

TBC – 5/23/04 p.m.

“WATCH UNTO PRAYER”

1 Peter 4:7

Intro: There seems to be a growing realization among many serious minded believers today that we are not seeing prayer answered as the people of God have seen it in past days.

No one can read the Bible without learning that prayer has to be a very important part of the life of every child of God. Not only were prophets and apostles to pray, but prayer is enjoined upon every child of God, men and women, young people, and children. Prayer is our God-given way of communicating with God. It is our way of recognizing our dependence upon God. We probably learn the most about praying when we are faced with some situation which has overwhelmed us, some circumstance which we have been forced to realize that we cannot handle, and therefore we need God’s help.

True prayer is humbling because it is contrary to our inborn feeling of self-sufficiency. Prayer has many forms. Some times it is worship. Some times it is bringing our own personal burdens to the Lord. Some times we come to intercede for others. Prayer is drawing near to God, and it is having God draw near to us. As long as you and I live, we will keep learning more and more about prayer.

According to the verse I have chosen as my text for tonight, the times in which we live place upon us both a great need and a great burden for prayer. “But the end of all things is at hand: be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer” (1 Peter 4:7). People in every generation have been taught to expect “the end of all things.” We know an end is coming, but we do not know when it will come. But, in the light of the prospect that God is going to be bringing all things on earth to a conclusion, we need to pray.

People have been asking me, and maybe they have been asking you, or maybe you have asking, do you think that the coming of the Lord is near? I do not know the answer to that question, but I do know that we have more reasons to look for the coming of the Lord than any generation before us has had. Paul told Timothy in his last letter to be a part of God’s Word that “in the last days perilous times will come” (2 Tim. 3:1). The NASB calls them “difficult times.” They will be difficult times for everyone, but in particular for the people of God. That includes us. So

things are not going to get better, but they are going to get worse before the Lord comes. And we may very well be very close to “the end of all things.”

But the important part about our text is that Peter was telling the people of God back in his day, that “the end of all things” was “at hand,” and so he called upon them not only to pray, but to “be ... sober, and watch unto prayer.”

The verbs “be sober” and “watch” are very close to each other in meaning. The first means to be clear and right in our minds. We need to be thinking straight, which means to have our thoughts guided by the Word of God. It carries with it the idea of being self-controlled, and humble. There are several words in the NT which are translated “watch,” but this one is a word that you might use to rebuke a drinker, one who is not thinking straight because he may be involved in things while take the edge off of his spiritual alertness. It means that we are not to go to sleep, not even be drowsy.

So together they mean that “the end of all things” calls for us to be at our best spiritually, and not go to sleep like others are doing thinking that things are going to go on forever and ever. Peter was really sounding an alarm. It is a verse which ought to send us to our closets, to get on our knees, and to make sure that things are right between us and the Lord.

The verse actually means that our lives need to be built around and upon our relationship with God in prayer. We must take time to pray. Nothing must be permitted to keep us from praying. And this is a battle because our lives are so full, there is always so much to do, that if we don’t specifically make prayer a major part of our lives, it probably will have little or no place in our lives. Wasn’t it Martin Luther who said, “I am so busy that I must pray”? I think it was.

And so each one of us must take time right away to see the place that prayer has in our lives. There probably is no greater threat to our prayers than *busy-ness*. The writer of the book of Hebrews instructed to “lay aside every weight and the sin which doth so easily beset us” (Heb. 12:1). Often the things that slow us down are things that are not really essential for our lives. We often make work for ourselves. We pursue activities that are non-essential. Most of us need to make changes, and make them permanently.

How much time do you pray each day, time set aside when you really seek the Lord? Many years ago Andrew Murray who lives in South Africa held a conference for pastors. It was a prayer conference. And at the beginning he asked the pastors present to indicate on a piece of paper how much time they spent in prayer each day. Now these were pastors, men leading congregations of the Lord's people. What do you think the average was for all of those men, two or three hundred of them. *The average was ten minutes!* Now if that was the average for the pastors, what do you think was the average for their people? If the pastors were hardly praying, probably the average of their people was close to zero!

We live in a generation of Christians that give lip service to prayer. The greatest influences that we have for good in seeing the lives of people changed are four:

- 1) The ministry of the Word.
- 2) The power of the Holy Spirit.
- 3) Prayer.
- 4) Godly living.

Instead we have followed the world with its hunger for entertainment, and we are ignoring the most powerful instruments that God has provided for us. We need to pray. We need to pray more than we do. We need to pray fervently and constantly, humbling seeking the blessing of the Lord, and crying out for help.

What does it mean to "watch unto prayer"?

The first thing it means is that we need to pray. That fact is made clear all through our Bibles. We need to pray because we are going to be overwhelmed by the world if we don't. We need to pray because we face a powerful Enemy in the Devil, and he knows that he has but a short time to do as much damage to as many people as he possibly can. Please turn with me to Rev. 12, beginning with verse 10, and follow as I read what it has to say.

The best way to meet the attacks of the enemy, is by prayer.

I have been reading a wonderful book on prayer that has provoked a lot of thought on my part. The author's name was Thomas Cobbett. He was an Englishman who lived back in the 1600's. His book is called, *Gospel Incense*. Of course he was one of the Puritans. He makes four suggestions as to what it mean to "watch unto prayer." I am rewording his

suggestions to a certain extent, but I want to pass on to you what he wrote years ago.

First, he said that it means that we need to prepare our hearts to pray. In Psa. 5:3 David made a commitment to the Lord which we all need to make. If we begin the day with the Lord, it is much easier to be lifting our hearts to the Lord throughout the day. But we need to have time, a quiet time, before the activities of the day get started, when we can meet with God and trust Him to meet with us. If we seek Him while He may be found, we will never be disappointed.

I am restating his second suggestion for watching unto prayer, but this was his meaning. Learn to pray the Scriptures back to God. If you read a promise that you need to have fulfilled, pray that promise back to the Lord. He loves for us to talk to Him about His Word. Please turn with me in your Bibles to 2 Sam. 7, especially verse 25 through 27. The Holy Spirit will use the Word to lead us in our praying. The prayers of the Bible are a great aid by which we can watch unto prayer.

A third thing that will keep us watching to prayer is to review the circumstances of our lives, the problems we have, the people we are concerned about, the opportunities that are before us, and many other things. There are always things in our hearts, secret sins which need to be confessed and forsaken before God. If you and I never prayed for anyone but ourselves, we would have all that we can possibly to help us to watch unto prayer.

And then there is a fourth point, somewhat related to the third point. If you have known the Lord for any time at all, you know that there have been times when prayer has been a struggle, and there have been other times when prayer was a delight and you were hesitant to leave the place of prayer because of the liberty that you had experienced at you speak to the Lord. Cobbett speaks in his book about comparing prayer with a musician tuning his instrument. All of our children took lessons on musical instruments – Dwight, John, Carolyn, and Gary. (Illus: What Mr. Ewert told Gary as he started to learn to play the violin. And what he does now whenever he plays it, making sure that every string is in tune.) Mr. Cobbett talks about tuning our hearts. Cf. Psa. 66:18; Psa. 19:14: 139:23-24.

So we need to pay particular attention to the condition of our hearts if we are to watch unto prayer.

1 Pet. 4:7 (5)

There is so much that we all need to learn about prayer. We need to be taught to pray. The Lord taught His disciples when they asked Him to, and He will do the same for us. Great blessings are ahead. Great victories to be won even though our times are bad in the world. But these are great times in which we can learn to “watch unto prayer.” May the Lord enable us to see our need. It will quickly spread to others as they see the results of it in our lives.