

The Art of Praying with Authority

“From the days of John the Baptist until now, the Kingdom of Heaven has been coming violently and the violent take it by force.” (Mt. 11:12)

Introduction

We live in a world full of violence. We experience wide scale terrorism, suicide bombs and ethnic cleansing etc. We withdraw in horror from the murder, torture, rape and deprivation of freedom that is the result of this violence. It is therefore a shock to hear that the Lord Jesus calls for violent people! War is the most universal and unrestrained form of violence and spiritual warfare – like all warfare – is never gentle!

The Lord Jesus spoke of His Kingdom in terms of **an invasion** that would drive Satan from the territory that he has illegally occupied. In Mt. 12:28 we read, ***“But if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the Kingdom of God has come upon you.”***

The Greek word for cast out is ‘*balleo*’. This word implies ejection with considerable force. We must not be naïve. Satan will never easily relinquish his grip on territory. He must be forced to do so and that involves violence. An intruder won’t leave unless he is convinced that you intend to throw him out and even then he may stay and fight it out!

What does it mean to ‘take the Kingdom’?

It means to depose Satan. It means to take from him the control that he has in the hearts and lives of men and women in a community. This control he has wrongfully taken. Our task is to establish there the rule of the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom is growing but it will not come fully until the Lord Jesus returns. Then it will come in all its fullness.

Paul saw that any sacrifice was acceptable if it furthered the advancement of the Kingdom. See Acts 21:13, ***“I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus”***. Yet with us there is often so little earnestness! We long for jolly and joyful lives. We are relaxed and laid back. Are we following Jesus?

The disciples watched Jesus cleanse the temple. (Jn. 2:13-22) They were awestruck at the way He cleared away the money changers. Then they remembered it was written of Jesus, ***“Zeal for your house will consume Me”***. (Jn. 2:17) The great sin of most believers is passivity. This probably weakens the Kingdom more than anything else. We are in a training programme for men and women of holy, Spirit-filled violence who will go on in and dispossess Satan. We must bind up ***“the principalities and powers and forces of wickedness”*** and take the Kingdom. The Bible talks of men and women who ***“through faith conquered kingdoms ... stopped the mouths of lions ... became mighty in war putting armies to flight ...”***. (Heb. 11:34)

God is still looking for such men and women.

Two Characteristics of people who are “Taking the Kingdom”

1. The Violence of Self-Discipline

There is an **inner war** we must win. Violent men are always intolerant of everything they see as thwarting their purpose. ***“Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh that wage war against your soul.”*** (1 Pet. 2:11) The ‘passions of the flesh’ are those sinful desires or character weaknesses that war against our souls. The answer is the application of the Cross (a violent form of death) to the flesh. Gal. 5:24 says, ***“Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires”***.

There are two aspects to this self-discipline:

- An all-out war against sin in our lives
- A war to ensure that our spiritual will dominates our physical desires

Our bodies love ease! There is a constant desire by the body for us to surrender to our physical appetites. We have to learn to assert the ascendancy of our spirit over our body. Why is it that fasting is so often linked with prayer? Why fast? Scripture gives four reasons:

- ❖ It breaks demonic bondages (Mt. 17:19-21)
- ❖ It is a sign of repentance (Neh. 9:1)
- ❖ It helps us to get an understanding of God's will (Dan. 9:3)
- ❖ It helps to clear the mind in a time of crisis (2 Chron. 20:3)

In essence, it strengthens the inner man by liberating us from the demands of the body and sensitizing us to the realm of the Spirit. The body has a very loud and very persistent voice: *"Feed me – wash me – put me to sleep – pander to me"*. It commands and we leap to obey! The still small voice of the Spirit can so easily be drowned out!

There is often a need for fasts from things other than food – e.g. from TV and other media. Such a fast will decrease your dependence on **external** stimulation.

We read in 1 Cor. 6:12, ***"All things are lawful...but not all things are helpful. All things are lawful but I will not be enslaved by anything."***

Make sure that your spirit is free and is not being enslaved by anything. Echo Augustine's prayer:

**"Toward God a heart of flame
Toward man a heart of love
Toward myself a heart of steel."**

Paul put it this way, ***"I discipline my body and keep it under control lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified"***. (1 Cor. 9:27)

2. The Violence of Intercessory Prayer

Col. 2:1 ***"For I want you to know how great a struggle I have for you...."***

Col. 4:12 ***"Epaphras... always struggling on your behalf in his prayers."***

Eph. 6:12 ***"Our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places."***

'Struggle' is a wrestling term. It implies continuous, violent spiritual expenditure of energy.

Jesus taught us about this!

Mt. 12:28-29 ***"How can anyone enter a strong man's house and carry off his possessions unless he first ties up the strong man? Then he can rob the house!"***

Lk. 11:21-22 ***"When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own house his possessions are safe. But when someone stronger attacks and overpowers him, he takes away the armour in which the man trusted and divides his spoils."***

Note the order: **First bind and then spoil**. We must **first** bind the strong man, remove his armour and **then** we can take his possessions. If we try and plunder the house while he is free and fully armed, we shall be in trouble and we will leave empty-handed. It is clear that "the strong man" is the devil and the whole demonic hierarchy. Satan is the prince of this world, powerfully in control of the minds and hearts and wills of people. He is armed with all sorts of weapons.

Intercession is not only earnest petition; it is "binding the strong man". Clearly this is the key to successful evangelism. Clearly this sort of intercession is a very violent business.

How do we "bind the strong man"?

It is best to follow the example of the Lord Jesus. This will show us that it isn't repeating some kind of mechanical formula. It depends on you as a person.

