**Uniquely Jesus: The Story Continues** September 23, 18

Acts 7:17, Proving God’s Faithfulness

In our court system, after the charges are read, the accused is asked by the judge, “How do you plead – ‘guilty’ or ‘not guilty?’”

The high priest in Acts 7 asked Stephen, **“Are these charges true?”**

Have you slandered Moses and God?

Did you attack a core pillar of Jewish identity?

Jesus had promised his disciples, **Luke 12:11-12:**

*When you are brought before synagogues, rulers and authorities, do not worry about how you will defend yourselves or what you will say, for the Holy Spirit will teach you at that time what you should say.*

What the Holy Spirit did with Stephen, is what he does with all of Jesus’ followers. **John 16:13-14:** *… he guides us into all truth*

Stephen told the story of Israel, focusing particularly on Abraham, Joseph and Moses – whom all Jews revered.

These three men were men of faith; they were friends with God.

Stephen carefully pointed out a pattern.

These three men who were friends with God experienced rejection at the hands of their own people.

But God in his kindness, used these individuals, to rescue the very ones who’d rejected them.

What we learn from the example of the Hebrew nation – is that the default of the human heart is to resist God and go its own way.

We also learn that the patience and kindness of God is immeasurably greater than we could ever imagine.

**The story of Moses**

v.17a. *As the time drew near for God to fulfill his promise to Abraham…*

Two important truths are referenced in this short phrase.

1. In history and in our personal lives, there are special moments that arrive when God intervenes – when he invites a person into relationship with him and to be a part of his story of rescue; when God acts to bring justice.
2. God does what he says he will do.

The Greeks had two words for time – chronos and kairos.

Chronos describes time that moves sequentially, chronologically.

Most of our daily schedule happens chronologically.

For Abraham’s family in Egypt, their days of slavery passed chronologically.

Kairos however, describes a special moment; as significant, God-opportunity.

The birth of Moses was a kairos moment; as was Moses’ confrontation with Pharaoh when he reached eighty years of age.

While we won’t unpack this emphasis, it is important that we understand that in v.17, the phrase, “as the time drew near,” does describe a kairos moment.

What was the promise Stephen made reference to?

See v.6-7.

It’s this truth that I want us to press into this morning.

Point of Connection

God does what he says he will do.

As followers of Jesus, as we live in trust of him, we demonstrate that his promises… really… are enough!

Story of Hudson Taylor and the hospital.

During this time, it was recorded *“they were much in prayer. But day after day went by without bringing the expected answer.”*

When the last bag of rice was opened, Taylor said to the cook: *“The Lord’s time for helping us must be close at hand.”*

And it was – for that day, a letter from England, sent 3-4 months earlier, arrived.

It came from a friend, a Mr. Berger, who in his letter said, that *“a heavy burden had come upon him; the burden of wealth to use for God.”*

In the provision which God sent through Mr. Berger, the LORD confirmed his faithfulness to Hudson Taylor and to that band of new believers.

But I want you to hear the testimony of those who didn’t know Jesus and yet saw how the LORD faithfully provided: *“Where is the idol that can do anything like this? Have they ever delivered us in our troubles or answered prayer like that?”*

Hudson Taylor’s Spiritual Secret

Those believers experienced a kairos moment that put-on display God’s faithfulness; just as God’s rescue of Abraham’s family at the time he said he would rescue put on display God’s faithfulness to those who lived in that time.

My heart longs for people in Sooke to say – *“which god or goddess can do anything like Jesus has done? Have any of them ever helped us in our troubles, like Jesus has helped his followers at Sooke Baptist?”*

Prayer is not a futile exercise where you and I talk into the air.

It isn’t an activity we tolerate or endure – like going to the dentist.

Those in a dynamic, vibrant, interactive relationship with our God, talk to him.

Knowing that we prove the faithfulness of God, as we listen to and speak with him, Andrew Murray, in his book entitled Prayer, urges: *Pray with the daring which reaches heaven and brings down blessing in the mighty name of Jesus…*

We are to speak to God with daring, not timidly; not carelessly.

We are to pray, aware that we are invited to ask of our heavenly Father because Jesus is mighty.

