation to The time we give to other things Even things other than our necessary duties And family or whatever Maybe a good exercise for myself And for yourselves To draw up a little sheet And put down in that sheet The number of hours we spend doing certain things Whether it's actually watching television

Being on Facebook But put a column there As to the number of hours we spend In a month let's say In collective prayer That will be quite revealing I'm sure And quite challenging as well Well what we're saying is that That collecting Collective prayer The gathered church As it gathers to pray Is such an important feature In its health In its witness to God And in our building of one another up Collectively in the faith that is in Christ Now the issues The issues that are most emphasized in the Bible And especially in the New Testament The issues that are specified Most or most specified As issues for prayer Are actually spiritual Not material You look at Paul's epistles Look at the glimpses he gives us

In these passages in some of his epistles That tell us about what he was praying for And he's revealing to these churches And whether it's Ephesus or Colossae Of the kind of things that he was praying for Again let's just think of Ephesians In chapter 3 And from verse 14 onwards there Where he says this For this reason I bow my knees before the Father From whom every family in heaven and on earth is named That according to the riches of his glory And then he goes on to specify what he's praying for That he may grant you to be strengthened with power Through his spirit in your inner being So that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith And that you being rooted and grounded in love May have strength to comprehend with all the saints What is the breadth and length and depth and height And to know the love of Christ That surpasses knowledge That you may be filled with all the fullness of God You see the things he's praying for

[ 49 : 31 ] He's praying for He's praying for the church's strengthening For the church's growth in their appreciation of the love of Christ And all the way through He tells us these spiritual things That he sets before God in prayer And is now revealing to the church This is what I'm praying for And he's saying this is what you yourselves Are actually to be committed to as well So it contributes to our unity in the faith But secondly, the benefits of gathering together Connects us with God at work It connects us with God at work Because God answers prayer Now just in passing I want to mention verse 15 there It's interesting there, it's quite revealing That when news was brought to the meeting That Peter had actually been released from prison They told Rhoda, you're out of your mind No, that's not possible, he's in prison

No way he's getting out of prison Just now, how could he possibly have gotten out? Of course, they were praying for one thing They were praying for Peter And yet when it came to the point of his release They weren't prepared to believe it That it was true And it reminds us that we are to pray expectantly As God enables us That we're not to pray certain things Leave them with God And then not exercise our minds believingly Or expectantly He was a church at prayer And yet, even in the days of the apostles They weren't prepared to accept That their prayers had been answered Or answered that quickly That's in the passing But it's important But what is it that follows from their prayer?

How did God answer the church at prayer? Well, in two things First of all, in Peter's release And then secondly, in the death of Herod The man who had actually organized And in his authority Had

taken pleasure in putting James to death And Peter in prison As you go through the chapter As we read through it All of a sudden he died Just as he was in the midst of A great oration And in his pomposity And in the regal splendor of his gowns As he spoke there to the people He was struck down by an angel of God And he was eaten of what I'm saying Some internal Condition Which led very quickly to his death Here he was The voice of a God And not of a man And this is going on as the church Was praying for their situation And praying for Peter And praying for themselves And all of a sudden

The person who was most instrumental In putting Peter in prison Is dead Is part of God's answer They didn't pray that Herod would just fall down dead Doesn't appear to be the case anyway Some of them might have wished that But in any case That's the result That's how God In his wisdom Answered their prayers And Peter was free And Herod is dead And both of these As elements in answer to prayer Fit the purpose of God And what is the purpose of God?

Well it's in verse 24 But the word of God Increased and multiplied You see the contrast That word but You find it there in verse 5 Peter was kept in prison But Ernest prayer was made by the church Here is Herod's threatening But the word of the Lord Increased and multiplied That was God's purpose That is actually what happened And many revivals in the history of the church Have come about Through times of persecution That were accompanied by or involved The church turning to prayer The church turning to prayer The church turning to prayer People gathering together for prayer One of the greatest Tragedies or events In the church in our own nation Took place in 1662 What's known as the Great Ejection When nearly 2,000 Puritan preachers Were ejected from their congregations Because they weren't prepared to sign up

