

**Acts 2: 42 -45; “Continuing Steadfastly in Prayer”, Sermon # 14 in
the series – “Laying the Foundations, Delivered by Pastor
Paul Rendall on September 18th, 2011,
in the Morning Worship Service.**

I believe that there was an order which the Holy Spirit arranged when He inspired the men of old in their writing of the Scriptures which we hold in our hands today. In verse 42, for instance; it could have been that the activity of “prayers”, in the setting down of this verse by Luke, could have followed the Apostle’s teaching or the fellowship of the saints in this list of things which the early church in Jerusalem engaged in. Or it could have preceded all of them. But it was placed last on this list. It is not placed last because there is an order of importance given to us here. They are all important. It is placed last because the Lord wanted us to understand that all the activities of teaching, fellowship, and the breaking of bread need to be followed up with the prayers of God’s people lest it falsely be thought that their activity is what brings about the blessed results that God alone can bring and establish. And it was placed last because praying after the other activities mentioned, was something that the disciples really did in that day. They went away from the gathered church services with prayers in their minds and prayers upon their lips. They thanked the Lord for the fellowship which they had experienced with other saints. And they prayed that the special communion that they had held with Christ, in breaking bread together, would continue to feed their souls and make them stronger in the days following their taking it. This is not to say that prayer was not being made before the activities of worship. The church continued steadfastly in prayer, it says here. But I think that the weakness that believers are sometimes prone to in our day; is in thinking that they do not need to pray after they have heard the Word preached; or after they have had fellowship; or after they have taken the Lord’s Supper. But we should understand that the Lord God does many things after the Word has been preached in the lives of the saints and also in the lives of unbelievers after they have heard the word. He does many things in the hearts of the saints in relation to Himself and the advancement of Christ’s kingdom after they have fellowshiped together. He does many things also in their hearts after they have broken bread together. Indeed, we can say as we look at these verses, that God established many things after the activities of worship and fellowship, to promote and establish the kingdom of His dear Son. This is what we want to look at this morning together. Because if we truly believe this; we will continue steadfastly in prayers; looking expectantly for God to do mighty things for us, in relation to the building of the kingdom of God in this place, for His glory. So what we want to do this morning is to ask this question: What were the results of the saints continuing steadfastly in prayers in those days? I think that we can see from this text that there were 3 things which resulted from

their prayers. 1st – Godly fear came upon every soul. (Verse 43a) 2nd – Signs were done through the Apostles. (Verse 43b) And 3rd – The church sought to share everything together. As we look at what they did then, I would ask each of us to think of what we can do together; continuing steadfastly in prayer.

1st of all – When they prayed godly fear fell upon them all.(Verse 43a)

“Then fear came upon every soul.” They were praying together, and it was a learning experience for them all. It was not just that fear came upon a few people who happened to be more sensitive to the Spirit’s working. “Fear came upon every soul,” it says. In other words, this ability for the early church to continue steadfastly in prayer was a work of the Holy Spirit in their hearts, bringing the whole congregation to reverence God’s presence with them. They drew near to God and God drew near to them. This godly fear came upon every soul by the power of the Holy Spirit and it produced in every believer’s heart, an understanding that God was right there present with them. And then, realizing that the presence of the Lord was with them; this led them to further corporate prayer as a church, and then to continue steadfastly in prayer as the days went by. They were caught up with God’s working in their hearts and God’s working in their midst. Their attention was captured by God, and drawn to realize that God was right there with them, so that they were being taught by Him to continually pray. If this was so with them; then we should begin to take our prayers to God much more seriously. What is prayer? Prayer is “the offering up of our desires unto God for things agreeable to His will, in the name of Christ, with confession of our sins, and thankful acknowledgement of his mercies.” So says the Shorter Catechism, question 98. This is a good definition. Prayer, in these New Testament times, must be made in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ or it will not be heard by God at all; to answer it. Prayer must also only be made for things which are agreeable to His will, which is found in the Bible. God will not hear the desire of sinners to continue in their sin. Prayer is the offering up of our desires unto God; desires for salvation and to become a more godly person. What was the united desire of these people, in the days following Pentecost? It was that they would honor God in their worship, and that the truth of the Word of God being preached, would advance and prevail over the hearts of men; that many would be won to Christ and that they would become His sincere disciples; keeping the commandments of God, and Christ their Savior. This is to walk in the fear of God.

