

The Community of those who Call Upon the Name of the Lord

Introduction

Several weeks ago, I brought a message entitled “The Regenerate Community of the New Covenant”. I trust that those words now hold a wonderful and beautiful significance for all of us! This morning I’ve entitled the message, “The Community of those who Call Upon the Name of the Lord.” And once again, I pray that by the grace of God we will be able to truly exult in these words by the end of the message.

What I want to try and do this morning is to put Church Prayer Meetings in a biblical-theological perspective. What does that mean? Well, it means that I’m not just going to quote a bunch of verses that say prayer is important and then based on those verses try to guilt us all into going to prayer meeting. I want us to see prayer meetings *within* the big picture of the story of God’s saving plan. I am not bringing this message to badger or guilt trip anyone. I am bringing this message in order that through the Word, the Holy Spirit might encourage us, and motivate us, and yes, even convict and rebuke us (*whether we attend prayer meetings already, or not*).

I do believe that we have a “good” church. And yet we have only a very few who support the Thursday evening prayer meetings, and only a slightly larger number of people who support the Sunday morning prayer meetings. So how can I reconcile a “good church” with the poorly attended prayer meetings? I have begun to wonder if the problem is that we honestly and “sincerely” aren’t quite convinced of the *biblical importance* of prayer meetings. Perhaps we think of prayer meetings as outdated things of the past – something like tent meetings or Sunday evening church services. Maybe we think that the issue is not so much where we pray or with whom we pray, but *that* we pray. So if I pray at home and if I pray at Fellowship Group, why should I feel so convicted about not praying at prayer meeting? Where does the Bible say: “Thou shalt attend prayer meeting”? In an already busy schedule, I really need Thursday evenings to spend with my wife and children. At the end of the day, what’s really the big deal about prayer meeting?

I. The beginnings of prayer, and what prayer means in a fallen world

Back in Genesis chapters four and five, Moses traced two lines of Adam’s family – the wicked line of Cain, and the godly line of Seth. In the line of Cain, we see the continuing sinful effects of the fall. Cain murders his brother Abel because of jealousy. Lamech, the seventh in line from Cain, marries two wives, and avenges himself on another man with violence and murder. In the line of Cain, we see man in his continuing efforts to live his own life in his own way, *independently* of God.

But then we come to the line of Seth. The line of Seth carries the hope that one day the offspring of the woman will be victorious over the offspring of the serpent in fulfillment of God’s promise (Gen. 3:15). And so we find that contrary to Lamech (the seventh in line from Cain), Enoch, the seventh in line from Seth, “walked with God, and he was not, for God took him” (Gen. 5:24). Enoch was taken up into heaven without ever dying, and so he became a sign of the ultimate

defeat of sin and death through the offspring of the woman – which was Jesus Christ. In line with all of this, we find one other thing of great significance connected with the line of Seth.

- ✓ Genesis 4:25-26 – Adam knew his wife again, and she bore a son and called his name Seth, for she said, “God has appointed for me another offspring instead of Abel, for Cain killed him.” To Seth also a son was born, and he called his name Enosh. ***At that time people began to call upon the name of the LORD.***

What does this mean... this “calling upon the name of the LORD”? It means *prayer*. Throughout the Old Testament, God’s response to those who “call on His name” is to ***answer*** – it is to *answer* their ***prayer***.

- ✓ 1 Kings 18:24 – You call upon the name of your god, and I will call upon the name of the LORD, and the God who ***answers*** by fire, he is God.”
- ✓ 1 Chronicles 21:26 – David built there an altar to the LORD and presented burnt offerings and peace offerings and called on the LORD, and the LORD ***answered*** him with fire from heaven upon the altar of burnt offering.
- ✓ Psalms 99:6 – Moses and Aaron were among his priests, Samuel also was among those who called upon his name. They called to the LORD, and he ***answered*** them.

So we could translate Genesis 4:26 – “At that time, people began to ***pray***.” Prayer was ***THE PRIMARY*** distinguishing ***mark*** of the godly line of Seth. Prayer was the ***mark*** of those who, instead of trying to live independently of God, sought to acknowledge their *dependence* upon, and their need for God in all of life. “To call on the Lord’s name is... the simplest and the most sufficient way of designating in others... what... ***shows*** them to be Christians” (Lenski). “This... is [a characteristic] common to all the pious; for as it is one chief exercise of faith to *call upon the name* of God, ***so it is also by this duty chiefly that believers are to be estimated***” (Calvin). Prayer is the expression of true saving *faith* and of a humble *submission* to God’s will and God’s ways. Where there is no prayer, there is no saving faith. And yet, of course, we’re not talking here about a few perfunctory words that we say before meals and bedtime! Prayer is a calling upon the name of the LORD! When a person first calls upon the name of the LORD, God answers with salvation.