There is no one greater than him.

It is as speak with him; as we pray, we prove the faithfulness of God – that in Jesus all his promises are yes!

Andrew Murray continued:

*Rely upon the unspeakable greatness and omnipotence of God, and so live and act on this promise –*

*“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, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever!”* Ephesians 3:20-21

God is able….

That statement impresses upon us that the LORD is sufficient.

He is not limited – in power or perspective.

He can do “immeasurably more” than all we ask or imagine.

And from where does God do this “immeasurably more?”

He does it through his power which is at work in us.

We must not miss this.

God does express his power and glory in our individual lives.

But he also does so… in his church.

And not just in the time of Acts.

Not just in the time of the Reformation.

Not just in the Great Awakening.

Not just in the Welsh, the South African and the Canadian revivals.

Not just in the Jesus People movement.

He does so… “throughout all generations.”

Does that mean he want to do this in our generation?

Does he want to make known his power and glory through this local church?

Does God long to show the power of the gospel to save in the town of Sooke?

Does the Father and the Spirit desire to lift up the name of Jesus in our region?

Yes!

Yes!

Yes!

Yes!

Then why does the Island continue to have a reputation for being a spiritually dark place?

Why are there so few followers of Jesus?

Andrew Murray writes: “*It is prayerlessness that robs us of the power which God has intended for us. It is our prayerlessness that limits God – thinking it impossible for him to do greater things than we have seen.”*

Can God cause a 90-year-old woman to have a child?

He said she would conceive and give birth to a son.

Sarah proved the faithfulness of God.

Can God release a falsely accused man from prison and in one day elevate him to be the ruler over a nation?

God said he would.

Joseph proved the faithfulness of God to rescue him from all his troubles.

Can God save the life of a 3 month old infant; and protect that child as he is raised in a completely pagan culture?

He said a rescuer would come.

Moses proved the faithfulness of God to preserve and keep.

If you and I are to prove the faithfulness of God… than we must know him and trust him as the all-sufficient One; we must keep our eyes fixed on him; our hearts must long for him, like the deer longs for water.

Psalm 42 – *My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God?*

We are called into relationship with the Creator God who is mighty to save.

In relationship with him, he calls us to work with him.

He doesn’t just call us to work for him.

He calls us into relationship with him and then privileges us to serve with him.

The question raised by David is an important one.

When can we go and meet with God???

We can meet with God on a daily basis in our homes.

The question is - do we?

Is time with God a priority for us because we love him?

As parents do we read God’s word to our children and pray with them because we love God and above everything else, we want them to know and love him?

As an individual; as a couple; as a family – we are to prove the faithfulness of God.

We can meet with God and other believers in a small group on a weekly basis.

The question is - do we?

As a small group we are to prove the faithfulness of God.

On a weekly basis we can meet with God as his church.

But is this our priority?

We live in a time when we have so many other options.

Is the worship of God as his church a key priority for us?

Is praying together as his church a key priority for us?

As a church we are to prove the faithfulness of God.

Our vision statement says – we exist to be God’s agents of a spiritual awakening in Sooke.

We cannot orchestrate such a thing.

Only God can awaken a spiritually dead person; only God can save those whose hearts are hard and whose minds are blind.

But we can prove the faithfulness of God and the power of his gospel to save, as we pray with daring; with boldness; with confidence.

I have not urged upon us as a church the means by which we prove God’s faithfulness.

I have been far too casual about this one reality that makes all the difference.

In this regard, I have failed you.

When we lived in Ottawa I had the opportunity to go with a friend to visit his sister who was married to the pastor who served at the Time Square Church.

We were delayed arriving in New York.

And so, we had to meet them at the church on a Friday night where a large youth outreach was underway.

I don’t remember who it was that shared – but when they finished, dozens of teenagers made their way to the front to invite Jesus into their life.

I watched amazed.

Afterwards my friend’s sister showed us around the church.

We eventually came to a large room behind the auditorium.

When the door was opened, I was surprised to see inside that room, close to 70 adults.

They explained to us what they were doing.

I will never forget what was said – “this is why the things that happened tonight, the salvation of many teenagers, happened.”

