

XI

DANGEROUS PRAYERS

Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth laborers into his harvest (Matt. 9:38).

This certainly seemed like an innocent and harmless request. Anyone can pray!

The problem with praying, however, is that sometimes God calls upon us to answer our own prayers . . . or sometimes He brings upon us such pain and distress that we are almost literally thrust out of our lethargy into the work of His harvest.

In the Scripture before us it is important to remember that Jesus sent out the very disciples into the harvest whom He had asked to pray about the harvest.

A closer examination of the Scripture provides an interesting insight into the way that God sometimes chooses to work.

W. E. Vine in his "Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words" lists 12 different Greek words which are all translated

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as “send” in the New Testament Scriptures. Each of these words has its own particular emphasis so that the meaning of our Lord might be understood with a certain measure of precision.

The word before us is “ekballo.” It is a compound of two different Greek words. “Ballo” means to “throw” and “ek” means “out.” It literally means to “throw out.”

Fifty-two times it is translated as “cast out” in the King James Version of the Bible.

Thayer in his Greek English Lexicon defines the word, “with the included notion of more or less violence.”

This is the word used to describe the cleansing of the temple when Jesus “cast out” the moneychangers (Matt. 21:12; Mark 11:15; John 2:15).

This is the word used to describe the way that Paul and Barnabas were driven out of Antioch in Pisidia (Acts 13:40).

This is the word used to describe the way that Sarah wanted Abraham to “cast out” Hagar and her son (Gal. 4:30).

This is the word used to describe Diotrephes who prated against the Apostles with malicious words. He would not receive the brethren, and “cast out” those who did (III John 10).

This is the word used to describe the way that Jesus was “driven” into the wilderness to be tempted of the Devil (Mark 1:12).

There may be instances when the word reflects less violent actions than others, but it is indeed a special word which seems to have some very strong connotations. The word is used in James 2:25 to describe the way that Rahab sent out the spies another way. Rahab did not literally “drive out” or “cast out” those spies. Yet, the circumstances surrounding that incident were very powerful indeed.

As you will recall, the king of Jericho was searching for the spies of Joshua and undoubtedly would have tortured them to obtain information, and in all probability would have then had them put to death if he could have only found them.

Rahab, in the meantime, had hidden them under stalks of flax upon her roof. Having instructed the soldiers to search in

the wrong direction, she "sent out" the spies another way. No one can read the story without feeling some of the urgency and emotion which must have been experienced at the time.

There is a certain danger associated with praying that the Lord "send" for laborers into his harvest. He may send us! He may create such discomfort for us in our present circumstances that we would be almost literally "cast out" into the work which He has for us to do.

An unknown author has captured the meaning of this Scripture in this beautiful piece of poetry.

IT'S DANGEROUS TO PRAY

I prayed, Oh Lord, bless all the world,
And help me do my part.
And straightway he commanded me,
"Bind up a broken heart."
I prayed, Oh bless each hungry child,
May they be amply fed.
Then God said, "Go find a starving soul and
Share with him your bread."
Oh, stir the hearts of men, I prayed
And make them good and true.
God answered quickly, "There is one way,
I stir men's hearts through you."
Dear friend, unless you really mean
Exactly what you say,
Until you mean to work for God,
It's dangerous to pray.

RANDY CARLSON

The first time I remember seeing Randy Carlson, he was walking across the campus of a Christian college. The person next to me said, "There's that kid who is dying of cancer."

Randy was indeed a cancer patient. He had gone through the sad cycle of surgery, radiation, and chemotherapy, but nothing seemed to be working. At one point he was given only two months to live.

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Since Randy was a radiant Christian, I looked him up one day and asked him to go to the hospital with me to call on a young mother who was dying of cancer. I still remember the pointed question which he asked on the way, "Do you think it is right for a person like me to have a date?"

It was not just concern for the possibility that somehow his cancer might be contagious that he asked this question, but more specifically, should he be seeking relationships when he had such little time to live? Would it be fair to someone he might come to love? Would it be fair to himself?

As Randy continued to cling to life his health somehow improved. Ultimately, he became my associate and we worked together in the same church. He even lived for a time with our family and we became the closest of friends. His deliverance from cancer is certainly "providential" and possibly even "miraculous." In either case, to God be the glory!

On two different occasions I have been asked to write letters of recommendation for Randy. Each time the questionnaire asked for Randy's strong points I listed maturity. A young man who faces death in his late teens somehow grows up a little faster than do others.

This interesting fact brings us abruptly to the subject of prayer. As a young high school student, Randy was told by his sister that if he really wanted to grow in Christ he would have to pray for trials. Randy did really want to grow in Christ . . . so he prayed for trials.

It was only years later, after his amazing recovery from cancer, that he put two and two together and associated his prayers with his illness.

God does not cause illness. Illness comes from the Devil. But the Devil cannot do his evil work without God's permission. It was only after a consultation with God that the Devil was able to take away Job's wealth, or his health. Randy believes that the same was true with him. God did not cause him to be

sick, but he allowed it. Randy now thinks that these trials came in answer to his prayers.

Be careful how you pray!

HOLLIS WHITROCK

Some time ago it was my privilege to meet Hollis Whitrock. At the time he was preaching in Colorado.

I was interested to discover that this eloquent and capable preacher of the Gospel had no formal theological training. The process by which God made a preacher out of Brother Whitrock gives us profound insights into the subject of prayer.

Hollis was working as a fireman and was doing contracting on the side. He felt a burden to be more active in Christian work, but lacked the courage to give up the job security and benefits of working for the fire department.

