

Sonoraville Baptist Church
Sunday, March 28, 2010 – 6:00 PM
Rev. Steve Skates, Pastor

Praying Together- Matthew 18:18-20

Tonight, as we are a little over a month away from our revival meetings, we're going to continue to talk about prayer. Last Sunday Night, I mentioned that in many churches across America, prayer is almost treated as an afterthought. I mean, in some churches, the only prayers you hear are those used to begin and end a meeting or service, or those offered before the offering is received, or those spoken before meals. Now, don't get me wrong, incorporating prayer into a worship service is a good thing. Any church service without prayer in it, I would question whether any worship of God went on at all!

But what I'm saying is that if that is a church's only emphasis on prayer, then it is missing most of the meaning and importance of prayer.

Again, as I said last Sunday night, God works through prayer and for that reason alone, we need to pray and pray often. But there's so much more about prayer that we need to understand. Prayer is the Christian's source of life and power. Praying taps us into the mind of God. Prayer is what moves the hand that moves the world. And by prayer God's people receives grace and faith and wisdom and direction for life.

So, in God's church, there should be a definite and deliberate emphasis on prayer. In fact, in my opinion, there should be more emphasis placed on God's people praying together. Why? Well, our Scripture for tonight tells us why.

Let's look briefly at these and see the reasons why God's people should pray together. First, we should pray together because of:

1. Hostility (18). Jesus says, *"I tell you the truth, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."*

What is Jesus talking about - binding and loosing? He's talking about the great divide that exists between the ways of heaven and the ways of earth. Specifically, He's talking about the hostility between heaven and earth that is going on because of this great divide. He's talking about Christians, as spiritual warriors, binding those things we are to be against, and loosening things that we are to be for.

We are to pray together because as followers of Christ, we are engaged in a spiritual warfare.

2 Corinthians 10:3-4 (NIV) says, *"For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds."*

Folks, we are in the midst of spiritual warfare and it's not supposed to be between the Baptists and the Methodists, or the Conservatives and Liberals, or the Deacons and the Treasurer.

Ephesians 6:12 (NIV) says, *"For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms."* This war is not with people we can see, but rather against powers we can't see. Our struggle is with Satan and his demonic forces who seem to be gaining the upper hand. Satan is fighting hard. He's coming at us left and right, and over and under. And he's not letting up!

So the hostility is great. But I want us to understand something...even though our enemy is cunning, he's not the **Creator**. He's strong, but he's not the **Son of God**. He may be powerful, but he's not **Preeminent**. He's relentless, but He's not the **Resurrection and the Life**. So when God says that *"Greater is He within me than he that is in the world,"* and when He tells me that *"the battle is not ours, but the Lord's,"* I'm going to take Him at His word! Folks, when we engage in this hostility with the Lord on our side, we're in the majority and our potential for victory in this fight is greater than our fear of defeat!

Do you remember what Jesus said in when He ascended into heaven... *"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you..." Acts 1:8 (NIV)*? Well, He came and empowered those weak and timid disciples to go out and turn the world upside down with the gospel. And they did it in spite of tradition, in spite of Rome, and in spite of being severely outnumbered. They did it because they trusted in the great I Am, who said the He wanted *"His kingdom to come, and His will to be done, on earth as it is in heaven."*

We need to realize that there is a spiritual kingdom around us that is waiting to be loosed. And we need to

band together and pray for it to come alive in our hearts and lives. And when we do, it will loosen the resources of the Holy Spirit in our lives, and then, God's power becomes our power.

As I quoted to you last week, Samuel Chadwick said, "*The one concern of the devil is to keep Christians from praying. He fears nothing from prayerless studies, prayerless work, and prayerless religion. He laughs at our toil, mocks at our wisdom, but trembles when we pray.*"

I don't understand all there is about prayer, or how and why God works. But I do know that when we come together as a church before God in prayer, He moves in powerful ways.

