

Prepared to Pray Always

May 3, 2020

PASTOR: Good morning, everyone. I'm glad that we can again open the word of God and be able to share the scriptures with you today.

Many of you have been unexpectedly having a lot of quiet time, and I think this lends itself to thinking about prayer. Perhaps at the beginning of the virus when it first came out you prayed more, and now that it's become old hat maybe your prayers have dwindled. The old hymn says, Did you think to pray?

This morning I want to talk about prayer, and I want to discuss with you being prepared to pray always. And let's have a word of prayer first as we ask God's blessing on the proclamation of his word.

Oh Father, we continue to seek your face during this time. We have missed the fellowship of God's people. We have been disappointed, Father, by the long wait in between the weeks, and we thank you, Lord Jesus, for your goodness and grace in our lives. We thank you for watching over so many and having mercy on us. We thank you, oh Lord, for your continued work in our hearts. Thank you for those that are praying and for those that are keeping up

with the word of God. We pray that during this time that the spirit of God is using all of this to work in our hearts and our lives. May you refresh us with your truth again as we hear your word, and we'll thank you in Jesus' name. Amen.

As we mentioned, our sermon today is called Prepared to Pray Always, and I want to go back to an old friend of ours, Jonah, this morning. And I think sometimes we're ready to pray when troubles come. And in Jonah 2 troubles came to Jonah in the belly of the fish. It says this: Then Jonah prayed to the Lord his God, in verse 1 of Jonah 2. He prayed in a very troublesome spot. He prayed from the belly of the fish.

We've prayed in some probably bizarre places in our life when we've been in trouble. Maybe when we were a kid we prayed in the principal's office. Perhaps we've prayed before when we have had a struggle at work or in a car accident, or maybe we were afraid during a very bad time in our life, in hospitals and all kinds of horrible places, maybe some of you even during military times. This was in a fish's belly. It doesn't get more bizarre than that, does it?

And he said: "I cried out to the Lord

because of my affliction, and He answered me."

God does answer. We do have afflictions. I think at the beginning of this Covid-19 there were people praying all over the place. Saved/unsaved people were praying, crying out to God, worried, afraid, anxious, and perhaps now that it's been several weeks later maybe people are saying, well, God took care of me; that's over with; I guess I don't need to pray anymore.

I've noticed, though, that in this passage that Jonah, even though he's still in trouble, he said, "For You cast me into the deep, into the heart of the seas, and the floods surrounded me; all Your billows and Your waves passed over me."

Can you imagine? Jonah was in this belly of a fish, and no doubt it smelled and he was uncomfortable. He had water surrounding him and seaweed, and the stench of being in the belly of a fish probably was overwhelming. And so here he is and he's crying out to God: I'm in trouble.

Then you'll notice by the time you get to verse 7 he said, "When my soul fainted within me, I remembered the Lord."

When you have been in trouble not only, perhaps, thinking about this virus but in various

times of your life, it was a very opportune time for you to pray and you cried out to God maybe desperately. Maybe it caused you to fall down on your knees. Perhaps it caused you to weep out to God in desperation. And then sometimes when it's over we kind of forget. But did you notice? He said, "I remembered the Lord." "I remembered the Lord." When my soul fainted within me, it's the first thing I thought of. I remembered the Lord. He is a God who helps us. So we become ready to pray when we're in trouble. I remembered the Lord and my prayer went up to you into your holy temple.

I like at the end of verse 9 there. Interesting. He says, "I will pay what I have vowed. Salvation is of the Lord."

Isn't that one of the classic lines of scripture? Isn't that a wonderful thought in the Old Testament? Isn't that what sums up our life, too, when you think about it? Salvation is of the Lord. It's not any other thing. It's not of your works. It's not of your heritage. It's not of all the other things that you think will get you there, your righteous acts or anything of that nature. Salvation is always of the Lord.

So he said at that point, the Lord spoke to

the fish, and it vomited Jonah onto dry land.