Now we need to make some distinctions here, regarding the different types of fear that affect religious men so that they pray. There is a kind of craven fear of God that leads men to pray. Let me give you an Old Testament example. Turn with me over to Jonah Chapter 1. Jonah was a prophet. But he was a disobedient prophet. For it says in verse 1 – “Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, ‘Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry out against it; for their wickedness has come up before Me.’” “But Jonah arose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord.” “He went down to Joppa, and found a ship going

to Tarshish; so he paid the fare, and went down into it, to go with them to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord.” “But the Lord sent out a great wind on the sea, and there was a mighty tempest on the sea, so that the ship was about to be broken up.” “Then the mariners were afraid; and every man cried out to his god, and threw the cargo that was in the ship into the sea, to lighten the load.” “But Jonah had gone down into the lowest parts of the ship, had lain down, and was fast asleep.” “So the captain came to him, and said to him, ‘What do you mean sleeper?’ “Arise call on your God; perhaps your God will consider us, so that we may not perish.” It is a terrible shame for one who truly knows God, to be found sleeping instead of praying, and to be reproved by the zeal for prayer which was shown by this sea captain who was a worshiper of false gods. Sometimes the zeal for prayer by those who believe in false gods outstrips the zeal for prayer on the part of people who really know God. This is the case of the Muslims today. They are called to prayer in the morning, and they are called to it again in the evening. And they, en masse get down on their faces and pray to their god. They are not praying to our God, the only true and living God, because the only way to access to Him is by faith in our Lord Jesus Christ and calling on His blessed name. But nevertheless, their fleshly zeal puts many a Christian to shame. They may be like these men were; on the ship that Jonah was on that day. They feared what God might do to them if they do not pray, but God is in no way hearing their prayers as He does hear the prayers of the Christian. The men on the ship feared God in what He was doing to them in the storm. But they needed to be taught the true fear of the Lord. Jonah did teach them the fear of the Lord, even though he was himself acting in direct disobedience to the command of God to him.

Look at verse 7 – ‘And they said to one another, ‘Come, let us cast lots, that we may know for whose cause this trouble has come upon us.’ “So they cast lots, and the lot fell on Jonah.” “Then they said to him, ‘Please, tell us!’ “For whose cause is this trouble upon us?” “What is your occupation?” “And where do you come from?” “What is your country?” “And of what people are you?” “So he said to them, ‘I am a Hebrew; and I fear the Lord, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land.’” Now here is a man who truly fears the Lord, and yet he is in direct disobedience to God as to his preaching to the Ninevites. And yet these heathen men are acting the part of men who truly fear the Lord, even though they do not; as yet, really fear Him. They now know that Jonah’s god made the sea and the dry land. They know that He is the Creator God. Now they interview Jonah to see if they can learn anything more about this God. “Then they said to him, ‘What shall we do to you that the sea may be calm for us?’ “For the sea was growing more tempestuous.” “and he said to them, ‘Pick me up and throw me into the sea; then the sea will become calm for you.’ “For I know that this great tempest is because of me.” (Now they are learning something about atonement for sins.) They needed to know that one man should die so that all of them would not perish. Jonah had brought this storm upon himself, and them, because of his

disobedience. The answer for them, to be delivered from the storm, was for the men to throw Jonah overboard into the sea and it would become quiet. This is what the men did not want to do. Verse 13 – “Nevertheless the men rowed hard to return to land, but they could not, for the sea continued to grow more tempestuous against them.” “Therefore they cried out to the Lord and said, ‘We pray, O Lord, please do not let us perish for this man’s life, and do not charge us with innocent blood; for You, O Lord, have done as it pleased You.’” “So they picked up Jonah and threw him into the sea, and sea ceased from its raging.” “Then the men feared the Lord exceedingly, and offered a sacrifice to the Lord and took vows.” This was the true fear of the Lord, whereas their initial fear of the storm was only a craven fear that led them to pray to their own heathen gods. Once they learned something about Jonah’s God, they then knew that praying to their own false gods was futile. They threw Jonah into the sea and the sea ceased its raging.

What these men learned is a type of the true New testament, New Covenant offering up of prayers. There has to be atonement made on our behalf by Christ Jesus our Lord, before our prayers for the removal of our sins and the wrath of God upon us, can take place. The Church was like a ship at sea, under the storm of God’s wrath against the disobedience of men. Jesus Christ knew that unless He went to the cross that the sea of God’s wrath against our sins would never be still. Jesus was never disobedient to the Father’s will, as Jonah was. So He voluntarily offered Himself up, to suffer our punishment at the cross, so that when we would see the sea become still for us, and that we would fear exceedingly and offer the sacrifice of praises; and that God the Father would receive the offering up our prayers in Jesus’ name relation to our “coming to the shore of heaven safely”. Because of His “being thrown overboard” at the cross, we would come to heaven eventually. And that in our journey there, we would know His peace and strength of grace working in our hearts to labor for His name’s sake to bring others into His glorious kingdom. It was God’s who brought all of these good things about for the men in the ship that day. And we know from our reading in this text in the Book of Acts, that it was the Holy Spirit who caused the holy “fear” to come upon every soul in the “ship” of the Church during that time period when they continued steadfastly in prayers for the furtherance of Christ’s kingdom. They offered up their prayers in the name of Jesus for God to answer them, and give them the desire of their hearts, that Christ’s kingdom would advance and grow in the hearts of more and more people.