- ✓ Joel 2:32 – And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls on the name of the LORD shall be ***saved***.
- ✓ Romans 10:11-13 – For the Scripture says, “Everyone who *believes* in him will not be put to shame... everyone who *calls* on the name of the Lord will be ***saved***.”

And yet this calling upon the name of the Lord is not a one time thing! Instead, it is the *continual expression* of *faith*. Prayer is ***THE PRIMARY DISTINGUISHING MARK*** of faith, and of our humble submission to God’s will and God’s ways. “At that time people began to pray.” And yet there is more than that here.

II. The special place of prayer is within the community of faith

This prayer, this calling upon the name of the Lord that the Bible associates with the family line of Seth, was practiced within the context of *public* and *regular* divine worship (cf. ESV Study notes). In the line of Cain, we read that “Adah bore Jubal; he was the father of all those who dwell in tents and have livestock. His brother’s name was Jubal; he was the father of all those who play the lyre and pipe. Zillah also bore Tubal-cain; he was the forger of all instruments of bronze and iron” (Gen. 4:20-22). So if the line of Cain gives us the origins of farming, music, and metallurgy, then the line of Seth shows us the very beginnings of a regular divine worship (cf. Wenham) – *which is described in Genesis as a calling upon the name of the Lord in prayer.*

- ✓ Genesis 12:8 – From there [Abram] moved to the hill country on the east of Bethel and pitched his tent... And there he built an altar to the LORD and called upon the name of the LORD.
- ✓ Genesis 13:3-4 – And he journeyed on... as far as Bethel... to the place where he had made an altar at the first. And *there* Abram called upon the name of the LORD.
- ✓ Genesis 21:33 – Abraham planted a tamarisk tree in Beersheba and called *there* on the name of the LORD, the Everlasting God.
- ✓ Genesis 26:25 – So [Isaac] built an altar there and called upon the name of the LORD and pitched his tent there.
- ✓ 1 Chronicles 21:26 (cf. Ps. 116:17) – David built there an altar to the LORD and presented burnt offerings and peace offerings and called on the LORD, and the LORD answered him.

We see that this calling upon the name of the Lord is a very *public and formal* affair. As God’s people grew in number, this “calling upon the name of the Lord” naturally came to be associated with the entire *community* of faith in the context of the *temple*.

- ✓ Ezra 6:10 – Let [whatever is needed] be given to them day by day without fail, that they may offer pleasing sacrifices to the God of heaven and pray for the life of the king and his sons.
- ✓ Psalms 116:12-14, 17-19 – What shall I render to the LORD for all his benefits to me? I will lift up the cup of salvation and call on the name of the LORD, I will pay my vows to the LORD ***in the presence of all his people***... I will offer to you the sacrifice of thanksgiving and call on the name of the LORD. I will pay my vows to the LORD ***in the presence of all his people, in the courts of the house of the LORD***, in your midst, O Jerusalem. Praise the LORD!
- ✓ Isaiah 56:6-7 – And the foreigners who join themselves to the LORD... — these I will bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer; their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for ***my house shall be called a house of prayer*** for all peoples.

This *wasn't* a threat! This was a wonderful and gracious promise! God’s house is the place where His people call upon His name. God’s house is the place where His people *pray* – acknowledging their need for, and their dependence upon Him, *and* their submission to His will and ways. And so we see that prayer is also ***THE PRIMARY DISTINGUISHING MARK*** of the people of God as a ***community***. Faith must naturally spill out into prayer both in the individual and (*especially*) in the context of the community (the church).

III. Man's failure and God's promise

Throughout the Old Testament, we find that there was very little of this calling upon the name of the Lord in prayer – because there was very little faith, and a whole lot of people wanting to live their own lives independently of God.

- ✓ Isaiah 64:6-7 – We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment. We all fade like a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away. ***There is no one who calls upon your name, who rouses himself to take hold of you;*** for you have hidden your face from us, and have made us melt in the hand of our iniquities.

What a dismal picture. “There is *no one* who calls upon your name, who rouses himself to take hold of you.” But God’s promise was that one day, things would be different.