On more than one occasion he drove his pickup to the chief's office, fully intending to hand in his resignation. Each time, however, he lacked the faith and courage to go through with it.

Finally, in desperation, he prayed for God to get him out of that job. That, my friends, was a dangerous thing to do. In a very short time Hollis became ill . . . so ill in fact, that at one point he was given less than 30 days to live.

Not only was Hollis Whitrock not able to continue working for the fire department, he was not able to work at all. His wife found work to support the family and he tried to take care of the cooking and housework. His health was so bad, however, that he could not even go from room to room without crawling on the floor.

Finally, he gathered his family together and moved to Colorado. He was moving there to die.

As he planned a heritage for his children, he became more and more active in the church. He didn't want to leave his children in a youth group that was weak and unspiritual so he began ministering to them in his home.

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Unexpectedly, his health began to improve. In about two years he was placed on staff by the church as a full-time youth worker and he continues in Christian work to this time.

Skeptics may deny any association between his prayers and his illness. Hollis Whitrock, however, feels differently.

I must emphasize that a life of Christian service is not filled with drudgery and regret. It is, in fact, life abundant. It is joy unspeakable and full of glory. It is exciting beyond words to work in the harvest fields for Jesus.

Therefore, it is not in any way dangerous spiritually for one to pray. We who are evil know how to give good gifts unto our children. They can ask for anything they want, but we who love them will only give them that which is ultimately appropriate for their own good.

From a carnal point of view, however, it is still sometimes dangerous to pray. God may choose to thrust us out into the harvest so that we can help to answer our own prayers.

DESTINED TO GLORIFY GOD

In John 9 is the story of a blind man whom Jesus healed. Jesus said that his destiny was to make manifest the works of God. It is interesting that no one else seemed to see him in this regard.

The disciples saw him theologically and wanted to know who sinned to place him in such a predicament.

The neighbors saw him socially as merely a beggar pleading for help.

The Pharisees saw him legally as involved in an infraction of the Sabbath Law.

His parents saw him emotionally . . . and even fearfully. Their statements regarding their son were framed in such a way that they would not be put out of the synagogue for the Scriptures teach that they "feared the Jews."

Jesus saw him differently! He saw him as a man whom God was going to use. The pain and problems of his life would be

beautifully orchestrated by God to bring glory to His wonderful name, The Devil would be helpless to change the course of destiny, for God is capable of making even the errors and sins of mankind work out ultimately for good.

The greatest achievement of the Devil is seen at Calvary . . . and this, God has transformed into the best news the world has ever heard . . . or ever will hear.

Let me challenge you with the idea that you too have been born with a destiny to bring glory to God. Before you were born He knew you while you were yet in your mother's womb. He traced your steps throughout each precious moment up to the very present time. As you read these words, He is discerning the thought and intents of your heart.

He wants to guide you! Out of His infinite storehouse He longs to share bits of information and wisdom with you which will enrich your life and magnify your ministry.

GUIDED WITH HIS EYE

In Psalms 32:8 the Scriptures teach, "I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go: I will guide thee with mine eye."

The next verse presents a dramatic contrast,

Be not as the horse, or as the mule, which have no understanding; whose mouth must be held in with bit and bridle, lest they come near unto thee . . . (Ps. 32:9).

God wants to guide us with His eye . . . He does not want us to be like a horse or a mule.

God wants us to be sensitive to His leading in our lives . . . He does not want to beat us into submission or bring about unnecessary pain by jerking us around with bit and bridle.

The obedient child knows what to do at bedtime . . . with a glance of the eyes a loving father can send the obedient child to bed.

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The child without an obedient heart will make the experience an unpleasant one for everyone concerned.

Be not as the horse and the mule which have no understanding. Remember also that we do not pray without assistance,

. . . for we know not what we should pray for as we ought; but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered (Rom. 8:26).

Let us enter in boldly, therefore, into the holiest of all by the blood of Jesus!

MY PRAYER

I knelt to pray when day was done,
And prayed, "O Lord bless everyone
Lift from each saddened heart the pain;
And let the sick be well again."
And then I woke another day,
And carelessly went on my way.

The whole day long I did not try
To wipe a tear from any eye
I did not try to share the load
Of any one along the road;
I did not even go to see
The sick man just next door to me.

Yet, once again when day was done,
I prayed, "O Lord, bless every one."
But as I prayed, into my ear,
There came a voice that whispered clear;
"Pause friend, before you pray,
Whom have you tried to help today?"

God's sweetest blessings always go;
To hands that serve him here below;
And then I hid my face and cried,
"Forgive me, God, for I have lied;
If you will let me live but another day,
I will try to live the way I pray."

(Anonymous)

*The testimonies of Randy Carlson and Hollis Whitrock are available on video tape from Good News Productions Int. in Joplin, Missouri.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS FOR CHAPTER XI

1. What does it mean in Romans 8:26 that we do not know how to pray as we ought?
2. How does the Holy Spirit intercede in our behalf?
3. Why do Christians sometimes behave like the "horse and the mule"?
4. How is it possible for God to guide us with His eye?
5. Does God ever do for us the things which we can do for ourselves?
6. Was Paul's "thorn in the flesh" good or bad (II Cor. 12)?
7. Was the experience of Jesus at Calvary good or bad?
8. How is it possible for all things to work together for good to them that love God and are the called according to his purpose (Rom. 8:28)?
9. Would you ever knowingly give anything to your children which would hurt them?
10. Will God ever give things to His children that would harm us?