Well, trouble stimulates us to pray, doesn't it? It is, perhaps, one of the greatest stimulants of prayer, if not the greatest stimulant of prayer even when someone recognizes their sin in their life and their desperate need of salvation. Perhaps that happened to you. You came to a point in your life and you said, boy, I'm a terrible sinner. What am I going to do? What am I going to do? I need forgiveness of sin. And because I need forgiveness of sin, it caused you to do what? You desperately cried out to God in your troubles, your burden, your fears of going to hell, of not being forgiven of your sin, and He forgave you of your sin. But you cried out to God: Forgive me for being a sinner. My only hope is in the Lord Jesus Christ. One of the great crying out to God and the deepest need of our life, our spiritual life, our souls, but maybe you've done it before because of sickness. How many of you have cried out to God in the trouble of sickness or money or jobs or perhaps cried out to God for comfort because a loved one died. It's a stimulant to our prayer life: Trouble. Are you ready always to pray when trouble comes? So we remember this.

I like the account -- if you've never read *Pilgrim's Progress*, I would encourage you to read it. In *Pilgrim's Progress* we're told this. God gives to Christian, who was, of course, the main character in *Pilgrim's Progress*, and he was on his journey and he needed a weapon. He was going through this very, very dark place and he had a weapon called All-prayer, and that's what we need in our lives as well. He had a weapon called All-prayer.

And the instruction was this, that when things fail in your life, when things go south on us, when everything seems to fail us in every direction and we are in deep, dark trouble, you better pray. This will cause you to be able to defeat all the terrors that come in the valley of the shadow.

When he pours out his soul in prayer, Christian became this powerful, formidable individual, but he had to call out and this was his greatest weapon, to pray. All-prayer was the name of the weapon.

This is kind of where we're at this morning. If you've missed it somewhere so far up to this point, this is a call for us not only to pray but to keep praying. Always to pray. We entitled this, again, to pray always, Prepared to Pray Always.

So it's more than an additional weapon. It's the place in which all of our living occurs. It's not just when we're in trouble. This is where we're at in our life. We need to pray and we need to pray always, but it is a formidable weapon when we are in deep, dark trouble, and I think we all get there once in a while. We all have our trouble, and the first thing we need to do and it stimulates us to pray: I am in trouble, Lord. Help me, help me, help me. And so we pray if it's Jonah in the belly of the fish or wherever you're at.

E.M. Bounds, who wrote a lot of books on prayer, said this: "Our praying needs to be pressed and pursued with an energy that never tires, a persistency which will not be denied, and a courage that never fails." Love that. Love that.

I was thinking about Abraham Lincoln, too. Abraham Lincoln said, "I have been driven many times upon my knees by the overwhelming conviction that I had no where else to go." Have you ever been that way? Do you ever have that overwhelming conviction, I have nowhere else to go? That's what Lincoln said. He said: "My own wisdom and that of all about me seemed insufficient for that day." It's pretty wise of old Abraham Lincoln, wasn't it? He had nowhere

else to go. Troubles come. We need to pursue it all the time, not just when troubles are there.

So, first of all, are you ready always to pray when trouble comes? And so that's our first line of action.

Second of all, are you ready to pray always? Ready to pray always?

In the book of Ephesians, Chapter 1, Paul begins the book of Ephesians on this very heavenly trip, this very deep theology and talking about heavenly places, and he talks about prayer. He talks about prayer.

So I am reminded in verses 15-16 of chapter 1, he says, Therefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, do not cease to give thanks for you. He never stopped saying thanks to God for them.

He says, making mention of you in my prayers. This was an unceasing gratitude and an unceasing attitude of praying for these Ephesian believers.

I appreciate reading some of these old accounts. Perhaps you remember George Müller. George Müller was an old minister back in the 1800s, I guess it was, and he ran an orphanage for one



thing. He did a lot of preaching and had a church, as I understand it, and was born in Germany but I think he somehow gravitated other places. But he kind of ran this orphanage by faith, and it's kind of -- he always was a man of great prayer, and so he told the account of this orphanage where he had, like, 300 kids. It sounds a pretty big orphanage.

