

Corporate Prayer Meetings in the Bible – Topical Message – OIC - 21/6/15.

### Introduction

We have already discovered from the Disciple's prayer how we should pray. The question we now face is how we practice this in the corporate life of the Church. What lessons can we learn from the Bible about how to pray together as a fellowship here at O.I.C.?

The best place to start is in the Acts of the Apostles.

Read Acts 1: v. 12-26.

<sup>12</sup> Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day's journey. <sup>13</sup> And when they had entered, they went up into the upper room where they were staying:

Peter, James, John, and Andrew; Philip and Thomas; Bartholomew and Matthew; James *the son of Alphaeus* and Simon the Zealot; and Judas *the son of James*. <sup>14</sup> These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers.

<sup>15</sup> And in those days Peter stood up in the midst of the disciples (altogether the number of names was about a hundred and twenty), and said, <sup>16</sup> "Men *and* brethren, this Scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit spoke before by the mouth of David concerning Judas, who became a guide to those who arrested Jesus;

<sup>17</sup> for he was numbered with us and obtained a part in this ministry." <sup>18</sup> (Now this man purchased a field with the wages of iniquity; and falling headlong, he burst open in the middle and all his entrails gushed out.

<sup>19</sup> And it became known to all those dwelling in Jerusalem; so that field is called in their own language, Akel Dama, that is, Field of Blood.) <sup>20</sup> "For it is written in the Book of Psalms: 'Let his dwelling place be desolate, And let no one live in it'; and, 'Let another take his office.'

<sup>21</sup> "Therefore, of these men who have accompanied us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, <sup>22</sup> beginning from the baptism of John to that day when He was taken up from us, one of these must become a witness with us of His resurrection."

<sup>23</sup> And they proposed two: Joseph called Barsabas, who was surnamed Justus, and Matthias. <sup>24</sup> And they prayed and said, "You, O Lord, who know the hearts of all, show which of these two You have chosen

<sup>25</sup> to take part in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place." <sup>26</sup> And they cast their lots, and the lot fell on Matthias. And he was numbered with the eleven apostles.

The first recorded prayer meeting in the Acts of the Apostles is found in Acts 1: v. 12-14.

In obedience to Jesus' instructions which are found in Luke 24: v. 49 the disciples were in Jerusalem waiting for the outpouring of God's Holy Spirit. During this time of waiting they met in a large upper room for a prayer meeting that lasted for some days.

It must have been a large room, because at one time there were 120 people in the room.

(Acts 1:15)

The disciples had an important decision to make. They had to choose somebody to replace Judas who had betrayed Jesus. They were also waiting for the outpouring of God's Holy Spirit.

So the first thing that we learn about united corporate prayer as a whole Church is that it is "essential" for two reasons in the context of the passage.

Firstly it is essential if we want to see an outpouring of God's Holy Spirit in and through His believers. Secondly it is "essential" before we make important decisions about people who take leadership responsibility in the Church.

In John's Gospel chapter 16: v. 8 it tells us that the main ministry of the Holy Spirit is to convict people of sin and of righteousness and of judgment.

John 16:8 New Living Translation (NLT)

"And when he comes, he will convict the world of its sin, and of God's righteousness, and of the coming judgment."

So if we want to see the Holy Spirit operating in the way which Jesus intended Him to work, then we will need to meet regularly as a whole Church to pray for the Holy Spirit to work in our Church and in our city of Osaka.

The problem is that many of you would say to me today "I am too busy to pray"

I read a story this week that gives us an illustration about what happens when we are too busy to pray.

A man was driving his car down the road in America and he noticed another car pulled up by the side of the road with the hood up (bonnet in U.K.) The man stopped and discovered that the other driver had run out of gasoline (petrol in U.K.) Fortunately he had a spare gallon of petrol with him in case of an emergency so he gave the gasoline (petrol) to the man. He also told him to stop a few miles down the road and fill up with gasoline (petrol)

The man drove off. About 20 miles down the road the same man who had been helped was pulled up by the side of the road. He had the hood up (bonnet) and was looking rather embarrassed. Yes you guessed it, he was so busy trying to get to his next meeting that he didn't have time to stop at the garage and fill up with gasoline (petrol) this time the man couldn't help him and drove off.

It is hard to believe that anybody would be so stupid in that situation not to stop and fill up with fuel. However if we say that we are too busy to pray corporately as a Church then we are like the man who kept running out of fuel. We must take united corporate prayer seriously or otherwise as a Church we will run out of the power that enables us to function in the way that God intends us to function.

