



## "Meet, Pray, Love"

We are taking a break from our verse-by-verse study through the Gospel of Matthew this morning.

Our **text** will be two verses from the Old Testament - Habakkuk 3:1-2.

Our **topic** will be prayer, especially meeting together to pray for revival.

The **title** of our message is, *Meet, Pray, Love*.

### Introduction

I feel a little bit like Naaman must have felt when he visited Elisha.

For those of you who've not heard the story of Naaman, let me briefly summarize it. Naaman was the commander of the Syrian army. He also suffered from leprosy. On one of Syria's frequent raids of Israel, a young Israelite girl was captured and became a servant to Naaman's wife. The girl told her mistress about the prophet Elisha, and that he could heal Naaman of his leprosy.

When Naaman arrived Elisha refused to see him. Instead he sent a messenger to him telling him to "go and wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh shall be restored to you, and you shall be clean."

Naaman was offended. The Bible recounts it like this:

2Ki 5:11 But Naaman became furious, and went away and said, "Indeed, I said to myself, 'He will surely come out to me, and stand and call on the name of the LORD his God, and wave his hand over the place, and heal the leprosy.'

2Ki 5:12 Are not the Abanah and the Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? Could I not wash in them and be clean?" So he turned and went away in a rage.

2Ki 5:13 And his servants came near and spoke to him, and said, "My father, if the prophet had told you to do something great, would you not have done it? How much more then, when he says to you, 'Wash, and be clean'?"

2Ki 5:14 So he went down and dipped seven times in the Jordan, according to the saying of the man of God; and his flesh was restored like the flesh of a little child, and he was clean.

I said that I feel a little bit like Naaman, and here's why. This past week I was with over a thousand Calvary Chapel pastors and their associates at the annual Senior Pastor's Conference in Murrietta. More specifically I was with Geno and Alex from our fellowship and with Jacob and His worship leader, Chris, from Calvary Tulare, and John and his associate, R.C., from Refuge Sanger.

As always, I expected God was going to speak to me; to show me something - something powerful, something profound, something prophetic.

I can summarize what God showed me in one word: Pray.

Really? That's it? I had to go to Murrietta and sleep in a room with five other guys, sharing one bathroom, for that?

The Murrietta campus features natural hot springs. The water smells like sulfur - like rotten eggs. I could honestly say to The Lord, "is not the water of Hanford just as smelly?"

I pray; you pray; we pray. Still God is encouraging us to prayer.

That certainly means to pray more. But I think it also means to pray first and foremost, to pray as if we understood it was more effective than anything else we might do.

If God tells me, tells us, to pray, what should we do?

I'd like to see the Holy Spirit move on our hearts to emphasize prayer. To make prayer our first and greatest resort.

We'll be doing some things to accomplish that as a congregation. To begin to encourage us I want to look at two verses in the Old Testament book of Habakkuk.

Hab 3:1 A prayer of Habakkuk the prophet, on Shigionoth.  
Hab 3:2 O LORD, I have heard Your speech and was afraid; O LORD, revive Your work in the midst of the years! In the midst of the years make it known; In wrath remember mercy.

Let me just give you the two points I'm going to organize my thoughts around: #1 If We Are To Emphasize Prayer We Need To Be Renewed In The Fear Of The Lord, and #2 If We Are To Emphasize Prayer We Need To Be Revived In The Faithfulness Of The Lord.

## #1 We Need To Be Renewed In The Fear Of The Lord

Habakkuk was a prophet who served the Jews just prior to the Babylonian invasion and captivity in the sixth century BC. He is famous for asking God to do something to revive the Jews, who he recognized to be sinning. God tells Habakkuk that He is going to do something but that Habakkuk won't like it.

Habakkuk wants to know and when God reveals that His plan is to give Judah over into the hands of the Babylonians for a time of judgement, Habakkuk retreats to a time and place of prayer.

Hab 2:1 I will stand my watch And set myself on the rampart, And watch to see what He will say to me, And what I will answer when I am corrected.

He pictures himself as a watchman on a wall, expectantly waiting for the coming of, not the enemy, but of The Lord, to answer him.

God does answer him, in the remainder of chapter two. Habakkuk responds with more prayer, in chapter three.

Hab 3:1 A prayer of Habakkuk the prophet, on Shigionoth.  
Hab 3:2 O LORD, I have heard Your speech and was afraid

It's "a prayer," insinuating that prayer had become a much more constant activity of "the prophet." Let me put it this way. You'd think that the most regular, most prevalent, activity of a prophet would be to prophesy. But prayer is what we get most from Habakkuk.

There are various opinions on "Shigionoth." It seems to refer to a distinctive type of music, sung in a spirit of victory and excitement.

Is there victory and excitement in my praying? Sometimes, even a lot of times, not. It seems to me that God isn't doing anything in response to my prayers; that He isn't answering them, one way or another. I therefore find it had to rejoice.

