

A Community at Work

We have recently heard about the aspect of being a godly community. Last time I spoke to you we looked at part of the Sermon on the Mount. It is a truism that Matthew highlights the need for righteousness in our lives - godly righteousness, not human righteousness.

If Matthew highlights the need for righteousness, then Luke, in his gospel, shows righteousness in action. You might think of some of the great parables and events that occur in Luke's gospel that are unique to Luke's rendition of Christ's teaching, and Christ's life. The Good Samaritan shows true righteousness in action, the realisation of who really is our neighbour. There is the account of the prodigal son and the events associated with that. There is the occasion on which Zacchaeus came to Jesus Christ and, in an act of repentance and contrition for his past, undertook to provide so much of his goods for the poor.

Luke's view of righteousness and of a community of righteousness in action, is not just contained within his gospel. What Luke does in his gospel carries on throughout the book of Acts as well. When Luke wrote, John's gospel had not been written, and someone reading the New Testament in the early years of the first century would not have had John's gospel. If we lift John's gospel out of the New Testament, the sequence would be Matthew, Mark, Luke and Acts.

Luke very much saw the book of Acts as being a continuation of his gospel - which it truly is. The foci that Luke provides in his gospel are developed and continued throughout the book of Acts as well. Luke provided a continuous treatment of this community, a community of God, from the birth of John the Baptist through to Paul preaching in Rome.

His purpose was very much to show the community of God at work. "What do they do?" "How do they do it?" How does Luke see righteousness in action?

To start with, Luke does not see righteousness occurring by itself. It is not something that people can put on of and by their own strength. He sees two essential ingredients to righteousness. The first one is God's Holy Spirit. The second one is very closely associated with that - prayer.

It is to the latter aspect that I would like to focus our attention as a godly community today. Godly prayer by itself, is an act of godly righteousness, just as self-focused prayer can be an act of self-righteousness. Matthew makes that abundantly clear for us in the Sermon on the Mount. Let's break into a section of the Sermon on the Mount which starts in Matthew 5:21 and carries on into Matthew 7:12, where Jesus is outlining to each and every one of us, how our righteousness is to exceed that of the Scribes and Pharisees. That's the whole focus of this section of the Sermon on the Mount.

Matthew 6:1 "Take heed that you do not do your charitable deeds before men, to be seen by them. Otherwise you have no reward from your Father in heaven.

This is not really a correct translation. It provides the INTENT of what Jesus was saying, but if one were to translate it directly from the Greek, one would have to read:

1 Take heed that you do not your righteousness before men to be seen of them. Otherwise you have no reward from your Father in heaven.

The term that has been translated "charitable deeds" or "alms" is, in fact, the word for *righteousness*. It was one of the major acts of righteousness together with the very next subject:

5 "And when you pray ...

Prayer was understood by the Jews of that day, and to this day, as being an act of righteousness. Jesus Christ saw it as being an act of righteousness. He says it has got to be better than that of the Scribes and Pharisees.

Jesus was dramatically ratcheting up the requirement in terms of prayer above that of the Scribes and Pharisees of His day.

The aspects of charitable deeds, prayer, and fasting are aspects of righteousness. God expects us to be involved in those in a way which has a greater purpose and a greater benefit than that of the Scribes and Pharisees. I am not saying that He expects us to do it more frequently, or anything of that nature, but He expects what we do in that area to have a greater purpose, and be done for a greater value than that undertaken by the Scribes and Pharisees.

Luke, in his gospel, deals with the aspects of prayer. If you want to find out about prayer, there are two books in the New Testament that you ought to set aside and examine. They are Luke's gospel and the book of Acts. There are more references to prayer in Luke's gospel than literally all of the other gospels put together. I am talking about the English word "pray," or "prayer," or the various connotations of that.

In the Greek language, numerous words were used that are translated as "pray," or "prayer," which convey various elements of what God means by prayer. Luke starts with prayer. He provides a vignette for us to appreciate and understand the importance that he is going to place upon prayer. He gives an introductory salutation in the first four verses of his gospel, and then from verses 5-9 he gives an introduction to the principle players who are going to be introduced:

Luke 1:5 There was in the days of Herod, the king of Judea, a certain priest named Zacharias, of the division of Abijah. His wife was of the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth.

6 And they were both righteous before God ...

These people are established as being righteous before God. In other words, they were part of God's righteous community.

6 ... walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless.

