

Ephesians #09: Ephesians 6:18b

Ephesians

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Our text words this afternoon are Ephesians 6:18b, "and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints." You recall last time we had considered the first part of this verse, "Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit," thus this afternoon the apostle concludes his description of prayer as the grand secret in the art of Christian warfare. Whereas last time we have considered the what, the when and the how of prayer, this afternoon we wish to consider watchful prayer, "watching thereunto," persevering prayer, "with all perseverance," and intercessory prayer, "and supplication for all saints." Thus prayer, the grand secret in the art of Christian warfare: watchful prayer; persevering prayer; intercessory prayer.

For a number of weeks now we have been considering in some detail the Christian armor with which God desires to outfit his Christian soldiers to do battle against satanic warfare. We have seen that from head to toe, from the helmet of salvation to feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace, God desires a fully armed, fully active Christian soldier, but we have also observed on last occasion that all of this armory must be put into effect through the grand secret of Christian warfare, the secret of prayer. We have seen that prayer is the inner motivation, that prayer is the inner substance, the inner flavor that gives reality, gives vitality, gives strength, gives success in the hands of God to all the pieces of Christian armor wherewith the Christian soldier is girded, and Paul has admonished the Ephesian believer who is suffering much persecution and difficulty to pray always with all prayer and supplication. Now in our text this afternoon, he gives us three marks of that kind of prayer, three marks in working out that secret for with prayer must be attained: watchfulness, perseverance, intercession.

"Watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints." Thus Paul says in the first place, true prayer, powerful prayer is watchful prayer. He interweaves prayerfulness with watchfulness. "Watch thereunto," he says. He says it in the very active tense. You should be praying always and watching thereunto, thus the watching and the praying are linked together. This is a very common teaching of the apostle. Many places in Scripture he links together watchfulness and prayerfulness even as did his Master Jesus in Matthew 26:41, "Watch and pray." So Paul says in Colossians 4:2, "Continue in prayer and watch in the same with thanksgiving." And again in 1 Peter we find Peter also taking up this same theme of prayerfulness and watchfulness walking hand in hand, "the end of

all things is at hand, be ye therefore sober and watching in prayer." An ancient Puritan, little-known but deserved to be better known, Paul Baynes once wrote, "We must all day long have a waiting soul that carrieth the duty of prayer in remembrance."

A praying soul is a waking soul, a watchful soul. Thus Paul is saying, you see, that the true Christian soldier is not one who just mumbles words, he is not one who just utters petitions but he is one who as he prays watches. The true Christian soldier is one who must not be caught off-guard. We may do the form of prayer but if we leave ourselves unguarded in prayer, we may quickly fall. David and Peter are all too well-known examples. As true prayer calls for alertness, true prayer calls for vigilance, true prayer calls for watchfulness and watching thereunto.

Well, what must the true Christian soldier, then, watch for? What does this watching actually mean in concrete terms? Well, in the first place to pray watchfully means to watch for needs to pray for. To watch for needs to pray for. To watch for specific things that may surface in our lives or in the lives of others for which we ought to pray. This past week on house visitation, we were discussing prayer and we were speaking with one another about how many times our prayers can be so general that we wouldn't even know if God would answer them, when he would answer them. The generality of prayer can so strip down all specifics that we don't even recognize the hand of God when he comes to answer. Our forefathers aimed for specificity in prayer. They wanted specific needs. There is room for a general praying for the world at large, for the mission, for the church, for the nation, but my friends, we also be specific in our prayers. We must hone down on particular issues, on particular sins in our own lives and in the lives of others. A particularly sick person, we must be specific. We must watch for needs to pray for.

Then again, true watchfulness means to watch and know the needs that we are praying for outside of ourselves but it means to watch the very prayers we do pray. How often if we don't watch our prayers we are prone to approach God in an irreverent manner or in an absent-minded manner, having our minds wander during prayer, having half-hearted sincerity, or using God to ask him to fulfill our requests, to ask God to follow our plans and we fail to recognize many times that we are called also to watch our own prayers, to watch ourselves to make sure that we don't stick our own will into our prayers in the forefront but that we recognize that the main task of prayer is to seek to cause a sinner to wrestle to come under the will of God.

