

When Saints Meet to Pray

As students of the Word, we know the Bible abounds with references to the great power of prayer. But do we know it also teaches that there is an even greater power in collective prayer? Jesus said, "Again I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Matt 18:19-20).

In context, Jesus is speaking of the church. He had just pointed out that heaven responds to what the church does on earth (v18). Now He emphasizes that even if the group is small, the Father hears and answers. But apparently two or three are better than one.

Where Jesus says, "If two of you shall agree," the Greek word for agree is *sumphoneo*, from which we get our English word symphony. Jesus is saying, "If two of you harmonize in prayer." One person can't harmonize; it takes at least two. Evidently there is a special benefit in saints uniting in prayer.

When this condition is met, what is the promise? Anything they agree on earth to ask, the Father in heaven will do. Of course, this is within the bounds described in other scriptures, "in faith" and "according to His will." Jesus' point is that when saints on earth unite in prayer, it moves the Father in heaven to answer.

The word "for" connects verse 20 to verse 19. Jesus is saying that the Father hears and answers the saints' prayer symphony because Jesus is in their midst. Jesus is the One who takes their prayers to the Father and brings His answers back to them.

The condition is gathering together in Jesus' name. This happens when saints meet to worship Him, when they meet in obedience to Him, when they meet to carry out His business, and when they meet to pray to the Father in His Name.

The promise is that Jesus is in their midst. He will be there to carry their requests to the Father, to carry the Father's answers to them, and to bless them with His wonderful presence. What a blessing! Don't we want to be where saints meet to pray, to share in this blessing?

What happens when saints meet to pray? The Bible gives numerous illustrations. Here is a partial list:

- God's people are revived (2Ch 30:21-26).
- God hears from heaven (2Ch 30:27).
- God reveals secrets (Dan 2:17-19).
- Lives are saved, delivered from unreasonable and wicked men (Dan 2:24; Est 4:16).
- Ungodly men acknowledge God's greatness (Dan 2:47).
- God answers the request (Matt 18:19).
- Jesus is in the midst (Matt 18:20).

- God appoints and enables leaders (Acts 1:14,24; 6:6; 13:2-3).
- God's Holy Spirit descends, infills, and empowers (Acts 2:1-4).
- God shows His earthshaking power (Acts 4:31).
- God's Spirit fills His messengers with boldness (Acts 4:31; Eph 6:18-20).
- God sends His angel (Luke 1:10; Acts 12:5-11).
- God answers beyond what we could ask or think (Acts 12:12-15).
- Hearts are opened (Acts 16:13-14).
- Captives are freed (Acts 16:25-34).
- The church is unified (Rom 15:31).
- God's servants are refreshed (Rom 15:32).
- Bodies and souls are healed (Jas 5:14-16).

In each of these examples prayer was collective, a symphony of saints that reached God's ears. And God responded with marvelous answers. These are all things that happen today, in various ways and times, when saints meet to pray.

While we can meet in prayer around the throne even while physically separated, there is a special blessing in gathering together. And although we can pray together in family worship and in regular Sunday services, we receive an added dimension of power and blessing when we assemble for the purpose of prayer, as we do at our midweek services.

Someone has noted that prayer meeting is a thermometer that indicates the spiritual temperature of a congregation. We may add that it is also a fuel that feeds the flames. A vibrant congregation will have vibrant prayer meetings, which will stimulate more spiritual growth and power. Conversely, a dying congregation will have dying prayer meetings, which will throttle back the spiritual life that remains.

How much is it worth to us to participate in our prayer meetings? A certain boss asked his employees, "For a ten-thousand dollar bonus, could you get to work on time? For a ten-thousand dollar bonus, could you get to work on time every day for a year? Well, you're not getting the ten thousand, but now you know you can do it." For ten thousand dollars, could we make it to every prayer meeting for a year, when we're physically able? If it's easy to skip prayer meeting because it would cost too much to go back and finish a job Thursday morning, does that say how much prayer meeting is worth to us?

Do we want to see God's people revived? Do we wish to have Jesus in our midst? Do we desire the enabling power of the Holy spirit within us? Then when the saints gather for prayer, we'll do what we can to be there.

When the Jews at Shushan were called to pray and fast for Esther and the very survival of God's people, do you think they said, "Oh, no, not another prayer meeting; we're too busy at work these days"?

When Daniel gathered his three friends for a prayer meeting to ask the God of heaven to have mercy and spare their lives, do you suppose they listlessly mumbled a few meaningless words? Or did they earnestly pour out their hearts to God?

Are lives in danger? Are souls in captivity? Does the church need leaders? Do God's messengers need boldness? Do hearts need to be opened to the gospel? Does the

church need unity? Do folks need physical or spiritual healing? Then let's take the time to gather together, share these burdens, and earnestly cast them on the Lord. "God does not disappoint the hopes of His people when they seek Him unitedly in fervent and believing prayer."

In a typical congregation, certain prayer requests keep coming up over and over, prayer meeting after prayer meeting. They may be names of unsaved relatives or neighbors. We are tempted to wonder, "Does God hear? Does it make any difference?"

Let's keep on praying. Jesus pronounced a blessing on persistent prayer as well as on collective prayer. We underestimate the power of persistent, collective prayer. We know of instances— and there must be many more—where some long-lost sheep has returned to the fold after years of faithful intercession by the saints. When nothing seemed to be happening, God was hearing, and His Spirit was working.

Many more stories could be told of wondrous things that happened when saints met to pray. Probably each of us could relate personal experiences with this. And the stories are not over. Let's not forsake the assembling of ourselves together for prayer, as the manner of some is, and so much the more, as we see the day approaching. Who knows what God will yet do when saints meet to pray!

~Clair Auker