



THE POWER OF CORPORATE PRAYERS

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“Now about that time Herod the king stretched out his hand to harass some from the church. Then he killed James the brother of John with the sword. And because he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to seize Peter also. Now it was during the Days of Unleavened Bread. So when he had apprehended him, he put him in prison, and delivered him to four squads of soldiers to keep him, intending to bring him before the people after Passover. Peter was therefore kept in prison, but the church offered constant prayer to God for him. And when Herod was about to bring him out, that night Peter was sleeping, bound with two chains between two soldiers; and the guards before the door were keeping the prison. Now behold, an angel of the Lord stood by him, and a light shone in the prison; and he struck Peter on the side and raised him up, saying, “Arise quickly!” And his chains fell off his hands. Then the angel said to him, “Gird yourself and tie on your sandals”; and so he did. And he said to him, “Put on your garment and follow me.” So he went out and followed him, and did not know that what was done by the angel was real, but thought he was

seeing a vision. When they were past the first and the second guard posts, they came to the iron gate that leads to the city, which opened to them of its own accord; and they went out and went down one street, and immediately the angel departed from him. And when Peter had come to himself, he said, "Now I know for certain that the Lord has sent His angel, and has delivered me from the hand of Herod and from all the expectation of the Jewish people." So, when he had considered this, he came to the house of Mary, the mother of John whose surname was Mark, where many were gathered together praying. And as Peter knocked at the door of the gate, a girl named Rhoda came to answer. When she recognized Peter's voice, because of her gladness she did not open the gate, but ran in and announced that Peter stood before the gate. But they said to her, "You are beside yourself!" Yet she kept insisting that it was so. So they said, "It is his angel." Now Peter continued knocking; and when they opened the door and saw him, they were astonished. But motioning to them with his hand to keep silent, he declared to them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison. And he said, "Go, tell these things to James and to the brethren." And he departed and went to another place. Then, as soon as it was day, there was no small stir among the soldiers about what had become of Peter. But when Herod had been very angry with the people of Tyre and Sidon; but they came to him with one accord, and having made Blastus the king's chamberlain their friend, they asked for peace, because their country was supplied with food by the king's country. So on a set day Herod, arrayed in royal apparel, sat on his throne and gave an oration to them. And the people kept shouting, "The voice of a god and not of a man!" Then immediately an angel of the Lord struck him, because he did not give worms and died. But the word of God grew and multiplied." – Acts 12: 1- 24.

The story in the above passage is that of a time when Peter entered into trouble. The enemy just decided to stretch his hands to vex certain members of that early church. The trend has not changed. Often we groan under heavy burdens and cry because of great pains at times when the enemy seems to be all out in vicious attacks against members of the church. It is not strange. The Bible says, "***Many are the afflictions of the righteous, But the LORD delivers him out of them all***" (Ps.34: 19). Again, are we warned in the book of 1Peter 5: 8 to be sober and vigilant; because our adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Sometimes these attacks take such

deadly turn that the lives of certain saints are lost. The devil's tripartite ministry is to kill, steal and destroy! (John10: 10). Such was the situation of the early church at this time. The devil already had succeeded through king Herod in beheading James and he saw that it pleased the Jews and there was resistance the church, he proceeded to arrest Peter.

Like Peter, the enemy has arrested many Christians today in one area of life or the other and this is why no longer enjoy the liberty and joy that is freely given by God. Peter was not only arrested, he was imprisoned. When person is imprisoned, he is restricted, he is completely immobilised and incapacitated. Such was Peter's case and such is the experiences of many Christians now that have been imprisoned and limited in life. The devil was not done with Peter yet. While in prison, Peter was guarded four squads or quaternions of soldiers. A squad or quaternion has four soldiers in it. That means sixteen soldiers were guarding Peter alone! It is something to be guarded by one, two, four, six or even ten soldiers but is something else for just one to be guarded by a whole of sixteen soldiers! Really, Peter was in a big trouble. Or can you imagine a whole of sixteen demons or principalities from the pit of hell being assigned to you alone over a particular problem? It would take a miracle to break through such problems. This is why the Lord Jesus Christ Himself said that certain problems in life are not easily solved except we couple our prayers with fasting (Matt. 17: 19- 21).