If any of us want a commendation, if we want something to be written about us, what God has provided here about Elizabeth and Zacharias is about as good as it gets. If we were to rephrase it, their names are probably written in the Lamb's Book of Life. That is what all of us look for! They were part of that godly community.

7 But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and they were both well advanced in years.

***8 So it was, that while he was serving as priest before God in the order of his division,
9 according to the custom of the priesthood, his lot fell to burn incense when he went into the temple of the Lord.***

Zacharias was in the rotation of the priests who served one week at a time, according to their division. During that week it was decided by lot which priest was going to go in the morning to burn the incense, or trim the candles in the holy place. In the evening, another lot would be drawn as to who would do it. Once a priest had had the lot fall to him, he was then withdrawn from another opportunity during that week.

So the occasions when a priest like Zacharias would go into the holy place, were highly restricted. He served in the Temple for basically four weeks of the year - the two weeks for his "course," and also the Days of Unleavened Bread and the Feast of Tabernacles, when all the priests were in the Temple. The rest of the time he wasn't in the Temple.

So it may have been that once a year, at the very most, he would have the opportunity of being able to go into the holy place to burn incense and to trim the lamps.

But notice what Luke says happened when he went into the holy place. This is a view of Jerusalem and the Temple that we don't normally have in mind.

10 And the whole multitude of the people was praying outside at the hour of incense.

Here were devout people who worshipped God, the ones who were later going to be influenced on the Day of Pentecost by the preaching of the apostles. They were at the Temple at the hour of incense, praying, while the priests went in to offer incense before the Eternal, and to trim the candles.

Luke is setting up for us this net of a godly community who were devoted to godly service. It's a very interesting point to consider, because so often we think of all the people in Jerusalem as being unrepentant and cut off from God. That wasn't the case at all. Luke makes it abundantly clear that there were very devout people alive at that period of time who were looking for the coming of the Messiah, and whose prayers and lives were focused upon that.

So here Luke introduces the aspect of prayer, by these devout people being in the Temple - using it in the way in which God saw it should have been used. As Jesus Christ said in John's gospel, "My house is to be a house of prayer for all people." These people were praying.

We don't need to go on any further from there, because we know what happened. An angel appeared to Zacharias.

Let's compare what Luke provides here in chapter 1 with Acts 2. There were devout people in Jerusalem from all parts of the Roman Empire. On the Day of Pentecost:

Acts 2:5 And there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men, from every nation under heaven.

After the list of nations from which they came ...

11 ... we hear them speaking in our own tongues the wonderful works of God."

They had an identity, and they could identify with what the apostles were speaking at that point in time. It struck a bell. They were on the same side, so to speak. These were the 3,000 people who were then added to the Church at that particular time. Luke is very careful to identify that.

As I said, Luke uses many Greek words to focus on the aspect of prayer. I would like to focus on two of them today. One is *deomai*, and its related word *deesis*. They are an interesting pair of related words.

One of these words is only used once in Matthew's gospel. That gives you an idea of the differences in Luke's focus. These words aren't used in Mark or John. They are used in Luke, in the book of Acts, and the apostle Paul uses them as well.

The intent and meaning of these words is:

- Beseeching
- Praying with intensity

Oftentimes, in some of the more modern translations, they are translated as "implore," or "beg." In the New King James Version, they are translated as "supplications."

The aspect of *deomai* is, "to ask with urgency, with the implication of presumed need, to plead, or to beg."

The original meaning of both *deomai* and *deesis* is based on LACK or OF NEED. That is the origin of the words in the Greek language. They recognise a lack or a need.

So, as a result of that, when they are used in reference to prayer, they are used in terms of URGENCY. As one dictionary says:

"... with the implication of a presumed need."

"There is a need because I lack something."

There are three areas that I would like to focus on. We find that Luke uses these words in particular ways.

Our Health

The first way in which he uses them is in terms of health - both physical and spiritual. One of the first occasions of the use of the word is in Luke 5. Jesus was preaching in Galilee:

Luke 5:12 And it happened when He was in a certain city, that behold, a man who was full of leprosy saw Jesus; and he fell on his face and implored (deomai) Him, saying, "Lord, if You are willing, You can make me clean."

It's very easy to read over that. The difficulty is that probably very few of us here have ever experienced or spent time with a person suffering from leprosy. We have no idea of the mental anguish of this man. Someone who had leprosy was "outside the camp." He wasn't able to have contact with other people. Leprosy was considered to be a contagious disease even right up until the 20th century.

