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The importance of the prayer meeting

The enemy and the prayer meeting

"And he shewed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the LORD, and Satan standing at his right hand to resist him," Zechariah 3:1.

We can gauge the importance of prayer in many ways, none better than its impact upon the enemy and the enemy's attitude toward it.

The enemy fears and resists most that which threatens and damages him.

Nazi Germany knew it had to destroy the RAF before it could ever consider invading mainland Britain. Likewise, in the prelude to the IRA terrorist campaign which began in the late 1960s, the effective deterrent of terrorism in Northern Ireland, The Ulster Special Constabulary, was targeted by Irish Republican propagandists with a view to have them disbanded and the way laid open for the terrorists' strategy of murder and mayhem. Sadly, the British government was all too ready to believe the propaganda and had the B Specials, as they were known, disbanded. In the aftermath of that treacherous folly, the IRA began a three long decades of intimidation, robbery, murder and terror.

Just what is the attitude of the enemy of God's people, to prayer?

I. HE EVER RESISTS PRAYER.

"And he shewed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the LORD, and Satan standing at his right hand to resist him," Zech 3:1. Here is the saint in prayer and resisted by the devil. He was acting as an "adversary." The word "resist" comes from that which means to "attack."

- 1. He gives special attention to prayer.** It is Satan himself who is engaged in this work. The first use of the word "adversary" indicates the character of the word. "And God's anger was kindled because he went: and the angel of the LORD stood in the way for an adversary against him. Now he was riding upon his ass, and his two servants were with him," Numbers 22:22. Even so does the devil resist prayer amongst the saints of God.
- 2. The position he adopted.** He stood at the high priest's right hand, the arm associated with strength and power. Satan would seek to paralyse the arm of prayer. Remember the events recorded in Exodus 17:8-13. Moses' arms grew weary and had to be supported. Weariness in prayer, all too common, stems from the opposition mounted by the devil.

The devil presently is permitted to resist the saints in prayer. But a day is coming, shortly before the Saviour's return, when that will end. "And I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night. And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death. Therefore rejoice, ye heavens, and ye that dwell in them. Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and of the sea! for the devil is come down unto you, having great wrath, because he knoweth that he hath but a short time," Revelation 12:10-12. Note the phrase: "he knoweth that he hath but a short time." This casting out of heaven is a prelude to the devil's overthrow by Christ and his confinement in the bottomless pit for one thousand years, Revelation 20:1-3.

- 3. The boldness of Satan.** The high priest stood before the Lord, but Satan sought to resist him. He can still resist us even at God's throne. He will not have such access barred to him until very near the end of this age, a precursor of his binding during the Millennial reign, Revelation 20:1-3.

His binding is one of the immediate results of Christ's return in power. "And I saw the beast, and the



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kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against him that sat on the horse, and against his army. And the beast was taken, and with him the false prophet that wrought miracles before him, with which he deceived them that had received the mark of the beast, and them that worshipped his image. These both were cast alive into a lake of fire burning with brimstone. And the remnant were slain with the sword of him that sat upon the horse, which sword proceeded out of his mouth: and all the fowls were filled with their flesh. And I saw an angel come down from heaven, having the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years, And cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years should be fulfilled: and after that he must be loosed a little season." Revelation 19:19-20:3.

II. HE IS RESTRAINED BY PRAYER

"Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places," Ephesians 6:11-12. This is why the devil resists prayer. "But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint," Isaiah 40:31. Prayer makes us overcomers. Our prayers penetrate right into the heart of the enemy camp. The word "stand" means "to stand unmoveable."

1. Prayer has been the key to victory when the enemy had the upper hand. The glorious record of Hebrews 11:33-34 tells us this. "Who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens."

The prayer of Hezekiah at a time when Judah was faced by an overwhelming enemy illustrates this truth. "And Hezekiah prayed before the LORD, and said, O LORD God of Israel, which dwellest between the cherubims, thou art the God, even thou alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth; thou hast made heaven and earth. LORD, bow down thine ear, and hear: open, LORD, thine eyes, and see: and hear the words of Sennacherib, which hath sent him to reproach the living God. Of a truth, LORD, the kings of Assyria have destroyed the nations and their lands, and have cast their gods into the fire: for they were no gods, but the work of men's hands, wood and stone: therefore they have destroyed them. Now therefore, O LORD our God, I beseech thee, save thou us out of his hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that thou art the LORD God, even thou only. Then Isaiah the son of Amoz sent to Hezekiah, saying, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, That which thou hast prayed to me against Sennacherib king of Assyria I have heard," 2 Kings 19:15-20.

Again, this truth is illustrated for us in the days of Abijah. "And when Judah looked back, behold, the battle was before and behind: and they cried unto the LORD, and the priests sounded with the trumpets. Then the men of Judah gave a shout: and as the men of Judah shouted, it came to pass, that God smote Jeroboam and all Israel before Abijah and Judah. And the children of Israel fled before Judah: and God delivered them into their hand. And Abijah and his people slew them with a great slaughter: so there fell down slain of Israel five hundred thousand chosen men. Thus the children of Israel were brought under at that time, and the children of Judah prevailed, because they relied upon the LORD God of their fathers," 2 Chronicles 13:14-18.

The same truth is displayed in the New Testament. "And being let go, they went to their own company, and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said unto them. And when they heard that, they lifted up their voice to God with one accord, and said, Lord, thou art God, which hast made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all that in them is: Who by the mouth of thy servant David hast said, Why did the heathen rage, and the people imagine vain things? The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord, and against his Christ. For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of



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Israel, were gathered together, for to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done. And now, Lord, behold their threatenings: and grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy word, by stretching forth thine hand to heal; and that signs and wonders may be done by the name of thy holy child Jesus. And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness," Acts 4:23-31.