My friends, when we watch our own prayers, we will not be proud creatures. We will have much cause for humiliation. But it is best, it is good that we watch our own prayers as much as possible. That may mean adjustments in our prayers. That may mean giving more pause in our prayers to hear what God will say. That may mean speaking our prayers aloud at times. But above all that will mean recognizing how unable we are to pray in our own strength by watching our own prayers and bringing our inability to God and saying, "O God, teach thou me to pray!"

You know, my friends, one of the great purposes of prayer is to teach us how prayerless and unable we are. One of the great purposes of prayer is to teach us that we need to be

taught to pray, and it is to the groanings and wrestlings of the Spirit in prayer that we recognize our prayerlessness, and as we watch our prayers, that we ask God that we may be more watchful. A saint who is satisfied with his prayers has never watched his own prayers. My friend, the publican was not satisfied with his prayer. The Pharisee was. The publican knew how empty his heart was. He knew that the words just poured from his heart. They were not fanciful. They were not articulate in the language of the day. They were born from the inner recesses of his soul. And still even when they are born and created in the inner womb of need, the believer recognizes how poor his prayers are. He watches thereunto.

Then, thirdly, we must not only watch for needs to pray for, and we must not only watch the prayers we do pray, we must also watch for God's answers or apparent lack of answers to our prayers. I've told you before that John Bunyan listed as one of his great 10 sins the sin of knocking on the door of grace and turning around and leaving that door before God came to answer the door, and Bunyan bemoans himself and says, "My quick turning from God indicates methinks that I have no great need for his answer." Oh, my friend, when we watch our prayer life we will find out how many prayers we pray that we really don't pray, we don't really need the answer. We give up on the Lord too quickly. We don't realize how many times that God's delays are not denials but his delays are often siftings to sift us in the fiery furnace of affliction and to adorn our lives with greater and deeper and maturer spiritual faith. That God would answer all our prayers right away, we would be no better in the spiritual pilgrimage than spoiled children are in their earthly pilgrimage, to receive at every whim the beckoning and the answer from their parents they are seeking for. So a child grows up to be spoiled, knowing that the whole world revolves around his or her own will. My friends, God doesn't deal that way with his people. He often delays because they're not ready to receive an answer, because their need is not great, because his sovereign will decrees otherwise for their lives, because he has his own wise reasons far above their comprehension, and therefore the believer is called to watch, to wait on God for his answers. He is called in this process to recognize that as a true Christian soldier often learns much about battle during practice, so he may learn much, indeed he may learn most, in the practice of ongoing prayer day by day. God, you see, causes his people sometimes to grow more in his apparent lack of answers than in his gift of answers. There are times when God's people may say, "God's delays have served me in better stead than the very answers he would give. I have learned more in the waiting times than in the possessing times. I have learned more in the missing times than the embracing times."

God firms and fits his Christian soldiers through the exercise of teaching them to watch for delayed answers, and not only to watch for delayed answers but also to watch for answers which often are not quickly recognizable. Many times God is answering our prayer even when we don't acknowledge it, when we don't see it. It is one thing to receive the gift of prayer and it is another thing to receive the insight to understand God's answer. Sometimes a believer may pray for more dependence on God, for a closer life with the Lord and the Lord may send affliction, may sanctify it and lead him closer to him, and you'll never recognize or seldom recognize that that is an answer to his very prayer.

Sometimes the Lord will use the believer's very prayerlessness to answer the very prayer he is praying so that he may feel his dependence on God for more prayer.

You see, my friends, prayer is often viewed far too simply by modern Christendom and also, I'm afraid, in our lives prayer is often viewed as an automatic thing. "Here is my petition and there is the Lord's answer." But the Lord uses prayer in a much more complex way. He doesn't need our prayers but he sovereignly chooses to use prayer to mold and shape and form the true believer after his divine molding. And so the more the believer advances, the more he learns to watch, to watch in more profound ways than he ever watched before. He learns to watch by looking back on his life and asking himself, "Lord, whatever thou didst and however thou didst it, dost thou mean more to me, does Christ mean more to me today than he did five years ago? And do I esteem myself less today than I did five years ago?" And when the answer is an honest yes, oh, then the believer recognizes, you see, by watching the hand of God that even in secret ways he did not recognize during those five years, God has been shaping and molding him and confirming within him that he must increase and I must decrease.