“The prayer of a righteous man has great power as it is working.” (James 5:16)

The Lord Jesus had three great encounters with the devil:

1) In the desert (Mt. 4:1-11)

Satan attacked Jesus along the only three avenues where people can be reached:

- appetite (v. 3)
- avarice (v. 6)
- ambition (v. 8)

We can see two reasons for Jesus’ triumph in ‘binding the strong man’.

➤ **Definite resistance with the Sword of the Spirit (The Word of God)**

Use the Word of God in prayer. Claim the promises. Remember Moses told Joshua to lead the army into battle against the enemies of God while he went up the hill to pray. (Ex. 17) I don’t think Joshua was very impressed by this! But this isn’t all that Moses did! He said, ***“I will stand on the top of the hill with the staff of God in my hand.”*** The staff was a symbol of God’s authority. It had exercised immense power!

Our authority is the Word of God. Use specific Bible promises for specific situations as the Lord Jesus did. Here are some examples:

- Victory over fear 2 Tim. 1:7
- Victory over a sense of inadequacy 2 Cor. 9:8
- Victory over a weariness of spirit Gal. 6:9
- Victory over worry Phil. 4:6-7

➤ **No unyielded areas in His life**

“The prince of this world comes and has no hold on Me.” (Jn. 14:30)

Satan has no hold on Jesus! Why? He was filled with the Holy Spirit! You will be powerless to bind Satan if there are unyielded areas in your life that can give Satan an opportunity to manipulate you and, in fact, to bind you!

2) In the garden (Mt. 26:36-46)

Here the conflict with Satan was intense and agonising. Jesus sweat drops of blood so intense was the pain and the struggle. How did Jesus win? How did He “bind the strong man”?

The answer: By merging His will with the will of the Father

In Mt. 26:39 we have the first recorded prayer of Jesus. Notice the distinction between ***“My will and Your (the Father’s) will”***.

Mt. 26:42 is the second prayer of Jesus. Now it is only ***“Your will”***.

Finally in Jn. 18:11 we have that great statement of acceptance, ***“The cup that My Father has given me, shall I not drink it?”*** and the exultant cry on the Cross, ***“It is finished”!*** These indicate not a grudging acceptance of the will of God, but joyful acceptance.

The lesson is clear: unquestioning acceptance of the will of God with joy.

The place of authority, the place of victory with the ability to ***“bind the strong man”*** is conditioned on this acceptance of the will of God in our lives.

3) On the Cross

The Cross was the decisive event of victory over Satan. In the ultimate sense we see the Lord Jesus in close combat with the “strong man” – the devil. He didn’t rest until He had overcome Satan and

He won't rest until Satan's house is utterly despoiled! If we are going to bind demonic forces, we must be utterly convinced of Christ's victory over Satan on the Cross.

In Col. 2:15 we read, ***"And having disarmed the powers and authorities, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the Cross."***

Heb. 2:14 says, ***"Since the children have flesh and blood, He too shared in their humanity so that by His death He might destroy Him who holds the power of death – that is the devil – and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death."***

Jesus, by His death, broke the power of the devil over us. Any dominion the devil now exercises over us is **either** because we don't understand Christ's triumph and so we don't make it ours **or** because we tolerate sin in our lives. As we embrace the victory of Jesus, His victory becomes our victory! His authority becomes our authority! What Jesus began we continue! ***"They* (i.e. us) ***overcame him* (the devil) ***by the blood of the Lamb.*"** (Rev. 12:11)****

It is the Cross and our identification with the Cross that invests us with the authority to plunder.

The Father can and does act unilaterally, but since Pentecost He has chosen to act through His children. John Wesley put it this way, ***"Without God man cannot. Without man God does not."***

So aggressive praying is always based on the Cross. We can prevail because of Christ's triumph on the Cross. Perhaps the example of J.O. Fraser (OMF) is helpful:

Fraser worked for five years with great devotion and self-sacrifice among the Lisu of South West China. He got very discouraged. He arrived at a point of inner desperation in his spirit. He found that much of what he had been taught about prayer didn't work! At this point he was sent an article about "the prayer of faith". In it he read that deliverance from the power of evil comes through **definite resistance on the grounds of the Cross**. Spiritual breakthroughs would happen when a person fought (wrestled) based on the claim of the victory of Christ on the Cross.

Fraser began to pray for 100 Lisu families. Praying became an "authoritative notice to quit". It was based on Satan's loss of victory on the Cross. He found Satan didn't mind carnal, rambling prayers. But when he prayed with definite faith for specific objectives based on Christ's victory, unimaginable results began to be seen! He began to "rob Satan"! **Thousands** of Lisu families turned to the Lord.

Making the Potential Actual

How are we going to make Jesus' example real for us? It isn't enough to grasp this intellectually! We need to exercise the spiritual authority that has been given to us. Are our prayers effectively ***"binding the strong man"*** or is he laughing at our puny attempts to spoil his house? Are we needlessly impotent?

In Mt. 17:19-20 the disciples were powerless to cast out the demon. Why? Lack of prayer and fasting! We need violent, holy men and women who are involved in aggressive prayer – binding Satan – breaking the spiritual powers that bind people, communities and countries.

Summary

- **Be ruthless with sin in your life.** Don't toy with it. It opens up your life for Satan to manipulate you.
- **Yield yourself completely to Jesus.** Merge your will with His will.
- **Take a definite stand and a position of authority** based on Christ's victory on the Cross. Claim the effect of that victory on your situation.
- **Use the Word of God.** Claim specific promises for specific situations.
- **Pray through to complete victory** – note the example of Moses in Exodus 17.