

Prayer and the Victory of God

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My aim in this message is to leave in your mind the strong impression and the firm conviction that the victory of God is coming, and that it will come by means of your prayers. The title of the message, as you see there in the worship folder, is *Prayer and the Victory of God*. The point is, the victory is coming and it will come by means of your prayers. Let me pray once more before we launch into this.

Father, I ask that in these services, the Lord's day morning and Lord's day eve and New Year's morning and New Year's Eve, that you would do this: that you would lodge, by the Spirit, the strong impression and the deep conviction that a glorious victory of Christ over the world is coming! And that, little though we feel, our prayers bring it! Lord, do that. Lift us, I pray, into this strong conviction that its coming, its glorious. And that our prayers bring it. I ask this in Jesus' name, AMEN.

Let me clarify for you what I mean by the victory of God, by reading several passages of Scripture.

Matthew 24:29-31 (ESV)

"Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.

That's the victory of God!

Revelation 1:7

Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him. Even so. Amen.

That is the victory of God!

2 Thessalonians 1:6-10

...God considers it just to repay with affliction those who afflict you, and to grant relief to you who are afflicted as well as to us, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might, when he comes on that day to be glorified in his saints, and to be marveled at among all who have believed...

That is the victory of our God and it is coming.

I Thessalonians 4:15-17

For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will descend from heaven <now this is the loudest verse in the Bible> with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord.

One more...

Isaiah 9:7

Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.

The victory of God is the coming of the Son of God, King of Kings, Lord of Lords, to punish all who have rejected His grace, to banish all ungodliness and unbelief out of the world into Hell, to gather the elect from all the nations, establish justice, righteousness, peace, joy on the earth. And to be worshipped with white-hot affection forever and ever and ever. That is the victory of God and it is coming. Paul calls it our blessed hope in Titus 2:13. The appearing of the glory of our Great God and Savior. This is going to happen and it could happen in your lifetime. Catch your breath!

And yet, it is vastly greater than your life or my life. Now God cares about little things. He really does. He cares about your marriage, where you are there. He cares about the earache of your little one year old. He cares about those things. But O how much greater is our God than those things and His care of those things. His victory is greater than your little life and my little life. And my aim, my prayer, is that this message will produce this year in you, a feeling that you are captured by a cause and a vision a thousand times greater than your life! I know that many of you feel, "Look, Pastor John, you don't know what I'm dealing with. I just want to survive another day. I just want to keep my marriage together. I don't think big thoughts. I just want to raise a couple of decent kids. I just want to keep my nose clean. I'm not into that..." Now listen; me too! I'm not opposed to that. Good marriages, keeping your nose clean, raising a few decent kids, AMEN. Let's not fail there. But, I don't want to burden you and I have a deep deep conviction behind what I'm doing in this service. And the conviction is that it will be liberating and energizing to see your little life, with all of its problems, in connection with this victory. That will not, if you get it right, it won't feel like a burden. "Oh...I have to think big thoughts...I have to get into some big mode of heroic life." No, unless you turn and become like a child, you can't enter into the kingdom of Heaven. So we're not into big, weighty, make everyone theologian type thoughts. We're into connecting our little lives, that feel so small, so ordinary, with the most magnificent

event that will ever happen in history. There's a connection. And I believe that once you get that connection, once you feel that connection, it transforms the meaning of all of those little things in your life.

I promise you, from the Bible and from my experience, that it is not oppressive to see the littleness of your life in connection to the largeness of God's victory. Every just war that has ever been fought for a great ideal has given meaning to the loneliness, and the amputations and the widowhood that it costs. Every great battle, every great conflict, every global engagement that has a just cause behind it, like the cause of Christ, is what gives meaning to the widowhood who loses the husband in the conflict, gives meaning to the amputations, gives meaning to the long seasons of loneliness when he's in Iraq. Its not, turn away from the big issues of life because my life is made up of little things. No, don't turn away, immerse in, dive into the ocean of God's magnitude and the greatness of His victory and let it saturate all the little things. These have meaning because of THAT.