As a starting point in united corporate prayer we must be prepared to pray in our worship service, in small groups if needed, so that we might see the Holy Spirit working in the way that the Bible teaches us. That is convicting men and women of sin and of God's righteousness.

After I have completed my sermon, I am going to ask you all to stand up and we will say the Lord's Prayer, first in English and then in Japanese. We will then remain standing, I will pray a short Pastoral prayer and then we will all pray together at the same time.

You may pray out aloud or you may pray in your heart. It is better to pray out aloud but if not pray in your heart.

We will only do this for 5 minutes this time, maybe in future we can extend this as God guides.

I think you will be amazed to see God work in the future if we stand together as a whole Church and pray. God may change us first before He changes other people, but that is O.K. We must submit to Him.

Let us now look at the second recorded incident in Acts concerning all church prayer.

Read Acts 2: v. 40-47.

Acts 2:40-47 New Living Translation (NLT)

<sup>40</sup> Then Peter continued preaching for a long time, strongly urging all his listeners, "Save yourselves from this crooked generation!" <sup>41</sup> Those who believed what Peter said were baptized and added to the church that day—about 3,000 in all.

<sup>42</sup> All the believers devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, and to fellowship, and to sharing in meals (including the Lord's Supper<sup>[a]</sup>), and to prayer. <sup>43</sup> A deep sense of awe came over them all, and the apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders.

<sup>44</sup> And all the believers met together in one place and shared everything they had. <sup>45</sup> They sold their property and possessions and shared the money with those in need.

<sup>46</sup> They worshiped together at the Temple each day, met in homes for the Lord's Supper, and shared their meals with great joy and generosity<sup>[b]</sup>— <sup>47</sup> all the while praising God and enjoying the goodwill of all the people. And each day the Lord added to their fellowship those who were being saved.

As a result of the upper room prayer meeting, Matthias was chosen to replace Judas, and the Holy Spirit was poured out resulting in 3,000 people being saved.

We are now informed that this all church prayer meeting continued as part of daily life in the Church.

In v. 42 Luke uses the definite article to describe definite prayers uttered in worship.

In Acts 3: v. 1 we are told that Peter and John went up to the Temple to pray at the hour of prayer, the ninth hour. According to the Talmud the Jewish people offered prayers in the temple 3 times per day. The first time was early in the morning, then in the afternoon and finally at sunset. As the Priests offered sacrifices, the Jews prayed.

It appears that corporate prayer seems to have been a primary focus in the early Church.

The result of all this praying was a God consciousness in the early Church. In v. 43 it says that fear (awe in N.L.T.) came upon every soul. It was a healthy fear of God.

When the Holy Spirit is working in a powerful way in any given situation, there is a healthy FEAR of God. There is a sense of "AWE" and "WONDER"

During the Revival on the Island of Lewis in Scotland between 1949 -1952, God used a preacher called Duncan Campbell. At one time he was the principal of the Faith Mission Bible College that I attended. I had the privilege of attending this college between 1985-1987. The principal's wife had become a Christian during the Lewis Revival.

I experienced first-hand the burden of this lady for God to come again in revival power, not just to the Island of Lewis but to the whole of Scotland. Her husband the late Rev. Dr. Colin Peckham was also infected with this burden. Therefore I know a little about true Revival.

Duncan Campbell said these words about the Lewis Revival "When God stepped down, suddenly men and women all over the parish were gripped by the fear of God."

If we were to receive a visitation from the Holy Spirit in Revival Power, one of the evidences would be that we too would be gripped by the fear of God.

Revival never happens in the world unless a group of people start praying for it.

Maybe God might use us to be that group of people?

In v43 of Acts 2 it also says that many wonders and signs were done through the Apostles.

The greatest sign and wonder that I would like to see is men and women being “Born Again”. People’s lives changed for all eternity. That is the greatest miracle of all.

The next evidence of united prayer in Acts is united prayer for “Boldness to Witness”

Many people find it difficult to witness about Jesus to people so this passage might be of real help to you.

Read Acts 4: v. 13-37.

<sup>13</sup> Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated and untrained men, they marveled. And they realized that they had been with Jesus. <sup>14</sup> And seeing the man who had been healed standing with them, they could say nothing against it.

<sup>15</sup> But when they had commanded them to go aside out of the council, they conferred among themselves, <sup>16</sup> saying, “What shall we do to these men? For, indeed, that a notable miracle has been done through them is evident to all who dwell in Jerusalem, and we cannot deny *it*.”

<sup>17</sup> But so that it spreads no further among the people, let us severely threaten them, that from now on they speak to no man in this name.” <sup>18</sup> So they called them and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus.

