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Pataskala Church of the Nazarene
May 4, 2008

Christ Can Be Exalted In You and His Church!

Philippians 1:18-21

Intro:

Herbert Jackson, A new missionary was assigned a car that would not start without a push or what we would call a jump-start.

After pondering his problem, he devised a plan. He went to the school near his home, got permission to use some students to push his car.

As he made his rounds, he would either park on a hill or leave the engine running. He used this ingenious procedure for two years.

This missionary developed some health issues and was forced to leave that mission field and a new missionary came to the station he was assigned to.

When the missionary explained his arrangement for getting the car started, the new man began looking under the hood.

Before the explanation was complete, the new missionary interrupted and called him by name, "Why, Dr. Jackson, I believe the only trouble here is the loose battery cable."

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He gave the cable a twist, stepped into the car, turned the key, and to Jackson's astonishment, the engine roared to life.

For two years needless trouble had become routine.

The power was there all the time. Only a loose connection kept the missionary by the name of Jackson from putting that power to work.

He just wasn't connected to the power.

Paul said to the Ephesians 3:20-21, "***Now to Him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to His power that is at work within us, 21 to Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever.***"

Again in Ephesians 1:19-20 it reads these wonderful and powerful words, "***How tremendous is the power available to us who believe in God.***"

I don't know how to get this across to us today with enough impact to powerfully influence what God wants to give to each of us this morning through His Holy Spirit.

Paul says, "***How tremendous is the power available to us.***"

I want to quote David Ravenhill here – I want you to listen – I really believe this will help us sit the stage for the Holy Spirit to work in conviction upon each of us this morning.

He says, “I am convinced that much of believer burnout at all levels stems from a lack of personal and spiritual intimacy with God. We have become so professional. We have focused on the externals at the cost of true inner life. A major problem in the Church today is that we emphasize charisma more than character. Character can be forged in our lives today on the anvil of experience and with the hammer of obedience to God and His Word.”

When we make firm our connection with God, His life and His power flows through us.

In our last three sermons we’ve been talking about JOY – PEACE in every part of our lives throughout every circumstance.

Every one of us without exception want a sense of fulfillment in our life. Would you agree with me?

The older I get and would you folks who are at that age – would help me with this – the older we get the more we want to know a sense of accomplishment and meaning.

When we are young, we just assume that our lives will accomplish great things.

We dream great dreams and fully expect that some day we will reach them, any way that is our desire.

And we do accomplish many things, some we set out to accomplish and some we don’t.

One of the problems that we all face in our search for meaning is the problem of just how routine life can become.

Church can become just routine! Our spiritual lives can become just routine! Our relationship with God can become routine!

Illus.

This week I had a gentleman who stopped by the church to visit me.

He attended a local church in Johnstown. I won’t mention the name of the church or the name of the man.

He was in his 80’s and he was so concerned about his church.

In short – he told a story that all too familiar.

The church he attends spasmodically still has the old basement with the jack poles holding up the building.

He wondered how this church has accomplished what we have done.

And so I shared with him the story of a group of people who had prayed and had a vision to purchase close to 40 acres and move from Vine Street out here.

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He has grandchildren who play soccer and basketball here and he comes to watch them. He's really concerned that these grandchildren don't go to church.

He is impressed with our property and buildings. And when I told him we wanted to build another building, you could tell he was taken back by what I said.

And He said, "How do you get the people to see the need?"

And I shared with him the Scripture that says, **"Where there is no vision, the people perish."**

I found this man to be a very influential and wealthy man and he has given monetary gifts and pledges to a number of worthy places in Pataskala and Johnstown.

The problem he expressed to me with his church he attends is people settled into a routine of holding on to tradition and just being satisfied and comfortable.

He described his church as a social club.

And he asked me – how do you get religion to the kids when they come to play ball?

And I explained to him that coaches, volunteers, and those who give testimonies and devotions all strive to do one thing and that is to get the Gospel of Jesus Christ to children, parents and grandparents.

At 80 plus years old – his eyes lit up and then he said, **"Okay, now I'm understanding 'VISION' – that's it!"**

"You're taking religion to them through sports."

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Sometimes we have the tendency to think that we are not accomplishing anything significant.

Sometimes we forget to look at all the ministries that is happening around here. We just sort of – take them for granted when other churches would just love to have what we are doing.

