
Paul, Prison, Pestilence

Steve Berger March 22, 2020

Some Observations

Remember when 2020 was the year of clear vision? We're seeing clearly in the nation and church that . . .

- We are **less prepared** in all ways for challenging times than we **ever thought**.
- We are **more addicted to creature comforts** than we ever **realized**.
- We are **more selfish** than we were previously **willing to admit**.
- We are **more faithless** than we **ever imagined**.
- We are **more fearful** than we **ever considered**.
- We are **more shakable** than we are **comfortable confessing**.
- We are **more misguided** than we can **comprehend**.

We haven't just been **exposed to** COVID-19; we've been **exposed by** COVID-19. What's been exposed in us isn't pretty.

The church needs a word from God so we can live above the fear and hysteria that is overcoming so many. We can live in such a way that we shine in the darkness as a beacon of hope for the flailing and fearful world.

Promise over Panic

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

***Fact**—Prayer and worship aren't commanded just because God is worthy and demands it. God commands prayer and worship because it causes God to release miraculous power in the midst of impossible circumstances!*

1. Children of Israel Enslaved by the Egyptians

- **Exodus 2:23**

Now it happened in the process of time that the king of Egypt died. Then the children of Israel groaned because of the bondage, and they cried out; and their cry came up to God because of the bondage.

- God speaks to Moses in the distant land of Midian and tells him to go back to Egypt to deliver His children.
- Moses obeys—he goes back and tells the Israelites what God has promised.

- **Exodus 4:31**

So the people believed; and when they heard that the Lord had visited the children of Israel and that He had looked on their affliction, then they bowed their heads and worshipped.

- Before a single thing changed in their circumstance, the Israelites believed and bowed their heads in prayer and worship. They chose to believe in the promises of God instead of panicking.
- God dramatically delivered them!

2. Children of Israel Invaded by Moabites and Ammonites

- **2 Chronicles 20:12**

O our God, will You not judge them? For we have no power against this great multitude that is coming against us; nor do we know what to do, but our eyes are upon You.

- Children of Israel were in an impossible situation—they were seriously outnumbered and powerless—but they chose to focus on God instead of the situation.

- **2 Chronicles 7:13-14**

When I shut up heaven and there is no rain, or command the locusts to devour the land, or send pestilence among My people, if My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land.

- Jehoshaphat recites the promises God gave King Solomon and claims them for his day and his situation.
- Jehoshaphat sends worshippers out first in the battle—not the warriors and weaponry—and the battle is the Lord's.
- The Israelites prayed and worshipped, and God dramatically delivered them!

3. Paul and Silas in a Philippian Prison

- **Acts 16:25-26**

But at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them. Suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone's chains were loosed.

- Paul and Silas were held in a deep, inner prison cell. They were beaten by metal rods, and their feet were bound in stocks.
- *The Bible does not give us a record of a specific promise given to Paul and Silas, but they nevertheless knew what was right to do based on God's nature and historical events.* They knew prayer and worship in troubling times are the keys to God's dramatic deliverance. At midnight, Paul and Silas prayed and worshipped.
- Other prisoners were listening to them, just as the world is watching us. What is the world seeing? Let it be faith-filled, fearless, compassionate, and generous followers of Jesus!
- As they prayed and worshipped, an earthquake happened, the prison foundation was shaken, all doors were opened, and everyone's chains were loosed.

**We're living in shaky times—
all that can be shaken will be shaken.
Either the things that try to hold us will be shaken
by our prayer and worship
or we'll be held by the things that shake us.
We choose!**

- **Acts 16:29-33**

Then he called for a light, ran in, and fell down trembling before Paul and Silas. And he brought them out and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" So they said, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household." Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their stripes. And immediately he and all his family were baptized.

- The jailer and his family were saved after witnessing the power of God released by the prayer and worship of Paul and Silas.

Fact—*If the church can do what's right in this hour of trouble, our prayer and worship will open other's cells and loose their chains. What an incredible hour of opportunity!*

**Prayer and worship release
the miraculous power of God
in impossible situations.
No wonder it's the will of God for our lives!**

What God wants from Christians right now—

Prayer and worship;

generosity instead of selfishness;

giving instead of hoarding;

people coming to Jesus Christ because of the testimony of Christians in troubling times.

Saints—How the church responds determines people's willingness to hear, believe, and receive Jesus as their Savior!

Sinner—Are you wondering how to be saved? If you are without Jesus Christ in your life right now, please hear this: Jesus is your answer.

To be saved, first you must repent—change your heart and change your direction. Turn from your sin and your guilt and turn to God.

Next, believe—believe that Jesus Christ is the Messiah, Who died on the cross to pay the penalty for your sins and rose on the third day to defeat death and the grave.

Last, receive and confess—receive Jesus as your Savior and confess your belief in Him.

Discussion Questions

1. Why are prayer and worship God's prescriptions for difficult times?
2. How has the church responded to this pandemic? What is the world seeing in us?
3. Do we need a specific promise from God for our situation to engage in prayer and worship?
4. How do these three examples of the power of prayer and worship encourage you?
5. What can you do in the coming weeks to be a testimony for Jesus to a world in panic?

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