

'The Prayer 20/20 Impact' - Knowing Jesus More! October 11th, 2020

Dear Praying Friends, and Partners In Prayer Team, and whole Church Family,

"Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful!"

Colossians 4:2 (NIV)

If you were Paul, what do you think your number one prayer request would be? We can think a lot about that, but what is really unexpected for us is that Paul didn't have a prayer request for getting out of jail, or escaping his hardships, or finding a good lawyer as he faced a threatening trial before Caesar. He instead was asking people to be devoted to prayer habitually, earnestly, and to never give up praying for an open door, and boldness to present the gospel of Christ. Christ was so real in his life, his number one prayer was, "Let Christ be seen, and help me share!"



What if we were that kind of church? What would happen if we became that kind of church? What hope in reaching this lost and confused world would occur? How would we appear as a testimony for Christ if we had that prayer request during these fearful Covid-19 recovering days, or the highly charged and ugly fights for the coming presidential elections? What if we become a church stripped of everything we used to do, and every ministry, and every program we had in our past that we depended on, in order to be a people of real revival prayer? Our passage today for our message was what Paul said is essential to living Christ to a wayward world "Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful, and thankful!" And I love the different translations given, so take a moment and just enjoy the wording and meanings each one adds to this verse:

- "Be earnest and unwearied and steadfast in your prayer [life], being [both] alert and intent in [your praying] with thanksgiving." (Amplified Bible)
- "Never give up praying. And when you pray, keep alert and be thankful." (CEV)
- "Always maintain the habit of prayer: be both alert and thankful as you pray. Include us in your prayers, please, that God may open for us a door for the entrance of the Gospel. Pray that we may talk freely of the mystery of Christ (for which I am at present in chains), and that I may make that mystery plain to men, which I know is my duty." (J. B. Phillips Translation)
- "Give a lot of time and effort to prayer. Always be watchful and thankful." (NIRV)

- “Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving.” (ESV) (This one is my absolute favorite translation compared to the original Greek)

Paul was telling them to pray diligently. He wanted them to stay alert, with their eyes wide open in gratitude. He didn't want them to forget to pray for his ministry which was still going on while he was in jail. He wasn't out of God's will somewhere, or out of a job. He asked them to pray that God would open doors for telling the mystery of Christ, even while he was still locked up in jail. He asked them to pray that every time he opened his mouth, he would be able to make Christ as plain as day to unbelievers. Isn't that a great understanding and prayer request? Not something like, “Help my hurting toe.” Not pray for my grumpy neighbor who argues with me, not even, “I hope I get a new car soon.” Heed wants to pray more and share Christ more!

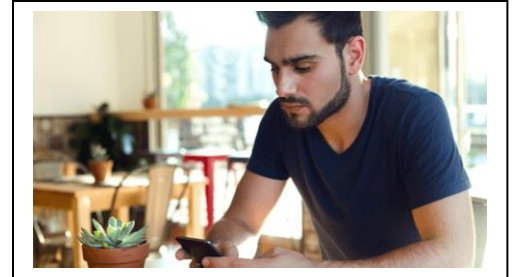
So with that joy in mind, look at the verse in three great ideas: praying should never stop; praying includes watching; and praying should be mixed with thanks. So let me use several outside sources to bring home this idea for us. I am going to bring in the letters and testimonies of a pastor and two missionaries to show how this is what our church needs for prayer.

1. Praying should never stop! Steve and Kelly Marks are praying and working hard to get back to Thailand. They really know God wants them there. And we don't know why there are some hindrances to their return, but even if they get the Covid-19 virus; they still want to be where God wants them. They face fears, but they know serving God is so much more important. Contrast that with the atmosphere of others right now living around us. We can't escape the fear and frustration that people continue to experience on every level in every way. When the borders of Thailand reopened, the Marks family had some missionary acquaintances who also were trying to return to Thailand. I want to share with you their story, that of Eric, Rutha, Jadon and Esther Ebeling. Eric is a teacher at CRICS School that Kelly is teaching at. Steve had me praying for this wonderful family as the school sent out good news on September 30th that this family was on a van coming back home to Chiang Rai. They flew into Thailand without Covid-19. Then after just several days in quarantine they all tested positive. Eric suffered from the symptoms. They had to live in a public hospital for 30 full days. Truly, this journey for the Ebelings has followed so many difficult and beautiful steps but it shows that even Covid-19 is not above Christ's power. So I will just copy the story written through the administration of the school so you can see how continuous prayer was answered:

“Right now, I believe it will be important to help them transition to ‘normal’ life again. I imagine this may take some time, and we have no expectation that Eric and Rutha or their kids will return to ‘school as usual’ for some days. However, the Ebelings will be back on our campus again. Considering the present, extremely serious concern about the Covid19 virus by our school, our country and our world, I want to take this moment

to make everyone in our community aware of our great confidence about the safety of welcoming the Ebelings back to our campus and our community.