What he did was he would collect these children that were orphans off the street and had no means and he had compassion on them and so he said, I've got to do something, and so he picked these kids up even though he didn't have the means to take care of all of them so there was a place provided for these kids.

And so he tells a story. He said, "The children are dressed and ready for school," he said, "but there's no food for them to eat," the housemother of the orphanage informed George Müller. George asked her to take the 300 children into the dining room and have them sit at the tables. He thanked God for the food. Now, remember, there's no food. He thanked God for the food and waited. Remember, the house lady said no food.

So he thanks God for the food and then he waited. He had them sit at the table. He said,

George knew God would provide food for the children as He always did. Within minutes, a baker knocked on the door. "Mr. Müller," he said, "last night I could not sleep. Somehow I knew that you would need bread this morning. I got up and baked three batches for you. I will bring it in."

Soon there was another knock at the door. Can you believe that? It was the milkman. His cart had broken down in front of the orphanage. The milk would spoil by the time the wheel was fixed. He asked George if he could use some free milk. George smiled as the milkman brought in 10 large cans of milk. It was just enough for the 300 thirsty children. I found it interesting. He prayed for food they were going to eat and God provided it. I'm not saying that that's the way we ought to go, but it's an interesting account of some man of faith who prayed that God would provide and He did. Ready to pray always. Even when things seem to look bleak, we're ready to pray always.

Does it really mean that we should pray always? Did you notice here in Ephesians 1:15-16, it says, Therefore I also, after I heard -- he heard of their faith of their salvation in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints. He heard about it. He

said, do not cease to give thanks for you. He doesn't stop giving thanks for them. He says, making mention of you in my prayers. Again and again.

And so the question is asked, it can't possibly mean that. We work; we sleep. It has the idea of a constant attitude. Always ready to pray. We're always in that spirit. Always ready to pray. I am ready to pray all the time. All the time. You mean at work? Yes. What if I wake up in the middle of the night and something is burdening me? Should I pray? Yes. Does that ever happen to you? You wake up and you're burdened about something. Maybe it's a family member. Maybe it's a family member and you're really burdened to pray for that family member. Ready to pray always.

By the time we get to 6:18 of Ephesians here -- it's a great passage. It starts off, as we mentioned, at the beginning with this praying-without-ceasing kind of attitude. By the time you get to chapter 6, guess what, how he finishes the book. He starts out, I keep praying for you always; I'm always praying for you. Then in chapter 6 we find the armor of God, okay, which is what we normally look at in chapter 6, or maybe we look at and tell our children to obey their parents

or something of that nature at the beginning of the chapter, but we don't often look beyond that scope. But right after that do you notice, in verse 18, praying always -- do you notice how Paul is repetitious? -- praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints.

Do you notice how often Paul says "all" and "always"? All, always, always.

So he ends this book about I'm praying always for you, and that's kind of where we're at this morning. You pray always when you're in trouble. We have this stimulant in our life like Jonah. You're in a heap of trouble and so you pray. You may not be in the belly of a fish but you feel like it sometimes so you are stimulated at that point, but what about the rest of the time? We had the virus scare, and some people aren't as scared. Maybe they still are. But maybe all this quiet time has caused you to say, I need to pray.

We have the word "perseverance" in this passage. Do you see it? With all perseverance. The word indicates persistence, it indicates tenacity, and that's how we pray.

You need -- when we say we can't do it all the time, we understand you sleep, you eat, you work, and not every moment but you're ready to pray. You're going to persevere. You're going to persist. You're going to have tenacity about wanting to pray. I've got to pray about it.

In Luke 21:36 the Lord Jesus told the disciples to watch and pray. Watch and pray. That's how we live.

We're told in 1 Thessalonians 5 we are to pray how? Without ceasing. It's the same attitude. Do you realize that this concept is repeated over and over and over again?

Listen. If you miss everything else in this sermon, I want you to understand scripture calls people to continue to pray. Pray continually. Keep praying and praying and praying some more. Don't stop praying. Just because maybe your trouble is over briefly, keep praying.