[ 53 : 53 ] To what was called the Act of Uniformity Where they would have to comply with the state In terms of what was set out in the Book of Common Prayer And other things that accompanied that Well, I don't need to go into detail But that's what they were The state trying to force them to do that They said, no, we can't do that So they were ejected from their congregations But you see that led to a great volume of prayer And it didn't just happen that immediately God answered these prayers But many take the view that the revival The evangelical revival that broke out Especially in the 1730s to 1740 Not just in this country But also in North America as well The Great Awakening as it was called Out of the view that that itself Was an answer to the church at prayer And the church at prayer following a time of persecution God hears his praying people Worldly persecution

Cannot prevent the gospel's advance When it's in the mind of God to advance it Nothing is going to actually interfere with that Nothing is going to prevent that What happened here The word of God increased and multiplied You see, that's the very thing that Herod was trying to prevent That's what he was trying to stand against By putting James to death And putting Peter in prison There was Herod exercising authority And saying pretty much that I'm not going to allow this message, this gospel These people to interfere with my reign, with my authority With the state's power, with the secular state's power This is gone Herod's gone God's listened to his people The very thing that Herod tried to prevent Is the very thing that happened In the providence of God The word of God increased and multiplied

Not only was Herod And those who helped him Unable to prevent it happening But it was just the opposite Of what he was trying to do He was trying to stamp out the influence of the word of God And of the apostles and of the church That advance And it didn't just fail It actually led to an increase In the word Multiplying Throughout these regions But it didn't happen Without the church gathered for prayer And that's the point that I want to finish on That's the point we've been laboring All the way through our study tonight Everything that happened here The word of God increasing The demise of Herod None of that happened Without the church at prayer And the lesson for us is that When the church is collectively And wholeheartedly engaged in prayer

Things happen Because God hears that volume of prayer God hears every individual prayer That's sincerely offered to him Thanks be to God But here and elsewhere in the Bible The church gathered to pray Is something that is emphasized Something that's significant Something that has historically led By God's blessing to results To further blessing To the gospel's increase To God's church being strengthened Friends, I need not tell you that The days in which we are living Are perilous times for the gospel There are so many things that Are being brought out as threats To the gospel's advance And yes, we need to go home And pray about that individually We need to be doing that all the time But the more the church sees the threat

Of the world to the gospel The more the church sees the world The state seeking to clamp down  
And indeed to bring the gospel To nullify its effects The more you and I should be persuaded We  
need to get together to pray We need to be like the church In the book of Acts That actually come  
realizing that God Hears his people as they pray And expectantly set our concerns Our prayers, our  
desires before God As the church at prayer The church engaged in prayer You know, prayer is  
Surely one of our greatest privileges And being collectively gathered together to pray Is a privilege  
along with that It's our privilege to come individually And speak to God It's our privilege to be  
together

[ 59 : 04 ] To share together To hear together To have all of that Those features of gathered prayer  
What a great privilege that is When the world is concerned To be together so often For worldly  
purposes When today you would have had Thousands of people Gathering together At different  
sporting events I'm not decrying sporting events Though we would rather They were not on the  
Lord's Day But there's the commitment of the world To following their agenda Where is ours For the  
agenda of the gospel For the church's proclamation For the truth For God's name to be glorified For  
ourselves as a church

To be strengthened By the grace of God Well, may God bless these thoughts On his word to us  
Let's conclude by singing again In Psalm 57 I'd given verses 1 to 3 Which is a mistake really It's  
Psalm 57 But the final verses I'm sorry If that complicates things For the presenter It's the same  
The same psalm So it'll fit the tune that he's chosen The tune is Martyrdom But if we sing from  
verse 5 Sorry, from verse 7 Verse 7 My heart is fixed My heart is fixed My heart is fixed O God I'll  
sing and praise My glory wake Wake, wake, psalter heart Myself I'll early raise I'll praise thee  
among the people Lord Among nations sing will I For great to heaven Thy mercy is Thy truth is to  
the sky O Lord Exalted be thy name Above the heavens to stand

Do thou thy glory far advance Above both sea and land These verses 7 to the end of the psalm To  
God's praise My heart is fixed My heart is fixed O God I'll sing and praise My glory wake With  
saundry heart With saundry heart Myself I'll early raise I'll praise thee among the people Lord My  
nations sing will I My nations sing will I For great to heaven

Thy mercy is Thy truth is to the sky O Lord Exalted be thy name O Lord exalted be thy name Above  
the heavens to stand To love thy glory far To love thy glory far advance Above both sea and land I'll  
go to the main door after the benediction Now may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ The love of  
God the Father And the communion of the Holy Spirit Be with you now and evermore  
Amen