

Wrestling in Prayer (Part 3)

Sunday, February 14, 2021

Colossians 4:12

*12 Epaphras, who is one of you and a servant of Christ Jesus, sends greetings. He is always **wrestling in prayer** for you, that you may stand firm in all the will of God, mature and fully assured.*

We have been considering the phrase found in Colossians 4:12 “wrestling in prayer”. This morning I want to look at someone else who had his own time of wrestling in prayer

Matthew 11

11 After Jesus had finished instructing his twelve disciples, he went on from there to teach and preach in the towns of Galilee.

2 When John, **who was in prison**, heard about the deeds of the Messiah, he sent his disciples **3** to ask him, “Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?”

4 Jesus replied, “Go back and report to John what you hear and see: **5** The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor. **6** Blessed is anyone who does not stumble on account of me.”

7 As John’s disciples were leaving, Jesus began to speak to the crowd about John: “What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed swayed by the wind? **8** If not, what did you go out to see? A man dressed in fine clothes? No, those who wear fine clothes are in kings’ palaces. **9** Then what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. **10** This is the one about whom it is written:

“I will send my messenger ahead of you,
who will prepare your way before you.’

11 Truly I tell you, among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist; yet whoever is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. **12** From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven has been subjected to violence, and violent people have been raiding it. **13** For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John. **14** And if you are willing to accept it, he is the Elijah who was to come. **15** Whoever has ears, let them hear.

16 “To what can I compare this generation? They are like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling out to others:

17 “We played the pipe for you,

and you did not dance;
we sang a dirge,
and you did not mourn.'

18 For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, 'He has a demon.' **19** The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners.' But wisdom is proved right by her deeds."

20 Then Jesus began to denounce the towns in which most of his miracles had been performed, because they did not repent. **21** "Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. **22** But I tell you, it will be more bearable for Tyre and Sidon on the day of judgment than for you. **23** And you, Capernaum, will you be lifted to the heavens? No, you will go down to Hades. For if the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Sodom, it would have remained to this day. **24** But I tell you that it will be more bearable for Sodom on the day of judgment than for you."

25 At that time Jesus said, "I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. **26** Yes, Father, for this is what you were pleased to do.

27 "All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

28 "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. **29** Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. **30** For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

In this passage John is in prison. Do not miss that little statement because that is the reason for this entire passage. John is in prison and he is wrestling in prayer.

Prison can represent many things. Sickness and disease, impossible situations, unanswered prayers, devastating circumstances. Regardless, prison is a place of confinement, loneliness, discouragement, questioning, doubt, depression, fear.

And it is in prison That we find ourselves wrestling with some of the same things John was wrestling with

Why am I here?
How long will I be here?
Why doesn't God get me out of here?
Is God going to get me out of here?
Was I wrong about everything?
Did I do something wrong?
Has God forgotten about me?

Wrestling in prayer will sometimes mean wrestling with our own personal prisons. And in those times, like John, what we need most is a Word from the Lord

God if I can just hear your voice. God if I can just know you're here. God if I can just get a word from you.

There have been a few times in my life when I really needed a Word from God

- Daniel's illness
- My struggle with pain
- Samantha's illness
- In the Hospital

I want you to know that if you are wrestling in prayer today, God has a word for you. And like Elijah, God's word doesn't always show up in the same way. Sometimes it's powerful, like the earthquake, sometimes it moves us like the force of a mighty wind, sometimes it consumes us like fire, and sometimes it is the whispering assurance of a still small voice

Jesus had a word for John that day, but it wasn't just for John, in his answer to John's disciples Jesus has a word for all of us who might be wrestling in prayer today.

The Kingdom of God is so much bigger than my own personal circumstances

4 Jesus replied, "Go back and report to John what you hear and see: **5** The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor.

Sometimes we apply what is happening in our own lives to everyone else. If it is not happening for me then it is not happening for anyone else.

But Jesus said, go tell John that... Great things are happening, powerful things are happening, miraculous things are happening, impossible things are happening. The kingdom of God is here

and is moving and impacting people's lives. People are getting saved, healed, delivered, set free, restored.

That is a powerful word of assurance and encouragement even when we are in our own personal prisons. The Kingdom of God is advancing... It is true... and people's lives are being changed. Just because we are in prison right now doesn't mean that everything we have believed in and proclaimed to others is untrue.

Take heart God is here and He is advancing His kingdom.

Keep the Faith

As I wrestle in prayer in my own personal prison, I may not have all the answers to my questions, but just hearing the voice of the Lord encouraging me to keep the faith gives me the strength to carry on.

6 Blessed is anyone who does not stumble on account of me.” **(Keep the Faith)**

Remember Jesus's Words to Jairus that we read last week when news came to Jairus to stop bothering the master because his daughter was dead... *"Don't be afraid, just believe"*

So, he sends word back to John... Don't give up, don't stumble, keep believing, rise up in your faith and keep standing strong. Keep the faith.

Jesus gives John a word similar to one he gives his disciples later on...

