

October 24, 2010

## *Living in the Light of Christ's Return*

### *Pray, For Not All Have Faith*

2 Thessalonians 3:1 – 5

John Nelson Hyde, the son of an Illinois Presbyterian minister, left America to begin his lifetime of missionary work in the Punjab area of India in 1892. At that time, he was one of only five missionaries in a territory holding nearly one million non-Christians and progress was slow. In a letter to his seminary after his first year in India, Hyde wrote: *"Yesterday eight low-caste persons were baptized at one of the villages. It seems a work of God in which man, even as an instrument, was used in a very small degree. Pray for us. I learn to speak the language very, very slowly: can only talk a little in public or in conversation."*

Hyde's inability to master the complex native languages was due in no small degree to his partial deafness. To the dismay of mission authorities, he devoted most of his time to Bible rather than language study, displaying the withdrawn intensity of a visionary rather than the engaging demeanor of the traditional missionary. In time, however, Hyde gained a certain fluency, though he never lost his zeal for Scripture. With periods of outright persecution by natives, and few, if any conversions, Hyde began leading his fellow missionaries in intercession for India. So deep was his call to prayer that by 1899 he began spending entire nights face down before God. In a letter to his college he wrote: *"Have felt led to pray for others this winter as never before. I never before knew what it was to work all day and then pray all night before God for another... In college or at parties at home, I used to keep such hours for myself, or pleasure, and can I not do as much for God and souls?"*

In 1904, Indian Christians and western missionaries gathered for the first of an annual series of conventions at Sialkot in what is today Pakistan. To support this time of spiritual renewal, John Hyde and his friends formed the Punjab Prayer Union, setting aside half an hour each day to pray for revival. The results of their prayers were plainly seen at the Sialkot Convention as a special anointing fell upon those gathered. Year by year the prayer union fasted and prayed, and at each convention a growing urgency for evangelism and intercession filled each attendee. John Hyde emerged as the prayer leader, and all were amazed at both the depth of his spiritual insight, and the ferocity of his burden for India.

During these times, John Hyde was almost constantly in the prayer room. *"He lived there as on the Mount of Transfiguration."* He received Isaiah 62:6-7 as a command from God. *"On your walls, O Jerusalem, I have appointed watchmen; All day and night they will never keep silent You who remind the Lord, take no rest for yourselves, And give Him no rest until He establishes and makes Jerusalem a praise in the earth."* "How often in the prayer room he would break out into tears over the sins of the world and especially for God's children."

J. P. Jones recalls the prayer life of John Hyde. *"He was always on his knees when I went to bed, and on his knees long before I was up in the morning, though I was up with the dawn. He would also light the lamp several times in the night, and feast on some passages of the Word, and then have a little talk with the Master. He sometimes remained on his knees the whole day. The Spirit made him an object-lesson to us, that we might have a better idea of Christ's prayer life."*

By 1908, John Hyde dared to pray what was to many at the convention an impossible request: that during the coming year in India one soul would be saved every day. Three hundred sixty five people converted, baptized, and publicly confessing Jesus as their Savior. Impossible -- yet it happened. Before the next convention *John Hyde had prayed more than 400 people into God's kingdom*, and when the prayer union gathered again, he doubled his goal to two souls a day. Eight hundred conversions were recorded that year, and still Hyde showed an unquenchable passion for lost souls.

At the 1910 convention, those around Hyde marveled at his faith, as they witnessed his near violent supplications, *"Give me souls, oh God, or I die!"* Before the meeting ended, John Hyde revealed that he was again doubling his goal for the coming year. *Four souls a day, and nothing less.* During the next twelve months John Hyde's ministry took him throughout India. By now he was known as "Praying Hyde," and his intercession was sought at revivals in Calcutta, Bombay, and other large cities. If on any day four people were not converted, Hyde said at night there would be such a weight on his heart he could not eat or sleep until he had prayed through to victory.

It was in Calcutta that friends persuaded Hyde to see a doctor about his rapidly deteriorating health. The years of travail had obviously taken a toll. Yet no one expected the medical examiner's incredible diagnosis. John Hyde's heart had shifted out of its natural position on the left side of his chest to a place over on the right. It was unlike anything the doctor had seen before, and he warned Hyde that unless he got complete rest he would be dead in six months. In fact, Praying Hyde lived for nearly two more years, long enough to see a wave of revival sweep through the Punjab and the rest of India -- and long enough to have his own personal vision enlarged. Before he died, he shared what God had shown him:

