

Place: St John UMC, Prospect Ky

Date:08/27/23

Sermon 5: "The Battle in Prayer"

Scripture: Luke 11:14-20

Rev. Dr Alvarez

Purpose: To encourage believers to persevere in prayer and recognize the spiritual battle that takes place in the realm of prayer.

Introduction: Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Have you ever felt like your prayers are falling on deaf ears? Have you ever wondered why some prayers seem to be answered quickly while others go seemingly unanswered? Today, we will explore the battle that takes place in prayer and how we can overcome obstacles to see breakthrough.

Imagine going into battle armed with the strongest armor, the sharpest weapons, and an unwavering resolve. You face a formidable opponent, but you know that victory is within your grasp. In our passage today, we will explore the battle in prayer and discover the power that lies within our persistent prayers.

Sermon Illustration: The Cruise Boat and the Battleship

Imagine two mighty vessels sailing on the same ocean. On the horizon, we see a luxurious cruise boat, adorned with all the comforts and amenities one could desire. People aboard are enjoying the calm, gentle waves, basking in the sunlight, and indulging in various forms of entertainment.

But just a short distance away, there is a battleship, built with strength and purpose. It cuts through the turbulent waters, equipped with powerful weapons, stout armor, and a crew trained for combat. Its sailors are disciplined, vigilant, and ready to face enemy opposition.

In this illustration, the cruise boat represents the mindset of many Christians today. It reflects a mentality that seeks comfort, entertainment, and personal satisfaction. While there is nothing inherently wrong with enjoying the blessings God provides, we must recognize that as followers of Christ, we are not called to live a life of leisure alone.

On the other hand, the battleship represents the soldier mentality that Jesus calls us to embrace. **Ephesians 6:12** reminds us that "our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms." As soldiers of Christ, we are engaged in spiritual warfare, fighting the battles that have eternal significance.

Just as a battleship prepares for war, we, too, need to equip ourselves for spiritual battles. We must put on the full armor of God, as described in **Ephesians 6:13-18**, which includes the belt of

truth, the breastplate of righteousness, the shoes of the gospel of peace, the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God.

The battle ship's crew symbolizes the army of believers, united in their purpose and committed to fighting against the forces of darkness. Just as soldiers undergo rigorous training and discipline, we must cultivate spiritual disciplines such as prayer, fasting, Bible study, and fellowship. These practices keep us alert, focused, and equipped to face the challenges that come our way.

When storms arise and adversity strikes, the cruise boat may be overwhelmed, shaken, and in danger of sinking. But the battleship remains steady and perseveres through the rough waters. Likewise, as Christians, we are called to stand firm in our faith, unshaken by the trials we encounter, knowing that "greater is He who is in us than he who is in the world" (1 John 4:4).

Reading of the Text: Luke 11:14-16 (NIV)

"Jesus was driving out a demon that was mute. When the demon left, the man who had been mute spoke, and the crowd was **amazed**. But some of them said, 'By Beelzebul, the prince of demons, he is driving out demons.' Others tested him by demanding **a sign from heaven**."¹⁷ Jesus knew their thoughts and said to them: "Any kingdom divided against itself will be ruined, and a house divided against itself will fall.

¹⁸ If Satan is divided against himself, how can his kingdom stand? I say this because you claim that I drive out demons by Beelzebul. ¹⁹ Now if I drive out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your followers drive them out? So then, they will be your judges. ²⁰ But if I drive out demons by the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. **(Luke 11:17-20, NIV)**

Prayer is not just a casual conversation with God; it involves a spiritual warfare **where unseen forces seek to hinder our connection with the Father**. As we dive into this topic, let us remind ourselves of the words spoken by Jesus:

John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, emphasized the significance of fervent and persevering prayer. He encouraged believers to earnestly seek God's guidance and intervention, stating, "God does nothing but in answer to prayer." Wesley understood the importance of prayer in the spiritual battle we face as followers of Christ.

The Battle Behind Closed Doors in the Unseen:

1. Prayer Opens Doors: In verse 14, Jesus casts out a demon, and the people are amazed. It is a reminder to us that prayer has the power to break strongholds and bring freedom. Through prayer, we can experience deliverance, healing, and restoration.