There were islands in the South Pacific where lepers would be quarantined in "leper colonies." Medical science has basically been able to take care of many of the problems of leprosy. Leprosy is a horrible disease. It is a wasting disease. People lose their digits and their limbs as a result of it. One is an incomplete person. They are shunned. They are outside of everything.

If any of you have ever been shunned in some way, you realise the sense of loss of not being able to associate with people. So we can understand why this man would come and IMPLORE Jesus. He had a need. He had a lack, and he realised that Jesus Christ was the only Person who could fill that need. There was no other way that it could be done.

This man had a sense of urgency about him because he probably saw his life ebbing away in front of him, with the leprosy eating away at his limbs, and probably various vital organs as well. It is not a nice disease at all. Some diseases don't necessarily affect us, but leprosy is a very disfiguring disease. Leprosy is an unpleasant disease simply because of the way in which it mars and disfigures the human body.

This man PLEADED with Jesus. The derivation of the Greek word used is *deomai*.

Let's look at another example. After Jesus Christ had explained the parable of the sower to the disciples, He crossed the Sea of Galilee, where the winds and waves obeyed Him. Then they came to the opposite side of the lake:

***Luke 8:26 Then they sailed to the country of the Gadarenes, which is opposite Galilee.
27 And when He stepped out on the land, there met Him a certain man from the city who had demons for a long time. And he wore no clothes, nor did he live in a house but in the tombs.***

***28 When he saw Jesus, he cried out, fell down before Him, and with a loud voice said,
"What have I to do with You, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg (deomai) You, do not torment me!"***

Here was another health issue. This time it was not a physical problem. It was a spiritual problem. This person was possessed with a demon. The demon was imploring Christ not to torment him. Jesus Christ told the demon to come out:

29 For He had commanded the unclean spirit to come out of the man. For it had often seized

him, and he was kept under guard, bound with chains and shackles; and he broke the bonds and was driven by the demon into the wilderness.

30 Jesus asked him, saying, "What is your name?" And he said, "Legion," because many demons had entered him.

31 And they begged Him that He would not command them to go out into the abyss.

32 Now a herd of many swine was feeding there on the mountain. So they begged Him that He would permit them to enter them. And He permitted them.

33 Then the demons went out of the man and entered the swine, and the herd ran violently down the steep place into the lake and drowned.

34 When those who fed them saw what had happened, they fled and told it in the city and in the country.

35 Then they went out to see what had happened, and came to Jesus, and found the man from whom the demons had departed, sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind. And they were afraid.

36 They also who had seen it told them by what means he who had been demon-possessed was healed.

37 Then the whole multitude of the surrounding region of the Gadarenes asked Him to depart from them, for they were seized with great fear ...

I guess they were fearful of what was going to happen to all of those demons that were now out of this man.

37 ... And He got into the boat and returned.

38 Now the man from whom the demons had departed begged (deomai) Him that he might be with Him ...

Here was Someone who had changed his life totally. It is hard to know what understanding a person has of what their life is like when they are demon possessed. I know that people who have bipolar conditions or manic conditions can be aware of some of the problems they create for others in such things. I wouldn't be surprised if this man was very much aware of the problems he suffered as a result of the possession of demons. And, having been given his right mind back, he PLEADED with Jesus to let him go with Him. Here was Someone who had totally turned his life the right way up.

38 ... But Jesus sent him away, saying,

39 "Return to your own house, and tell what great things God has done for you ..."

"... keep your mind on it, to protect yourself from the demons again in the future." This man prayed with intensity. He IMPLORED Jesus Christ to allow him to be a disciple.

Here is another example:

Luke 9:38 Suddenly a man from the multitude cried out, saying, "Teacher, I implore You, look on my son, for he is my only child.

39 "And behold, a spirit seizes him, and he suddenly cries out; it convulses him so that he foams at the mouth, and it departs from him with great difficulty, bruising him.

40 "So I implored Your disciples to cast it out, but they could not."

Let's look at another aspect of our spiritual health. What about repentance? How does this aspect of prayer relate to repentance?

At the time when the Church in Jerusalem was scattered because of persecution, Philip went down to Samaria. Amongst those who heeded Philip's teaching was Simon the Sorcerer. The apostles sent Peter and John to back up what Philip had done in Samaria.

Acts 8:14 Now when the apostles who were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them,

15 who, when they had come down, prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit.