To help you feel confident that the Ebelings are safe to return, understanding the details of the Ebeling's journey might be helpful. When the Ebelings started what would be a very long trip back to Thailand and to CRICS almost 45 days ago, they completed much paperwork and official PCR Covid19 testing required in order to allow them to board a plane for Thailand. All paperwork and Covid19 PCR testing checked out, and the Ebelings were



allowed to travel to Bangkok where they were immediately transported to an "Alternate State Quarantine" hotel for an expected 15 day stay. (All returning teachers have done this, in fact right now Amber D, our 5th grade teacher and Elementary V.P. is completing her quarantine time in Bangkok.) During quarantine, all individuals are required to receive negative results for two additional Covid19 PCR tests. The Ebelings passed the first test after their second day in quarantine. However, after this first test, they started to feel some Covid19 symptoms. They did not have fevers, but other symptoms were present. Hoping for the best, on day 12 of quarantine they took the third Covid19 PCR test, and the results for all family members came back positive for Covid19. Immediately, they were taken by ambulance to a local hospital in Bangkok. That was a sad and difficult day for us all.

Immediately, the hospital provided important medical care and a highly restricted quarantine for the next 30 days. To be honest, all of the family felt some symptoms, but Eric got the worst of it. Body aches and difficulty breathing were just some of the difficulties. After much prayer and great care by the hospital and doctors, all of the Ebelings returned to good health again. During the last week of the 30 days in the hospital, the Ebelings were tested for Covid19 again twice, the last test occurring on Sept. 28th. All of the Ebelings had negative results for these last two tests for Covid19, allowing the doctors and hospital staff to confidently declare the Ebeling family as Covid19 free and safe to return to Chiang Rai and the community of CRICS. The hospital staff even threw a going away party yesterday for this family that they became so fond of during the 30 days. Doctors, nurses and hospital staff felt safe to be with the Ebelings and say goodbye. They even interviewed them on film to record their experience. Yikes, 30 days in the hospital is a long time! Many of you gave generously to help the Ebleings with unforeseen costs, THANK YOU! While these costs were high, it was important that the hospital and the government require the 30 day stay in the hospital in order to be sure that the Ebelings were Covid19 free and able to safely return to their home in Chiang Rai. We are thankful that the Ebelings completed everything required of them so that they could return to be a part of our school community.

Please know that the Ebelings suffered in this trial, but through it all they held the great concern for our CRICS community and Thailand. They gladly completed the 30 days knowing that they could be sure not to pass on Covid19 to anyone else. The Ebleings now return to Chiang Rai confident that they can be a safe part of our community.

*Right now there is a lot of fear in our world, and I recognize some may feel anxious about Covid19. Please know that the leadership team at CRICS will continue to take the necessary precautions expected for keeping our campus safe. The Ebelings and everyone entering our campus should abide by the safety precautions established by the CRICS Health and Safety Committee. With these precautions well established, we encourage you to feel peaceful that CRICS continues to be a safe place for your students and our teachers. Please consider saying a prayer of thanksgiving for the Ebelings' lives.
Peace of Christ...*

That is why we at Palisades should never stop praying. So don't stop praying to get our missionaries, the Marks family, returning back to Thailand, or even our upstairs host family, Tim and Helen VanSumeren getting to Thailand by next spring. Don't just stop praying for just our missionaries, but even the reaching of all those around us at PCBC. We are planning a mailing soon, and would you seriously pray that it will touch lives and God will call some of those who are our neighbors to begin the journey to Christ? Pray for salvations! Pray for healing! Pray for people to return to God. Never stop praying! Let's be that church that never stops praying!

2. Praying should include watching! Prayer is the way we express our dependence on God. To be prayerless is to be self-sufficient. John Calvin called prayer "The chief exercise of faith." Prayer should be our "oxygen tanks" over our face each and every day. Think of that as our illustration, instead of the facemasks we all wear. Prayer is the way we keep our spiritual oxygen and stay alive with Jesus. We pray and talk to Him.