The fervent prayer of a godly man avails much. A righteous man avails much we're told in James. We're told also in other passages as well.

In Colossians 4 Epaphras was always laboring fervently for you in prayers. Isn't that neat? Here's a guy that's not on the tip of your

tongue, a guy by the name of Epaphras, and he is recounted as someone who labored fervently always for you in his prayers he's telling the people of Colossi.

We need people who will labor. It's not always easy to pray you know. I'm not going to stand here this morning and say, boy, it's easy to pray. Man, you should be able to do that without any sweat all the time. I understand we are distracted, we are busy people, but that's the point of this message. We've got a few less distractions right now. So many people are still staying at home, so many people are still waiting this out, and we are thinking about praying and so I encourage you in that direction, to keep praying.

I notice, too, in the passage in Ephesians, both in chapter 1 and at the end of Ephesians and chapter 6, that we're to be ready to pray always for the saints, that we are to pray always for the saints. But why just the saints? How about unsaved people? I will mention that in a little bit as well. It's -- well, let's just say this. Shouldn't you pray for unsaved people, too? But we have this special bond with other Christians. Remember in chapter 6 when you just get to verse 18 we just went

through the armor of God. Sometimes we do a lot of battles. Don't you think you should pray for other Christians? Sometimes the battle is pretty tough.

The old hymn says, Must I be carried to the skies / On flowery beds of ease? And most of us would say we're not. We would like to, but we're not. And that battle that we face, both supernaturally and day by day with the physical things, we need to understand we face battles, and the saints, the Christians, need our prayers.

Sometimes we falter. Sometimes we fail. Sometimes we're just so feeble we need the prayers of God's people. We need God's strength in our life to lift us up beyond the scope of where we are in our human existence so keep on praying always for the saints. That's what we're supposed to do.

And, on the other hand, pray for your unsaved loved ones or people that you know that are unsaved that they might believe.

So Paul started the book of Ephesians with praying with thanks to God for all these saints, for their faith and love for each other. Isn't that wonderful to know there are other Christians, and so we pray for them. Prayer is a response to God for his work in them. By the time we get to the end of

Ephesians, Paul is continuing that pursuit, praying always. Always, always, always.

I was reading in a book by Tim Keller -- incidentally, it's on prayer -- and he was bemoaning that he and his wife didn't pray much together, and his wife -- it really bothered her, and his wife, by the name of Kathy, said, well, we need to do something about it, and they didn't seem to have the discipline.

Like I said to you earlier, I don't fault him for it. I understand it's difficult and it's a challenge in our life. That's why the challenge is brought before you this morning, that pray and pray some more, that we're to pray always.

But his wife told Tim Keller this. He said, Imagine -- she said, Imagine you are diagnosed with such a lethal -- lethal condition that the doctor told you that you would die within hours unless you took a particular medicine, a pill every night before going to sleep. Imagine that you were told that you could never miss it or you would die. Would you forget? Remember, you would die if you didn't take this pill. So she gives this imaginary tale to her husband, that if -- just imagine if you don't take this pill before you go to bed that you're



going to die. She said, Would you not get around to it? Some nights would you just say, oh, well, I don't feel like it? No, it would be so crucial that you wouldn't forget. You would never miss. Well, if we don't pray together to God, she told him, we're not going to make it because of all we are facing. I'm certainly not, she said. We have to pray. We can't let it just slip our minds.

I thought that was an interesting analogy that she gave her husband. We can't make it unless we pray. We've got to do it all the time. It's like a medicine, that if we don't take it every night before we go to sleep, we're going to die. We can't make it unless we pray. Do you ever feel that way about prayer?

I understand more when Paul talks about this in chapter 6 again. I'm going to look at this one more time as we bring this to a close here soon. It says this. Don't miss the fact, by the way, again, it's the armor of God leading right up to it. It says praying always. Praying always with all prayer. Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance. That tenacity, that persistence and supplication for who? All the

saints. This is particularly geared for you praying for all the saints.

We are planning as a church to come back here soon. We need to start praying for all the saints. We need to do that. We need that. It's incumbent upon us to say, I am going to pray for everyone.

