

Acts 2:40-47

Devoted to the Prayers

Introduction: We've been looking for the last few weeks at the early church and their devoted commitment to their new identity in Jesus and the Kingdom of God.

We talked extensively about how the early Church was enamored with the Jesus story - It had cut so deeply to their hearts that the whole of their lives were radically changed.

When the Gospel (what Jesus did when he gave himself for you) becomes the defining reality of your life you look at everything differently. As we saw a few weeks ago when Jesus comes in to your life with transforming power you get a new freedom, a new identity and community, a new power and new way of seeing the world. As Paul said, **“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.”**

Luke tells us that this New Life expressed itself in a whole life devotion to the Jesus story - these people came together everyday to learn more about the Jesus story, to practice the Jesus way of living (self sacrificial service to others), to the breaking of bread (remembering Jesus substitutionary death) and to take advantage of the Jesus story through prayer.

This morning we want to look at their devotion to the Prayers.

Here at Refuge we've done many studies on prayer and it's importance in our lives. Even this Summer we did a series through the book of Psalms in order to teach us how to pray from scripture. But the prayer that is being referenced here is a bit different. We have focused in past studies on individual prayer, but the early church gathered daily to pray together, this is what we call corporate prayer. The word corporate though not used in this text comes from the latin word Corpus -meaning body. As we've been seeing through our recent studies these new christians considered themselves members of the same body, they were one, devoted, committed to one another, and one way this one-ness manifested itself was through devotion to prayer.

What is prayer? Prayer is talking with God. It can be praise, awe, adoration, or thanksgiving. It can be confession, and petition. There are

many ways in which we can pray - but in its most basic form prayer is simply talking with God.

What does it mean to be devoted to Prayer? It does not mean that prayer is all we do — any more than being devoted to a wife means all the husband does is hang out with his wife. But his devotion to her affects everything in his life and causes him to give himself to her in many different ways. So being devoted to prayer doesn't mean that all you do is pray. It means that there will be a pattern of praying that looks like devotion to prayer. Is there a pattern of praying in our lives, in our church, that can truly be called "being devoted to prayer"?

1. Why did they Pray?

1. **Because they had experienced the love of God and power of God in an unprecedented way.**
2. As we've been saying the early Christians came together to take advantage of the Jesus story - access to God through prayer. Because of the sacrificial work of Jesus, the way is opened to us to approach God in prayer with total confidence. **"Since, then, we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the son of God...Let us therefore approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need." - Hebrews 4:14-16**
3. In our first study in the book of Acts we talked about how the Ascension of Jesus means Absolute Presence, Power and Persuasion. His presence with us wherever we go, no matter what, his power over all things to bring about his kingdom, his glory and our good, and his persuasion that we are perfectly loved and accepted by God the Father because of his sake.
 1. The following week we talked about what the giving of the Holy Spirit meant for the first Christians and for us, **"The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God"; "God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us."; "God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!"**
 1. The basis of prayer is sonship. It is expected for a child to ask something from his father and it is expected that a father will listen to the request of his child.

2. “Prayer is the symbol and proof and gauge of grace. All that happens in the converting work of grace whereby we receive the adoption of sons, is that, being sons, we begin to pray.” - Samuel Chadwick
2. Remember these first Christians were Jews, they prayed and were familiar with prayer, but they had been given through Jesus’ work and the descent of the Holy Spirit a whole new way of relating to God - as Father. They had an instinctual desire to talk to their Father, to call on him, to praise him, to thank him, to know him more.
3. Secondly, I believe they also had a renewed faith and hope in prayer because of the power of God. The God who had promised so long ago to break into the world and heal it, to restore it, to make it his dwelling place once again, had begun to do so through the work of his son Jesus Christ -evidenced by the resurrection. God and his kingdom were on the move with resurrection life and power...And they were praying to be fellow workers, co-laborers with God in his kingdom work. The Church was praying for that Kingdom to come, for God’s will to be done on earth as it is in heaven in a whole new way..

2. What did they Pray?

1. The early Church prayed about everything:
 1. Healing and deliverance from unclean spirits (Acts 3: 2-9, Acts 5:16)
 2. Boldness to speak the word of God (Acts 4:29)
 3. Healing, signs, and wonders -God’s presence to be known in the church and in the surrounding community (Acts 4: 30)
 4. Forgiveness of their persecutors (Acts 7:59-60)
 5. The dead to be raised (Acts 9:36-42)
 6. The persecuted, for God’s guidance, for conversion
 7. James told the church to pray for one another that they might be healed from physical illness. (James 5:16)
 8. Paul told Timothy to teach the church to Pray for government and leaders.. **“I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, 2 for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way.” -1 Timothy 2:1-2**
 9. The church Prayed for Jesus’ soon return.

10. The early church prayed for anything and everything that concerned the establishment and furtherance of the kingdom of God.