- 2. Prayer has preserved persons and nations.** I have no doubt that the cries of God's people in the wake of Dunkirk and in the days of the Battle of Britain were heard and answered to the confounding of Hitler and the Nazis.

"Except the LORD of hosts had left unto us a very small remnant, we should have been as Sodom, and we should have been like unto Gomorrah," Isaiah 1:9.

"And I sought for a man among them, that should make up the hedge, and stand in the gap before me for the land, that I should not destroy it: but I found none. Therefore have I poured out mine indignation upon them; I have consumed them with the fire of my wrath: their own way have I recompensed upon their heads, saith the Lord GOD," Ezekiel 22:30-31.

Prayer was the means of rescue in days of national distress. Here is why it is hated by the devil. Here is why it is important for us to attend, support and take part in prayer meetings.

- 3. To the end of time it will be the means of curbing sin.** These words are worth reading and who it is who is praying is also worthy of note.

"Look down from heaven, and behold from the habitation of thy holiness and of thy glory: where is thy zeal and thy strength, the sounding of thy bowels and of thy mercies toward me? are they restrained? Doubtless thou art our father, though Abraham be ignorant of us, and Israel acknowledge us not: thou, O LORD, art our father, our redeemer; thy name is from everlasting. O LORD, why hast thou made us to err from thy ways, and hardened our heart from thy fear? Return for thy servants' sake, the tribes of thine inheritance. The people of thy holiness have possessed it but a little while: our adversaries have trodden down thy sanctuary. We are thine: thou never barest rule over them; they were not called by thy name. Oh that thou wouldest rend the heavens, that thou wouldest come down, that the mountains might flow down at thy presence, as when the melting fire burneth, the fire causeth the waters to boil, to make thy name known to thine adversaries, that the nations may tremble at thy presence! When thou didst terrible things which we looked not for, thou camest down, the mountains flowed down at thy presence. For since the beginning of the world men have not heard, nor perceived by the ear, neither hath the eye seen, O God, beside thee, what he hath prepared for him that waiteth for him. Thou meetest him that rejoiceth and worketh righteousness, those that remember thee in thy ways: behold, thou art wroth; for we have sinned: in those is continuance, and we shall be saved. But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away. And there is none that calleth upon thy name, that stirreth up himself to take hold of thee: for thou hast hid thy face from us, and hast consumed us, because of our iniquities. But now, O LORD, thou art our father; we are the clay, and thou our potter; and we all are the work of thy hand. Be not wroth very sore, O LORD, neither remember iniquity for ever: behold, see, we beseech thee, we are all thy people. Thy holy cities are a wilderness, Zion is a wilderness, Jerusalem a desolation. Our holy and our beautiful house, where our fathers praised thee, is burned up with fire: and all our pleasant things are laid waste. Wilt thou refrain thyself for these things, O LORD? wilt thou hold thy peace, and afflict us very sore?" Isaiah 63:15-64:12.

Even in the Millennial age, prayer will be a chief feature of the believer's activity, though then the devil will be bound and totally unable to resist and interrupt prayer. "And it shall come to pass, that before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear. The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, and the lion shall eat straw like the bullock: and dust shall be the serpent's meat. They shall



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not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain, saith the LORD," Isaiah 65:24-25.

III. THE REJOICING OF THE ENEMY OVER PRAYERLESSNESS

- 1. The enemies' joy when the House of Prayer is destroyed.** The record of events after the fall of the temple, in the days of Jeremiah, emphasises the enemies' reaction to all setbacks suffered by the flock of God. "All that pass by clap their hands at thee; they hiss and wag their head at the daughter of Jerusalem, saying, Is this the city that men call The perfection of beauty, The joy of the whole earth? All thine enemies have opened their mouth against thee: they hiss and gnash the teeth: they say, We have swallowed her up: certainly this is the day that we looked for; we have found, we have seen it," Lamentations 2:15-16.

Surely such rejoicing indicates what a source of trouble the house of prayer was to the ungodly!

- 2. The joy when the saint falls.** "Therefore I will look unto the LORD; I will wait for the God of my salvation: my God will hear me. Rejoice not against me, O mine enemy: when I fall, I shall arise; when I sit in darkness, the LORD shall be a light unto me. I will bear the indignation of the LORD, because I have sinned against him, until he plead my cause, and execute judgment for me: he will bring me forth to the light, and I shall behold his righteousness," Micah 7:7-9.

Rejoicing when the saints falls, when his prayer-life ceases! What a testimony to the effectiveness of prayer!

- 3. When the prayer link is broken the saints are defeated and scattered.** "But thou shouldest not have looked on the day of thy brother in the day that he became a stranger; neither shouldest thou have rejoiced over the children of Judah in the day of their destruction; neither shouldest thou have spoken proudly in the day of distress. Thou shouldest not have entered into the gate of my people in the day of their calamity; yea, thou shouldest not have looked on their affliction in the day of their calamity, nor have laid hands on their substance in the day of their calamity; neither shouldest thou have stood in the crossway, to cut off those of his that did escape; neither shouldest thou have delivered up those of his that did remain in the day of distress. For the day of the LORD is near upon all the heathen: as thou hast done, it shall be done unto thee: thy reward shall return upon thine own head," Obadiah 1:12-15.

How helpless is the backslidden, prayerless Christian before the onslaught of the ungodly!

Here is the fate of the prayerless saints. Here is reason enough for us to take every measure instituted of God to maintain the spirit of prayer amongst us.

Ivan Foster.

(One of a series of messages delivered at the weekly prayer meeting in Lewes Free Presbyterian Church during May and June 2014.)