Jesus told us to "watch and pray" (Mark 14:37-38). Watching is prayer's musical accompaniment. To be prayerless is to be careless and to fail in our watch. How providential is it that in 2019 we did a study on "watching", remember? We need to keep a steadfast focus and loving eye upon Christ seeking to cherish His graces (Mark 14:41-42). Our definition through those message was this: "Watchfulness is the heavenly habit and discipline of being alert, willing, and ready, to action for Jesus Christ by seeing His beauty and knowing He is coming soon." And it is so important that we watch our hearts, and the gates in our minds such as our eyes, and ears. What is coming at us through Facebook, news media, and through this world is not always Godly. We need to be watchful as we pray. A wonderful pastor who has made an impact in some areas of my life is named Francis Frangipane who pastored about an hour west of where we lived while we were in Iowa and is still there. This is one of the things he has shared recently through these times of distress: *(This is his devotional: "An Unguarded Heart" dated October 2nd, 2020)*

People of Destiny, Take Heed

We are fighting the 'harlotries' and 'witchcrafts' of Jezebel. Those who have been defeated by this spirit often feel they were drugged by their own passions. They did things that were flagrantly sinful, almost daring God (or the devil) to expose them. I am

talking about the war against church leaders, politicians, and men and women in general. How many more must fall before we realize the need for repentance and discernment?

The Jezebel spirit is a ‘man whisperer.’ Its approach typically is not bold but enticing. It comes with seductive words that stimulate the degrading thoughts of human flesh. Its quiet power overwhelms and then disarms the conscience. In your desire to walk upright, what you may actually be fighting is Jezebel, in particular, her many ‘witchcrafts.’

One may argue, ‘My battle is just sin, not warfare.’ Perhaps that is true for you, but for others it is a spiritual attack on an unguarded heart. Its power may be aimed at Christians in general, but its specific target is church leaders and those called to places of authority.

There are times when I think the world has greater discernment than the church. Consider these select words from the old Frank Sinatra song, ‘Witchcraft’:

*Those fingers in my hair
That sly come-hither stare
That strips my conscience bare
It's witchcraft
And I've got no defense for it
The heat is too intense for it
What good would common sense for it do?
'cause it's witchcraft, wicked witchcraft
And although I know it's strictly taboo
When you arouse the need in me
My heart says ‘Yes, indeed’ in me
‘Proceed with what you're leading me to’
—C. Leigh, C. Coleman*

The song did, in fact, reveal characteristics about the effect of witchcraft. The composers wrote, ‘[It] strips my conscience bare.’ It continues, ‘I've got no defense for it/The heat is too intense for it/What good would common sense for it do?’ and then, ‘When you arouse the need in me/My heart says, “Yes, indeed’ in me/Proceed with what you're leading me to.” Of course, we do have a defense for it in Christ, but that defense begins with guarding our hearts from the opportunities and deceptions of the Jezebel spirit.

Set a Guard

I don't want to make too much of the possibility of witchcraft, for becoming overly focused on this type of warfare can itself become a swamp of darkness. Let's keep things in perspective. However, this is a chapter taken from my book on discernment. We need to be aware of the spiritual realm around us. Whether witchcraft is what you are fighting or just natural weaknesses of the flesh, all of us need to close the door to the hyper-sexuality of our world. Indeed, the world has ‘no defense for it.’ However, for those in the kingdom of God, ‘the weapons of our warfare are ... divinely powerful’ (2 Cor. 10:4). Our weapons and defenses are mighty, but we must use them.

Scripture commands us, 'Watch over your heart with all diligence, for from it flow the springs of life' (Prov. 4:23). The NIV says it this way: 'Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it.'

A guard is one armed and trained to recognize an enemy and turn away that enemy's attack. We are in war and must stay militant in attitude. We cannot be casual with sin or temptation. When you use the Internet, use a software filter as a guard. Be accountable to others. Don't feed your sexual appetites, for these kinds of addictions only go from bad to worse (Rom. 1:24-28).

I'm not saying this will be an easy fight. As powerful as the allure of the sin may seem, the enemy will also work to isolate you from others. The efforts we spend hiding sin are the very tools Satan uses to entrap us in it; so, talk to someone (Eph. 5:11-13). Embrace the process of cleansing, of repentance, and washing your 'robes ... in the blood of the Lamb' (Rev. 7:14). Confess your sins to God and one another.