You know, I firmly believe, my friends, that most of God's answers come in very secretive, gradual, inner ways of working. Peter speaks of God strengthening with the strength of the inner man. Those are things we often don't recognize at the time but later we look back and we say it was good for me to have been afflicted. Later we recognize under watchfulness that God has been at work. Later we feel and see and may believe that even as we stood knocking at the door, God was answering and opening that door bit by bit though we often have not seen him. Watching thereunto.

Then, fourthly, to watch in prayerfulness means also to watch not only our prayers in our inner life but it means to watch also our external life, to watch our lives, to watch how we spend our time, to watch what activities we engage in, to watch in the externals of our behavior, our dress, our walk of life, what we do, what we say to others, to watch whether we walk consistently in public with the prayers we pray in private. Let him that nameth the name of the Lord, let him that calleth on the name of the Lord depart from iniquity. True prayer in the inner closet walks hand in hand with holy, careful watchfulness outside of the inner closet.

Then finally, fifthly, true watchfulness in prayer has a way of augmenting, a way of expanding our petitions. When we truly watch with prayer, we watch what is going on not only in the externals of our own lives but also we watch what is going on in our homes, in the streets of our cities, in our state, in our government, in our country, our world, our church denomination, and then our prayers, my friends, are not restricted and bound to selfish piddly ends but they become large, they become universal, they become great in momentum, they become large in expectation and in petition. For need abounds on every hand. Prayerfulness and watchfulness opens up avenues of prayer and binds upon souls channels of prayer we have never prayed about before.

Just look around you, there's need everywhere. Chances are that the person sitting beside you in the bench today, or that your neighbor living next door to you on your street, or

the peers with which you work, chances are that they are several of them which if you had eyes to see are carrying heavy burdens, perhaps very visible burdens that call for your prayers, perhaps more secret burdens that you can read under faces that they are troubled, perhaps you should engage in conversation with them and gently prod and probe them and cause them to become a matter of your prayers. Look around us. Look at our society. Look at despicable denial of God in our public education system. Consider too even in religious Christendom the great need that exists for our prayers.

Several weeks ago, we were discussing in the Grand Rapids Press one of the religious news editor's columns, a column of holy humor, religious humor, and it was very unholy. It calls for our action. It calls for our prayers that God may save our society, may save our city. You see, when we are watchful, when we are in God we are like sentinels on top of the city wall and we are crying out that God may preserve his name. When we look at our own congregation and we see all the shortcomings in each of our lives, we see all our human foibles, we see sometimes callous indifference, we see people who have come to church all their lives who still have not a godly concern for their own soul. What need we have, my friends, for prayer. Oh, watch thereunto. Our prayer life is far too restrictive. Society in general, our nation, the world at large, pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, Christ says, also for ambassadors with a nearly unheard of shortage that we have in our day, in our denomination, what need there is for prayer. My friend, watch round about you and what you see with your eyes, what you read with your eyes, turn those things into prayer and watch and pray.

Then says the apostle, when you watch and pray, pray not once or twice or three times but pray with perseverance. "And watching thereunto," he says, "with all perseverance." In the original Greek word, this has the implication of pursuit. The word that Paul uses which is here translated "perseverance" is the word that the Grecians used for a dog that pursues its prey until it catches its prey. It's a very beautiful complex Greek word. It means that as a dog will not hesitate and will not cease from running and racing until it catches its prey, so you, Ephesians believer, do not cease to persevere, do not cease to plod on, do not cease to race on in your prayers until you have the answer of God. Be in pursuit of God. Be in pursuit for his answer. It was a forefather who wrote a book once called "In Pursuit of God." This is what Paul is saying right here to the Ephesians, they must persevere, they must continue on, they must go forward in the strength of the Lord God, continuing to pray.

They must persevere. Why must they persevere? Well, in the first place, because God commands it. God commands it. Whatever God commands, my friends, is worthy reason in itself to seek grace to perform. But secondly, not only is perseverance strictly commanded, it is to be highly commended. It is especially to perseverance in prayer that what we have spoken about before is realized, that the believer grows in grace and faith. "Yes, but," you say, "there are things I've prayed for for many many years. I have a wandering prodigal daughter or a prodigal son. Or I have a particular need that has burdened my soul for many years." My friend, pray on. I know what you're going to say, you're going to say, "But it seems the Lord never answers." But I say to you, pray on. And even as you have prayed for that prodigal son and daughter, have you not learned

many lessons even in your prayers as you have prayed for them? Has not the Lord even used your prayers though the literal answer has not come? Has he not given you spiritual answers in the process of persevering? In the process of pursuing? Have you not learned more about the prodigality of your own heart as you have been concerned about the prodigality of your dear flesh and blood, to take only one example? You see, in the process so much is learned and this is what Paul is saying, this is what Scripture says again and again in prayer, and this is what is ignored in our modern society, in our fast consumption, easy answers, we ignore that prayer is most often a process and that it is the process itself that God blesses to our spiritual maturation.