Sometimes we even devalue the ordinary things we do. But we shouldn't. God has helped us to get where we are. Praise His Name!

Everything we do has significance. Even the mundane things of life.

There is an old story that is told from medieval days that recounts the story of a traveler who came upon stonemasons working on a building project.

He asked one man, "What are you doing?" And he said, "I'm mixing mortar."

The asked the second man what he was doing and he said, "I'm helping put up this great stone wall."

Then the third man was asked what he was doing, he proudly declared, "Why, I'm building a great cathedral to the glory of God."

Friends, we'll enjoy our lives more if we put the process of living in proper perspective.

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Paul tells us in I Cor. 10:31, ***“So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.”***

Do you see what Paul is saying?

We are not called to accomplish great things for the glory of God; we are called to live daily for the glory of God.

We don't glorify God in the routine things that we do.

But instead, in everything we do, we should seek to glorify God.

That is the primary reason we are here on Earth.

Let me take you back to this thought in Eph 2:21 ***to Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever.”***

Wouldn't you like to be a part of expressing ***“Glory in the church . . .”***

God wants to give His glory to us.

Let me quote David Ravenhill one more time:

“We are in danger as a church of forgetting how seriously God takes the matter of character in His people. God is very jealous for His name, His glory, and His honor.”

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Isaiah 42:8 records, ***“I am the Lord, that is MY name; I will not give My glory to another nor MY praise to graven images.”***

Leviticus 20:26 reads, “Thus you are to be holy to Me, for I the Lord am holy; and I have set you apart from the peoples to be Mine.”

The only way we can qualify for the anointing and the Glory of God to fall on us is when we meet the condition of God.

When we recognize our spiritual state of apathy and decide to do something about it.

You see the problem I see in the church today is we've gotten away from seeking the anointing of God.

No wonder the church of our grandparents talked testified about the Glory of God coming down on them – they would talk about the “Anointing of God falling on them.”

We seek to have a Sunday morning service that will entertain us rather than praying for the Glory of God to fall on us and I'm not against preparing – that's not what I'm talking about.

But we're not here to entertain or be entertained.

We're here to Glorify God!

We're here to ask God to change us to be like His Son!

You see folks we left the prayer closet and can't find our way back.

As I was preparing and praying over this sermon God began to show me and lead me to this from Jim Cymbala in his book called **The Church God Blesses**.

Jim says, "It is very possible to be a Christian who is born again in the scriptural sense, but at the same time be ill and weak due to spiritual malnutrition.

This explains so much about the joyless, semidepressed and unfruitful living among many believers today.

I believe this is also a root cause behind the staggering divorce statistics among church going Christians and the growing carnality across the land.

How can we fight "the good fight" and stand strong against the enemy Satan when our spiritual vital signs are precariously low?

How can a church make a positive impact on its community when it can't even get its own members to pray together?

One of the keys to the church and the people God blesses is that they understand and follow the directions God Himself gave for maintaining spiritual vitality and strength.

How can we be other than what we eat? How can God's grace work powerfully in us when we cut ourselves off from the very food He has

prepared for our souls? Only one third of all churchgoing, professing Christians read their Bibles even once a week! Is it any wonder why they are spiritually sluggish and easy prey for Satan's attack?

The practice of private prayer and collective prayer together as a church has dropped to an all-time low in too many places.

No wonder congregations are barely surviving and have no bold and powerful gospel witness to unbelievers.

We can be spiritually "alive" yet be in an almost comatose state.

A church blessed by God is a joyful, loud, singing place, for how could it be anything else?

What a shame that many Christians get more excited and vocal about football games or an ocean cruise than about Jesus Christ, the Lord of heaven and earth!"

No wonder Paul was Joyful in his experience with Jesus.

Paul saw it clearly. He saw that His purpose in His life was to lift up Jesus Christ.

Do you see that when you come to worship here on Sunday mornings?

Whatever the circumstance –

Whatever difficult thing you're going through –

If you feel you're in chains –

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If you feel people have forsaken you –

You see – Paul expected God to glorify Himself one way or the other.

And folks, we need to look at what Paul was doing in order to discover what we need to do for Christ to be exalted in us; for Christ to be exalted in this church of believers.