16 For as yet He had fallen upon none of them. They had only been baptized in the name of

the Lord Jesus.

17 Then they laid hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.

18 And when Simon saw that through the laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Spirit was given, he offered them money,

19 saying, "Give me this power also, that anyone on whom I lay hands may receive the Holy Spirit."

In the English language today, we have the term "simony." It is "the buying of a religious office," and it comes right from this very event. Simon tried to buy a position within the Church by the use of money.

20 But Peter said to him, "Your money perish with you, because you thought that the gift of God could be purchased with money!"

21 "You have neither part nor portion in this matter, for your heart is not right in the sight of God.

22 "Repent therefore of this your wickedness, and pray (deomai) God if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you.

In using the term, *deomai*, Peter is saying, "Really get down and SEARCH for what it is you need - this change of heart." It's not just a casual thing. It is something that has to be sought. It is something that we have to see that we lack in our lives, something that we have a need of. Our prayer needs to be DRIVEN by that understanding of a lack, and the understanding of the need - come what may. Repentance without that is not repentance.

The apostle Peter told Simon, "If you want to have a part with us, you must get on your knees and really implore the Eternal, to get rid of this wretched heart that you have."

What was Simon's reaction?

23 "For I see that you are poisoned by bitterness and bound by iniquity."

24 Then Simon answered and said, "Pray (deomai) to the Lord for me ...

"... you do it for me!" Is that what God is looking for? No, not at all! This man tried to pass the buck and say, "You do it." That's why he never became part of the Church. He wasn't prepared to humble himself to the point where he saw a real need and lack in his life that could only be filled by the Spirit of God. He simply saw the Spirit of God as being a tool that he could use to control other people. So Peter, under inspiration of the Eternal, said:

23 "For I see that you are poisoned by bitterness and bound by iniquity."

"You are totally given over to it."

Interestingly, in the same chapter, Luke sets the account of Simon Magus off with someone who sought true repentance. A few verses later, Philip is dealing with the Ethiopian eunuch. Look at the difference in this man's attitude toward the Word of God:

Acts 8:26 Now an angel of the Lord spoke to Philip, saying, "Arise and go toward the south along the road which goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." This is desert.

27 So he arose and went. And behold, a man of Ethiopia, a eunuch of great authority under Candace the queen of the Ethiopians, who had charge of all her treasury, and had come to Jerusalem to worship,

28 was returning. And sitting in his chariot, he was reading Isaiah the prophet.

29 Then the Spirit said to Philip, "Go near and overtake this chariot."

30 So Philip ran to him, and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah, and said, "Do you understand what you are reading?"

31 And he said, "How can I, unless someone guides me?" And he asked Philip to come up and sit with him.

He then describes the passage of Isaiah 53 that he was reading from:

32 The place in the Scripture which he read was this: "He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; And as a lamb before its shearer is silent, So He opened not His mouth.

33 In His humiliation His justice was taken away, And who will declare His generation? For His life is taken from the earth."

34 So the eunuch answered Philip and said, "I ask you, of whom does the prophet say this, of himself or of some other man?"

We lose the intensity of what the Ethiopian eunuch is asking Philip because the Greek word that has been translated "ask" is *deomai*! "I PRAY you, PLEASE tell me; explain this to me. I WANT to understand this. I WANT to have a grasp of it. I don't comprehend it and I WANT to understand it."

He was literally **IMPLORING** (*deomai*) Philip to explain the Scriptures to him, making **SUPPLICATION** to him so that he could have understanding. Why? He clearly saw a lack in his understanding. He was a great man. This would be like Ernie George who was the governor of the Bank of England, driving in a limousine, and reading the Word of God. The Ethiopian eunuch was a man of similar standing, a very important person in the land, a man of considerable mental acumen. This man was nobody's fool. He had to have been a very astute individual to be Queen Candace's treasurer.

Yet he saw a need. He lacked understanding of the Scriptures and he wanted to know. He realised he **NEEDED** to know. So he implored Philip.

We find a similar thing in:

**Acts 10:1 There was a certain man in Caesarea called Cornelius, a centurion of what was called the Italian Regiment,
2 a devout man and one who feared God with all his household, who gave alms generously to the people, and prayed to God always.**

What did a centurion need? Very little! He could extort it out of anyone he wished. He had the power to do so, yet this man "*deomai-ed*" God. He realised there was a lack in his life. He realised he needed something, and, for all of his position, he was going to seek it and find it. This attitude of realising a lack or a need, becomes a **FOUNDATIONAL ASPECT** of repentance, of realising something is missing. "I am not complete the way I am."