2. And we should too. God has called his church, His kingdom citizens here on earth to intercede for the world. In intercessory prayer, that we are called, even chosen, as a people not for our own sake but for the sake of the world. Just as Adam and Eve were created to be God's image bearers in and to the world, and just as Israel was chosen in order to be a light unto the nations, so the church is called to be the people of God to and for the world. It is because we are God's ambassadors and image bearers, charged with caring for creation, that we bring to him the concerns of creation, praying for each other, for the church, and for the world at large. As a congregation, we pray for one another, we also pray for those outside our community of faith: for our neighborhoods; for municipal and government leaders; for the poor and those in prison; for those suffering persecution, exploitation, or the effects of natural disasters; even for our enemies.
 1. In intercessory prayer we pray for the needs of the world. Any area where we see evidence of the curse of sin we pray **"Your Kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven."** We pray for healing from illness and disease, for protection from abuse, for the end of environmental exploitation, for the eradication of racism, for an end to war.
3. Prayer for wisdom, illumination, and conformity to God's word and his will and his kingdom.
 1. When I was preparing this teaching I kept thinking about the simple yet profound words of the Hymn -What a friend we have in Jesus.
 1. "What a Friend we have in Jesus, All our sins and griefs to bear! What a privilege to carry Everything to God in prayer. O what peace we often forfeit, O what needless pain we bear, All because we do not carry Everything to God in prayer! Have we trials and temptations? Is there trouble anywhere? We should never be discouraged, Take it to the Lord in prayer. Can we find a friend so faithful Who will all our sorrows share? Jesus knows our every weakness, Take it to the Lord in prayer. Are we weak and heavy-laden, Cumbered with a load of care? Precious Savior, still our refuge— Take it to the Lord in prayer; Do thy friends despise, forsake thee? Take it to the Lord in

prayer; In His arms He'll take and shield thee, Thou wilt find a solace there."

2. Many of us know the truth of this. We can take everything to God our Father in prayer, there is nothing that is too great, there is nothing too small. God has all wisdom, power, love, help, comfort, peace, etc and He invites us to bring everything to him. As Peter says, **"Cast all your cares on him, knowing that he cares for you."**
3. But it's not enough to know it, it's worthless if we do not take advantage of this resource. Anytime we talk with one another, about needs, struggles, fears, blessing, victories, plans - all of these can and should be taken to God in prayer. It's not that we don't meet needs that are presented and we pray instead but rather that we subject all of our serving, wisdom, and care to God and to his Spirit.
 1. Charles Spurgeon said this, "My heart has no deeper conviction than this, that prayer is the most efficient spiritual agency in the universe next to the Holy Spirit... I could as soon think of living without eating or breathing, as living without praying".
4. That God would convict us in this truth. That we would be a church that brings everything to God in prayer.

3. How did they Pray?

1. They prayed with devotion and steadfastness. We're told they did this daily. They had a daily commitment and rhythm of prayer.
2. They prayed with Faith. They believed in the effectual power of prayer. Prayer was not a last resort, but a priority. They prayed proactively...God was on the move and they wanted to join him in his mission to the world.
3. Paul often reminded the church that they were to be a people that prayed without ceasing. Meaning that it became a defining act of their lives - a life that marked total dependence on God.
4. What if we determined to do this? What if we determined that we are going to be a church that prays together, for one another, not seldomly, but often, that our Sunday gatherings, that our midweek lunches and coffees, that our community groups would be marked by prayer. What might we see God do in us - his presence in our lives, what might we see God do in our city around us?
 1. John Chrysostom, an early church father said these profound words about the effectual power of prayer - "The potency of

prayer has subdued the strength of fire; it has bridled the rage of lions; hushed anarchy to rest, extinguished wars, appeased the elements, expelled demons, burst the chains of death, expanded the gates of heaven, alleviated diseases, repelled frauds, rescued cities from destruction assuaged diseases, repelled frauds, rescued cities from destruction, stayed the sun in its course, and arrested the progress of the thunderbolt.....Prayer is an all efficient armory, a treasure undiminished, a mine which is never exhausted, a sky unclouded, a heaven unruffled by the storm. It is the root, the fountain, the mother of a thousand blessings” - John Chrysostom

Conclusion: What we want to do this morning is not simply talk about prayer, or talk about how we need to pray more but to actually pray together.

So here’s what we will do.

We’re going to break into groups of four or five and pray together, pray over one another.

Is there anyone in need? sick, fearful, condemned, angry..pray for one another.

What are the needs in the church currently - our church, or the church in general. -Conformity to Christ, greater representation of the healing work of the kingdom, unity, prayerfulness, faith in the power and sovereignty of God

What are the needs of the world around us? Suffering, hunger, war, famine, disease, racism, exploitation. Let’s pray!