What Paul did is what I need to do:

First – Paul trusted in the power of Prayer. V 19

...for I know that through your prayers and the help given by the Spirit of Jesus Christ, what has happened to me will turn out for my deliverance.

We see from this verse that the Apostle Paul was confident that God would make a way for him in the midst of his difficulties.

He had a belief system that knew God would provide what he needed.

He was optimistic.

He was hopeful.

He was confident.

Paul knew that he could expect God to move because people were praying.

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And Paul knew what the power of prayer could do.

Illus.

This past week on Thursday morning I presented a short sermon on Elijah to our Major, community leaders, pastors and laity on how Elijah prayed earnestly.

James 5:17-18

“Elijah was a man just like us. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and half years. 18 Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops.”

Thank God that old prophet of God **Elijah was just like us. Don't let that get from you.**

Verse 17 says, **“Elijah was a man just like us.”**

I want you to picture him with me and see him sitting under a tree, complaining to God and expressing his unbelief.

Would you agree with me this morning that we have done the very same thing so often?

Just complaining and not having belief that God is was able to do what He said He would do.

Just wallowing in self-pity like I said last week.

The thing we have to learn in our spiritual walk with God is that when we are not **“In Touch”** with God like we should be – **we’ll complain and not have faith.**

As a matter fact when we are not **“IN TOUCH”** with God the way we ought to be – **“The Old Man”** will come to the surface and begin his work to stir up any trouble he can. And all of us know how many times he has succeeded when God is left out of the picture.

You see – when Elijah was **“IN TOUCH”** with God and by that I mean Elijah had a **RIGHT RELATIONSHIP** with God **then things happened.**

The stuff just happened! Like fire from heaven and rain from heaven. A man just like us and yet he caused Amazing Miracles to happen.

“Elijah was a man just like us,” YET “He prayed earnestly.”

The literal meaning of this in the Greek language is magnificent: instead of saying, **“Earnestly”** it says, **“He prayed in prayer.”**

In other words, folks, Elijah **“Kept on praying”**

He wouldn’t let God alone until God heard his prayer and answered him.

So how do we apply this to us?

HOW CAN WE PRAY BEST? JAMES GIVES US TWO ANSWERS:

The answer is simple:

First, we must have a RIGHT RELATIONSHIP with God by confessing our sins – NOT JUST TO GOD BUT TO EACH OTHER.

Sometimes it’s a lot easier to confess our sins to God than it is to confess our sins to other people.

To have the right relationship between God and ourselves, we must also work at having a right relationship between ourselves and others.

Illustration:

I remember in Bible college days we would have chapel and oh – the Spirit of God would fall. There were times when the Spirit of God convicted other students about their gossip and their wrong spirits and there was freedom to get it right. I recall one service and I can still see it in my mind when this thing called **“Restitution”** was the thing that happened in chapel. Students and faculty members going to each other and apologizing for the things they said.

Sometimes we have a pretty hard time saying – **“I’m sorry, I was wrong.”**

But if we don’t address this first – then our praying will be useless.

You see the Word of God teaches us that if we ***“regard iniquity in our hearts, God will not hear our prayers.”***

Illustration:

Let me give you an illustration:

Most of us are married here this morning.

All of us know what it is like to have a spat with our spouse.

And sometimes these spats can be pretty serious.

It causes a good relationship to become soured.

Have you ever tried to talk and communicate with your spouse when you have this barrier between you?

HA _ HA It's tough!

Oh, I really like making up with my wife.

What a relief! If I've said anything to offend her – I have learned somewhat to get it taken care of quickly.

Application:

How do you think it is when we have a broken relationship with God?

Prayers can't get through until we get this broken relationship corrected.

It's no wonder why we have so many anemic Christians in the church because the broken relationship hasn't been fixed.

Now I realize I'm going all over the place this

morning – but this is what God has given me to give to you.

Let me get back to Elijah's story:

If you're familiar with the Old Testament and where Elijah was – He was on top of Mount Carmel.

I want you to use your imagination with me this morning and let's all climb to the top of Mount Carmel together and just see this great story of faith unfold and use it for this nation of ours and our community when it comes to praying and seeing things happen.

Elijah is on top of Mt. Carmel – and most of you would remember Elijah prayed a 63 word prayer and fire came down from heaven to defeat the prophets of Baal.

Remember what had happened – Elijah had issued a challenge to the Baal priests.