Saint Augustine once said, "Pray as though everything depended on God. Work as though everything depended on you." These words echo the sentiments expressed by Jesus in Luke 11. While prayer is a battle, it also requires our active participation. It is through our persistent prayers that God's power is unleashed.

2. Spiritual Opposition: In verse 15, some accused Jesus of casting out demons by the power of Beelzebub, the prince of demons. This accusation indicates the spiritual warfare that often takes place in the unseen realm. As we engage in prayer, we should be aware that there may be spiritual opposition seeking to hinder our prayers and discourage us.

The Power Struggle in Prayer in this passage: Jesus highlights the power struggle that occurs within the realm of prayer. He encountered opposition from those who accused Him of using demonic forces to perform miracles. However, Jesus responds to them adequately, stating how absurd it would be for Satan to work against himself. From this, we learn that prayer invites spiritual warfare.

In the Old Testament, we witness numerous accounts of battles fought through prayer. Moses, Joshua, Elijah, and many others waged spiritual warfare through their prayers, leading their people to victory. In Exodus 17, the Israelites were victorious in battle as long as Moses' hands were lifted in prayer. Likewise, in 1 Kings 18, Elijah called upon the Lord and defeated the prophets of Baal.

3. The Kingdom of God: Jesus responds to the accusation by explaining the nature of the battle. He asserts that if He casts out demons by the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon them. Our prayers tap into the power of God's kingdom, bringing His authority and dominion into our situations.

N.T. Wright, a modern theologian, reminds us of the Lord's Prayer in Matthew 6:10, where Jesus instructs us to pray, "Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." This prayer serves as a battle cry against the forces of darkness, inviting the reign of God's kingdom into every area of our lives and our world.

The phrase "**the finger of God**" is mentioned in the Bible in the context of Moses and his encounter with God during the liberation of the Israelites from **Egyptian slavery**. In the book of Exodus, when the Israelites were wandering in the wilderness, Moses went up to Mount Sinai to receive God's commandments. During this encounter, **God wrote the Ten Commandments** on stone tablets using **his own finger (Exodus 31:18)**.

One application of this phrase can be seen in the significance of **divine authorship**. By writing the commandments with his finger, God emphasized the importance of these laws as being directly from Him. This underscores the authority and sacredness of the commandments, as well as the importance of obeying them in daily life.

Furthermore, the phrase "**the finger of God**" can remind believers of the ultimate source of authority in their lives. Just as the Ten Commandments were written by God's finger, believers are called to align their lives with his will and follow his guidance. It serves as a reminder to seek and submit to God's authority, knowing that his ways are righteous and just.

Finally, the use of the phrase "the finger of God" highlights the divine intervention and supernatural power of God. It emphasizes his sovereignty and ability to perform miracles beyond human understanding. In the case of Moses, the finger of God demonstrated his complete control over nature and his ability to bring about the liberation and salvation of his people.

The theological significance behind this phrase extends to recognizing God's direct involvement in the lives of individuals and communities. It implies that God is not an aloof or distant deity but actively engaged in human affairs. The finger of God signifies his divine presence, guidance, and intervention throughout history.

In summary, connecting the phrase "the finger of God" with Moses emphasizes the divine authorship of the Ten Commandments, highlights the importance of submitting to God's authority, and signifies God's intervention and involvement in human affairs. Recognizing the finger of God underscores the need for obedience, faith, and trust in his guidance and demonstrates his ultimate power and sovereignty.

4. Kingdom Divided: The significance of unity, Jesus uses the analogy of a divided house to illustrate the importance of unity. When families or communities are divided, they become weakened and vulnerable. In the context of prayer, unity among believers is essential for an effective spiritual battle. **UMC**

In this battle, Jesus emphasizes the need for unity within God's Kingdom. He highlights that any kingdom divided against itself cannot stand. Just as a divided kingdom will ultimately fail, so too will a divided house. **Saint John**. Are we United?

This truth transcends the New Testament and finds resonance in the Old Testament. In the book of Psalms, David repeatedly calls for unity among God's people, stating, "How good and pleasant it is when God's people live together in unity!" (**Psalms 133:1**, NIV). It is through our unity in prayer that the Kingdom of God advances, and the enemy's plans are thwarted.