So in terms of spiritual health, this aspect of prayer is very important; this aspect of urgent beseeching, praying with a real sense of intensity, imploring, begging the Eternal to help us understand our part within His plan. In terms of our spiritual health it's very important.

In terms of personal care, the maintenance of our lives, after we have repented, it is also very important.

**Luke 5:33 Then they (the Scribes and Pharisees) said to Him, "Why do the disciples of John fast often and make prayers, and likewise those of the Pharisees, but Yours eat and drink?"
34 And He said to them, "Can you make the friends of the bridegroom fast while the bridegroom is with them?
35 "But the days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them; then they will fast in those days."**

The implication in verse 33 is that the disciples of John used *deomai*. They prayed with great intensity. Theirs were not ritual prayers that had been written out by some group many hundreds of years before, and reiterated daily.

The disciples of John prayed with intensity. John had been beheaded. Their leader had been taken.

Jesus Christ said, "While I am with them, they won't necessarily do it, but the time is coming when, in realising their lacks, and in realising their needs, they will have to have that level of intensity."

Notice one other Scripture in Luke's gospel which ties in with this very well. It is the Olivet prophecy. Jesus talks about the need for being aware:

Luke 21:34 "But take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness, and cares of this life, and that Day come on you unexpectedly.

35 "For it will come as a snare on all those who dwell on the face of the whole earth.

36 "Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man."

The watching and the praying is not just a ritual three times a day: "I want to be in your Kingdom. I want to avoid the problems that are coming upon the earth." ... and that is it!

It is prayed with a certain level of intensity, understanding that the only Person who can really save us from the problems that are coming on the earth, is the Father. That is the only way it can be. I think this is a very important aspect. As Jesus Christ said:

34 "But take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness ...

" ... but we don't get involved in that!"

34 ... and cares of this life ...

I will tell you one thing! We, as people, DO get caught up with the cares of this life!

34 ... and that Day come on you unexpectedly.

That is possible for any of us. We may not be carousers. We may not be drunkards, but we can certainly get caught up in the cares of this world! The solution to avoid that is *deomai* - praying with a depth of intensity; realising that it is not within ourselves to save ourselves from the problems that are coming upon this world.

The solution, the answer to that is in the Eternal's hands. It is only by realising that, and realising that He is the One who can keep our minds focused on the things that they need to be focused upon, that we can avoid getting caught up in the cares of this world.

For our own spiritual health, you and I have to be involved in *deomai*. We have to pray with INTENSITY - with great feeling, to make sure that our lives are being lived in accordance with the plan of God, and that we are seeking His plan.

I read the New York Times from time to time. The other day I noticed a book review in it. I think it is very appropriate in terms of what we are talking about here, in terms of the intensity of our relationship with God. The book that was being reviewed, was written by a Somalian who has returned to Somalia after having been in this country for a good number of years. He fled from Somalia in the 1980s, when there were great problems with the President of Somalia, Said Barre, and various other warlords. Somalia literally became the pits.

America became involved, and movies and urban legends have since been created out of it. It has entered America's folk lore because of the problems that America got into there. In the book, this man went back to that area and came to understand the power of the gun, the way in which life existed. The book itself was not necessarily the more important thing. The reviewer was the person who was able to put his finger on the pulse. In reviewing the book he said:

"This man is talking about reality. Our lives are the unreal. We live in a state of luxury and of ease that humanity doesn't understand."

There are people who think that the Kingdom of God has come, and that it is in the United States, because we have so many wonderful things here! They never stop to think, how can the level of wealth that we have

in this country, be rolled out to take care of the entire world? In terms of human economics it just cannot be done. We live in an UNREAL world, and the cares of living in that unreal world can distract us from the reality of the need for the Kingdom of God. Do you realise that it can also destroy our spiritual health?

My parents lived through the Great Depression, and the lesser depressions before that. In the early part of the 20th century there were numerous depressions. I haven't had to live through a depression. I haven't experienced that. My psyche has not been shaped by that.

Yes, I understood what want was, as a child growing up. We did without things. But I have seen what REAL want is too - because I have spent the best part of ten years in Africa. I have seen what people suffer. I have seen Church members' children who suffer from rickets, with their distended bellies and their bowed legs, because the child has never really had a proper, decent, meal. I have seen their want. I see the problems that it creates for those people as well. In reality, if one looks at the statistics, those people live in the REAL world!