<sup>19</sup> But Peter and John answered and said to them, “Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more than to God, you judge. <sup>20</sup> For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.”

<sup>21</sup> So when they had further threatened them, they let them go, finding no way of punishing them, because of the people, since they all glorified God for what had been done. <sup>22</sup> For the man was over forty years old on whom this miracle of healing had been performed.

<sup>23</sup> And being let go, they went to their own *companions* and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said to them. <sup>24</sup> So when they heard that, they raised their voice to God with one accord and said: “Lord, You *are* God, who made heaven and earth and the sea, and all that is in them,

<sup>25</sup> who by the mouth of Your servant David have said: ‘Why did the nations rage, And the people plot vain things? <sup>26</sup> The kings of the earth took their stand, And the rulers were gathered together Against the LORD and against His Christ.’

<sup>27</sup> “For truly against Your holy Servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, were gathered together <sup>28</sup> to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose determined before to be done.

<sup>29</sup> Now, Lord, look on their threats, and grant to Your servants that with all boldness they may speak Your word, <sup>30</sup> by stretching out Your hand to heal, and that signs and wonders may be done through the name of Your holy Servant Jesus.”

<sup>31</sup> And when they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word of God with boldness. <sup>32</sup> Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul; neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common.

<sup>33</sup> And with great power the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And great grace was upon them all. <sup>34</sup> Nor was there anyone among them who lacked; for all who were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold,

<sup>35</sup> and laid *them* at the apostles' feet; and they distributed to each as anyone had need. <sup>36</sup> And Joses, who was also named Barnabas by the apostles (which is translated Son of Encouragement), a Levite of the country of Cyprus, <sup>37</sup> having land, sold *it*, and brought the money and laid *it* at the apostles' feet.

As Peter and John were going to the Temple to pray they met a lame man at the entrance. He was begging for money. Peter replied to that man in this way. He said "Silver and Gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk. He took him by the right hand and lifted him up and immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength. Everybody in the Temple discovered that he was healed and they were also excited to praise God for his healing.

Peter used this opportunity to preach to the people. About 5,000 people were converted from his preaching. They were put in prison for one night by the Captain of the Temple and the Sadducees who didn't believe in the resurrection of Jesus.

They were let out of prison the next day because of the miracle of the lame man and also they had so much support from the people.

In Chapter 4: v. 23 we are told that they went back to their companions and had a united prayer meeting. In v. 24 it appears that they all prayed together quoting Psalm 2.

In the context of the passage we discover that this united prayer meeting was all about trusting in God's word when witnessing about Jesus is difficult and also praying for the boldness to continue when we get opposition from the enemy. (satan)

We have here clearly a very good reason why we must pray together unitedly as a Church here at O.I.C. We need the boldness to witness about Jesus and the gospel message.

Japan is a hard country spiritually speaking. There has never been a heaven sent Revival and there is a spiritual stronghold in Shinto and Buddhism. On top of this many people are required to work long hours. Sometimes from 8 a.m. in the morning until 10p.m. at night.

Therefore boldness to witness to people at our work is a great need here at O.I.C. We must pray for this today when we stop later for a united time of prayer.

In v. 31 we are told the result of this united prayer meeting. The place where they had assembled to pray was shaken and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit.

God answered their prayers and they spoke the word of God with "BOLDNESS"

If we want to be bold witnesses for Jesus in our work place in Japan we need to unite together in prayer for boldness to witness about Jesus.

Whenever we are serving Jesus with boldness by the power of His Holy Spirit, there will always be opposition.

In the great Heaven sent Revivals that have happened all over the world, there has always been opposition. Surprisingly some opposition has come from Christians who don't recognize it as the work of the Holy Spirit. Let us pray for boldness but be prepared for opposition.

#### Last Passage Acts 12: v. 1-17.

In our last passage, in support for united whole Church prayer meetings we turn to an incident in Acts 12: v. 1-17. ( N.L.T.)

12 About that time King Herod Agrippa<sup>[a]</sup> began to persecute some believers in the church. <sup>2</sup> He had the apostle James (John's brother) killed with a sword. <sup>3</sup> When Herod saw how much this pleased the Jewish people, he also arrested Peter. (This took place during the Passover celebration.<sup>[b]</sup>)

<sup>4</sup> Then he imprisoned him, placing him under the guard of four squads of four soldiers each. Herod intended to bring Peter out for public trial after the Passover. <sup>5</sup> But while Peter was in prison, the church prayed very earnestly for him.

<sup>6</sup> The night before Peter was to be placed on trial, he was asleep, fastened with two chains between two soldiers. Others stood guard at the prison gate.