Let me show you now what I mean by the connection. The connection I'm drawing, because we're going into prayer week, is prayer. Your prayers are the way the victory is coming. They are God's appointed means by which he brings his own victory. And again, I know that many will say, "that's not the way I pray. I don't pray for HUGE victories. I just pray for one little victory at a time." And I think that the Lord would like to change that, today. I don't think you should be satisfied, as small as you feel, as weak as you feel, as insignificant globally, universally, historically as you feel. God chose a peasant virgin to carry his son. It is a non-sequiter to say, "I'm little, small, insignificant, therefore, I can't be significantly connected to the victory of God." That does not make sense in God's economy. It may be that precisely because you feel small, little, insignificant, that you are perfectly situated to be a major connection between this moment and the coming victory. Its a dishonor to God to use your smallness as an argument for why your prayers should not bring the second coming.

So, let me show you this connection. If you wonder where's Isaiah 37, the text, its coming. Here's my plan. I'm going to quote nine passages of Scripture fairly briefly, to show you the connection between your life of prayer and the victory of God. Then I'm going to close with one of the most stunning examples of prayer and the victory of God, that I know of, from Isaiah 37. Don't bother looking these up, I'm going to move too quickly. Jot them down, if you want to, to look at later. Just listen carefully and be praying, "Lord awaken a new passion for prayer in me, this year. Speak to me. Grant that I would participate in the coming of your victory the way I should."

Matthew 6:9. The Lord's Prayer, goes like this. Pray like this!

Our Father, in Heaven, Hallowed by your name. Your Kingdom, let it come. Your will on earth, like its done in Heaven, let it be done.

That's amazing. Its coming. The kingdom is going to come. The victory will come. The name of God will be hallowed. It will cover the earth like the waters cover the sea, the hallowing of God's name. The will of God will be done perfectly on the earth some day. Just like the angels do it in

heaven today. But, guess what? Its coming by prayer. Pray this my people, pray this, pray it down, my people. Say, "Come, Kingdom." Say, "Come universal hallowing of the name of God." Say, "Come, will of God being done on earth as its done in Heaven." "Come. Come." Pray this.

That's amazing. Don't say you do not make a difference in this. If you have ever prayed the Lord's prayer with understanding and faith, He will come because you ask Him to.

Second text, Matthew 24:14.

This Gospel of the Kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all the nations and then the end will come.

In other words, the Good News of King Jesus and His salvation is to spread throughout all the nations as a prelude to the victory. A prelude to the final victory. Its going to spread and it will be a witness to all the peoples. Then the victory will come, the end will come. You know how it is spreading. It is spreading by people, lay people, evangelists, missionaries, pastors who open their mouths and speak the Gospel.

Therefore Jesus says this, Matthew 9:37, "*The harvest is plentiful, the laborers are few, therefore PRAY earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest.*"

There is no doubt Matthew 24:14 is going to happen. This Gospel of the Kingdom will be preached throughout the whole world as a testimony to all the nations, and then the end will come. There is no doubt this promise will happen. And Jesus says, "pray for the people that make it happen to step forward." AWESOME place of prayer in the history of the universe.

Number Three. Jesus told a parable in Luke 18 verses 1 following. About an unrighteous judge and a widow badgers him. The point of the parable is to always pray and not lose heart. Always pray and not lose heart. This widow keeps coming to him and she says, "give me justice against my adversary." He's very resistant. Finally he gives in and gives her justice. He vindicates her over against her adversary, because she's so persistent. Then Jesus makes this point, *Here what the unrighteous judge says. And will not give justice to his elect who cry to Him day and night? Will he delay long over them? I tell you he will give them justice speedily.*

The day is coming when with unbelievable speed, justice will be done from Heaven, because the elect cried to him day and night. "*How long O Lord, vindicate your people. They suffer around the world. They are mocked, torn to shreds, they are sawed in two, they walk around in sheeps clothing, they hide in caves. How long, how long, will the princes of Heaven be mocked?*" Do you ever pray like that? Day and night? Enough do, then he will come.

Number 4. The battles to be fought on the way to final victory. The battles that prepare for Christ's coming, and move us forward, they move us forward by prayer. Acts 4:31. The early church gathered, *When they had prayed, the place where they were gathered together was shaken, they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the Word of God with boldness.*

How does the Gospel advance in the world? It advances by ordinary people praying, the Holy Spirit falling, boldness rising, mouths opening, and irresistible Gospel converting sinners. That's the way the Gospel and the triumph of God spreads, on the way to the climax. Therefore, even the battles that are won incrementally on the way to the final victory are won by prayer.

