

Notes for the Ones Called-Out to Meet

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Pray and Watch

by Dan Trygg

“Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving.”

Colossians 4:2

“Through every prayer and petition praying at every occasion in the Spirit, and unto this, be watching with all perseverance and petition for all the saints...”

Ephesians 6:18

Last week, we did a study on the word for “watch”. The Greek word, *gregoreō*, means to “watch, pay attention, keep awake, and be alert”. The message was based upon Matthew 26:41, where Jesus told His disciples to “**Watch and pray, in order that you may not enter into temptation.**”

We are to be alert, circumspect, paying attention to our surroundings, so that we may not be caught unawares, and the enemy catch us by surprise.

We are also to stay attentive to our responsibilities to the Lord. It is easy to forget that we are stewards, who have been given resources and abilities from God that He intends for us to use in service to Him, not for our own ends. If we lose sight of that, we can begin to misuse what has been entrusted to us, and He will call us to account when we do not expect. We are to “stay alert” and keep on task, so that when He does call us to account, we will have done well.

Today’s study comes at this in another way. Paul uses the same two basic words, “watch” and “pray”, but he guides our attention in an entirely different direction. In Matthew 26:41, we were to “**watch and pray**”. Here in Colossians 4:2 and Ephesians 6:18 we are to “**pray and watch**”.

In most of the occurrences of “watch”, we are to be on the lookout for what the enemy is doing, or the potential dangers or pitfalls that we might succumb to. Or, we are to “watch ourselves” to make sure we don’t become lax and irresponsible. In Colossians 4:2, we are to be watching for what God is doing.

Last time, I mentioned that when Jesus told His disciples to “watch and pray”, we tend to understand and relate to the “pray” part of what He said, but we often forget the importance of the command to “watch”. The same could be said here in Colossians 4:2. We typically understand that we are to pray, but we often don’t see how important it is that we “watch” to see what God does in response to our prayers.

Let’s break down the verse. Colossians 4:2 says, “Continue-unremittingly in the prayer”, ...that is, “busy-yourselves with”, “be-engaging-in” or “persevere-in”, or “devote-yourselves-to” the prayer. The word for “prayer” is directional, ...it is “praying toward” an objective. It is not just conversational; it is intercessory or focused toward an end. It is describing a situation where you are pressing into God for a specific need or concern. Clearly, the emphasis is to “pray and keep praying”. It is about “praying when you don’t feel like praying”, and “persisting in prayer” when it would be easy to simply give up. It is describing focus and importunity in prayer, ...that is, staying with it until you get an answer from God. And, then, ...we are to “watch and keep watching”.

There is a parallel verse in Ephesians 6:18. Notice the same two components: We are to devote ourselves to prayer, ...“Through every prayer and petition, praying at every occasion in the Spirit...”, but notice the focus... “and unto this, be watching in all perseverance and entreaty concerning all the saints...”. We are also to be watching or alert in our prayers. The word for “watching” here is a different Greek word, but it means basically the same thing, “be alert, attentive, and watchful”. Again, the force of the words for prayer here are very directive, intercessory and focused. We are to be pressing into God in prayer, ...and then, we are to be watchful for what He does in response to our prayers. The word for “watch” here also emphasizes ongoing, continuous action.

We see these two principles evident in Jesus’ life. He often spent time in prayer. It was a daily pattern in His life to get up early, and find a quiet place to pray (Mk. 1:35; Lk. 4:42). He would also often slip away from the crowds by Himself to pray (Matt. 14:23; Lk. 9:28). When it was time to choose His twelve apostles, He spent an entire night in prayer and intercession (Lk. 6:12,13). His prayers were often with intensity, and even with loud crying and tears (Heb. 5:7; Matt. 26:36-44; Lk. 22:40-44). He taught His disciples about the importance of importunity in prayer (Lk. 11:1-13; 18:1-8). Importunity means perseverance, even almost shameless persistence, pressing in after God until an answer is given. The introduction to the parable of the unrighteous judge and the persistent widow is that He wanted “to show that at all times they ought to pray and not to lose heart...”. Jesus also revealed that He was always watching to see what the Father was doing, and that it was His practice to join with what He saw the Father initiating (Jn. 5:18). Jesus was both praying and watching.