It's not only Somalia. It is Sudan, Rwanda, Burundi, Afghanistan, Iraq, Yemen ... we can keep on naming them, one place after the other; one country after another around the world where people don't know ANY sense of security, whether they are going to be struck by a stray bullet. That does happen!

In 1980, I visited Beirut and stayed for a weekend with some members there. Some time before, I had baptised one of them in Africa. As Beirut was part of my area in 1980, I thought I would stop by and see them. I won't do it again! It was a frightening experience. We were standing on the balcony, looking at the sunset over the Mediterranean. That was a beautiful sight. I can understand why people like Beirut as a city. It is a beautiful environment.

But about ten stories down, across the street, a man came out in military fatigues and something like an AK47 across his shoulder. He started marching up and down. I said to the Church member, "Who is this guy?"

He said, "One of the leaders of the P.L.O. lives over there. The P.L.O. was 'taken out' down the street by Israeli operatives the other day. My wife was talking to a friend on the phone, and the phone suddenly went dead. She later found out that her friend had been killed by a ricocheting bullet."

Life has no security for the majority of the people in the world. That is reality! What we live in is an unreal world. We have gone through "Alice's Looking Glass," and we are on the other side. Our world is an unreal world. It's so very easy for us to get caught up in that world, and not realise how DESPERATELY this world needs the return of Jesus Christ.

Our life may be fine - but our life is unreal. It's not the reality of this world. So for our own spiritual health, Jesus Christ said: "You've got to pray with INTENSITY to make sure that your life is in harmony with the Word of God, so that you don't get caught up in the cares of this world - or the carousing, or the drunkenness, or whatever it is, as the case may be. Don't get caught up in that in any way at all."

So even in this aspect of our personal care, having repented, we have to MAINTAIN a sense of intensity in our prayer life with God.

The Work

The second aspect is about the Work. Let me just touch on one or two areas. At the beginning of Luke's gospel, Christ was being taken into the Temple for the very first occasion:

Luke 2:25 And behold, there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon, and this man was just and devout, waiting for the Consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him.

26 And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ.

27 So he came by the Spirit into the temple. And when the parents brought in the Child

*Jesus, to do for Him according to the custom of the law,
28 he took Him up in his arms and blessed God and said:
29 "Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace, According to Your word;
30 For my eyes have seen Your salvation ...*

"I have seen what you are going to do for humanity!"

*31 Which You have prepared before the face of all peoples,
32 A light to bring revelation to the Gentiles,
And the glory of Your people Israel."
33 And Joseph and His mother marveled at those things which were spoken of Him.*

Then somebody else comes on the scene; this time, a lady, a prophetess:

*36 Now there was one, Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher.
She was of a great age, and had lived with a husband seven years from her virginity;
37 and this woman was a widow of about eighty-four years, who did not depart from the
temple, but served God with fastings and prayers (deesis) night and day.*

She served God with fasting and intense prayer - supplication - night and day. That was her work. Why? Because she was concerned about the Work of God.

*38 And coming in that instant she gave thanks to the Lord, and spoke of Him to all those
who looked for redemption in Jerusalem.*

She saw the place of this Child within the plan of God, and the Work that He was doing. Anna was a remarkable lady.

*Luke 10:1 After these things the Lord appointed seventy others also, and sent them two by
two before His face into every city and place where He Himself was about to go.
2 Then He said to them, "The harvest truly is great, but the laborers are few; therefore
pray (deomai) the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest.*

How often do we pray with REAL INTENSITY that God would add labourers to His harvest? If He doesn't do this, we will all burn out!! We NEED labourers to do the Work. We can't do it of ourselves. We have a need. We lack.

How did Jesus tell us to go about it? It wasn't just some ritual that we pray at bedtime: "Add some more co-workers, add some more members." It is something that is to be prayed with INTENSITY. We must BESEECH the Eternal. We must IMPLORE Him to add those people.

Why does He ask us to implore Him when He could so easily call them? Because He wants to see how much you and I are committed to His Work. As Christ told the people of His day, He could very simply raise up children to Abraham from the stones. God has got the power to do it, but He has called you and me to be partners in this work, to be co-workers, to be labourers. He wants to see how deeply COMMITTED we are to that Work. He says, "Pray with intensity, not just a matter of words, but with intensity."