Pursue. Persevere. This is highly commended. And thirdly, persevere because God has wise purposes to fulfill his prayers, his God-given prayers as he will, when he will, and how he will. In due season, says Scripture, we shall reap if we faint not. You know, my friends, almost every great thing that has happened in this world has taken a great deal of time. A great artist who has painted a very famous work of art, for example, often does not have recognition for that work of art until many years later but he has to learn for the discipline of the art to enjoy the painting itself, that it brings its own reward with it. And so it is with prayer. Prayer brings its own reward, the kind of reward we were speaking of this morning, the reward of grace with it. Prayer in process is itself a blessing. Prayer answered directly is a blessing on top of a blessing. In due season we shall reap if we faint not.

Oh, my friends, are we not far too prone to faint in prayer? Far too prone to have excuses in prayer? Far too prone to give up on the Lord in prayer? Far too prone to be active with our human reasoning in prayer? Far too prone to pray only as long as we can see a way to an answer? What are we doing then but praying to ourselves? Praying to human capabilities and forgetting that God is the God of this universe, and that what is impossible in man is possible with God? Pray on, my friend, and ask God for grace to pray in your prayers.

There are many causes for our lack of pursuing God in prayer but every one of those causes is unjustified. Unbelief is a great cause that breaks down our perseverance. Pride is another cause. Human expectation is another cause. Human expectation does not increase our prayers, it minimizes them. The one who really has his prayers multiplied is the one who has no expectation himself but all expectation in the mighty God, the Father Almighty of heaven and of earth. Lack of submission is another cause, refusal to yield our will to the will of God. A lack of endurance of discipline, a lack of principle or motive is another cause. And against all these causes Paul says, "Pray. Keep watching with all perseverance, with all perseverance. Don't give up on the Lord."

He doesn't make any exceptions. He doesn't say, "Watch with perseverance in 95% of your petitions." He doesn't say, "Quit here or there on certain petitions." But he says, "Watch with all perseverance. Continue instant in prayer." Thus not twice, not three times, but keep on and keep on because God is never tardy in his answers. He answers in the fullness of time. The Old Testament church kept on for 4,000 years praying for the Messiah child to be born. Many times one generation must have sighed to the other, "It

seems that God is past time." But, no, in the fullness of time the child was born, the Son is given.

God is never tardy, my friends. God is always on time but his delays try the constancy of our faith. His delays tried Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, all his saints, and they try his saints to mature and lead his saints closer unto himself and thus pray on with watchfulness, with perseverance, with intercession. Make supplication for all the saints. But that's our third thought and we will sing first. Psalter 363, stanzas 1, 4 and 5. "From the depths to I invoke Thee. Lord, to me incline Thy ear." And what follows 1, 4 and 5 of 363.

"From the depths do I invoke Thee,
Lord, to me incline Thy ear;
To my voice be Thou attentive,
And my supplication hear.

For the Lord my soul is waiting
More than watchers in the night,
More than they for morning watching,
Watching for the morning light.

Hope in God, ye waiting people;
Mercies great with Him abound;
With the Lord a full redemption
From the guilt of sin is found."

"And make supplication for all saints." Well, maybe you say, "That doesn't apply to me. I have ample reason to consume all my prayers upon myself. Things are so terrible with me in the spiritual realm that I have no room to pray for others. And if things ever become spiritually well for me, then I will begin to pray for others, but in the meantime, no. This is not my duty." Is that reasoning right? We hear people reason like that sometimes. They will ask other people to pray for them but they themselves won't pray for the other people because they say, "My prayers are of no avail. My own house is not set in order, how shall I pray for others?" My friends, you are called to pray for yourself and you are called to pray for others. You ought not leave the one undone but you ought not leave the other undone either.