We can observe a great illustration of this in the life of Nehemiah. In the first chapter, he heard of the conditions of Jerusalem from his brother, and others who had visited the city and had returned. He heard of the

distress of the people who had returned, because they were unprotected. They had no walls or fortifications, and were exposed to the dangers and ill-will of some of those who hated them. **He heard this report in the month of Chislew, which is December, and he began to pray and intercede for the city of Jerusalem with intensity, day by day. He was praying and watching for an opportunity to address this need somehow. His heart was heavy, and he poured out his soul daily for the next four months,** from December until a day in Nisan (which was March-April), when King Artaxerxes noticed his sadness, and spoke to him about it. “Why is your face sad, though you are not sick? This is nothing but sadness of heart” (2:1,2). **Nehemiah was afraid,** because it was forbidden to be sad in the king’s presence, but **he also saw this as the occasion that he had been praying for.** *He had been praying and watching.* As a result, he shot up a quick prayer to God, and shared the burden of his heart with the king. The king responded with favor, and gave Nehemiah the permission, time and resources to go to Jerusalem and resolve this problem. **Nehemiah had been praying, and he saw the hand of God in his circumstances, and he aligned his life and actions alongside what God was doing.** As a result, God used him to accomplish His purposes for His people, and to reveal Himself through Nehemiah’s life. Not only did his obedience resolve the conditions in Jerusalem, but it encouraged the people of God who had been under distress, and it also served as a witness to the king of Persia himself, when Nehemiah was given an opportunity to report back on what he had accomplished.

In another example, in Exodus 17 the Amalekites attacked the camp of Israel. Joshua chose men to go out and fight against them. Meanwhile, **Moses went up on an overlooking hill, along with Aaron and Hur, to intercede for God to support Israel in battle. They went to pray and watch.** As Moses lifted up his hands to pray, they *noticed* that the Israelites would prevail, but when Moses became weary and lowered his hands, the Amalekites began to prevail. **They were praying and watching, and noticed what was taking place.** Moses’ was having difficulty holding up his hands in prayer, so they had him sit on a stone, and Aaron and Hur supported his hands, Aaron on one side and Hur on the other. In this way, Moses was able to keep his hands and heart lifted up in prayer until the sun set, and Israel won the battle. **They prayed, they watched, and they responded to what they saw God doing.**

In Acts 10, Peter had been on a ministry excursion along the coastal cities by the Mediterranean Sea. He was in Joppa, at the house of Simon, a tanner. He had experienced some wonderful, Spirit-empowered ministry, healing a man who had been bed-ridden for eight years in Lydda, and then being called to Joppa, where God used him to raise a woman from the dead. As a result, the story was shared throughout that region, and many had come to the Lord. **He had been in Joppa for some time, and this particular day, had gone up on the rooftop to pray,** while lunch was being prepared. **While there, he had a vision from God,** where a sheet came down from heaven, filled with unclean animals, and a voice told him, “Arise, Peter, kill and eat.” Peter said, “No, Lord! For I have never eaten anything unclean.” The voice said, “What God has cleansed, no longer call unclean,” Just then, messengers appeared at the gate, looking for him. **The Holy Spirit spoke to him, saying, “There are men at the gate looking for you. Go with them, without any hesitation, for I have sent them.”** The next day, he went with them to Caesarea, about 40 miles to the north. When he arrived, there was a centurion, Cornelius, and a gathering of a number of other guests he had invited, called together to hear a message from him! As Peter was processing all of this, he said, “I most certainly understand now that God is not one to show partiality” and began talking to them about Jesus. **As he spoke, suddenly the Spirit fell upon all of the people gathered there,** and they began to speak in tongues. Peter, and the Jews who were with him were amazed, but concluded that God had done this, and ordered them to be baptized. **This whole chain of events was initiated by God, even before Peter had been on that rooftop, days before, but Peter was praying, saw a vision, heard instructions from the Holy Spirit, adjusted his life to follow God’s leading, and watched as God did more than he certainly had imagined or expected.** As he and the other Jews *watched* what God did, they concluded that He had granted repentance and salvation even to the gentiles!

In one final example, the apostle Paul and his team were in Troas (Acts 16:6-10). They had traveled through the inland regions where they had planted churches before, checking on the disciples, but **when they had tried to go into new areas, their way was blocked.** They tried to go into Asia and Bithynia, but the Spirit did not open the way. **As they were praying and seeking God for guidance, Paul received a vision** in the night of a man from Macedonia who said, “Come over to Macedonia and help us!” **In the morning, when Paul shared the vision, they concluded that this was God indicating that they should preach the gospel there.** As a result, they booked passage to Macedonia, and an entirely new field of ministry opened up before them on another continent!

Going back to Colossians 4:2 and Ephesians 6:18, **we are told to pray and watch, asking that “God may open up a door for the word, so that we may speak forth” about Jesus,** and that **we are to pray that God might give “a word in the opening of my mouth to make known with confidence the mystery of the gospel”.** We are to be praying and watching for God to give us opportunities and the ability to speak for Him. Then we need to watch and act in cooperation with what He brings into our lives. **Pray, expect, watch and act in partnership with God where you see Him at work.**