

# The Prayerless at the PRAYER MEETING



Sooner or later, as Christians, we come to understand this one, vital spiritual absolute...

***“The establishing and maintaining of a right relationship with God demands a devoted life of prayer.”***

There can be no doubt, the *flames* of the spiritual life are both ignited and nurtured in the *prayer closet*. If we fail to *commune with God*, we have no valid claim of knowing Him. Thus, those who truly walk with God eventually learn, *“men who do not pray are anything but spiritual.”* Like *Mr. Bunyan*, they will, without hesitation, declare...

*“He that is not a praying man, is not a Christian man.” -John Bunyan*

If we stubbornly refuse to acknowledge this by the teaching of *Scripture*, then *experience* will soon become a more brutal, yet convincing tutor. Unfortunately, the tendency for most is to learn via *experience*, but I pray we have ears to hear *God's Word* that we might avoid learning via the *classroom of pain*. Please take note of the text and the vital lesson therein found in *Mark's gospel, 14:26-44...*

*“And when they had sung an hymn, they went out into the mount of Olives. And Jesus saith unto them, All ye shall be offended because of me this night: for it is written, I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered. But after that I am risen, I will go before you into Galilee. But Peter said unto him, Although all shall be offended, yet will not I. And Jesus saith unto him, Verily I say unto thee, That this day, even in this night, before the cock crow twice, thou shalt deny me thrice. But he spake the more vehemently, If I should die with thee, I will not deny thee in any wise. Likewise also said they all. And they came to a place which was named Gethsemane: and he saith to his disciples, Sit ye here, while I shall pray. And he taketh with him Peter and James and John, and began to be sore amazed, and to be very heavy; And saith unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful unto death: tarry ye here, and watch. And he went forward a little, and fell on the ground, and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him. And he said, Abba, Father, all things are possible unto thee; take away this cup from me: nevertheless not what I will, but what thou wilt. And he cometh, and findeth them sleeping, and saith unto Peter, Simon, sleepest thou? couldest not thou watch one hour? Watch*

*ye and pray, lest ye enter into temptation. The spirit truly is ready, but the flesh is weak. And again he went away, and prayed, and spake the same words. And when he returned, he found them asleep again, (for their eyes were heavy,) neither wist they what to answer him. And he cometh the third time, and saith unto them, Sleep on now, and take your rest: it is enough, the hour is come; behold, the Son of man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise up, let us go; lo, he that betrayeth me is at hand. And immediately, while he yet spake, cometh Judas, one of the twelve, and with him a great multitude with swords and staves, from the chief priests and the scribes and the elders. And he that betrayed him had given them a token, saying, Whomsoever I shall kiss, that same is he; take him, and lead him away safely." -Mark 14:26-44*

I've entitled this article simply, 'The Prayerless at the Prayer Meeting'. May God give us grace and understanding that we might be doers of this most timely exhortation.

Now, as far as we know, this event was the first corporate *prayer meeting* recorded in the *New Testament*. Throughout the Gospels we see *Jesus* Himself *praying*, He taught on *prayer*, He encouraged *prayer*, and He commanded *prayer*. However, it is here, at *Gethsemane*, we have the first account of Him calling a *prayer meeting*. He assembled *Peter, James, and John*, and said...

**Mark 14:34b** ...tarry ye here, and watch.

The sad testimony is, *Jesus*, the *Head of the Church*, met with these disciples, and yet, He was the only one who really *prayed*. Now, there are vital lessons for us to learn in this story if we're teachable. As we examine our text, we will see that these men, very much like us, have every reason to *pray*, but somehow they/*we don't*. They typify the '*prayerless at the prayer meeting*'.

## FIRST, THEY HAD A *COMMAND*

**Mark 14:34** ...tarry ye here, and watch.

This of course, was not the first command of Christ regarding *prayer*, there were many more previously spoken by *Jesus*. However, this was in the context of the moment. Our text reveals, without a doubt, *Jesus* wanting them to *pray* and He wanted them to *pray* right now. He purposefully called these disciples aside, commanding them to *intercede* with *Him*. And remember, these were men who had forsaken *careers, family, and reputation* to follow *Jesus*. They had ministered along side *Him*. They had boldly preached the gospel. Moments earlier, they had even brashly proclaimed they would follow Him even if it cost them their lives. Surely, such men, if indeed they were *all* they appeared to be, could earnestly pray together. Yet, our text reveals otherwise...

**Mark 14:37a** And he cometh, and findeth them sleeping...

Sadly, even in the face of a clear command from *Jesus*, they failed to *pray*. Think of it, men who stood in the streets of *Jerusalem*, challenging fellow *Jews* to submit to *Jesus*, now refusing to obey. Even more amazing, is that men so bold to claim a willingness to die for *Jesus* could so quickly fall asleep at a *prayer meeting*. Especially when you consider this: *there is no easier place to pray than at a corporate prayer meeting*. This is nothing more than a sign of rank self-deception: *the prayerless always grossly over-estimate their own spirituality*. What is soon to transpire exposes their utter spiritual bankruptcy. Make no mistake, when there is difficulty at the *corporate prayer meeting* there will be awful failures in day to day tests.

**Mark 14:38** *Watch ye and pray, lest ye enter into temptation...*

They were exposed here, at the altar. *Jesus* knew the prayerless would miserably fail. Indeed, there's trouble when you can hear men's voices shouting in the street but they fail to groan in the *altar*. When men are quick to talk about selling-out but slow to supplicate, there's a *humbling* soon to take place.