Today would be a good time to build yourself up spiritually. You might consider signing up for In Christ's Image Training (icitc.org). Get back in the Word, for the sword of the Spirit is the Word of God. Use the authority of God's Word to defend your heart against spiritual attacks.

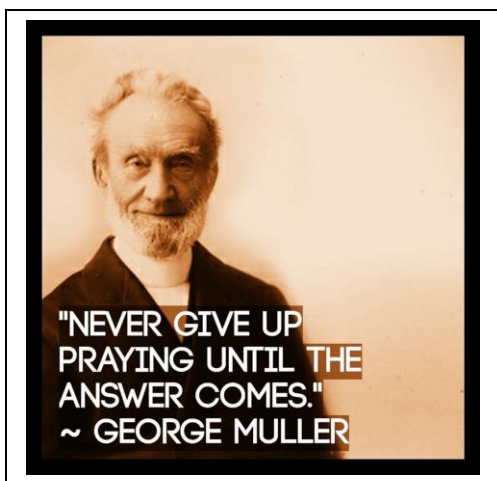
The most important thing you can do is to return wholeheartedly to God. The Lord promises, 'Because he has loved Me, therefore I will deliver him; I will set him securely on high, because he has known My name' (Ps. 91:14). Beloved, it is time to set a guard over your heart."

Why do I share his message? Because so much that the world is trying to feed our souls and hearts with right now is really garbage! And many believers are hooked, line, and sunk into not knowing what to do or believe. We must guard our hearts, not just from impure stuff as Pastor Francis writes, but the other messages of confusion, hate, and lies which are bombarding us right now today! So watch! Can you imagine if we prayed while watching? What kind of testimony and witness would we be as a church if we "watch and pray" like that? Christ is coming, loved ones! He is at the door and we don't know when He will return. So watch and pray!

3. Praying should be mixed with thanks! What do we mean by that? Praying is not just to be done with a positive and grateful spirit and words, but praying as if God has already answered the prayer even when we haven't seen the answer yet. I was reminded by Scripture that Daniel was like this in Chapter 9. He prayed for the return of Israel from exile after reading the prophet Jeremiah. His prayer in chapter 9 reeks with thanks as he ended his prayer like this: *"Therefore, our God, hear the prayer and the petitions of Your servant. Show Your favor to Your desolate sanctuary for the Lord's sake. Listen, my God, and hear. Open Your eyes and see our desolations and the city called by Your name. For we are not presenting our petitions before You based on our righteous acts, but based on Your abundant compassion. Lord, hear! Lord, forgive! Lord,*

listen and act! My God, for Your own sake, do not delay, because Your city and Your people are called by Your name” Daniel 9:17-19 (HCSB).

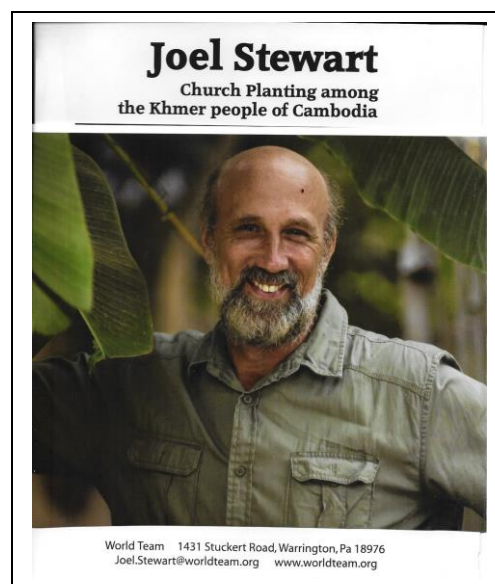
My mind also went to those wonderful stories of George Muller, a Christian business man who cared so much for the condition of children in Dickenson England that he opened and ran an orphanage by faith. There are stories of having no food nor bread to feed all the children, but he sat down to eat with an empty table and prayed: “Lord, for which You will bless us with and for which we are about to receive, we give You thanks.” Then a commotion outside, and George and the children ran outside to see a wagon that crashed over with loaves of bread in the street, and the driver just saying “Could you use this bread, it’s no good to me.” Amazing answers to thankful prayer.