Apart from being guarded, Peter was again chained. He was chained hands and legs. To chain a man's hands is to disallow him from working and there are Christians in this type of bondage already. Although they have graduated from the schools or their apprenticeship programme for sometime now they are still jobless. Despite their training, certificates and skills, it is like nobody wants to employ them. The enemy had already chained their hands. There are others whose legs are chained. The enemy does not really stop them from working, he only ensures that they are just restricted and are marking time on one spot. Lack of progress is their hallmark. However, God can break all chains whether in the hands or legs.

A death sentence was passed on Peter. Darkness and gloom hovered over his life. In his helplessness, Peter despaired and slept! May be a similar death sentence has been pronounced on your life. The doctor or one fetish Baba somewhere had told you, you would die. Look up to heaven. There is God in heaven, Who can break that death sentence on your life and set you completely free. No decree is established without Him (Lam.3: 37). Why don't you say to yourself therefore that, *"I will not die, but live to see the goodness of the Lord and declare the same in the land of the living"* (Ps.118: 17).

While Peter was undergoing this harrowing experience of passing through the terrible valley of the shadow of death, the church gathered together to pray for him. Thank God for churches that pray. That church did not gather together to buy and sell neither did they gather together to gossip about Peter's predicament or organise a pity party for him. They gathered together to pray! We should emulate them and pray too. But if we must pray like they did and got heaven to intervene in Peter's affairs, we must learn some lessons of scripture from this early church.

First of all, we must learn the discipline of coming together from time to time irrespective of however tight or busy our schedules and daily routines may be. The Lord has already promised to be present with us each time we gather together in twos or more and it is only as we gather like this that He binds for us in heaven whatever we bind on earth and loose those things we loose on earth (Matt.18: 20). The members of the early church constantly gathered together both in the temple courts and from house to house (Acts 2: 1) Paul; the Apostle also admonished us not to form the bad habit (as is the manner of some) of forsaking the assembly or gathering together of the brethren (Heb.10: 25).

Secondly, we should learn to pray like they did. The members of the early church did not gather together for any other carnal reasons or purposes but to pray (Acts 2: 41-42). The Bible says, ***"If My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land (Chron.7: 14).*** He says, ***"Cry out and shout, O inhabitant of Zion, for great is the Holy One of Israel in your midst!" (Isa.12: 6).*** The Lord said we ought to pray and not faint (Lk.18: 1). Apostle Paul also in 1Thessalonians 5: 17 said, ***"Pray without ceasing"*** and brother James in his own epistle said we should pray for one another the effectual fervent prayer of the righteous avail much (Jam.5: 16).

For our prayers to truly avail, we must learn to be united in our hearts lifting up our voice as of one man. No other passage of describes the beauty of church unity better than Psalm 133. It says, ***"Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity! It is like the precious oil upon the head, running down on the beard, the beard of Aaron, running down on the edge of his garments. It is like the dew of Hermon, descending upon the mountains of Zion; for there the LORD commanded the blessing – Life forevermore."*** As you can you see, the Lord only commands His blessing

in places and congregations where this sort of unity is found. Let us therefore be united in prayer raising a common voice to God.

The other condition for effectual, fervent and availing prayer is love. Love is the major means of identifying a true child of God for Jesus said; ***“By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13: 35)***. He further said, ***“This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you” and “These things I command you, that you love one another” (John 15: 12 & 17)***. In the words of John the beloved: ***“He who does not love does not know God, for God is love” (1 John 4: 8)***.

Finally, we must forgive one another. As long as we are alive and human we would offend people and others would offend us. In the words of Brother James, ***“In many things, we offend” (Jam. 3: 2)***. It is therefore imperative that we learn to forgive others their wrongs for, if we do not forgive others their wrongs, God also will not forgive us our sins (Matt. 6: 14 & 15). It is easy for God to deliver a man who has problem with the devil but who will deliver that man who has a problem with God? We should forgive therefore if we do not want to have problem with God! The standard of the Bible is, ***“Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed” (Jam. 5: 16)***. Even where there are conflicts among brethren, there are laid down biblical principles for conflict resolution we can apply. Such is what we have in Matthew 18: 15-20. It is only as we follow these scriptural guidelines that we can be free from all bitterness and malice and experience the genuine breakthroughs and great victories that God has promised us in the place of prayer. Let us pray!