I have found this time to be very, very rewarding for me in regard to prayer. I am finding that I am praying for my own church time and time again. You are being bathed in prayer since this virus is going on. I pray for our people anyway but, man, this has caused me to pray over and over and over and over again for our people.

And so it's no wonder that I am inclined to think that this is something that I would like to share with you. I believe this is something the Spirit has placed on my heart, and -- which is a good thing because my last point is ready to pray always in the spirit.

So if you missed it, first of all, the message is Prepared to Pray Always. Prepared to pray always when trouble comes, ready to pray always about all things, ready to pray always for the saints, and, finally, ready to pray always in the spirit.

So I want you to understand we are to pray always in the spirit. You see it in verse 18. That is the proper mode of prayer. It's the best prayer of all is when we pray in the spirit, in the Holy Spirit. This is not about tongues. This is not about getting new revelations or any of that sort of stuff. This is about praying in the spirit.

In Romans 8:26-27, the Spirit helps us to pray as we ought. Some things in life are just too heavy, folks. Sometimes I pray and I just sit there or I kneel there or I stand there or walk there or whatever I'm doing, and I think to myself, I don't know how to pray about this. I don't know what to tell you, God. And so sometimes -- and according to Romans 8:26-27, just a wonderful passage. Likewise, it says, the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses.

I'm weak; I'm frail. I testify to you this morning as I stand up here I am a weak and frail person. I have all kinds of weaknesses. I need the Spirit's help. You do, too. You do, too.

For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He makes

intercession for the saints according to the will of God.

You need the help of the Spirit. And so when Paul tells us in verse 18 of Ephesians 6, he says, praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, that is the intention. We don't always know how we ought to pray so we must pray in the Spirit and the Spirit leads us and directs us in a certain way. It means we can agree with the Holy Spirit.

It doesn't mean we're going to pray about bizarre thing: Lord, I can use a few million dollars. Can you deposit it at my door?

God gives us what we need. We agree with the Holy Spirit. And usually it's for the spiritual needs of one another. I pray for the spiritual growth of my church and for our people. I pray for virtues to be shown in the lives of our people. What kind of virtues? Well, how about the fruit of the Spirit: Love, joy, peace, etcetera, etcetera? Do you think the Spirit wants us to have the fruit of himself in our lives? Absolutely. Absolutely.

Jude said, in Jude verse 20: But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit.

So we pray that we might exhibit fruit and virtues in our lives and others to be led to pray for the lost. Yes, not just for the saints but to pray for the lost as well, and so that's what we do. So we pray in the spirit. It's not about selfishness. It's not about piling things up for our own benefit.

We're just traveling through, remember? A couple of weeks or so ago we preached about being pilgrims. I guess on a Bible study that we had midweek we talked about being pilgrims. That's who we are. We're just passing through. We're sojourners. We're aliens in this old land. We're not trying to pile up things for ourselves here. We're just trying to get through. But, boy, you know, there are some things we take with us into eternity and you may be rewarded for eternally, and those are the kind of things that the Holy Spirit allows us to have in our lives so we want to pray with that in mind, that the Spirit of God will use that in our lives.

So what should we do? We need to pray always. We need to pray always. Yes, when trouble comes, we certainly are stimulated to pray at that time a lot always, but we need to pray always and to be tenacious and to be persistent, persevering in the

Spirit, to always be praying that God would go with us in the needs that we may have both spiritually and physically and the needs of others, so let's keep praying. Don't stop now.

Heavenly Father, we're so grateful -- we're so grateful for You that remind us to talk to You, to pray and to cry out and to call out on You again and again, so we do that again this morning. We are challenged. We are convicted to pray more. It's so hard for us, Lord. It's a labor. We saw where Epaphras was laboring always. It's a labor. It's not easy. It's more easy to be distracted by so many other things, but it's -- it's who we are. It's our strength. It's our vitality when we pray, so help us. Help us to pray as we ought. And we'll thank you in the precious name of Jesus. Amen.