Contextual Background:

In this passage, Jesus has been casting out demons and performing miraculous healings. However, instead of recognizing the power and authority of Jesus, some people accuse Him of being in league with the devil. They attribute His miracles to demonic forces rather than acknowledging His divinity. **It is important to note that Jesus does not engage in a debate or**

argument with his critics. Instead, he uses this situation as an opportunity to teach about the power of persistent prayer. **Warning:** Mathew 12 Blasphemy against the spirit will not be forgiven!

Explanation of the Text:

In this passage, we see Jesus driving out a demon that had rendered a man mute. As a result, the man regains his ability to speak, and the crowd is amazed. However, **instead of rejoicing** in this miracle, some of the people respond with skepticism and accuse Jesus of being in alliance with the devil. **They attribute His power to demonic forces rather than recognizing Him as the Son of God.**

Theological Significance:

This passage highlights the spiritual battle that takes place in the realm of prayer. The enemy seeks to undermine and discredit the work of God. Just as Jesus faced opposition and skepticism, believers are also likely to encounter resistance when they engage in fervent prayer. The battle is not just against external forces but also against doubt, unbelief, and discouragement.

Key Principle:

The battle in prayer is a powerful weapon for believers, allowing us to overcome opposition and witness miraculous transformation in our lives and the lives of others. In the face of skepticism, persistent prayer aligns us with God's will and brings about the supernatural.

Practical Application:

1. **Recognize the Battle:** Acknowledge that prayer is not a passive exercise but a means to engage in spiritual warfare. Put on the armor of God (Ephesians 6:10-18) and remain focused on the truth of God's word. Just as Jesus faced opposition and skepticism, we too encounter struggles and doubts in our faith. However, prayer is our greatest weapon in spiritual battles.
2. **Spiritual discernment:** We must cultivate spiritual discernment to distinguish between the voice of God and the lies of the enemy. Prayer should always be grounded in the truth of God's Word, and we should not be swayed by false accusations or distractions. Let us not be discouraged by the challenges we face but instead take up the armor of prayer. When faced with opposition or discouragement. We should not allow skepticism or doubt to hinder us from seeking God's intervention and breakthrough.
3. **Do not give up:** We must not give up on the power of prayer. Even if our prayers seem unanswered or delayed, we can trust that God hears and responds to the cries of His children. Our faith should not waver, but rather grow stronger in the face of adversity. .
4. **Find Strength in Unity:** The crowd in this passage is divided in their response to Jesus' miraculous act. In contrast, believers should come together in unity, strengthening one

another through intercessory prayer. As we battle together in prayer, the power of God is multiplied, and miracles can happen.

Conclusion:

Dear friends, prayer is not a mere religious obligation but a powerful weapon that enables us to overcome spiritual battles. Jesus shows us the significance of persistent prayer, the battle that takes place in the realm of prayer, and the importance of unity in our praying community. As we continue this sermon series, let us be encouraged to engage in persistent prayer, knowing that God's unstoppable kingdom is at work.

May our prayers be marked by endurance, faith, and the confidence God hears and answers us. Let us stand firm and watch as God brings about incredible breakthroughs in our lives and in the lives of those around us. Amen.

Closing Prayer:

Heavenly Father, we bow before You in reverence, recognizing the battle that exists within the realm of prayer. Strengthen us, Lord, as we engage in warfare on our knees, we thank you for the privilege of prayer and the power it holds.

Strengthen us and our faith as we battle together in prayer, united in faith and love. Grant us discernment and fill us with determination to overcome the obstacles we may face.

We thank you for the victory that is ours through Jesus Christ. In His name, we pray, Amen.

Benediction:

May the power of the Holy Spirit guide and protect you as you engage in the battle of prayer. May you find strength in your communion with God, knowing that He fights alongside you. Go now in peace and may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you always. Amen.

Footnotes:

1. Biblical references: Luke 11:14-16 (NIV)

2. Theological sources: "The Battle in Prayer" by Eugene H. Peterson and "Prayer: Experiencing Awe and Intimacy with God" by Timothy Keller.