<sup>7</sup> Suddenly, there was a bright light in the cell, and an angel of the Lord stood before Peter. The angel struck him on the side to awaken him and said, "Quick! Get up!" And the chains fell off his wrists. <sup>8</sup> Then the angel told him, "Get dressed and put on your sandals." And he did. "Now put on your coat and follow me," the angel ordered.

<sup>9</sup> So Peter left the cell, following the angel. But all the time he thought it was a vision. He didn't realize it was actually happening. <sup>10</sup> They passed the first and second guard posts and came to the iron gate leading to the city, and this opened for them all by itself.

So they passed through and started walking down the street, and then the angel suddenly left him. <sup>11</sup> Peter finally came to his senses. "It's really true!" he said. "The Lord has sent his angel and saved me from Herod and from what the Jewish leaders<sup>[c]</sup> had planned to do to me!"

<sup>12</sup> When he realized this, he went to the home of Mary, the mother of John Mark, where many were gathered for prayer. <sup>13</sup> He knocked at the door in the gate, and a servant girl named Rhoda came to open it.

<sup>14</sup> When she recognized Peter's voice, she was so overjoyed that, instead of opening the door, she ran back inside and told everyone, "Peter is standing at the door!" <sup>15</sup> "You're out of your mind!" they said. When she insisted, they decided, "It must be his angel."

<sup>16</sup> Meanwhile, Peter continued knocking. When they finally opened the door and saw him, they were amazed. <sup>17</sup> He motioned for them to quiet down and told them how the Lord had led him out of prison. "Tell James and the other brothers what happened," he said. And then he went to another place.

In the context of the passage there was a serious situation. King Herod arranged for James the brother of John to be killed with the sword. On top of this Peter was arrested and put in prison.

Did the people give up and run away, the answer is NO. Well what did they do?

In v. 5 we are told that constant prayer was offered to God for Peter by the Church.

I don't know how many days the prayer meeting was going on but it was at least 3 days or maybe even one week. What is for certain is that it wasn't just a one hour prayer meeting.

I have examined the original Greek word that the English translators have translated constant prayer in the N.K.J. version. The Greek language is very specific and this word places a special emphasis on the continuousness of the praying.

The Greek can also mean that the people were praying earnestly. In other words they weren't half-hearted, they were desperate in their prayers.

It was a bit like Hannah's prayer in 1 Samuel chapter 2. She was desperate for a child and prayed earnestly.

So what we have here are desperate measures because of desperate circumstances.

I don't know about you, but I think that the world today is in a desperate state. Many of the bad things that are happening in our world today are shielded from N.H.K. News so you may not be aware of them. However they are happening. The most persecuted people in the world today are Christians. This calls for desperate measures of prayer.

On top of this over 100 million Japanese people are going to a lost eternity without Jesus, does this not stir us up for united prayer for the nation of Japan and the Missionaries who are working to reach them with the Gospel Message?

I hope that it does. Today you will have an opportunity to pray for the country of Japan and the millions who need Jesus.

We have only studied 4 passages in the book of Acts that challenge us as a Church to united whole Church prayer times. There are many more, both in the Old Testament and in the New Testament. I hope that you are now motivated to pray together with me.

I am now going pray a short Pastoral Prayer and when I have finished we will all pray the Lord's prayer in English and then in Japanese. It will be on a power point slide.

After the Lord's Prayer, we will remain standing where we are, or if you can't stand please sit down. Then we will cry to God with one voice unitedly. Either pray aloud or in your heart. Don't worry about the person next to you, concentrate of your personal prayer to God.

On top of other things you may be burdened with let us pray unitedly for 3 things.

1. The holy Spirit to be poured out on us and upon the city of Osaka and that the Holy Spirit will convict men and women and boys and girls of sin and the need of righteousness through Jesus. Pray for people by name if you have specific people you know.
2. Pray for "BOLDNESS" to witness about Jesus at your work place and in your daily life whatever you do.
3. Pray for Revival in Japan. If you don't know exactly what Revival is I will make sure that you have some books made available in the future in English and Japanese. You will be excited to hear what God can do. Remember Revival doesn't happen until God's people pray for it.

Our Father in heaven,  
Hallowed be Your name.

<sup>10</sup>Your kingdom come.

Your will be done

On earth as *it is* in heaven.

<sup>11</sup>Give us this day our daily bread.

<sup>12</sup>And forgive us our debts,

As we forgive our debtors.

<sup>13</sup>And do not lead us into temptation,

But deliver us from the evil one.

For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.

Lord's prayer in Japanese to follow.