The second reason why we should pray together is:

2. Harmony (19). Jesus said, "*Again, I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven.*"

Christians were not meant to exist in isolation. Jesus prayed, "**Our Father**" and "*Give us this day our daily bread.*" We belong to Him and to each other. That is why belonging to a church is so important. God designed us to exist in community and in harmony with each other. After all, we are called "*the body of Christ.*" We are His hands, His feet, His eyes, and His heart. And He expects His body, His community to work together.

We are not to be like the prison quartet. At church one Sunday morning, the pastor announced that their prison quartet would be singing. Since there wasn't a prison near that area, the people were curious as to where this "*Prison Quartet*" was from. When four members of the church approached the stage, the pastor said, "*This is our Prison Quartet because they are behind a few bars and always looking for the key.*"

Well, unlike that quartet's reputation...Prayer is meant to be a concert of praise and thanksgiving and intercession. The word translated "*agree*" means "*sound together*" or "*harmony.*" In other words, our prayers are to be like musicians that play together – blended together into a "*concert of prayer,*" because as believers, we have a kindred spirit when it comes to our worship and praying. We ought to sound good together. It ought to be pleasing to God's ears.

In everything we do, we should look for grounds of agreement. When we have differences that threaten to divide us, it's time to stop and pray. It's time to discover what God wants and find His will and His unity. And this must be done consistently and persistently until God shows up!

The third reason why we should pray together is:

3. Humility (20). Jesus said, "*For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them.*"

Prayer is coming to God on His merits, not our own.

Prayer is not about us, it's all about God. It's not about how faithful we are, but how faithful He is. It's not about how high and mighty we are, but about how high and mighty He is. We are not good, but God is all good. We come in His name, not ours.

We don't come asking for what we want, but for what He wants.

Our only desire should be to bring God glory, and that is why we pray in His name. And when we pray in harmony and humility, we recognize that we are not alone.

Notice that Jesus doesn't say that where two or three gather in His name, "*I will be there.*" He says, "*there I am.*" He is there because He is in every one of us.

We forget that whenever there's conflict in the church, don't we? But it's true - the Lord is in His people. The Bible says that every believer is a temple of the Holy Spirit, so we need to learn to look for Him in others and listen to each other.

God is here with us when we meet together for worship and prayer. God's peace comes to His church as we pray together, and as we do, then we're able to go forward as God has called us.

When the early church exploded with growth, it began with a gathering of prayer. So, we know that prayer is an essential element for growth and outreach. So, church, now is the time to consistently and persistently pray. Our future is dependent on our willingness and determination to pray together.

Tonight, we're going to close by forming three prayer groups and pray for specific areas of our church as we prepare for revival. I'm going to give each group an area to pray for. You can designate a person to pray, or make assignments, or all pray together, but do spend this time in fervent prayer.

GROUP 1

Age-Graded Ministries

Nursery & Preschool Children & Workers
Youth and Children's Ministries
Young Adult Ministry (Get Connected)
Adult, and Senior Adult Ministries
Women's Ministry
Sunday School Classes and Leaders
Vacation Bible School
Recreation Ministry
Cub Scouts & Boy Scouts
Families, Single Moms & Dads, Broken & Blended Homes

GROUP 2

Pastoral Ministries

Pastor, Staff & Church Officers
Deacons Ministry
Music Ministry
Church Committees
Worship and Prayer Services
Revival – Dr. Steve Parr, Evangelist

GROUP 3

Community & Missions

Mission Committee & Mission Teams
Community Benevolent Ministries
R.A.'s & G.A.'s
Specific Missions (Tanzania, Liberia, Ricks Institute, Mexico, Hands and Feet Ministries, Georgia Baptist Children's Home, Penfield Christian Home, Operation Christmas Child, Aftercare, Crisis Pregnancy Center)
Gordon Memorial Baptist Association (Blewer Food Bank, Good Samaritan Ministry)
Georgia Baptist Convention
Southern Baptist Missionaries (Cooperative Program, Lottie Moon & Annie Armstrong Offerings)