You see, as I've tried to tell you before, life always calls for balance. What would you think of the farmer that had a farm that was not in good condition and he said, "Well, since my farm is not in good condition, I will spend all my time out in the yard sprucing up the farm and I will spend no time with my family." Or what would you think of that same farmer if he said, "Things are not well in my house and I will spend all my time in my family and I will never go and work out on my farm." Either way would spell disaster. You see, life always calls for balance and so our prayer life calls for balance. Indeed, we all have ample enough material to pray 24 hours a day, every day for our own needs and for our own concerns and our own shortcomings and our own sins, but Paul would have us to be balanced in our prayers. Pray not only for yourselves, pray also in an

intercessory manner for others. When you see in the bulletin 15 or 16 weeks in a row someone in critical condition, did you realize it was your responsibility to pray in secret for that young man? Have you been making supplication for him? Has his family been bound on your heart? Is there balance in your prayer life?

We are called indeed to pray for ourselves and we are called indeed to pray for poor unbelievers, for those who are strangers of God's grace, but here Paul focuses his intercessory prayer on the saints. Make supplication for all saints, he says, and maybe that seems mysterious to you. You know, of course, that there are many texts in the Bible which say that we must pray for all men, thus unbelievers too. And maybe it seems mysterious to you that Paul here says pray especially for the saints. There are people sometimes that say, "Well, what's the sense of praying for other saints, for other children of God? They already have it, at least they have the basic. Why such a need to pray for them?" Well, my friends, there are several reasons why there is great need to pray for the saints.

First of all, that they may maintain their saintliness. Just yesterday I was reading one of our forefathers and he said a saint, and he defined a saint, I think that's the best definition I ever read of a saint, a saint is one who by grace when we look at his life makes it easier to believe in God. Think about that. A saint is one who when we look at his life makes it easier for us to believe in God. Surely, surely there is great cause for the saints to pray for the saints that they may maintain their saintliness and that they may maintain a Christ-like spirit, that the fruits of the Spirit may be visible in their lives, and that those fruits of which Paul speaks so abundantly to the Galatians, the fruits of love, humility, meekness, temperance, all those things of which Paul lists which against such there is no law, those fruits of the Spirit need to be cultivated and what better way can they be cultivated than saints remembering the need for saintliness for other saints in prayer? Pray that saints may maintain their saintliness.

A church where there are many of God's people who are walking as salt on the earth is going to be a blessed church, my friends. That saltiness is going to be sprinkled throughout the congregation because it's God's way to use the lives of his saints to bless the lives of others, to win and to gain others, as our Catechism says it, unto Christ by their godly conversation. It doesn't mean the saint can do that in his own strength, but it means that the saintliness of the saints is a means that God uses to gather others unto himself. Did you ever think of that, that the saintliness of the saints God can use as a means of grace and often does? Often does. When we see Christ's image penciled on a frail human being, when we see the embodiment of Christ carried out in a life of a broken saint who finds his strength in God, the vitality of the real Christian religion is promoted. It is easier to believe in God when we see God working vividly in the lives of others. Pray, then, especially for the saints.

Pray not only that they may maintain their saintliness, pray too for the saints because the saints are engaged in united battle. They are all fighting one fight. They are engaged in one cause. Pray for the saints. This is the context of why I believe Paul singles out the saints here in Ephesians 6. He is concluding his discussion of the whole Christian armor

and he is saying each one of these Christians one by one must be clothed with the Christian armor from the helmet of hope to feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace. But not only must each one be singly so clad, each one also forms a part of that large army of King Jesus and together they go into battle, together they fight the principalities and powers of darkness, and therefore pray for them together. They are one in battle. They are one in purpose. They are one in love. They are one in their Christian armor. They are one in their goal of glory in the victory of their God and King.

Pray that there be no division in the ranks of the Christian soldiers of Christ's army. Pray that the battle may be won. Pray that they may make headway against the archenemy. Pray that they may move forward as a united front. Pray that they may glorify the God who has bought them with the price of his own blood and came so lowly that he was born in Bethlehem's manger. Pray even as Christ prayed, "My holy Father, I will that all thy people be one."

Oh, how terrible it is, my friend, when there is division in the ranks of soldiers who fight for one country, and what a sure way to cause disarray, to allow the enemy to infiltrate the country's ranks, when there is disharmony in the soldiers themselves, when they lose sight of their common cause to fight for the country. My dear children of God among us, you are called to fight for a heavenly country, a better country. You have all the more reason, you have double cause to have no division in your ranks. You have one goal, you have one purpose. Pray for the fellow saints. You are not standing alone. You are all involved. There is a cosmic reality, that means a universal reality to all the saints in different nations and places. There is a bonding together. Paul speaks of them all as one members of one body. The living church is the one body of Christ. Pray for this one body.