*“On the day of prayer, God gave me a new experience. I seemed to be away above our conflict here in the Punjab and I saw God's great battle in all India, and then away out beyond in China, Japan, and Africa. I saw how we had been thinking in narrow circles of our own countries and in our own denominations, and how God was now rapidly joining force to force and line to line, and all was beginning to be one great struggle. That, to me, means the great triumph of Christ.”*

Praying Hyde entered the presence of the God he loved in February of 1912 and as he passed from this world to the next he was heard to say: *“Shout the victory of Jesus Christ”* [Taken in part or whole from an article by Richard Klein: Profiles In Prayer: Praying John Hyde]

The question for us this morning is 'Are we actively engaged in the work that ends with the victory of Jesus Christ? Are we willing to spend massive amounts of time in prayer for the triumph of the gospel in the world?' The Lord Jesus has given us, His church a commandment and a commission. The commandment is – to boil it down to the essentials – *Love God supremely and love your neighbor as yourself*. The commission and mission is this: *Go and make disciples*. In response to this commandment and commission, we ought to be building our lives and ministry around the following truths. You have heard them before – you'll hear them again – until they become an integral part of your thinking and heart.

#### **We were created to glorify God by enjoying Him forever.**

This is the part about loving God supremely. We were meant to worship and enjoy the God who made us. Another way to say this is that we exist to make much of God in all of life. If we miss this – we miss what this life is all about.

#### **We have been commissioned by Christ to spend our lives making others eternally glad in God.**

This is the part about loving our neighbor as ourself. Love is the accurate estimation and adequate supply for another's need – and the accurate estimation is that all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God and the adequate supply is the gospel of Jesus Christ to meet that need in every man, woman and child.

#### **We are called by Jesus to cultivate a lifestyle that reflects our everlasting enjoyment in God by risking temporal loss for eternal gain.**

This is the part about going and making disciples. It is not enough that we should be washed in the precious blood of the Lamb and enjoy God in our lives – but that enjoyment should compel us to risk everything in this life for the sake of the gospel. I pray that Christ would free us from the seduction of security – that He would release us from the paralyzing effects of comfort and ease – that He would explode the myth of safety and ignite our hearts to risk it all for the sake of Christ. I pray that none of us would in the end have to cover our face and say 'I've wasted it.'

#### **We must set ourselves as a church toward the goal of reaching the nations with the gospel.**

I want you to understand that when I talk about the goal of reaching the nations with the gospel I am talking about your unsaved friends, relatives and neighbors. And I am also talking about hometown missions of mercy, like CareNet, Love Inc., and Friends and Servants. And I am talking about overseas cross- cultural missions, like those we are engaged in Kenya and China and the Muslim world. We need to be massively engaged in all these arenas. The core of the gospel is this: *'For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that you through His poverty might become rich.'* 2 Corinthians 8:9 It was for our sake and the sake of all those that have gone before and those yet unborn, that He spent the capital of heaven lavishly to secure our enjoyment of God.

This begins with a revelation – a revelation of who Jesus is, and what He has called us to do. And this revelation is sustained by prayer – all kinds of prayer – private prayer and public prayer, prayer vigils and prayer closets, prayers with praise and singing, prayers with tears and sorrow, individual prayer and corporate prayer – all kinds of prayer. The kingdom of God advances on the prayers of the saints, and I am convinced that without prayer nothing is accomplished that glorifies God and magnifies His name in the earth. This is what Paul called the Thessalonians to and this is what we are called to.

In our text this morning, Paul says: *Finally, brothers, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may speed ahead and be honored, as happened among you, and that we may be delivered from wicked and evil men. For not all have faith.* 1 Thessalonians 3:1-2 Paul prays for two things to happen: pray that the gospel would spread and triumph – *speed ahead and be honored* [or *glorified*]; and pray that those who do the spreading would be delivered from wicked and evil men.

Taking the second thing first – deliverance from wicked and evil men, I don't believe that Paul was praying that we would never experience bad things. Consider his own ministry: *in far more labors, in far more imprisonments, beaten times without number, often in danger of death. Five times I received from the Jews thirty-nine lashes. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, a night and a day I have spent in the deep. I have been on frequent journeys, in dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from my countrymen, dangers from the Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the wilderness, dangers on the sea, dangers among false brethren ; I have been in labor and hardship, through many sleepless nights, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure.* 2 Corinthians 11:23-27

If he was simply praying that God would protect him from bad men and evil situations – it didn't work. So knowing the power of God and the place of prayer I think we can conclude that was not the focus of his prayer. I believe the prayer to be delivered from wicked and evil men has to do with his mission to preach the gospel. That is, in spite of wicked and evil men who do their best to stifle the gospel and destroy the messenger, that the gospel would triumph in the very face of evil and in spite of its efforts to kill, and God would be glorified as it spread.

