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(Following is an excerpt from a sermon by Jonathan Edwards entitled Corporate Prayer For Revival. It reminds us of the preaching issued prior and during the Great Awakening)

The Power of Prayer
by Jonathan Edwards

In Zechariah 8:20-22 we have an account of how this future advancement of the Church should occur. It would come to fruition as multitudes from different towns resolve to unite in extraordinary prayer, seeking God until He manifests Himself and grants the fruits of his presence. We may observe several things in particular:

1. THE NECESSITY OF PRAYER.

Some suppose that prayer includes the whole of worship to God and that prayer is a part of worship during the days of the gospel when sacrifices are abolished. Therefore, this can be understood as a prophecy of a great revival of religion with true worship of God among His people, repentance from idolatry, and growth of the Church.

However, it seems reasonable to me to suppose that something even more special is intended regarding prayer given that prayer is not only repeatedly mentioned, but that this prophecy parallels many other prophecies that speak of an extraordinary spirit of prayer preceding that glorious day of revival and advancement of the Church's peace and prosperity. It particularly parallels what the prophet later speaks of the "pouring out of a spirit of grace and supplications" as that which introduces the great religious revival (Zech. 12:10).

2. THE GOOD WHICH SHALL BE BROUGHT BY PRAYER: GOD HIMSELF.

Scripture says, "They shall go to pray before the Lord, and to seek the Lord of Hosts." The good that they seek for is "The Lord of Hosts," Himself. If "seeking God" means no more than seeking the favor or mercy of God then "praying before the Lord," and "seeking the Lord of Hosts" must be looked upon as synonymous. However, "seeking the Lord" is commonly used to mean something far more than seeking something from God. Surely it implies that God Himself is what is desired and sought after.

Thus, the Psalmist desired God, thirsted after Him and sought after Him:

"O God, thou art my God; early will I seek thee. My flesh longeth for thee, in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is, to see thy power and thy glory, so as I have seen thee in the sanctuary ... My soul followeth hard after thee ... Whom have I in heaven by thee? And there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee."

The Psalmist earnestly pursued after God; his soul thirsted after Him, he stretched forth his hands unto Him. All of God's saints have this in common: they are those that seek God. "This is the generation of them that seek Him." "Your heart shall live that seek God," etc.

If this be the true sense of this phrase "seeking the Lord of Hosts," then we must understand that God who had withdrawn Himself, or, as it were, hid Himself, would return to His Church, granting the fruits of His presence and communion with His people, which He so often promised, and for which His Church had so long waited.

In short, it seems reasonable to understand the phrase, "seeking the Lord of Hosts" means not merely praying to God, but seeking the promised restoration of the Church of God after the Babylonian captivity and the great apostasy occasioning it is called their "seeking God, and searching for Him;" and God's granting this promised revival and restoration called His being "found of them." (See Jer. 29:10-14)

The prophets occasionally represent God as being withdrawn and hiding Himself: "Verily thou art a God that hideth thyself, O God of Israel, the Savior. I hid me, and was wroth." The prophets then go on to represent God's people seeking Him, searching and waiting for and calling after Him. When God answers their prayers and restores and advances His people, according to His promise, then He is said to come and say, "Here am I" and to

show Himself, and they are said to find Him and see Him plainly.

"Then you will call, and the Lord will answer; you will cry for help, and he will say: Here am I ..."

"But Israel will be saved by the Lord with an everlasting salvation ... I have not said to Jacob's descendants, 'Seek me in vain.' I, the Lord, speak the truth; I declare what is right."

"The Sovereign Lord will wipe away the tears from all faces; he will remove the disgrace of his people from all the earth. In that day they will say, 'Surely this is our God; we trusted in him, and he saved us. This is the Lord, we trusted in him; let us rejoice and be glad in his salvation.' We wait for you; your name and renown are the desire of our hearts." (Isa. 58:9; Isa. 45:17,19; Isa. 25:8-9)

3. WE MAY OBSERVE WHO IT IS THAT WILL BE UNITED IN SEEKING THE LORD:

"the inhabitants of many cities ... yea, many people and strong nations." Many people from all over the world will unite to seek the Lord.

From the the prophecy, it seems reasonable to assume that this will be fulfilled in the following manner: First, God's people will be given a spirit of prayer, inspiring them to come together and pray in an extraordinary manner, that He would help his Church, show mercy to mankind in general, pour out his Spirit, revive His work, and advance His kingdom in the world as He promised.

Moreover, such prayer would gradually spread and increase more and more, ushering in a revival of religion. This would be characterized by greater worship and service of God among believers. Others will be awakened to their need for God, motivating them to earnestly cry out to God for mercy. They will be led to join with God's people in that extraordinary seeking and serving of God which they see around them. In this way the revival will grow until the awakening reaches whole nations and those in the highest positions of influence. The Church will grow to be ten times larger than it was before. Indeed, at length, all the nations of the world will be converted unto God.

Thus, ten men, out of all languages and nations, will "take hold of the skirt of" the Jew (in the sense of the Apostle), saying "We will go with you, for we have heard that God is with you." Thus will be fulfilled, "O thou that heareth prayer, unto thee shall all flesh come."

4. WE MAY ALSO OBSERVE THE MANNER OF THEIR UNITY IN PRAYER.

It is a visible and voluntary union that was first proposed by some of God's people with others readily joining in over time. Those who live in one city will declare to those of another city, "Let us go" etc. Many of those who hear their declaration will not only join with them but will make the call for the unity in prayer known to still others. As a result, the movement will grow, prevail and spread among God's people.

Some suppose that the words, "I will go also," are to be taken as words spoken by the one making the proposal. He states this expressing his willingness and desire to do what he is asking his hearer to do. But this is to suppose no more than is expressed in the phrase, "Come and let us go ..." itself. It seems more natural to me to understand these words as being the consent or reply of the one to whom the proposal is made.

This is much more agreeable to the flow of the text which represents the compliance of great numbers of people in this movement. And though if these words are thus understood, we must suppose something understood in the text that is not expressed: Those of other cities will say, "I will go also." Yet, this is not difficult to conceive of as such figures of speech are common in the Scripture (Jer. 3:22; Ps. 1:6,7).

5. NEXT, WE CAN OBSERVE THE MANNER IN WHICH THEY AGREE TO PRAY:

"Let us go speedily to pray," or, as it says in the margin: let us go continually. Literally translated this means, "let us go in going." The Hebrew language often doubles words for emphasis (e.g., the holy of holies signifies that which is most holy). Such doubling of words also denotes the certainty of an event coming to pass. For example,

when God said to Abraham, "in multiplying, I will multiply thy seed," God implies that He would certainly multiply his seed, and multiply it exceedingly.

6. FINALLY, THIS PROPHECY GIVES US A PICTURE OF THIS UNION IN PRAYER BEING AN INVITING AND A HAPPY THING.

We sense God's pleasure, and the results prove tremendously successful. From the whole of this prophecy we may infer that it is well pleasing to God for many people, in different parts of the world, to voluntarily come into a visible union to pray in an extraordinary way for those great outpourings of the Holy Spirit which shall advance the Kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ that God has so often promised shall be in the latter ages of the world.

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