

June 12, 2022 -

Acts 12:1-12  
(Characteristics of a mature church)

- The Power of Prayer

## Introduction

On a Saturday afternoon in August, 1806, a group of believers led by Samuel Mills gathered together to pray for God to send more people to share the good news of Jesus Christ. They gathered in a field to discuss the spiritual needs of those living in Asian countries. Then a thunderstorm arose and they took shelter in the lean of a haystack and continued to pray.

This gathering came to be called “The Haystack Prayer Meeting,” starting the modern mission movement. Within a few years, the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM) was formed and sent some of the first American Protestant missionaries to other lands... Today the Haystack Prayer Monument stands at Williams College in Massachusetts as a reminder of what God can do through prayer. Prayer is a most powerful tool of the church and it is most certainly the characteristic of a mature church. First, the...

### I. Power is in the believing:

1. The church in Jerusalem was powerless to free Peter but God was not so, they prayed. From this account I am not sure they all prayed believing but God answered. Their reaction to Peter's release was unbelief at least by some. Folks, the New Testament Church in our era is not going to be what God intends for it to be- except by a revival of prayer. We must make the choice to pray. Once you have made the choice to pray you must believe in the power of prayer. Prayer is a wonderful gift from God it is a precision tool – used it that way. Trust in its power and promise. **Matthew 21:22** Jesus said, “And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive.

2. As God's people we must learn to pray in the midst of problems, following God's Word. The devil is going to attack you, your family and your church, you can be sure of that. But praise God: "Greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world. Believe in the power of prayer.

(For the weapons of our warfare [are] not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds- II Co.10:4

In this passage we see the heart of the New Testament Church. Peter was put in prison as Herod intended to put him to death, to please the Jewish leaders. The church unearthed ...

### II Power in Communal Praying. (vv.1- 4- background)

1. “The days of unleavened bread” means that it was during the Passover season, the same period of the year when Jesus himself was taken and crucified. But the year is A. D. 44. We can date it very precisely because the date of Herod's death is recorded here, it is well known in ancient history. Therefore these events occurred about twelve years after the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus, and the coming of the Spirit on the Day of Pentecost.

2. Then Peter was put in prison and Herod intended to put him to death, in order to please the Jewish leaders. I am sure Peter was praying himself for deliverance on a personal level. The church was praying too, a prayer meeting was going on at the home of John Mark's mother.

These kinds of prayer meeting don't exist much today and the ones that do are going downhill fast. Let's learn what we can about prayer by this passage. You need to pray and others need to pray for you, both are important. Look at the pattern of prayer in verse 5:

a. "Without ceasing" The verse teaches us the value of **"united prayer"** -- the church coming together in prayer. God's appointed way is to wait for the people of God to pray for Him to act. **(2 Chron. 7:14)** If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land.

b.) Of the church" If we are to follow the New Testament pattern there needs to be: Continual prayer -- pray without ceasing in the church. This is what happened in the early church. When they realized that James had been put to death, and that this vicious attack of the enemy could be successful, it suddenly crystallized in their minds that they had a part to play in God's program. They were to go to God in earnest prayer that Peter might be delivered from death.

3. God set Peter free in a wonderful way. Look at what follows in verses 7 to 11. God dispatched an angel and Peter and this angel just walked out of the prison unnoticed. Even the iron-gate opened up as the bible states "of his own accord". The Greek is only one word and is neuter as it should be since a gate does not have gender. The Greek word here is *a'-tom'-a- tos* where we get our English word automatic so this was the very first automatic doors.

Prayers changes things, prayer changes lives, prayer grants us the protected power of God. God's appointed way is for us to pray. Prayer is a time when we, as sinful servants, speak to our Holy God. The Lord's Prayer focuses on God at the beginning and the end to remind us of this principle. God is not our "errand boy" or "divine Santa Claus" to whom we present our wish list. When we pray, we should remember the truth that we are his humble servants.

#### Illustration:

A missionary to Haiti was told by a doctor that it was likely she had cancer. A biopsy was performed and sent away for analysis. As she waited for the results, she was filled with fear and could find no peace of mind. As she reflected on all of this, it occurred to her that it was Wednesday evening--prayer meeting night in her home church back in the United States. She also realized that it was the first Wednesday night after friends had been notified of the potential crisis. These facts convinced this faithful missionary that God had given her an opportunity to sense His answer to the prayers of others on her behalf. The medical report soon came back with the welcome news that there was no cancer. Read with me **James 5:15-16**

**James 5:[15]** And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him. **[16]** Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.

#### Application:

What evidences have we witnessed of the power of prayer? Last week we prayed for Dan Sloss who had stage II cancer but now he has no cancer. Jayne Ratti is here with us and we are all aware her survival was a miracle of prayers. I have a list of evidence right here that goes back to 1994. I have one about Roy with back and neck injury. I believe in the power of the prayers.

Whatever it is keeping you from prayer is not worthy to be compared to what God has for you by the power of prayer. It is important that you pray both in private... and united in church at the church prayer meeting. The characteristics of a mature church is ...

### III The Leadership Praying vv. 17

1. James is singled out by Peter as he explains how God delivered him that night from death. James it is believed had begun to take the oversight of the Church in Jerusalem, which we afterwards find him exercising. However, he was not here at this important meeting. We don't know why but leaders should be examples in prayer.

E.M. Bounds emphasized the need for a ministry of prayer within the church when he wrote, "It may be laid down as an axiom, that God needs, first of all, leaders in the church who will be first in prayer, men with whom prayer is habitual and characteristic, men who know the primacy of prayer. But even more than a habit of prayer, and more than prayer being characteristic of them, church leaders are to be men whose lives are made and molded by prayer, whose heart and life are made up of prayer. Everything rises and falls on leadership!

People who have had an arm in a cast for a long period of time will tell you what happens when the plaster is finally removed. The muscles of the arm have atrophied; that is, they have shrunk and become weak because they have not been used. That's precisely what happens to a church when its leaders don't pray -- its ministry becomes powerless and ineffective.

2) The more the church prays together the more intimate our relations become, tears in prayer for a wayward child, a sick mom, a lost job, struggles in a marriage, family problems. The list goes on and on. We find common ground, we find common heartache, we find common struggles and we develop an intimate relationship because that is what pray does. There is power in that kind of prayer because it is the essence of the greatest virtue-love. The characteristics of a mature church is those the pray together stay together.

### Illustration:

Two people get married... They go their separate ways. One goes to England and one to Africa. They called each other each week on Sunday and speak for one hour. Five years go by. How many children do they have? None, they have no intimacy and they bear no fruit and neither will the church until we pray together and make it a part of our live. Only then will we see the real power behind power and no one will be able to keep you from it. You will long for it desire it, crave it, need it and cherish it because it is a great resource of power in your life.

### Conclusion:

For sixty years the members of Oak Grove Baptist Church in Mount Carmel, TN prayed for Joe Arnott to come to Christ. Even though he wasn't a Christian, he attended Sunday School and Church On March 5, 2000 their prayers were answered. Joe made a public profession of his faith. The congregation wept as they watched 60 years of prayers walk down the aisle to give his life to Jesus. Keep praying and wait on the Lord.