Because Paul adds at the end of that a sentence that almost seems like an afterthought: *For not all have faith.* If Paul was merely reminding his readers that not everyone was a Christian, you could almost feel the collective shrug, 'Duh!' The Thessalonians knew that not all people were Christians, they themselves had been model pagans until the gospel broke in on them and they turned from idols to serve the living God. So I don't think that is what Paul meant. I believe what this means is that Paul was telling the Thessalonians to keep praying that wicked and evil men would not get in the way of the spread of the gospel, because there were a lot of people yet that had not heard the saving news of Jesus Christ. *In other words, the time to stop praying that the gospel would triumph would only be when in fact it has.*

What I understand from passages like this and others is that the gospel of Jesus Christ will triumph and it does so on the wings of our prayers. God will cause His gospel to triumph, but He will not do that apart from the prayers of the saints. The purpose of God in creation and redemption hinges on the success of His word in the world. Jesus told His disciples that the gospel must be preached to all peoples and then the end will come; and in the end we see multitudes around the throne from every tribe and nation and people and tongue, glorifying God. Therefore the gospel must speed ahead to those people if the purpose of God is to be accomplished; and our prayers are crucial to the outcome. In fact, the primary purpose of prayer is for the spread of the gospel.

In John chapters 14 through 16, Jesus is giving some final instructions and encouragements to His disciples on the eve of His crucifixion. And in chapter 15, verse 16, we see the connection between the gospel triumphing and our prayers: *"You did not choose Me but I chose you, and appointed you that you would go and bear fruit, and that your fruit would remain, so that whatever you ask of the Father in My name He may give to you.* John 15:16 The connection between the two parts of this verse are crucial. Jesus says that He chose and appointed His disciples to go and bear fruit that lasts . . . *so that whatever you ask of the Father in My name He may give to you.* In other words, Jesus said 'I have given you a mission to bear fruit, in order that your prayers might be answered!' That only makes sense if prayer is for the purpose of bearing fruit. You would expect the verse to be just the reverse: *God will give you what you ask in order that you might bear fruit.* But Jesus says it the other way around: *I am giving you a mission to bear fruit so that your Father might answer your prayers.* God has given us prayer because Christ has given us a mission.

That mission to bear fruit *requires* our prayers to God to fulfill His word and cause His gospel to triumph in the world and His kingdom to come. I think John Hyde understood that. I think that is why he would give himself to intercede on behalf of millions of Indians who were lost and on their way to hell – I think that is why visitors to his room would often find him prostrate on the floor in a pool of tears, crying out: *Give me souls, oh God, or I die!* - I think that is why he died burned out for God at the age of 47 with a cry of triumph on his lips: *“Shout the victory of Jesus Christ”*

I am hopeful that this message would encourage you to pray for the triumph of the gospel in the world. I pray that Summit Christian Fellowship would not be noted, or envied or admired for the number of people who attend, the programs we run, for your pastor's preaching, or our outstanding worship team, or our great heart for missions, or a thousands other things – but for our single-minded devotion to pray for the triumph of the gospel in the world. The salvation we enjoy and proclaim to others is a ministry of those who have been made rich, spending their wealth so that those who are poor might be made rich in Christ.

Therefore I want us as a church to be engaged in the great work of God like never before. I want to see everyone of those who call this place home spending their lives, their time, their wealth and energy in the work of prayer for the triumph of the gospel. I want to see us burn out for the cause of Christ on the earth. I want to see us bear fruit through the gospel and missions of mercy and cross-cultural missions here at home and abroad. My prayer is that Summit Christian Fellowship would impact not only this corner but this world with the gospel of Jesus Christ. Jesus took eleven men of uncertain character, mostly unpolished, uneducated fishermen, and turned the world upside down. What could He do with us?

### ***Pray, for not all have faith***

*Our gracious God and eternal Father,*

*Grant that we would see with the eyes of our hearts enlightened the great place of prayer in Your purpose and plan. Pour out a spirit of prayer and supplication on Your people to pray as never before and ignite a fire in our souls to pray with confidence and certainty of Your triumph in the world, knowing that none of our prayers go unheeded in heaven. Forgive us Lord for our apathy in prayer and our often neglect of it. Help us to cherish and jealously guard our times of prayer knowing that the Creator and Sustainer of all things gives heed to our prayers and advances His kingdom through our petitions. Make us watchful and persistent and thankful in prayer. Break our hearts for the lost and move us to pray God-sized, Scripture saturated prayers that echo the refrain, 'Give us souls, Oh God or we die!' Fill our mouths with prayer to You and the gospel to the nations we pray in the precious name of Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.*