If anyone should find it hard to rejoice in prayer, it ought to have been Habakkuk. Things were going to get tough in Judah. Nevertheless Habakkuk would be able to say,

Hab 3:17 Though the fig tree may not blossom, Nor fruit be on the vines; Though the labor of the olive may fail, And the fields yield no food; Though the flock may be cut off from the fold, And there be no herd in the stalls -

Hab 3:18 Yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation.

Hab 3:19 The LORD God is my strength; He will make my feet like deer's feet, And He will make me walk on my high hills...

Bottom line: Habakkuk realized God was working powerfully in the lives of His people. He would use Babylon to save a remnant. He loved them too much to simply abandon them.

I must believe God is always at work. Especially when I can't see Him working; when it seems He is doing nothing, or even allowing things to get worse. He is God and *must* act according to His nature, which is to convict, to save, to restore. His timing is affected by many factors, e.g., the free will of those I'm praying for and about. But I must believe God is there, prompting, revealing Himself, because that's who He is.

His realization God was at work gave birth to the opening line of his prayer: "O Lord, I have heard your speech and was afraid."

Habakkuk had "heard" the "speech" about the coming of the Babylonians to conquer the Jews. It seemed utterly foolish to most of the Jews, trusting as they were in their heritage to save them.

We have heard more speech from The Lord than any generation in the history of the world. He is coming imminently for His church, and soon in His Second Coming. We should have a sense of urgency about us, mingled with awe and expectation.

And with fear. Emphasizing prayer will have little effect in our individual lives as Christians or our corporate life as a church unless we have a fear of The Lord.

We live in a time when I think it is valid to ask, "Whatever happened to the fear of The Lord?"

Looking at America, there is no fear of The Lord. Men have exchanged the truth of God for a lie and they worship and serve created things rather than their Creator.

The current national obsession to recognize and to legalize alternative marriages is a good example. God gave marriage to mankind, and He has defined it as the union of one man and one woman for life. To redefine it according to our own standards shows a profound lack of the fear of The Lord.

What is worse, however, is that there seems to be a profound loss of the fear of The Lord in His church. It can be shown, statistically at least, that the church is no better than the world in certain areas of sin, e.g., divorce and sexual sins like fornication, adultery, and pornography.

Used to be we all believed the bumper-sticker theology that, "God said it, I believe it, that settles it." Not so much anymore. Professing Christians, who know what God has said, simply revise His Word to accommodate their sin, rather than repenting of their sin to accommodate His holiness. Christians seem content to live with compromise, at best, and disobedience, at worst.

In the Book of Acts, in chapter nineteen, the apostle Paul was used by God to perform many miracles. Those miracles, coupled with a failed exorcism by some nonbelievers, caused a fear of The Lord to prevail in the city of Ephesus. Acts puts it like this:

Act 19:18 And many who had believed came confessing and telling their deeds.

Act 19:19 Also, many of those who had practiced magic brought their books together and burned them in the sight of all. And they counted up the value of them, and it totaled fifty thousand pieces of silver.

Act 19:20 So the word of the Lord grew mightily and prevailed.

Were these folks believers who had been dabbling in the occult? Or does it mean that they were recent converts who, when they got saved, brought forth and burned their books?

Either way, the practice of the occult - so common in their culture - had no place in the life of a believer who feared The Lord.

This episode caused Bible commentators William McDonald to say, "Perhaps if modern Christians would burn their trashy books and magazines, the Word would prevail much more."

I don't know if there are things in your life that should be brought forth and burned. Likely there are in at least some of our lives.

Bad habits, even sinful habits, tend to creep in to our lives disguised as Christian liberties.

If we want to really emphasize prayer, then those things need to be burned. Better we burn them now than they burn-up when we stand before The Lord.

The fear of The Lord is an absolute prerequisite to prayer. Without it Habakkuk could not have received God's word about the coming judgment on a way that caused him to rejoice. But with the fear of The Lord came the joy of relationship no matter the circumstances, knowing that, ultimately, God really was working all things together for the good of those who love Him.

## #2 We Need To Be Revived In The Faithfulness Of The Lord

Habakkuk used the "R" word. He said, "LORD, I have heard Your speech and was afraid; O LORD, **revive** Your work in the midst of the years! In the midst of the years make it known; In wrath remember mercy."

Revive, or revival, is something every believer has prayed for or does pray for. My research is correct, the word can mean *to make alive* or *to restore to life*.

- Revival is making alive those who are dead. Those who are dead are unbelievers – described in the Bible as "dead in their trespasses and sins." They are spiritually dead and need to be made alive by God. We would call this aspect of revival, evangelism.
- Revival is also restoring the life of those who are alive. These are believers whose walk with the Lord lacks vitality. They have the Holy Spirit; but the Holy Spirit does not have them! Leonard



Ravenhill is quoted as saying, "Evangelism affects the other fellow; revival affects me."

If you are not a believer in Jesus Christ, you need revival: You need to be made alive by God.