Interestingly, this is the one occasion in which Matthew uses this word *deomai*, in terms of the parallel account of this very same event.

*Acts 1:12 Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near
Jerusalem, a Sabbath day's journey.
13 And when they had entered, they went up into the upper room where they were staying:
Peter, James, John, and Andrew; Philip and Thomas; Bartholomew and Matthew; James
the son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot; and Judas the son of James.
14 These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women and
Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers.*

As they were waiting in Jerusalem, it was with intensity that God would give them the power to perform the work that He had given them to do.

Peter and John had been apprehended and brought before the council for a second time. Firstly they had healed a man at the Beautiful Gate of the Temple. This had caused somewhat of an uproar in the Temple. They had been arrested and released. Now they had been arrested again.

Acts 4:23 And being let go, they went to their own companions and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said to them.

24 So when they heard that, they raised their voice to God with one accord and said: "Lord, You are God, who made heaven and earth and the sea, and all that is in them,

25 "who by the mouth of Your servant David have said: 'Why did the nations rage, And the people plot vain things?

26 The kings of the earth took their stand, And the rulers were gathered together Against the LORD and against His Christ.'

27 "For truly against Your holy Servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, were gathered together

28 "to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose determined before to be done.

29 "Now, Lord, look on their threats, and grant to Your servants that with all boldness they may speak Your word,

30 "by stretching out Your hand to heal, and that signs and wonders may be done through the name of Your holy Servant Jesus."

31 And when they had prayed (deomai), the place where they were assembled together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word of God with boldness.

They *deomai-ed*. They were concerned about doing the work of the Eternal. Interestingly, they saw the death of Christ in its proper context here. There has been much debate in the past few months about the film, *The Passion of the Christ*. What does the Bible say? Read it!

27 "For truly against Your holy Servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, were gathered together

Who did he leave out? Methinks there is no exception! Herod, Pontius Pilate, the Gentiles and the people of Israel are ALL lumped in together! But notice what it says next. This is the really fascinating part:

28 "to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose determined before to be done.

All of these people, Herod, Pilate, the chief priests, the soldiers, the people, are bouncing around, thinking they have got all the power in the world. They all think they've got all the power in the world.

But who does power really rest with? They are only enabled to do what they do because God has willed it, and His Son, Jesus Christ, submitted to the Father's plan. The others were puppets, whether they liked it or not.

You may find it interesting to read the account of Jesus before Pilate in John chapters 18 and 19. Ask yourself, who really is on trial? Is it Jesus, or is it Pilate? I think you will come to the conclusion that John intends you to understand it is Pilate who is on trial. It is the systems of this world that are being judged by the death of Jesus Christ. Yet people don't see that.

But the apostles saw it. They understood the purpose of Christ's death within God's plan and they realised what part they had as a result of that. They *deomai-ed*. They prayed with intensity. They besought the Eternal that He would open the doors so that they could preach the word with boldness.

Paul spoke the same way a little later. He was speaking with a certain sense of intensity to the people who had power over him at that point.

Acts 21:39 But Paul said, "I am a Jew from Tarsus, in Cilicia, a citizen of no mean city; and I implore (*deomai*) you, permit me to speak to the people."

Acts 26:3 "especially because you are expert in all customs and questions which have to do with the Jews. Therefore I beg (*deomai*) you to hear me patiently.

Another area in which this aspect is important for us as a community, and that is concern for others. In Luke, Jesus Christ was giving the final instructions to His disciples before He was arrested:

Luke 22:31 And the Lord said, "Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for you, that he may sift you as wheat.

32 "But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren."

What was Jesus prayer? It was *deomai*! Jesus Christ prayed with great intensity for the safety, for the spiritual well-being of Peter.

If the Son of God would do it for one of His disciples, should we not do it for one another as well? Is that not to be part of our responsibility? Is that not to be part of my responsibility for you, as part of the community? I think it is, very much so!

Paul spoke this way very frequently in terms of the Church. Luke and Paul were close co-workers. Luke worked very much with Paul, and wrote his gospel for Paul's work.

Romans 1:8 First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world.

9 For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of His Son, that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers,

10 making request if, by some means, now at last I may find a way in the will of God to come to you.

The English words "making request" gloss over the intensity of what Paul is saying, because his request was *deomai*! His prayer was one of intensity. He wanted to come and see these people, so that they could be established and strengthened in the truth.