I want to just share some words which arrived by our missionary Joel Stewart this week. I didn’t know until I received his prayer letter by email on Monday, that he ventured from Cambodia to the United States. He was leaving Cambodia and his ministry, to come back for a visit with family, yet he decided to have a “secret devotional retreat” with God this week for the remaining days that he is here in the States. Here is what he wrote:

*“Dear Praying Friends,
‘O God, You are my God; Early will I seek You; My soul thirsts for You; My flesh longs for You In a dry and thirsty land where there is no water. So I have looked for You in the sanctuary, To see Your power and Your glory.’ –
Psalms 63:1,2*

*Greetings from The Secret Place,
Where is The Secret Place? You will have to open the update to find out. [He tells us that it is at a place in the Appalachian Mountains in Northern Georgia.] After 36 hours of travel on 4 flights I have arrived back in the US for a short visit with family. One of my brothers has a significant health challenge, and I wanted to spend some time with my siblings and their families. We are all getting older, and I don’t think I will look back on my times with regret and say, “I wish I had worked more!” Back in Cambodia we finished the dorm construction on schedule, and almost within budget. We had a special celebration dinner with the contractor, laborers and suppliers just a couple nights before I left for Phnom Penh. On Sunday night I flew out and landed in Chicago at 9:20 Monday morning (I gained a day while traveling, so I arrived in Chicago an hour before I left Korea!).*



Before I left our Cambodia field also was able to have a field retreat in Siem Reap. There I shared about our need to go to the Secret Place regularly. We had great times of fellowship, and mornings of waiting on Him in the sanctuary of His presence. Sound mystical? I guess entering into the presence of the Living God will always be a mystery, since we certainly haven't earned that great privilege. What did Jesus have to say about busyness? 'My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work.' Well, I have been busy. To me that has become another 4-letter word. It has been a very full 'summer' (rainy season in Cambodia).

It has occurred to me that we, as Western Christians, tend to base a lot on performance. As I have read various books during the past year, I have begun to see a trend. As Westerners we are often driven by the god of Efficiency. We often evaluate our worth by how much we accomplish and the end product. We are results oriented, often focusing on the fruit, and forgetting about the root. We have forgotten what abiding is, or have never really experienced it. We forget that there is a Lord of the Harvest and are filled with anxiety about the task.

Pastors and missionaries are not exempt from this either. We expect transformational discipleship to happen even when we have not been transformed ourselves. We have forgotten what our real work is. We have often cultivated a stressful (and prideful) obsession with quantity, efficiency and our self-absorbed plans. We lean towards striving and forget to work from a place of rest in His finished work — to be working from our rest not just resting from our work. We have forgotten that God calls us to meet Him in the Sanctuary – The Secret Place, and that our real mission must come from our genuine and intimate experience with God.

What is the solution for those who are wearied by the anxiousness of life, compounded by this pandemic, the social unrest and political polarization? Jesus' invitation is the answer. 'Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest... learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.' (Matthew 11:28,29). What do we do when we feel our lives are like the back of a tapestry... full of loose ends, knots and empty spaces? No amount of frenetic activity or striving will re-sult in everything making sense. We come to the sanctuary (Psalm 63) - the Secret Place (Psalm 91:1 NKJV) and to the place we will find rest for our souls (Matthew 11:29). When our anchor is in Him, He becomes our refuge from the storm. When doubts assail, He is our Rock. As He was for David. Where are you finding rest for your soul?

As you gleaned from my email, I am now on a spiritual retreat at The Secret Place overlooking a beautiful valley in the Appalachian Mountains. It is like a balm for my weary soul. You may not be able to get away to a quiet cabin, but you have the very same Secret Place waiting for you, wherever you are. You must be resolved to find it and not give up until you do. It does not have anything to do with a special place. It cannot be reached by having a 10 minute quiet time. It is the same place David found in the middle of a barren wilderness where there was no water. It is The Presence. Where God is. And He is calling you to meet Him there."

Joel is here in the States having a time with Jesus, and he doesn't know how it will end, but he is certainly "thankful" claiming with a thankful heart that God is answering his prayers even before any sign of the prayer is answered. That is the heart of what I wanted to point out from his message. Oh, that we will be a church like that! Thankful even before God answers our prayers. Are we willing to pray like that? Can you imagine the impact that our faith and witness would be?

