

Warrington "A Prayer for Victory" (Barley)
6/14/64 6/20/58
AM

Scripture Lesson:- Acts 4: 13 to 33.

Text:- Acts 4: 29. "And now, Lord, behold their threatenings: and grant unto thy servants, that with with all boldness they may speak thy word".

Introduction:- Pentecost broke upon the disciples of Jesus like a cloudless sunrise. At once there followed a great victory, a victory that was won with ease. Three thousand were added to the Lord. Other victories followed in quick succession until it must have seemed to those early saints that the young church was destined to conquer the world. Then, suddenly the skies were overcast. Opposition arose. In fact, these same Christians found themselves confronted and threatened by the same court that had crucified their Master.

You know that life has a way of treating us in the same fashion. We go our way, little touched by the tragedies that lay waste other lives. Suddenly we find ourselves face to face with veils through which we cannot see and pounding at fast-closed doors to which we have no key.

What did these early saints do when they found themselves confronted by grim difficulties. What do we do? People watch to see where we will take shelter when the storm breaks upon us. But it is the reaction to the storm, rather than the force of it, that determines the outcome.

I.

Some turn to false remedies that are "of the earth, earthy". Some time ago, or was it just yesterday, one who had been sorely wounded, told his story to an old friend. The friend heard his through, and then said, "What you need is a good drink". That is a quite popular suggestion in the world. But such relief is only temporary. The final result is apt to be an ill head and a broken heart.

2. There are others who, refusing to surrender altogether to the tragedy that has overtaken them grow harsh and hard. They fight in their own strength. Such people often win, but they do not win with joy and sweetness.

3. Then there are those who give over the fight altogether and whine in self-pity. "Why should this happen to me? They are like to the bride that was to be married. All arrangements were made; the minister was there; the wedding guests were present but the bridegroom never came. She ordered all clocks stopped at the hour of her disappointment. She surrendered utterly and completely to the tragedy.

4. There are others who follow the example of the early saints and take their difficulties into the presence of God. When these found themselves best by opposition that they could not meet in their own strength, they turned to God in prayer. How sensible! They exercised the same good sense that the embarrassed host did when he found all his bread gone, he went to his neighbor and borrowed some. These disciples took themselves to prayer.

II.

Notice next the nature of their prayer. Multitudes make little or nothing of prayer in spite of the fact that prayer is all but universal. I doubt if there is a living person who has reached maturity, who has not at some time felt like he wanted to pray. Yet entirely too few of us find prayer a mighty help in living of our lives day by day.

1. One of the first essentials, if we are to pray effectively, is a right conception of God. How did these people think of the God to whom they prayed? First, they addressed him as the God who had created the heavens and the earth and the sea and all that in them is. They thought of him as the God in the hollow of whose hand the seas roar and rage. They thought of him as the God whose breath had kindled every sun and lighted every star. In other words, he was to them a

God of might and power. He was a God for whom nothing was too hard.

We of today need a new conviction of God's almightiness. The Puritan. He prostrated himself in the dust before his maker, but he set his foot on the neck of the King.

2. The God to whom they prayed was a God of infinite wisdom. The tragic events of the recent days had not taken him by surprise. He had foreseen and foretold the events that had just taken place. He was a God of infinite wisdom.

3. Another fact about this prayer was that it was a united prayer. "They lifted their voices together". Jesus makes seemingly extravagant promises to those who pray alone. "Enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to the Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly". But if Jesus seems extravagant in his promises to the individual who prays, he is even more so in his promises to the group. "If two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven". If one by prayer can chase a thousand, two who agree can put ten thousand to flight. They prayed together. Why cannot we pray together? Let us try it, each evening at 7:10 o'clock.

4. Note finally for what they prayed. "And now, Lord, behold their threatenings: and grant what? In such a situation most of us pray for a change in our circumstances. "Grant that we may not have to suffer". Grant that we may escape with a whole skin? No, they did not pray this kind of a prayer. They prayed in a finer fashion. "And now, Lord, grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy message". They did not pray for an easy task. They prayed for strength bravely to do the task to which God had called them. This is the kind of praying that is most rewarding. When Jesus faced the cross, he was human enough to long to escape. But there was something else for which he longed more; that was to do the will of God. They prayed together. Oh that we might have a sim-

arrangement, As we could pray together

III.

-What was the outcome? "When they had prayed", then what? Did anything happen? In other words, did they find prayer a force or just a form? When they had prayed, what happened?

1. "When they had prayed, they were all filled with the Holy Spirit". This is sometimes spoken of "as a new Pentecost". It was not a new Pentecost, because "the Spirit came". When the Spirit came, he came not as a transient guest. What then does this being filled with the Spirit mean? It means that these who had already experienced Pentecost, had through prayer let God afresh come into their lives. Prayer is a means of opening the door of our hearts to Christ. The supreme and all-inclusive result of prayer is that it brings a new awareness of God. The eternal God becomes real to the man who prays.

2. "When they had prayed...they spake the word of God with boldness". It was for this courage that they had prayed. There are some parts of the message of Jesus that we can speak today without any great courage. Then there are some parts that require great courage. Were you ever afraid to speak out, even on his authority? Were you ever ashamed of your own cowardice. There is nothing that makes for courage like an awareness of God.

3. "When they had prayed, ...great grace was upon them". We read here, that these saints became possessed of great grace. The divine favor rested upon them. Receiving grace, they became gracious. They came to share in the winsomeness of Jesus.

4. Finally, "when they had prayed", they gave their testimony with great power". There was something about their witnessing that the world could not resist. The church of today towers above that infant church in many respects. It is superior in numbers, in wealth, in prestige. But in proportion it has only a fraction of the power possessed by that early church.

Conclusion:- As we face the dangers of our ~~revival~~ period, let us face the fact that we cannot win in *own strength, not by might or by power*