2ndly – When they prayed signs were done through the Apostles. (Verse 43b)

The Holy Spirit alone can give the power to continue steadfastly in prayer. But when He does come to a church in this mighty way to help in our prayers, then many good spiritual things will take place. Perhaps there will even be miraculous things that will take place. In the case of the early church, it was that the Apostles were given the ability by God to perform signs. In our day, we do not look for

more Apostles or for any Christian today to do miraculous signs and wonders. Those were for the babyish state of the Church, given by the Holy Spirit through the Apostles to confirm the prophetic Word of God spoken by them to the people. Those signs accompanied the Apostles and their preaching in order to confirm that this was the very word of God which they were speaking. They were receiving direct revelation from God. But the signs of God's working that we look for today, is the evidence of God the Holy Spirit's working in relation to the preached Word of God by the pastors of the churches. The miraculous working that we pray for is for God to come open our eyes that we might behold wondrous things from His law. (Psalm 119: 18) We should often be praying for God the Holy Spirit to come and regenerate the hearts of those who do not know the Lord, who are listening to the Word preached. This would be greatest "sign" that God is among us, and that He is turning our hearts and minds in a great way, toward spiritual things. Holy Spirit anointed prayer is essential to see the greater works of the Spirit take place in our midst. Luke 11: 13 – "If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!" Listen to John Owen in his treatise on The Work of the Holy Spirit in Prayer (Chapter 4): "Prayer, I take to be a gift ability, or spiritual faculty of exercising faith, love, reverence, fear, delight, and other graces, in a way of vocal requests, supplications, and praises unto God: In every thing let your requests be made known unto God," Philippians 4:6. This gift and ability I affirm to be bestowed, and this work by virtue thereof to be wrought in us, by the Holy Ghost, in the accomplishment of the promise insisted on, so crying "Abba, Father," in them that do believe.

This is something that the Muslims and other false religions of the world, know nothing about. They know nothing of the power and presence of the Holy Spirit turning the mind to consider the power and glory of Christ, and what He is able to do in response to our prayers. Turn over to Romans Chapter 8, verse 14 and you will see this. "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God." "For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, 'Abba, Father.'" "The Spirit Himself bears witness to our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together." Now you can see here that our approach to God in prayer is not one of fear, but of child-like confidence that we have been accepted in the Beloved. We have "access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in the hope of the glory of God." (Romans 5: 2) We have received the Holy Spirit when we believed in the finished work of Christ on our behalf. (Ephesians 1: 13) The Holy Spirit within us so reveals His presence and power that we realize that we are God's children through faith in Jesus Christ. We know that Christ is in us by His Spirit; the hope of glory. 1 John 4: 13 says, "By this we know that we abide in Him, and He in us, because He has given us of His

Spirit.” And here in verse 15 of Romans 8, we find it said that it is the Spirit’s presence which enables us to cry, “Abba, Father.” He is the One who convinces us in our spirit that we are children, and heirs of all that Christ has done for us. He is the One who makes us willing to suffer for Christ. He is the One who enables us to pray.

Paul goes on to say in verses 18-23 that the whole creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God, and how we saints, having the first-fruits of the Spirit groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body.” And then we find this: “For we are saved in this hope, but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one still hope for what he sees?” “But if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for it with perseverance.” “Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses.” “For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.” That “likewise” is placed in the text at this point, in reference to what we hope for in prayer. We do not see all that we would like to see, in terms of our making progress in holiness; in terms of the good results of people being converted to Christ and added to His kingdom, and persevering in their faith, and bearing fruit for God; but we know that the Spirit helps our weaknesses. He will show us, and He will lead us to pray for those things which are according to the will of God and the Word of God, and the plans of His great heart in relation to ours. We long with groanings for many things in prayer, which only our Great God can do, if they are according to the will of God. And we know that He is able to do, as Paul says in Ephesians 3: 20, “exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us.” O what great things can be wrought in prayer; both corporate prayer in the church, and private prayer at home. Will you not begin to engage your heart in prayer? Even the women among us, who are not allowed to speak in the worship services of the church; will you not covenant to pray to God in your spirit along with those of us who lead in prayer, that God may do great things for us and for His own kingdom’s sake? God is able to see all the desires of your hearts just as much as if you were speaking out-loud in this assembly in prayer today. May none of us quench the Spirit in this good way.

Then finally – Because they were praying together, the church sought to share everything together.

Verses 44 and 45 say – “Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods and divided them among all, as any had need.” I will not spend much time on this, except to say in closing; that we need to see the connection between this church’s continuing steadfastly in prayer, and their having all things in common. This was not Communism at work. This was the Spirit of God at work in the hearts of these believers causing them to take a person interest in the financial and material well-being of other poorer believers in the church. This came about because; when in prayer; each wealthier

believer was laying his all that he had before the Lord and asking the Lord to show him how He could benefit Christ's kingdom with what he had. There were many who honestly did not want to live for themselves, but wanted to share what they had with the others in the church. Whoever had needs; those needs were met. Possessions were sold and other goods as well; and the Apostles and their assistants saw to it that the proceeds were divided among all. Whenever the Spirit of God is at work in a believer's heart and life, there will be a greater consideration, and an actual praying to ask the Lord what he would have them to do, to provide and minister to the needs of others. Will you not, even this morning, search your heart to see if you have been given, by the power of the Holy Spirit; a generous spirit? The work of the Lord will hereby prosper and Christ's kingdom will advance when you and I become more people of prayer.