Luke 18:1-8

The Parable of the Persistent Widow

18 Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should **always pray and not give up.** **2** He said: “In a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared what people thought. **3** And there was a widow in that town who kept coming to him with the plea, ‘Grant me justice against my adversary.’

4 “For some time he refused. But finally, he said to himself, ‘Even though I don’t fear God or care what people think, **5** yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she won’t eventually come and attack me!’”

6 And the Lord said, “Listen to what the unjust judge says. **7** And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? **8** I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, **will he find faith on the earth?”**

A little later in this passage Jesus points to several towns that failed to have faith

20 Then Jesus began to denounce the towns in which most of his miracles had been performed, because they did not repent. **(despite what they saw and experienced they did not combine it with faith)** **21** “Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the **miracles** that were performed in you had been performed in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. **22** But I tell you, it will be more bearable for Tyre and Sidon on the day of judgment than for you. **23** And you, Capernaum, will you be lifted to the heavens? No, you will go down to Hades. For if the **miracles** that were performed in you had been performed in Sodom, it would have remained to this day. **24** But I tell you that it will be more bearable for Sodom on the day of judgment than for you.”

Hebrews 4:1-2 (New Century Version)

4 Now, since God has left us the promise that we may enter **(Matthew 11:28)** his rest, let us be very careful so none of you will fail to enter. **2** The Good News was preached to us just as it was to them. But the teaching they heard did not help them, because they heard it but did not accept it with faith.

As John's disciples turn to leave, Jesus continues to deliver a Word meant for John's ears. There is nothing that says they didn't hear this next part and take it back to John. I believe they did. I can just hear them telling John... Do you know what Jesus said about you?

7 As John's disciples were leaving, Jesus began to speak to the crowd about John: “What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed swayed by the wind? **8** If not, what did you go out to see? A man dressed in fine clothes? No, those who wear fine clothes are in kings' palaces. **9** Then what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. **10** This is the one about whom it is written:

“I will send my messenger ahead of you,
who will prepare your way before you.’

11 Truly I tell you, among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist; yet whoever is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

Here is what I believe Jesus words to John (and to us) mean

I see your integrity and devotion

Like the 7 churches in the book of revelation Jesus says ... I See you... I know your deeds, your hard work, your perseverance, I know your afflictions and poverty, know about those who slander you, I know the hard places where you live and carry out my work, I know your love, your faith, your service, I know your reputation, I know the closed doors that stand in your way... I SEE You and I KNOW you

I am pleased when you stand strong (most are blown around by every wind of doctrine)

I know you don't serve me out of greed and ambition (So many do)

I am proud of you (And all of my servants)

You have accomplished great things

The next part of Jesus message to John encourages us with three thoughts...

Persecution and struggle are part of the package

You're not alone in your struggle

The Kingdom is advancing

12 From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven has been (forcefully advancing) subjected to violence, and violent people have been raiding it. **13** For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John. **14** And if you are willing to accept it, he is the Elijah who was to come. **15** Whoever has ears, let them hear.

Jesus reminds us that persecution has always been a part of the package. (Subjected to violence and violent people have been raiding it) By including not only the ministry of John but those who preceded him (the law and the prophets), he assures us that this has always been the case. In doing so and by specifically likening John to Elijah (someone who knew what it was to face the discouragement of persecution) Jesus reminds us that we are not alone in our struggle. Others have faced similar circumstances for their service to the Kingdom of God. Some came out victorious in this life others gave their lives for the cause

Despite the persecution the Kingdom is victoriously advancing and will continue to advance even though persecution will continue. In fact, Jesus will soon face his own persecution and violence, a fact that only brought greater victory (his resurrection and defeat of sin, hell, death, and the grave) for the kingdom of God

There will always be people who are upset with you

16 “To what can I compare this generation? They are like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling out to others:

17 “We played the pipe for you,
and you did not dance;
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and you did not mourn.’

18 For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, ‘He has a demon.’ **19** The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, ‘Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners.’ But wisdom is proved right by her deeds.”

Sometimes we need to be reminded that no matter which decision we make there are going to be people who are upset with us. There will always be people telling us what they think we should be doing. You will never please all the people all the time. We must do our best to please God rather than men and to stay true to the calling He has put on our hearts. We also need to guard our hearts from being unnecessarily wounded from what others think and say about us.

You are my child

25 At that time Jesus said, “I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned and revealed them to little children. **26** Yes, Father, for this is what you were pleased to do.

27 “All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

Jesus returns to the language of prayer in his next remarks. Our Father who art in heaven. Jesus says God is our father and he is pleased to call us His children. How comforting it is to be reminded that I have a Father in heaven who cares for me and will not exclude me from his plans and purposes

Finally, we come to a verse which is so often quoted by itself and not within the greater context of which it was spoken. We forget the Jesus was still speaking to John and all those, like him, who would find themselves wrestling in their own personal prisons

28 “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. **29** Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. **30** For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”

It's ok to be tired

I will take care of you