These men and women were praying… and they believed that as they did so, God would hear and save.

They proved the faithfulness of *God’s promise*…. if Jesus is lifted up, he will draw all men and women to himself.

I call us as a church to prove the faithfulness of God; to prove he is a God who does what he says he will do.

I challenge us as a church to pray – not just individually; and not just in our small groups for our personal needs.

I challenge this church to pray together for spiritual awakening – for God does not desire that anyone perish.

The last Sunday of each month we hold a worship and prayer gathering.

We have done so for the last two years.

I am grateful for those who come and pray – anywhere from 7-15 people.

But my vision is to see this room packed with adults, teens and children asking great things of God because the mission of Jesus is great.

For the last six months there has been a prayer time on Wednesday mornings,

7-8am. And on each week, anywhere from 2-6 people have come.

But my vision is that dozens would gather to pray.

Many historical revivals started with a handful of people who met to pray, pleading with God to revive his church and to save those who didn’t know Jesus.

But then, a great groundswell of prayer by God’s people would arise.

And then… awakening came.

Those from this church, who have come out to pray the last Sunday of the month, and on Wednesday mornings, have led the way.

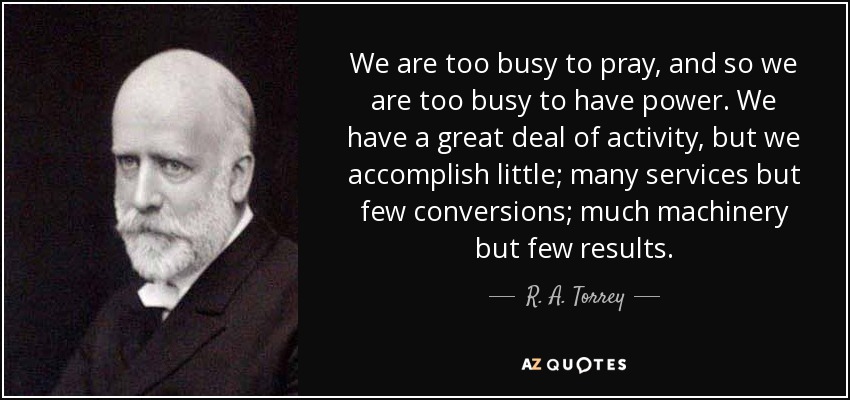
But it is now time, for the groundswell to happen.

We are on mission with Jesus.

And so, this church must pray together, regularly, for awakening.

Otherwise the spiritual status quo in Sooke will persist.

I fear this.



Howard Taylor asked the question – “If prayer is our only resource, is it enough?”

The LORD said to Solomon that it is.

2 Chronicles 7:14: *“If my people, who are called by name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked way, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land.”*

It is humbling to acknowledge that only God can revive our hearts; only God can awaken the spiritually dead.

You and I cannot carry the gospel to the people of Sooke without Jesus.

But then, Jesus never intended that we would.

Before he returned to his Father’s home, Jesus promised his followers, “I will be with you always.”

Was it not that very promise that led the church in Acts 4 to pray with daring when they were threatened with harm and told to be quiet?

In response to their prayer, God answered by shaking the place where they were gathered and filled them with the Holy Spirit, who enabled them to speak with boldness.

When Jesus’ people pray together, it is because – whether we can explain it or even fully understand it – we know God hears from heaven and responds, forgiving and healing and saving.

This is how we learn, as Hudson Taylor did, to move men and women… through God… by prayer.

What you and I believe about God and about prayer, is not just evidenced by what we say, but by what we do.

Are we convinced that apart from Jesus we cannot do anything as he said in John 15:5?

**If we are, we will pray together.**

**But if we think we are enough, we won’t pray.**

As I said, I have had to repent of not urging you; of not leading you to pray together as a church.

I ask your forgiveness.

I have had to repent for my own carelessness– for allowing busy-ness to keep me from what is most important.

I have asked the Lord to forgive me.

God is calling us to pray for breakthrough.

He calls us to persist in prayer like the widow in the parable – Luke 18.

He calls us as we pray to wait for him to open doors and make the way forward.