

The Prayer Ministry of the Church

Scripture Reading:

Matt. 18:18-20 18 Truly I say to you, Whatever you bind on the earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on the earth shall have been loosed in heaven. 19 Again, truly I say to you that if two of you are in harmony on earth concerning any matter for which they ask, it will be done for them from My Father who is in the heavens. 20 For where there are two or three gathered into My name, there am I in their midst.

I. **The Earth Controls Heaven**

- A. The special thing in Matt. 18:18 is that there must be a move on earth before there is a move in heaven. It is not heaven that binds first but the earth that binds first. It is not heaven that looses first but the earth that looses first. After the earth binds, heaven binds; after the earth looses, heaven looses. The move in heaven is controlled by the move on earth.
- B. When Moses was on the mountain, the Israelites won every time he raised his hands, and the Amalekites won every time he lowered his hands. This is God's principle of work and the key to His move. God cannot do what He wants to do unless man wants it-Exo. 17:9-11.
- C. God must be inquired of first before He will accomplish something for the Israelites. This is a clear principle. Even though God decides on a matter, He will not do it immediately. He would increase the house of Israel only after they inquired of Him. He wants the earth to control heaven-Ezek. 36:37.
- D. We can command God to do what He wants to do. This is our position. After we know God's will, we can say to Him, "God, we want You to do this. We are determined that You should do this. God, You must do this." We can utter such strong and powerful prayers before God. We have to ask God to open our eyes to see the kind of work He is doing in this age. In this age all His work is based on this position-Isa. 45:11.
- E. Heaven may want to accomplish something, but heaven will not do it alone; heaven waits for the earth to do it first, and then heaven does it. Although the earth stands in the second place, at the same time, it also stands in the first place. The earth must move before heaven will move. God wants the earth to move heaven.

II. **Harmony of Will**

- A. According to Genesis 2, God gave man a free will when He created him. God has a will, and man has a will. Whenever man's will is not one with God's will, God is limited.
- B. After God created a man with a free will, His power was limited by this man. He could no longer act according to what He wanted. He had to ask whether man wanted the same thing and whether he was willing to do the same thing.
- C. God is willing to be limited in time because He wants to gain a harmonious will in the second eternity. He wants man's free will to be harmonious with His will. This is a glory to God.
- D. God's intention is that man's free will would choose to obey Him. This is a glory to God! In eternity future the free will of man will be joined to God's eternal will. That will be the time for God's eternal will to be fulfilled and for man's free will to become harmonious with God's eternal will.
- E. However, in time, God is limited by man. God has no freedom at all! God's move is controlled by man in time.
- F. The church is standing on the earth today for God's will. If the church comes up to the standard of God's will, He will not be limited. But if it does not come up to the standard of His will, God will be limited. God is doing what He wants to do through the church. Today the church is taking the position that man will take in eternity.
- G. God is in heaven. Yet all His works on earth can be accomplished only when there is a will on earth that agrees with and decides to do the works. He will not put aside man's will on earth. He will not usurp man's will on earth and act independently. Everything related to Him can be accomplished only when there is a will on earth that cooperates with Him. When the earth works, God works. When the earth decides, God acts. God must have man's will in harmony with His will. This harmony in will is a great glory to God!

III. **Three Great Principles**

- A. The heavenly move is accomplished on earth only when the earth wants the same thing as heaven. Today this is called the ministry of the church.
- B. The ministry of the church is to bring the will in heaven to earth. How does the church bring the will in heaven to earth? It is by prayer on earth. Prayer is not as small and insignificant as some may think. It is not something that is dispensable. Prayer is a work. Prayer is the church saying to God, "God, we want Your will." Prayer is the church knowing God's heart and opening its mouth to ask for what is in God's heart. If the church does not do this, it does not have much use on earth.

- C. If a prayer is uttered according to God's will, it is the most powerful thing. For the church to pray means that it finds out God's will and speaks out this will. Prayer is not just asking God for something. For the church to pray means that it stands on God's side to declare that man wants what God wants. If the church declares this, the declaration will be effectual.
- D. Speaking out God's will.
1. Whatever the church binds on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever the church looses on earth will be loosed in heaven. This is a very important principle: today God works through the church. God cannot do anything at will; He has to do everything through the church. Without going through the church, God cannot do anything.
 2. The amount of power that the church has expresses the amount of power that God has because His power is expressed through the church.
 3. Today the capacity of the church determines the degree to which God's power is expressed. Today God is expressed in the church; the capacity of the church determines the degree of the expression of God and also the amount of knowledge one can have about God.
 4. The church is like a water tap. If the tap is small, the amount of water flowing through the tap will not be great, even if there is as much water as the Yangtze River.
 5. Heaven will not take the initiative to work; it follows the earth's work. God will not take the initiative to work; He follows the church's work. Brothers and sisters, since this is the case, how great is the responsibility of the church!
 6. When the church prays, it is like turning on the tap; the more the tap is turned, the less the pressure becomes. If the church does not pray, it is like a tap being turned off with pressure building up. When God wants to accomplish something, He puts a burden in a brother, sister, or the whole church. If the church prays and fulfills its duty, it will feel relieved. The more the church prays, the more relieved it will feel.
 7. If you feel heavy and pressed within, you have not fulfilled your ministry before God; God's pressure is upon you. Try to pray for half an hour or an hour; the pressure will be released, and you will feel relieved.
 8. The prayer ministry of the church is God telling the church what He wants to do and the church praying on earth what God wants to do. This prayer is not asking God to accomplish what we want Him to do, but asking God to accomplish what He Himself wants to do.
- E. The harmony in the Holy Spirit