Then thirdly, I believe Paul is saying pray especially for the saints not only that they may maintain their saintliness and have good salty effects in the world, and not only because they are engaged in the same battle and have the same goal, but thirdly, because this battle is not even the saint's battle but this battle is ultimately God's battle. And in some senses, I believe this is the grandest reason of all to pray for the saints. Our prayers are so often self-centered, trivial, but there is a grand glorious program God has in mind, a grand glorious goal God has in view from all of eternity, and that grand view is that one day on the shores of everlasting bliss he will gather all his saints unto himself, a throng that no man can number, united in singing praises and glory to the Lamb on the throne, and to this one grand goal all the saints are marching, to this one grand victory all the saints are traveling. And now Paul is saying, "Oh, dear Ephesian believers, you are persecuted on all sides but remember you are not alone. You are part of not only of this worldwide army of the saints of all places, but you are part of that army from generation to generation from the first Adam and Eve to the end of time, you are part of that everlasting army."

Pray for the full fruition of the glorious ingathering of the kingdom of God, and pray because you know that your prayer will meet success. The battle is God's. The victory is yours. Go out and pray for the saints that God may realize the victory he shall realize.

Pray that he who will not forsake the work of his own hands, pray that he won't forsake the work of his own hands. Pray the things that you know shall come to pass. Rise above your own problems and your own difficulties and fears and hopes sometimes in your prayers and pray for the great and ultimate victory of the whole living church of God. Pray that the principalities and powers may be cast down and that the strong man Christ Jesus may gain the victory. Pray soldier by soldier. Paul so prayed for the entire campaign, for the entire battle, for the entire army, for the entire church. You see, Paul is saying pray individualistically, pray specifically but also pray globally. Pray denominationally. Pray nationally. Pray ecclesiastically. Pray domestically. Pray with supplication for all the saints.

Now why do all these things that we have considered in two sermons? Well, because God blessed his people through the instrumentality of prayer. The bottom line of all these things, my friends, is that it is God's sovereign remedy, not his compulsion, he never needs to answer prayer, but his sovereign remedy to use prayer for many of the ills and diseases of the soul that tend to defeat us all. Those who live a close prayer life with the Lord live a close life with the Lord.

So the apostle knowing his own infirmities and his own weaknesses, and his own need to be included in this supplication for all saints, adds, as it were, a postscript to this Ephesian letter and he says, "And for me, that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the gospel, For which I am an ambassador in bonds: that therein I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak." You see, what Paul is saying, this great and mighty apostle, he is saying, "Ephesians, I am side-by-side with you in this battle. I am at best no more than one more Christian soldier and I need to pray for you, but I also need you to pray for me for it is one battle, it is one Lord, it is one cause and we are all sinners who need prayer." The greater the Christian, the greater the recognition that he needs the prayers of other believers.

"And for me also." Oh, isn't that beautiful? Paul comes right down on the level of the Ephesians. "I need it just as much as you do," and my friends, isn't that exactly right? Who of us can put himself above another? We all need the Lord just as much. We are all just as great sinners in ourselves. We are all totally depraved in ourselves. Isn't that true what Paul said, "What have you that you have not received? And if you have received it, wherefore do you boast?" Everything we have received that is of any value for eternity is the sheer gift of God, but in and of ourselves all men are on one level and thus this is so appropriate, "And for me also."

And when he prays, "And for me," what does he pray for? Does he pray that he is now in prison and that he yearns to be delivered from the physical prison? Does he pray that he is just then sick and perhaps as far as we know is still sick here and wants physical health? What's the thing that's lying closest on Paul's heart? What springs to the surface when he says, "And pray for me"? What is his greatest cause? What is his greatest longing? Oh, it is the gospel and the utterance of the gospel. "Pray for me that utterance may be given unto me that I may speak my mouth, open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel." It is the gospel that captivates him. It is the gospel he

longs to live for and die for. "Pray for me but as you pray for me, pray especially for the prospering of the gospel," he would say. "It is the gospel that I am most concerned about and that I may preach that gospel boldly."

