



BAROMETER OF THE CHURCH

**By Jim
Cymbala**

Do you believe in prayer meetings at the local church?

Is there really any significance in local prayer meetings?

Excerpts from Jim Cymbala's book - Fresh Wind, Fresh Fire

pp. 57-58, "Trouble is one of God's great servants because it reminds us how much we continually need the Lord."

p. 58, "Prayer begets Revival, which begets more prayer."

p. 59, "The reason "other churches" don't grow: "Jim, the truth is, I couldn't have a real prayer meeting in my church. I'd be embarrassed at the smallness of the crowd..."

p.66, "Persistent calling upon the name of the Lord breaks through every stronghold of the devil, for nothing is impossible with God. For Christians in these troubled times there is simply no other way."

p. 69, For all of us involved in preaching the gospel, performing music, publishing Christian materials, and all the rest, there is an uncomfortable message here: Jesus is not terribly impressed with religious commercialism (Mark 11:15-18). p. 70, I am dismayed by the contracts required by some contemporary musical groups. To perform a concert at your church, the stated fee will be so much (in either four or five figures) plus round trip airfare--often first class, not coach. Every detail of the accommodations is spelled out, down to "sushi for twenty persons" waiting at the hotel, in one case. All this is done so that the group can stand before an inner-city audience and exhort the people to "just trust the Lord for all your needs." ...The first century money changers were in the temple, but they didn't have the spirit of the temple...They were out of sync with the whole purpose of the Lord's house. "The atmosphere of my Father's house," Jesus seemed to say, "is to be prayer. The aroma around my Father must be that of people opening their hearts in worship and supplication. This is not a place to make a buck. This is a house for calling on the Lord."

p. 71, "The feature that's supposed to distinguish Christian Churches, Christian gatherings is the aroma of prayer...Does the Bible ever say anywhere from Genesis to Revelation "My house shall be called a house of preaching?" Does it ever say, "My house shall be called a house of music?" Of course not. The Bible does say, "My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations." Preaching, music, the reading of the Word--these things are fine--but they must never override prayer as the defining mark of God's dwelling.

p. 72, "What does it say about our churches today that God birthed the church in a prayer meeting, and prayer meetings today are almost extinct?"

p. 86, "God says to us, "Pray, because I have all kinds of things for you; and when you ask, you will receive. I have all this grace, and you live with scarcity. Come unto me, all you who labor. Why are you so rushed? Where are you running now? Everything you need, I have."

If the times are indeed as bad as we say they are...if the darkness in our world is growing heavier by the moment...if we are facing spiritual battles right in our own homes and churches...then we are foolish not to turn to the One who supplies unlimited grace and power. He is our only source. We are crazy to ignore him."

p. 97, "The key is not money; organization, cleverness, or education. Are you and I seeing the results Peter saw? Are we bringing thousands of men and women to Christ the way he did? [pastor Cymbala can rightfully ask these questions.] If not, we need to get back to His power source..."

p. 103, "When we get serious about drawing on God's power, remarkable things will happen." Acts 4:1-3, 4-14,18,21-31. "The priests and the captain of the temple guard and the Sadducees came up to Peter and John while they were speaking to the people. They were greatly disturbed because the apostles were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead. They seized Peter and John, and because it was evening, they put them in jail until the next day. But many who heard the message believed, and the number of men grew to about five thousand. The next day the rulers, elders and teachers of the law met in Jerusalem. Annas the high priest was there, and so were Caiaphas, John, Alexander and the other men of the high priest's family. They had brought Peter and John before them: 'By what power or what name did you do this?' Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them: 'Rulers and elders of the people! If we are being called to account today for an act of kindness shown to a cripple [Acts 3] and are asked how he was healed, then know this, you and all the people of Israel: It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed. He is 'the stone you builders rejected, which has

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become the capstone.' Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.' When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus. But since they could see the man who had been healed standing there with them, there was nothing they could say...Then they called them in again and commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus...After further threats they let them go. They could not decide how to punish them, because all the people were praising God for what had happened. For the man who was miraculously healed was over forty years old.

On their release, Peter and John went back to their own people and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said to them. When the people heard this they raised their voices together in prayer to God. 'Sovereign Lord,' they said, 'you made the heaven and the earth and the sea, and everything in them. You spoke by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of your servant, our father David: 'Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers

gather together against the Lord and against his Anointed One.' Indeed Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed. They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen. Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. Stretch out your hand to heal and perform miraculous signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus.' After they had prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly."