Remember the challenge –

We'll build an altar – put sacrifice on it.

You pray to your gods and whoever sends down fire to consume the sacrifice will be winner.

The priests of Baal prayed and howled and cut themselves with sharp instruments and nothing happened.

Then Elijah's turn came.

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He had the people dig a trench around the stone altar.

HE had them bring barrels of water and pour on the sacrifice until the water filled the trenches around the altar.

And then he prayed! All he prayed people, was a 63 word prayer and the fire came down from heaven and licked up the water, and consumed the sacrifice and the stones went with it.

That my friend, was the power of an Almighty God in the being of a man ***“Just like us.”***

In our passage from the Book of James we find the earth needed rain and so Elijah who had commanded fire to come from heaven is the same man – it says – *“he was a man just like us”* and he’s going to pray for rain.

He’s the same man who could bring rain using the same methods.

We are told, ***“Elijah ... bent down to the ground and put his face between his knees.” I Kgs 18:42***

This sounds like the old fashioned way of kneeling to pray.

Folks, I’m not trying to be legalistic in this sermon this morning, but if Elijah knelt to pray – why can’t we kneel again to pray?

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You see – he put himself in a position so that he couldn’t see or hear what was happening around him.

You see – I believe what the church today needs is to pray together. We don’t pray together anymore.

We’ve lost the Prayer meeting. I’m not talking about a night of testimonies that complains about sore toes and sick aunts.

I’m talking about praying prayers together that causes God to work for us.

We’ve substituted every thing else in our churches for praying.

Elijah then said to his servant, *“Go and look toward the sea.” I Kings 18:43*

When the servant came back he said, ***“There’s nothing there.”***

Just a simple answer: ***“NOTHING THERE”***

Now imagine with me this morning what we would do under the same circumstances.

-“WELL – BLESS GOD – I DIDN’T EXPECT IT TO HAPPEN ANYWAY!”

- AND WE’D STOP PRAYING!

But did Elijah stop praying? **NO!** In fact, six times he got down on his knees and prayed the same thing.

Over and over again for six times he told his servant, ***“Go back and look again.”***

Each time the servant came back and said, ***“Nothing there. I don’t see anything.”***

But watch what happens – ***“On the seventh time the servant reported, ‘I see a cloud as small as a man’s hand that is rising from the sea.’”***

Oh my – this is so rich! Don’t miss this!

What a fitting description, for a man’s hand had been raised in prayer before God before the rains came.

And the rains came so fast and furiously that Elijah warned King Ahab to ***“Go down before the rain gets you.”***

Now – it’s obvious that King Ahab was there for the prayer time.

If the king is there – you can bet there are a lot of people there.

APPLICATION:

I see a need in our nation today. I see a need in our community. I see a desperate need in our church today.

You see not only does our nation need prayer in the worst way and an answer from God to save our nation.

All of us know that our county – Licking county has been in the news in a negative way. Crime – drugs – sexual assaults – murder is on the rise.

Only 20% of our community attends church today. Shouldn’t that concern all of us?

Our community – our church needs a great Holy Ghost moving revival and the only thing that can rescue us is to Pray for the Movement and Power that only God alone can do for us.

This story of Elijah is a story of faith and sight – a faith cutting itself off from everything except God, with a sight that looks and yet sees nothing.

It’s look bleak for our nation and our communities – and to be honest – sometimes it looks bleak for our church –

I’m sensitive to the lack of tithes and offerings of our church –

I’m sensitive to the attendance figure when I see 50 to 75 people every week deciding not to attend their home church.

I’m sensitive to the need of God moving among us where the Glory and the Excitement comes back to us from God.

I'm sensitive to the lack of people getting saved at these altars.

I'm sensitive to the lack of people getting baptized and going forward to be disciplined.

Does that concern any of you besides me and my wife? I know some of you are concerned too!

Folks, I want to see God work His miracles in our midst, but it's not going to happen until we get serious and drop on our knees and begin to pray in prayer.

Yet in spite of utter hopeless reports brought back to Elijah received by sight – Elijah through faith keeps on praying.

Application:

Do you know how to pray in that way – how to prevail in prayer?

How is your prayer life this morning?

Do you know a prayer life that can testify to the move of God in your life?

You see prayer must be elevated from an occasional activity to a way of life in our lives and His church here.