As Charles Spurgeon closed his sermon on these verses, may his words be ours: *"Beloved... Thus, with the censor of prayer and praise, let us be this week like priests of God, and You, great High Priest, take our sacrifice and offer it before Your Father's face. I close my sermon. O that some here present may lay the subject of prayer to heart this week! Get alone, dear friends, get alone this week! Pray for your children this week, and groan with God over your ungodly sons and daughters! Pray for your neighbors this week! Put God to the test! See if He does not open the windows of heaven upon you. Be much in prayer and you shall be much blessed. And O poor sinner! You who have never prayed before, the year of God's redeemed is come. This is the acceptable day of the Lord. If you seek Him, He will be found of you. 'Seek you the LORD while He may be found. Call you upon Him while He is near.' Cry to Him now. Say, 'O sovereign grace, my heart subdue!' Trust Jesus with your soul, and unworthy though you are, your prayer shall be heard, and you shall be able to join with the company of the faithful in praying for others as well as for yourself. God bless you all, for Jesu's sake! Amen."* (Spurgeon: A Sermon for Prayer; Colossians 4:2, #354 pg. 9).

Will you pray now persistently, watchfully, and thankfully?

"Loving and Majestic Father, over the beauty and joy of these fall days, our needs are many and our time is short. We realize our Father, that You have the words of eternal life. Turning to trust others in these days is really a study of futility because they too are troubled. They too are neck deep in needs. So today we call upon You and we wait upon You, our Father, to be humbled by Your mighty truths. We pray that You make us as this verse a people of 'devoted and extraordinary ceaseless prayer, exceptionally watchful and diligent, and abundantly very thankful' (Colossians 4:2). When during these times friends fail us, and others misunderstand and attack what we believe, we have been left feeling empty and worthless, and our hearts fail. So we escape to You our Refuge in a time of chaos, to find hope in a time of our trials and fears. Oh, such fear around us that we have never experienced before. We praise You for our Lord Jesus and His mercies, grace and saving love. You have made us aware of our own patterns of pride and anxiety. Help us to ask for help and a sense of anticipation that You are at work. We long for that abiding presence, and the Spirit of God to take over and quiet our hearts. This day we humble ourselves before Your throne. You see our hearts and the battles we have faced. We ask that You restore us; make us wiser. Let not our enemy triumph over us. Fill us with Your Holy Spirit and grant us the grace to walk with a pure heart, a guarded heart,

before You. Meet the needs of our church and those who we are trying to share and witness our faith around us. Continue to give us a vision for those who are lost, those who are hungry spiritually, those who are broken and confused. In all things, lift our eyes to the saving, helping, keeping love our our wonderful Savior, in whose name we boldly come, and all God's people said, 'amen.'"

Pastor Corvin <><

P. S. I wanted to copy the introduction of Charles Spurgeon's message for this verse Colossians 4:2. He preached it as a New Year sermon on Sunday January 6, 1861. You will notice as he opens that he shared this verse to be the church's "verse for the year" just like we do each year and did this year, making 2 Corinthians 5:7 ours: "Walk by faith, not by sight." So it gives me great joy to know that other pastors and people of faith wanted to be people of prayer and learn verses for the year. So here is his introduction:

"'Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving.' Colossians 4:2. THOSE of you who constantly listen to my voice are aware that on the first Sabbath of the year I always receive of a venerable Clergyman, a veteran warrior in the Lord's hosts, a verse of Scripture which I accept as my New Year's text, and which after being printed becomes the motto of my congregation for the following year. It is somewhat singular that my venerable friend should have sent me in the envelope about a month ago this text. He knew nothing of the proposition for a week of prayer. I do not know that it had been even determined upon at that date, certainly neither to his knowledge nor to mine, and I could not but help thinking when I opened my envelope, and saw what was to be my text, that he had been directly and specially guided of God, that my text might be in keeping with the engagements of the week. 'Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving.' How greatly do I rejoice that the churches are awakened to prayer. My honored and venerable brother will this morning stand up in his village church, lift up holy hands, and bid his people join in the common supplication, and I feel but too happy as his younger brother in Christ, as but a babe compared to so experienced a pastor, to follow his example in stirring you up that you too, as a great host may join with the general company of the faithful and besiege the throne of grace till you carry the gates of heaven by storm, and obtain the mercy which both you and the world so much require. Without further preface, let me observe that there are three exhortations in the text connected with prayer. The first is continue, the second is watch, and the third is give thanks. 'Continuance' sits like Moses on the top of the hill, while Watching and Thanksgiving, like Aaron and Hur, hold up its hands." (Sermon #354 pg. 1)