What you just read was an early Christian prayer meeting, held to meet a governmental threat head-on--David and Goliath style.

p. 105, The prayer of the early believers recorded in Acts 4 highlights three fundamentals from which we are in danger of sliding away: [1] "Enable your servants to speak your word...[2] with great boldness...[3] Stretch out your hand to heal and perform miraculous signs and wonders" (vv. 29-30)."

p. 112, "The trouble with man-made novelties is that they don't produce the impressive results that are often advertised."

p. 113, "There is no better example of God's moving mightily in a city than the account told in Acts 11:20-21, "...men from Cyprus and Cyrene, went to Antioch and began to speak to Greeks...telling them the good news about the Lord Jesus. The Lord's hand was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord." Such a harvest occurred that Barnabas was dispatched from Jerusalem to check things out. "When he arrived and saw the evidence of the grace of God, he was glad...And a great number of people were brought to the Lord" (vv. 23-24). Who were these men who launched such a mighty church...? We don't know their names. We don't know their methodology...whether they were pre-millennial or postmillennial or amillennial. But we do know a couple of things: They spread "the Good News about the Lord Jesus," and "the Lord's hand was with them" (vv. 20-21)."

p. 115, "Let's forget the novelties. If we prevail in prayer, God will do only what he can do. How he does things, when he does them, and in what manner are up to him. The name of Jesus, the power of his blood, and the prayer of faith have never lost their power over the centuries."

p. 121, "When I ask fellow pastors the same question, I get the same answer--plus two others: "Membership is at five-fifty, we've just finished a new education wing, and our

gross income this year will top out at \$400,000." Attendance, Buildings, and Cash, A-B-C. The new holy trinity."

p. 122, "No church, including the one I pastor, should be measured by its attendance."

pp. 122-123, "Then what kind of spiritual things DO matter in a book-of-Acts church? The apostles' prayer in Acts 4 provides our next benchmark: [2] "Enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness" (v. 29). What the disciples wanted was not numbers but an essential quality that would keep them BEING the church God intended. Boldness can only be imparted by the Holy Spirit."

p. 124, "The apostles realized that without a bold aggressive attitude in proclaiming God's Word, they would not build the church Jesus intended, the apostles weren't trying to finesse people. They had not the faintest intention of asking, "What do people want to hear? How can we draw people to church on Sunday?"...The Bible does not say we should aim at numbers but rather urges us faithfully to proclaim God's message in the boldness of the Holy Spirit. This will build God's church God's way."

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p. 125, "God nowhere asks anyone to have a large church. He only calls us to do his work, proclaiming his Word to people he loves under anointing power of the Holy Spirit to produce results that only he can bring about."

p. 135, ""There will come a day, Paul says, when all our work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work" (I Cor. 3:13). The gold, silver, and precious stones will endure while the wood, hay, and straw will go up in smoke. Paul doesn't say that the QUANTITY will be tested. He says nothing about attendance totals. Everything will focus on QUALITY... "What's the difference between these materials, besides the obvious--that one group is fireproof while the other isn't?" Wood, hay, straw are abundant...But if you want gold, silver, and costly stones, you have to "dig" for them. They're not just lying around everywhere. You have to go deep into the earth. To me, these words are profound. Spiritual "construction" that uses wood, hay and straw comes easy--little work, little seeking, no travail, no birthing. You just slap it up and it will look adequate--for awhile. But if you want to build something that will endure on Judgment Day, the work is much more costly."

p. 138, [Part III of the Acts 4 formula], "BEYOND HEAD KNOWLEDGE: The absent element is what is expressed in the final sentence of the prayer recorded in Acts 4: [3] "Stretch out your hand to heal and perform miraculous signs and wonders.""

p. 139, "In too many churches today, people don't see manifestations of God's power in answer to fervent praying. Instead, they hear arguments about theological issues that few people care about."

p. 140, "People pay attention when they see that God actually changes persons and sets them free. When a new Christian stands up and tells how God has revolutionized his or her life, no one dozes off. When someone is healed or released from a life-controlling bondage, everyone takes notice. William Law, an English devotional writer of the early 1700's wrote, "Read whatever chapter of Scripture you will, and be ever so delighted with it--yet it will leave you as poor, as empty and unchanged as it found you unless it has turned you wholly and solely to the Spirit of God, and brought you into full union with and dependence upon Him."

One way to recognize whether we suffer from this disconnection is to look at our concern for people who are dirty...people who are "other"...people who don't fit the core group's image. The ravages of sin are not pleasant--but they are what Jesus came to forgive and heal. "The Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost" (Luke 19:10). Yet Christians often hesitate to reach out to those who are different. They want God to clean the fish before they catch them."

How important is the Church Prayer Meeting? Really?