## THEY HAD AN *EXAMPLE*

**Mark 14:35** *And he went forward a little, and fell on the ground, and prayed...*

*Jesus*, was the ultimate example in *prayer*. First, we know these men were exposed to *Jesus'* manner of *prayer* many, many times before. Nevertheless, here, like them, we have an up close and intimate view. *Jesus* was not bound or apprehensive, nor was there anything between Him and the Father to hinder His *prayers*. Look closely at the text: *Jesus'* entire demeanor indicated fervency in *prayer*. As we pool each *Gospel's* rendition of this event, notice the language used to describe *Jesus'* *prayer life*: *He was sore amazed, in agony, heavy, and earnest; He fell on the ground praying audibly, laboring till sweat like great drops of blood...and rest assured, Jesus prayed like this at the corporate prayer meeting because He prayed like that alone*. Likewise, the disciples slept at the *corporate prayer meeting* because, at least up to this point, that's what they did alone. There is no escape, how you *pray corporately* reflects on your personal history with God: *many are compelled by peer pressure*. Think about it, *men* just a few paces away, within earshot of the *Son of God* wrestling in prayer, who are so spiritually dull they fall asleep. You would think somebody would be inspired. Or at least, someone would inwardly surmise, "*Wow, I need to stir myself, I'm convicted, I need to rise up, press-in, seek God.*" No, either they were *unwilling, unmoved*, or more likely, *unbroken: they refused to press-in, a telltale sign of prayerlessness*. The *passive* are *passive* because they haven't learned that it's certain spiritual death: *the devil will steal everything you have*. Likewise, we come to the *corporate prayer meeting* and God has graciously exposed us to examples in *prayer* but we sleep on.

## THEY HAD A WARNING

**Mark 14:37-38a** *And he cometh, and findeth them sleeping, and saith unto Peter, Simon, sleepest thou? couldest not thou watch one hour? Watch ye and pray, lest ye enter into temptation...*

There's perhaps only one sermon more unpopular than preaching *prayer as a command*, that is, to warn those who fail to comply. Today, the idea that *prayerlessness* is sin is utterly despised.

**Matthew 28:20** *Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you...*

Likewise, to *warn* men that their *prayerlessness* will cost them, is seen as counterproductive and uncharitable. Yes, the *Antinomian naysayers* will cry, 'Legalism! Legalism!' However, I believe I'll side with *Jesus'* sermon on *prayer*, He certainly knows best. We could title His fiery message of warning, '*pray or else*'. No, He didn't just let them sleep. The *Good Shepherd* didn't just let them sink down to hell in their spiritual slumber, He sounded the alarm. "*You better wake up, you better cast off distraction, you'd better press-in, or you're gonna have some trouble, you will fall.*" Sadly, warning the *prayerless* is often futile, *there is a dullness of hearing, an unbelieving heart.*

**Hebrews 4:2** *For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them: but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it.*

You look the *prayerless* man in the eyes and quote the Bible, and he may very well argue you down. Some may inwardly reason, "Isn't it cruel, *Bro. Britt*, to continue to chastise the prayerless this way?" MY reply? *No, the Holy Ghost is trying to wake us up.* Warning is loving, even consistent with our story. Nevertheless, even *Jesus* will only warn you so much and then He will turn you over to the more effective *teacher of experience* to be humbled.

**Mark 14:41** *And he cometh the third time, and saith unto them, Sleep on now, and take your rest: it is enough, the hour is come...*

When the *hour* is come, it's too late to *pray*, but you will wish you had: *the spirituality you possess will be tested/exposed.* And notice the next verse...

**Mark 14:43** *And immediately, while he yet spake, cometh Judas...*

I believe this is no coincidence: *in the final stages of warning, the Holy Ghost will remind you of those you labored with who have fallen.* Don't be deceived, those who fail to bow their knee at the corporate *prayer meeting* at *Gethsemane* will fail the test. These *men* had a *command*, an *example*, and even a *warning*, but failed to *pray*. This leads us to our final point...

## ONE THING THEY APPARENTLY DIDN'T HAVE WAS *GRACE*

**Mark 14:38b** ...*the spirit truly is ready, but the flesh is weak.*

I believe with this statement, *Jesus* reveals there was indeed good intentions. It wasn't that they didn't intellectually understand their need for *prayer*. Nor was it a lack of 'how to' in regards to the basics of prayer. In fact, they had asked for teaching...

**Luke 11:1** ...*Lord, teach us to pray*

I believe the basic problem was they lacked grace to *pray*. This, of course, was not God's fault, but their own. Moreover, their lack of *grace* was rooted in two heart conditions: *unbelief and pride*. *Jesus* tried to point them to the problem, "*the flesh is weak, you can't do this in your own strength, why not rely on the Spirit.*"

**Romans 3:11** ...*there is none that seeketh after God.*

If they only would have *believed* His Word.

**Hebrews 11:6** *But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.*

The terrible cycle of *prayerlessness*, fueled by unbelief and pride, is a circular trap that can only be broken by deep repentance. *Unbelief* won't hear/act on *God's Word* and *pride* refuses to humble itself and *ask*.

**James 4:2** ...*ye have not, because ye ask not.*

If they would have simply asked, *Jesus* would have helped them, and likewise, if we will confess our weakness and ask in humility, God will hear our cry. As the Bible declares just a few verses later..

**James 4:6** ...*God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble.*

*Pride/self-sufficiency* and *prayerlessness* go hand-in-hand. *Pride* is not something we rid ourselves simply because we intellectually acknowledge its danger: *we must fall upon the rock.*

**Luke 20:18** *Whosoever shall fall upon that stone shall be broken; but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder.*

The encouraging thing is, these were none other than the *Apostles*, they did eventually learn to pray. However, it took a radical humbling to get their attention. I pray we will repent for our prayerlessness and hear God's Word.

–B.W.

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