- ✓ Zechariah 13:9 (cf. Isaiah 44:3-5; 12:1-6) – I will put this third into the fire, and refine them as one refines silver, and test them as gold is tested. ***They will call upon my name***, and I will answer them. I will say, “They are my people”; and they will say, “The LORD is my God.”
- ✓ Zephaniah 3:9-13 – For at that time I will change the speech of the peoples to a pure speech, ***that all of them may call upon the name of the LORD*** and serve him with one accord. From beyond the rivers of Cush my worshipers, the daughter of my dispersed ones, shall bring my offering. On that day you shall not be put to shame because of the deeds by which you have rebelled against me; for then *I will remove from your midst your proudly exultant ones*, and *you shall no longer be haughty* in my holy mountain. But *I will leave in your midst a people humble and lowly*. ***They shall seek refuge in the name of the LORD***, those who are left in Israel; they shall do no injustice and speak no lies, nor shall there be found in their mouth a deceitful tongue. For they shall graze and lie down, and none shall make them afraid.

What we have here is a prophecy of the *Church*, where along with the spiritual remnant of Israel, people from all nations will call upon the name of the LORD. As the Lord promised through Isaiah: “My house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples” (Isaiah 56:7). And we read in the book of Malachi:

- ✓ Malachi 1:11 – For from the rising of the sun to its setting ***my name will be great among the nations***, and in every place ***incense [prayers] will be offered to my name***, and a pure offering. For ***my name will be great among the nations***, says the LORD of hosts.

And so we come to the New Testament community of those who call upon the name of the Lord.

IV. The New Testament community of those who call upon the name of the Lord.

A regenerate (“born again”) community is a community of faith. A community of faith is a community that calls upon the name of the Lord. A community that calls upon the name of the Lord is a community that *prays* – Because that is what it means to call upon the name of the Lord... and because prayer is the primary, distinguishing mark of *faith*, and of a humble submission to the will and ways of God. And so in the New Testament, we find that the Christians are sometimes referred to very simply as those who call on the name of the Lord.

- ✓ Acts 9:14 – [Saul] has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on your name.
- ✓ 2 Timothy 2:22 – So flee youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart.

Yes, this “calling on the Lord” is an individual, personal thing, and yet it is *more* than this! The community that calls upon the name of the Lord in prayer is called the *Church*. Jesus said: “My *house* shall be called a house of prayer”, and we know that this house is now the Church, as the body of Christ and the true temple of God. *So...* it is the *Church* that should be preeminently a place of prayer. Perhaps most significantly of all, Paul writes in his first letter to the Corinthians:

- ✓ 1 Corinthians 1:2 – To the *church* of God that is in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints together with all those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ...

“To the *church of God that is in Corinth...* together with *all those who in every place...*” When Paul says “in every place”, he is referring to every *meeting place* of the *gathered Church* (cf. Fee). Paul is assuming that the gathered Church in every place throughout the world is to be *characterized* by its *calling upon the name of the Lord Jesus Christ!* But what is this calling? Is it just a generic way of talking about the invisible faith in the hearts of all true Christians? No, not at all! For Paul, this calling upon the name of the Lord is the ***visible expression*** of our faith. It is the primary, distinguishing ***visible mark*** of the people of God. This calling upon the Lord in prayer is the outflow and the expression of the Church’s life of faith and humble submission to God’s will. When Paul refers to those who “***IN EVERY PLACE*** call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ”, he is almost certainly echoing this passage from Malachi:

- ✓ Malachi 1:11 – For from the rising of the sun to its setting ***my name will be great among the nations***, and ***IN EVERY PLACE incense [prayers] will be offered to my name***, and a pure offering. For ***my name will be great among the nations***, says the LORD of hosts.

So now we should be able to see the full significance of what Paul writes to Timothy as he gives specific instructions for the corporate worship of the Church (1 Tim. 3:14-15):

- ✓ 1 Timothy 2:1, 8 – ***First of all***, then, I ***urge*** that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people... I desire then that ***IN EVERY PLACE*** [in every meeting place of the gathered Church throughout all the world] the men should pray [call upon the name of the Lord], lifting holy hands without anger or quarreling.

So here is one of the primary distinguishing marks of the *gathered Church* – It is the place where those who are humble and lowly call upon the name of the Lord in prayer. And so we read of the early Church:

- ✓ Acts 2:42 – They ***devoted themselves*** to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and ***the prayers***.

Prayer is the *visible expression* of the Church’s life of faith and humble submission to God’s will. We are the community of those who call upon the name of the Lord!