11 For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift, so that you may be established -

Paul spoke to the Thessalonians in the same way.

1 Thessalonians 3:10 night and day praying exceedingly that we may see your face and perfect what is lacking in your faith?

Paul prayed with great intensity for the Corinthians that they could be established and they could be built:

2 Corinthians 5:20 Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God.

In Ephesians, Paul uses the same expression again, summing it up. It's a very appropriate Scripture in terms of what we have discussed today.

Ephesians 6:10 Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might.
11 Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.

12 For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.

13 Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil

day, and having done all, to stand.

14 Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness,

15 and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace;

16 above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one.

17 And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God;

The next verse is a continuation of the armour of God. The armour doesn't end with the sword of the Spirit. It carries on ...

18 praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints -

19 and for me, that utterance may be given to me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel,

20 for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.

He uses the word "supplication" twice in verse 18. The word "supplication" is translated from *deomai*! It is praying with intensity! It is praying with intensity for what ends? That we are watchful, with all perseverance. We are watchful of ourselves so that we can be aware of the way in which Satan seeks to get at us.

If we find ourselves repeatedly stumbling with problems, maybe we need to set aside some time for praying with great intensity about overcoming those problems, rather than adopting a ho-hum, "I'll get over it one of these days," approach.

Maybe we should ask God to REALLY help us see our need, or our lack, so that we can overcome. These things don't just disappear as though we put some vanishing cream on them. It requires some effort, some intensity, on our part, to identify with the things of God, and understand how problems can be put behind us.

Paul immediately starts talking to the people about praying with intensity - *deomai* - in terms of their personal spiritual health. He talks about supplication for all the saints, those who have difficulties and problems. We ask you to pray for such people from time to time. Many of you have known one another for many, many years. You know the difficulties that individuals within the congregation face. We can pray for one another. We can implore God. We can beseech God to help the individual. That is part of our duty.

Proclaiming the Gospel

The third aspect that Paul mentioned was the proclaiming of the gospel: that God would open a door, and open Paul's mouth, so that he would be able to speak boldly, to make known the mystery of the gospel.

In preparing this, I remembered the occasion in the United Kingdom, when Mr Abler and his crew were wanting a special microphone in order to do some interviews. As they were standing in the lobby of the hotel, a television technician walked through, with the exact same microphone they needed! Coincidence?

They asked him if they could borrow it, and they were able to do so.

Sometimes we can get very blasé about these things. We can make a joke of them - but I wonder: was that door opened because someone somewhere was praying intensely about doors being opened? Maybe that's what we need to ask ourselves. Maybe when we hear of the "coincidences" and these wonderful things happening, we ought to ask ourselves, "Was I praying that God would open doors like that for Mr Hulme and the crew? Was I praying with intensity that the weather would suit the filming? Am I praying that God would intervene in all of these aspects, and take care of them?"

When I arrived back from New York without the video projector, this sent shivers up Mr Abler's spine.

He will soon be travelling with all his television equipment and cameras - and, due to present airport

regulations, most of the cases can't be locked! Brethren, we need some angels to sit on luggage as it goes through airports, onto planes and off at the other end! The fact that it arrives back safely could be the result of our prayers - the way in which we see God intervening, and taking care of these things. The success that we have is dependent upon that - upon us being intensely being involved in it.

We have talked about intensity this afternoon. You can't be intense all the time. I'm not suggesting that you are. I'm not advocating that you be intense in prayer for half an hour three times a day. But there does have to be a sense of intensity, and a sense of urgency in our prayers if we are going to fulfil what Jesus Christ has set as the standard for us. The community of God is a community of people who are intensely concerned about the calling that God has given them, about being part of God's plan, and fulfilling their responsibilities within God's plan.

I stop at times and break out in a cold sweat when I see what God is offering to us in His Kingdom! We see how incompetent we are, how little strength we have. We read God's Word, and we realise just how much God is wanting to invest in us as people, as members of His family.

It's worthwhile getting intense about, and realising we have to be PREPARED for that. We have got to be totally on side for that. Our minds have got to be shaped to the mind of God, so that when He gives us those responsibilities we can fulfil them in the way He wants us to.

Do we have to have intensity about the work? You bet we do - each and every one of us!

We also have to have a sense of intensity about one another, about the calling that each and every one of us has, and if so, if we can have that right sense of intensity, we have a community at work - doing the will of our Father!

*... Peter Nathan
12 Apr 04*