1. Verse 19 says that whatever one asks on earth will be fulfilled by the Father in heaven. The emphasis of the Lord Jesus here is not on asking in harmony, but on being in harmony concerning any matter and then asking concerning such matters. According to the original language, “any matter” belongs to both “in harmony” and “that they ask.” The Lord’s intention is not to tell men to pray for a certain matter in harmony, but to be in harmony concerning any matter. If we are in harmony concerning any matter, then our Father in heaven will accomplish whatever we ask concerning a particular matter. This is the oneness of the Body, the oneness in the Holy Spirit.
2. This kind of prayer requires the constitution of the Holy Spirit in the praying ones. God has to take you to the point where you deny what you want and want only what God wants, and another brother has to be brought by God to the point where he denies what he wants and wants only what God wants. When both you and the brother are brought to this point and are as harmonious as music, whatever you ask will be done for you from the heavenly Father.
3. If the whole church gathers together and is in harmony concerning a certain matter, that matter must be what heaven intends to accomplish. We have to trust the church.
4. If the church is to have this kind of ministerial prayer on earth, every brother and sister must learn before the Lord to deny the fleshly life.
5. We should pay attention to personal prayers and prayers for our own spiritual edification. This is particularly true for young brothers and sisters. If they do not have these kinds of prayers, they cannot go on properly. However, we must also see that prayers are not just for individuals and for spiritual edification. Prayer is for ministry and work. This prayer is the ministry of the church on earth; it is the work of the church. It is the responsibility that the church bears before God. The prayer of the church is the outlet of heaven. The prayer of the church means that when God wants to do something, the church prays about that matter first so that it can be fulfilled and God’s goal can be accomplished.
6. The highest and greatest work of the church is to be the outlet of God’s will. The church becomes the outlet of God’s will through prayer. This prayer is not a fragmentary prayer but a prayer that is in the nature of a ministry, a prayer that is in the nature of a work. God gives man vision and opens man’s eyes to see His will. When this happens, man takes his place to pray.
7. All the prayers in the Gospel of John are individual prayers. When John 15:16 records, “Whatever you ask the Father in My name, He may give you,” the number of people is not a condition. But in Matthew 18 the number is a condition;

there must be at least two persons. One person cannot accomplish this. One person cannot be God's outlet; there must be two. The principle of two is the principle of the church, the principle of the Body of Christ. Although there are only two in this kind of prayer, the "harmony" is indispensable. The two must be in harmony, and they must stand on the ground of the Body.

8. What God does today is measured by the amount of prayer that the church offers. God's power cannot exceed the prayer of the church. The power of God today can at most be as great as the prayer of the church.
 9. If we see the church's responsibility of prayer, we will see that our prayers are not big enough; we are limiting God and frustrating His work. The church has forsaken its duty! What a sad situation this is!
 10. The ministry of the church is prayer—not small prayers, but prayers that pioneer the way for God. God is accomplishing His work. But the church first prays and prepares the way before God finds the way. The church must have big prayers, serious prayers, and strong prayers.
 11. The capacity in heaven is controlled by the capacity on earth. We should not be afraid that the capacity on earth is too large, because the capacity in heaven is always larger. The capacity on earth can never match the capacity in heaven. Heaven always wants to bind more than the earth binds, and heaven always wants to loose more than the earth looses.
- F. Being gathered together.
1. We are gathered together. We do not choose to meet together; we are gathered together. There is a difference between meeting together and being gathered together. Being gathered together is being gathered by the Lord.
 2. Since the Lord is leading and enlightening them, and since the Lord is speaking and giving revelation, whatever is bound on the earth is bound in heaven and whatever is loosed on the earth is loosed in heaven. This is because the Lord is doing the binding and the loosing together with the church.
 3. We have to learn to deny ourselves before the Lord. Every time He gathers us together in a meeting, we have to learn to seek His glory. Our hearts have to be turned toward His name and desire that His name be exalted above every name and that every idol be cast down. If we do this, He will lead us.

Further Readings:

Chapter 1, the Prayer Ministry of the Church, Watchman Nee