That's why in these two verses he uses the word "boldly" twice. "Pray that I may open my mouth boldly. Pray that I may speak boldly as I ought to speak." My dear friends, may I submit to you in a humble way that we have no greater desire as your pastor than this very same desire. And for me, that I may be given utterance to speak to you the mystery of the gospel, utterance to speak it boldly, to proclaim the whole counsel of God, death in Adam and life in Christ. Pray especially for me in respect of the gospel. Pray that all fear of men may be delivered is what Paul is saying. That's why he's praying for boldness, that he may not fear his captures, that he may not fear the whims and opinions of men but that he may preach the unfettered gospel grace of God. Pray for the mystery of the gospel.

My dear friends, we have heard two times now much about prayer and what must we say as we close this series of sermons about our own prayer life? Are you petitioners? Are you clothed with the Christian armor of God but also does the spirit of that armor convey itself through a secret prayer life? How big are your petitions? Do they go beyond yourself? Are they concerned with the glory and the kingdom and the will of God, those after all are the greatest of all petitions? Didn't Jesus say, "Our Father which art in heaven, thy kingdom come, thy will be done"? Those are the great things, my friends. Those are the great struggles of the true believer as he wrestles in prayer to come under the will of God, and yet if we look at our own strength, what then? Oh, then we would give up praying before we start, would we not? Because everything from our side comes short, also our prayer life.

Paul uses four "all's" in this one verse, verse 18. Four "all's." Praying always with all prayer and supplication in Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints. All. He demands, he asks for, he wrestles for a spirit filled with all prayer. Who is sufficient for these things? Jesus Christ alone. He is the petitioner par excellence. Jesus Christ is the great praying high priest. What must we do with all our shortcomings and with all our lack of all's? We must bring all our partial prayers and our partial remembrance of the saints and our partial perseverance, we must bring all our partialness to the feet of Christ and ask him to take what is in part and to make it whole, to make it an all that we may learn to pray as he would have us pray. Only Christ can teach us, but that gives us no excuse, my friends. If we sit back and say, "Well, only Christ can do it," and we don't appeal to Christ, then we show that we are content with the guilt, it is our guilt that the all that does not come from us. It is our guilt. But bring your poor petitions to the Lord and ask the Lord to take your poor petitions, to salt them with his intercessions and so to make your interceding for all saints acceptable in the sight of God and having done all, and that's also only in Christ, having done all to stand. Only in Christ can we stand. Christ, we recall, was the centerpiece of every one of these Christian pieces of armor. They all refer to Christ and true prayer too can only be through Christ. True prayer is from the heart of the Father, through the intercessions of Christ, and wrought by the groanings of the Spirit.

My friend, are you seeking to pray in your prayers through the praying gifts of a Triune God? Are you clothed with Christian armor? Do you wonder why you stumble so much in the Christian warfare? Do you wonder why your life exemplifies so little Christian strength? Well, Paul says, it is because you are not adorned with Christian armor. We have great and mighty battle to do. We need head to foot Christian armor and that Christian armor must be dipped, must be bathed in the spirit of prayer and then the believer is ready to do warfare. In Christ, through Christ, and unto Christ, my friend, are you a Christian soldier? Maybe your armor is severely damaged. Maybe you are very weak. But are you a Christian soldier? We live, that means, out of the Christ, that's what the word Christian means. Do you live out of the Christ? Is he your sum and substance? Is he your armor? Your protection? Your offense? Your defense? Is he your hope? Your future? Your expectation? And your object of prayer? Pray on. Give not up in the battle in Christ's strength. Give up on your own strength but not Christ's strength and say with the Psalmist, "I will go forth in the strength of the Lord God. I will make mention of thy righteousness even of thine only." Amen.

Lord, bless what we have heard and use it for the encouragement of thy people to plod on in prayer, waiting, expecting, hoping, trusting in thee alone. Go with us further in this day, Lord, not only today but day by day. Oh, that we would walk more outfitted with thy readily supplied and readily applied Christian armor. Oh, that we would not think, Lord, we can do it so easily on our own, that we would be clothed more with thy armor. Forgive us all our self-presumption and all our indifference and the bondage and restrictiveness or generality of our prayers and enlarge us, oh, enlarge our cause and supply us with thy armor that thy strength and with thy intercessions, and enable us to go forward in Christ's strength. All this we ask out of free sovereign grace alone in Jesus' name. Amen.