If you are a believer in Jesus Christ, you might need revival: You might need to be restored to a walk that has vitality.

Historically, revival is accompanied and accomplished by prayer. It's been said,

It will generally be found, that when God is about to bestow any remarkable favor upon a person or people, He previously pours out upon them a spirit of earnest supplication for it.

So remarked a pastor in Philadelphia, around 1856, during a time of great revival.

Matthew Henry said, "When God intends great mercy for His people, the first thing He does is set them a-praying."

I hear a lot of talk about America returning to its Christian foundations. I agree! But how are we to accomplish that goal? Listen to this account by revival historian J. Edwin Orr.

Not many people realize that in the wake of the American Revolution (following 1776-1781) there was a moral slump. Drunkenness became epidemic. Out of a population of five million, 300,000 were confirmed drunkards. Profanity was of the most shocking kind. For the first time in the history of the American settlement, women were afraid to go out at night for fear of assault. Bank robberies were a daily occurrence.

What about the churches? The Methodists were losing more members than they were gaining. The Baptists said that they had their most wintry season. The Presbyterians in general assembly deplored the nation's ungodliness. In a typical Congregational church, the Rev. Samuel Shepherd of Lennox, Massachusetts, in sixteen years had not taken one young person into fellowship. The Lutherans were so languishing that they discussed uniting with Episcopalians who were even worse off. The Protestant Episcopal Bishop of New York, Bishop Samuel Provost, quit functioning; he had confirmed no one for so long that he decided he was out of work, so he took up other employment. The Chief Justice of the United States, John Marshall, wrote to the Bishop of Virginia, James Madison, that the Church 'was too far gone ever to be redeemed.' Voltaire averred and Tom Paine echoed, 'Christianity will be forgotten in thirty years.'

Take the... colleges at that time. A poll taken at Harvard had discovered not one believer in the whole student body. They took a poll at Princeton, a much more evangelical place, where they discovered only two believers in the student body, and only five that did not belong to the filthy speech movement of that day. Students rioted. They held a mock communion at Williams College, and they put on anti-Christian plays at Dartmouth. They burned down the Nassau Hall at Princeton.

They forced the resignation of the president of Harvard. They took a Bible out of a local Presbyterian church in New Jersey, and they burnt it in a public bonfire. Christians were so few on campus in the 1790's that they met in secret, like a communist cell, and kept their minutes in code so that no one would know.

[http://www.jedwinorr.com/prayer\\_revival.htm](http://www.jedwinorr.com/prayer_revival.htm)

How did the situation change? It came through prayer. Dr. Orr goes on to explain,

In New England, there was a man of prayer named Isaac Backus, a Baptist pastor, who in 1794, when conditions were at their worst, addressed an urgent plea for prayer for revival to pastors of every Christian denomination in the United States. All the churches adopted the plan until America was interlaced with a network of prayer meetings, which set aside the first Monday of each month to pray. It was not long before revival came.

**That**, folks, is our history; **that** is our heritage. We have a romantic notion of what our nation was like, religiously, at its founding. We need to have a more realistic notion. From the very founding of our great nation we have needed revival. It came through prayer as God moved on the hearts of men and women - transforming them into new creatures in Jesus Christ.

If anything in this life is certain, if history has taught us anything, it's that nothing spiritual can be accomplished apart from revival. We cannot *reform* society. Hearts must be *transformed*.

All of this comes as we pray. None of it unless we pray.

Right away we have a tendency to get in the way of revival. We read something like this and can think we need to contact every church in town, every church in America, and start a prayer program. Give it a name. Start compiling numbers. Guilt folks into attending. Probably take an offering!

No, what we need to do is, individually, begin emphasizing prayer. Sure, we need to meet together, to pray, more. But without an emphasis on prayer that permeates our entire walk with The Lord, meetings won't accomplish much.

In 1963 R.A. Torrey wrote the following:

The great need of the church today, and of human society as a whole, is a genuine, God-sent revival. Such revivals as far as man's agency is concerned always come in one way - by prayer.

We're going to do a few simple things to encourage prayer.

- In the following weeks we will, for example, suggest a book or two on prayer that we can all be reading together.
- I'd like to see us have our *Friends at Midnight* prayer meeting become more than an annual event.
- We will continue to pray on Saturday evenings.
- We will incorporate more corporate prayer on Wednesday nights at IGNITE!

I'm sure we will be led by God the Holy Spirit in other ways. Just as I'm sure that we face opposition to praying that will tend to discourage us and get us to quit.

Our movement, Calvary Chapel, is a revival movement. It was born in the 1960's, known as the *Jesus Movement*. There's an article on the wall in the Café that gives an overview of the *Jesus Movement*.

It's not just our past history; or, at least, it doesn't have to be. It can be our future as well. It can be our future because God is faithful. He is faithful to revive.

We've been meeting together since 1985. Our prayer **must** become Habakkuk's prayer, "O Lord, revive your work in the midst of years."