If you do not have boldness right now. You've got an agenda set for you in 2006. Mainly: pray.

Number 5. This is a cluster of texts from Paul. I love Paul, he's so real, so vulnerable, he's so broken, he's so strong, he's so weak, he's so hurt and he's so dependent on prayer. The greatest missionary that ever was. Experienced more breakthroughs for the Gospel in the early century of this era. And he said in his letters, how often must he say it for us to feel it. "Pray for me...pray for me...pray for me." Let me read you four of them.

2 Thess. 3:1. *Finally brothers, pray for us, that the Word of the Lord may speed ahead and be honored as it happened among you.* He knew he couldn't do it without God and God said "I will do it through their prayers." So, he said, "pray for me that the Word would run and triumph."

Ephesians 6:19. *Pray for me that Words may be given to me, in the opening of my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the Gospel.* Paul's very boldness, this man that seems to be a man above all men, saying to ordinary slaves in Rome, Ephesus, Colasse and Thessalonica, pray for me that I not be afraid. Amazing.

Romans 15:30. *I appeal to you brothers, by our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of the Spirit. Strive <the word is wrestle> in your prayers to God on my behalf.*

Paul was a great wrestler with the devil, with unbelief, with his own sin in Romans 7, with lions in Ephesus, and Jews in Caesaria, Jerusalem... He was a great wrestler, was he not? And what does he say? "Join me. Please join me, wrestle with me, strengthen me." What an amazing confession about the magnificence of prayer in ordinary people.

Colossians 4:3, the last text from Paul, number eight all together.

Colossians 4:3. *Pray also for us that God may open to us a door for the Word, to declare the mystery of Christ on behalf of which I am in prison.* So if there are going to be any doors opened. If China is going to open, if Vietnam is going to open, and North Korea is going to open, and Cuba's going to open, and Iraq and Afghanistan, and Oman and the United Arab Emirates... are going to open...it will be because some simple diaper-changing mom put her apron over her head at her Kitchen table and said.. "Lord, open a door in Cuba." And God beared His arm! What an amazing thing prayer is!

Final text on this, to illustrate the connection between prayer and the victory of God is Revelation 8:4,5. This is amazing, I love this image, try to get it. An angel, another angel came and stood at the altar. Picture God, no you can't picture God but here it is, an altar and God at a

throne....another angel came and stood at the altar with a golden censor and he was given much incense to offer with the prayers of all the saints, <get this> millions of saints <this is a picture of Heaven at the end, not back then, at the END. So millions and billions and billions of prayers, stored in Heaven, never forgotten. Not one, "Hallowed be Thy name. Thy Kingdom Come" will never be forgotten.> "With all the prayers of all the saints at the golden altar before the throne. The smoke of the incense of the prayers of the saints rose before God from the hand of the angel." <Now, we usually stop there and we think, 'oh yeah I've heard that the prayers of the saints are like incense and smell really good to God. And that's true and that's magnificent. You wanna make God happy? PRAY! You want to create a good smell in the Kitchen of heaven? Pray. This text isn't going there. Its going to victory. Verse 5, the angel took the censor and filled it with fire from the altar where these millions of prayers are burning. Filled it and threw it on the earth, with peels of thunder and rumblings and flashes of lightening and an earthquake. You wonder where did all these signs come from at the end? They came from your prayers. "Hallowed be thy name on the earth, O God. Let your Kingdom come, O God. Let it come. Bring it in O God. Let your will be done on this planet the way the angels do it in Heaven. Hasten the day of our God!" That's what gets thrown on the earth in fire.

The victory of God is coming and its coming by the prayers of God's people. Now the illustration in closing from Isaiah 37. Now you can go there with me this time, if you want. This will be quick but I think memorable. At least when I saw it in about 1989 or so, I've never forgotten it. The sheer number has stayed with me, lodged in my brain and maybe it will make an anchor for this message so that one fact will remain in your mind and then the fact just might yield help in bringing your prayers to this place.