Some time ago I preached on prayer and how important it was that people pray for me and I

had a beautiful couple come to me and said, “Pastor, we’re going to start praying for you during the Sunday morning services. One of us will be in the prayer room while you are preaching.”

Do we understand we have to depend on God for HIS Power to see our prayers answered? To see the Stuff happen in our church.

Illus.

John Wimber, the founder of the Vineyard church was truly and genuinely saved back in the early 70's.

John started going to church and he was reading in the Book of Acts about all the miracles that was happening after the Day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit fell on the 120 disciples in the Upper Room.

John was one of those new Christians who didn't know any better so after a while he asked the leaders of the church where he was attending, **“When are we going to do all the stuff?”**

And they asked, “What stuff?”

And John Wimber said, **“You know, all the stuff they did in the book of Acts.”**

And I wish I had time to tell you all about John Wimber starting the Vineyard church and all **“The Stuff”** that happened because of praying and faith believing **“The Stuff” to happen.**

Church - Prayer works!

I believe many are struggling in the church because they have not committed themselves to Spiritual maturity in the area of Prayer, Bible devotion, faithfulness to Church and obedience to God.

I want to close this sermon with one last quote from Jim Cymbala from Brooklyn Tabernacle.

“Many pastors know the frustration of trying to help people who claim to have been Christians for years yet have all the maturity of a bunch of toddlers who get upset when someone takes away their crayons. Believers who don’t continually drink the pure milk of the Word of God remain babyish and unstable because they are neglecting the spiritual food that will help them grow. How cruel it would be to deprive a newborn baby of milk and cause him or her to suffer horribly as a result. But think of all of God new born babies who are stunted in their spiritual growth because they deprive themselves of the pure milk their spirit craves. To grow into spiritual maturity, we need to be conscious every day of the needs of our inner man and the scriptural reminder that “it is good for our hearts to be strengthened by grace.” Heb 13:9 God’s grace comes in different forms and through various channels, but the truth remains the same. When we neglect such things as Bible reading, prayer, worship, and fellowship with other believers, problems of one kind or another will ensue as surely as night follows

day. How can we ever be other than what we take in?

No one is more aware of this than Satan. The part of spiritual warfare that so few of us think about is the demonic strategy of cutting us off from our food supply.

If it any wonder, then, that the Lord urgently calls out of His people to carefully listen to this message? “Come,” He invites us, “Come to the waters.”

He pleads with each of us to let our heart reach out and take action so our soul can be satisfied.”

Some how we as a church have to stop talking about Prayer and put action to it and humbly get on knees and bow before God and plead with Him to change us – to help us.

Prayer works because God works.

James 5:16b says, ***“The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.”***

This verse precedes James giving us the example of Elijah.

Our prayers are desperately needed here because our prayers move the heart of God to us and for us.

Friends, God loves us
He desires to bless us.
So we must pray.

And we must begin to pray for others.
We have to pray for those who are lost and unsaved and unchurched.

If we're going to be serious about following Jesus, then prayer must be elevated from an occasional activity to a way of life.

I have tried to enlist people to pray for us. I desperately need people to pray for me.

I don't have any doubt that many of you are praying, but it says that there is power in 2 or 3 get together to pray.

Today as we have gathered to worship God - let's ask God to help us to show us How to - to keep praying and know the importance and the power of God in praying that will cause things to happen that we could never see done except by the hand of God.

Let's don't let go until we know the answer has come.

Paul stressed the Importance of Praying by the Church at Philippi. And because of Prayer – Glory came!

Glory in the church is synonymous with the presence of the Holy Spirit which produces Holy Excitement.

Dear friend I ask you this morning where are you in your relationship with Christ?

How long has it been since you've been truly in His Word?

How long has it been since you've spent quality time in prayer with the God of heaven?

Do you have a disciplined prayer life?

Are you sure you have been sanctified holy by His Holy Spirit?

Have you given Him all of you? Have you surrendered to Him every part of you?

Do you still have the excitement?

Was there a time when you were excited about your relationship with Him?

Or have you lost your Glory?

Let's bow our heads and pray!

Holy Spirit of God would you do only what you can do. Would you convict of as a people of our lack of prayer? Would you convict us of our unfaithfulness? Jesus, we need you to change us to become what you desire for us to be.