Conclusion

At the end of the day, I can produce no chapter and verse that explicitly commands us to attend prayer meeting on the second Sunday and fourth Thursday of the month. But I pray that we've seen by now how within the bigger picture of the entire revelation of Scripture, our prayer meetings come to have a significance and an importance that is *way* beyond what we can even begin to comprehend. I said that my goal this morning was not to quote verses about the importance of prayer, and then try to guilt us into praying as a body. I wanted us to see prayer meetings perhaps as we'd never seen them before—within the beautiful bigger picture of redemption and the entire revelation of Scripture—so that we might not simply be “guilted”, but rather truly *convicted*, and then encouraged, and motivated, and excited to call upon the name of the Lord in prayer. It is my hope that we would not need any more convincing that this. And yet...

- ✓ 1 Thessalonians 5:17 – Pray without ceasing.
- ✓ Colossians 4:2 – Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving.
- ✓ Ephesians 6:18 – ...praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints.
- ✓ Romans 12:12 – Be constant in prayer.

These exhortations were written not simply to individuals, but to the church as a whole. And yet let's just pretend for a moment that they need only apply to us as individually. So how are we doing? I do struggle in my own personal prayer life, and if only for that reason, I find that our prayer meetings are a wonderful help as they enable me to be more faithful in prayer.

For better, or for worse, at Living Word Bible Church there are very few things that we schedule on any regular basis. The most important thing on the calendar after the Lord's Day Assembly is prayer meeting – more important than Fellowship Groups, more important than Sunday School, and more important than getting our kids to youth group. We schedule two times a month not so that we might pick between them and attend one or the other, but so that we might *at least* have the opportunity to pray together twice a month. But if Thursday evening is *literally impossible*, then at least Sunday morning should be possible for almost *everyone* here in this room. Nursery is provided on Thursdays and Sundays, and Sunday School through the Junior High level is also provided on Sunday. If it is not possible for the entire family to come, then at *least* it should be possible to have one representative from each household.

So why *wouldn't* we come? Maybe we really think that our answers to this question are legitimate. And *maybe* they are. But then again, within the big picture of redemption and the entire revelation of Scripture, have we really come to see how our prayer meetings have a significance and importance that is vastly beyond what we can even begin to comprehend? In *this* light, how do our reasons measure up? Now there is one excuse that I want to address specifically. It's an excuse that most of us wouldn't make out loud, and yet we may harbor it in our thoughts. “I don't go to prayer meeting because it's boring and people really aren't earnestly calling upon the name of the Lord.” First of all, this is a guaranteed sign that our heart is full of selfish desires to get out of prayer meeting only what we can get for ourselves. But secondly, if it is true that our prayer meetings have degenerated from an earnest calling on the name of the

Lord into an apathetic time of asking for things that have little to do with the things that Jesus told us we ought to be asking for—if this is true, then won't you come and be an agent of change, by God's grace and for His glory?

In the New Testament, it was assumed and expected that God's people were setting aside times to earnestly call upon the Lord in prayer. Prayer is the primary, distinguishing mark of the people of God. *Prayer* is to be the primary *visible expression* of the Church's life of faith and humble submission to God's will. We pray in our Sunday morning worship service. I'm assuming that we do some praying in our Fellowship Groups. And yet at Living Word, the *main* opportunity that we have to earnestly call upon the name of the Lord in prayer is the second Sunday and fourth Thursday of the month for only one hour (9:00-10:00 on Sunday and 7:00-8:00 on Thursday). Will you come?

Teaching our Children

- Q. What was the difference between the descendents of Cain and the descendents of Seth?
- A. The descendents of Cain were known for their wickedness and unbelief while the descendents of Seth believed in God. (See 1st two paragraphs under Roman Numeral I. on page 1)
- Q. What was the main way that you could tell the difference between the children of Seth and the children of Cain?
- A. ~ The children of Seth called upon the name of the Lord in prayer (Read Gen. 4:25-26 at top of page 2).
~ Talk with your children about the truth that prayer is the *primary visible expression* of faith and of a humble submission to God's will (contrast with the line of Cain).
- Q. When a person first calls upon the name of the Lord, what does He receive from God?
- A. Salvation (See Scriptures at bottom of page 2)
- Q. Should we ever stop calling upon the name of the Lord in prayer?
- A. NO! (See Scriptures at top of page 5)
- Q. Where is the special *place* for prayer (for calling upon the name of the Lord)?
- A. The special place for prayer is in God's house (with God's people; See Isaiah 56:6-7 on p. 3, 1 Corinthians 1:2, 1 Timothy 2:1, 8 & Acts 2:42 on page 5).
- Q. What is the main sign of the Church's life of faith, and humble submission to God's will?
- A. PRAYER

“This is why...” (The best way to teach our children is by example)