Isaiah 37, let me give you the situation and then I'll read a few verses with you. Sennacherib, magnificent King, terrifying King of the nation of Assyria, came up against all the fortified cities of Judah, where Hezekiah is King. Jerusalem is helpless before this King. There is nothing Jerusalem can do in herself against the hoard of the Assyrians. And so the King sends Rabshika, title for general or right hand man, and the Rabshika mocks the living God and says, "you think you have a great God."

Chapter 37:10.

Do not let your God in whom you trust deceive you in promising you that Jerusalem will not be given into the hand of the King of Assyria.

And it says that Hezekiah responded this way. I'm starting at verse 14 now. Hezekiah received the letter. This is the letter that taunts God and Jerusalem.

Hezekiah received the letter from the hand of the messengers, and read it; and Hezekiah went up to the house of the Lord, and spread it before the Lord. And Hezekiah prayed to the Lord: "O Lord of hosts, God of Israel, enthroned above the cherubim, you are the God, you alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth; you have made heaven and earth. Incline your ear, O Lord, and hear.

<Verse 20> O Lord our God, save us from his hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that you alone are the Lord."

You see how two things come together in verse 20. Yes, I want to be saved. I want my people not to be slaughtered. But Lord, make your name great among the nations. Those two things always go together. We are saved; He is magnified. We get the help; he gets the glory.

And then comes the key phrase. Verse 21.

Then Isaiah the son of Amoz sent to Hezekiah, saying, "Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel: <and then this next phrase I have underlined, circled> Because you have prayed <and now watch what happens> to me concerning Sennacherib king of Assyria, this is the word that the Lord has spoken concerning him:

So God speaks this effective word because of that prayer...I'm dropping down to verse 33 to get to the nub of it.

Therefore thus says the Lord concerning the king of Assyria: He shall not come into this city or shoot an arrow there or come before it with a shield or cast up a siege mound against it. By the way that he came, by the same he shall return, and he shall not come into this city, declares the Lord. For I will defend this city to save it, for my own sake and for the sake of my servant David."

Look at verse 36.

And the angel of the Lord went out and struck down 185,000 in the camp of the Assyrians.

That's pretty effective praying. That's breathtaking praying. Hezekiah is not a perfect man. He's not even going to end well. But this time, he did the right thing. He went into the house of God desperate and he lifted up his voice and said, "You're God, we're helpless. Make a name for yourself in saving us." And God killed 185,000 people. Killed them. If that doesn't stick in your memory. It did in mine. One prayer and God kills 185,000 people. That's an amazing victory through prayer.

Let me close. The enemies of the church today, of Jesus Christ, are not political, national, or ethnic. We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, powers against the world rulers of this present darkness, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the Heavenly places. We are not at war as Christians against Iraq. We are not at war against any ethnic, political, national enemy. Christians do not kill their enemies as Christians. We die and suffer in order to make known that the battle belongs to the Lord. And it is won by the opening of our mouth with truth, and the stretching forth of our hands in love and justice. That's the way the Gospel spreads. That's the way the victory will come. The great battle today is fought not with swords but with the Gospel of the crucified and risen Christ. It's fought for the souls of men. It is fought in the power of the Holy Spirit. It is fought with words of truth and deeds of love. And all that backed by prayer and the victory will come, will come. It will come by prayer. Therefore in the new year, pray for the victory of God.

The first Tuesday fast is to pray and fast for the second coming. I invite you to come.

Your Kingdom come, your will be done on earth. Send forth laborers O God. Open a door for the Gospel O God, make us bold in witness O God, save the peoples O God, vindicate your elect, O God, who cry to you day and night.

Come, Come Lord Jesus. Let's pray.

So I pray Father now again that the strong impression and the firm conviction will be lodged in the minds of your people that the victory is coming and that it comes by prayer. And once that is lodged, O God, and we see this vivid illustration of Hezekiah's cry and your dramatic intervention, let no ordinary person say, 'my prayers don't count.' Rather, may the simplest among us pray the most daring prayers. 'Come, Lord Jesus. Wrap it up, Hasten the day of your appearing.' Christ I ask it. Amen.