

Always bothering God

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[0 : 00] I would like you to come with me this evening to our portion of God's Word read, the prophecy of Isaiah, on chapter 62.

And to come to our text, let us read again, verse 6. Isaiah, chapter 62, and verse 6. I have set watchmen upon my walls, O Jerusalem, which shall never hold at peace day nor night. Ye that make mention of the Lord, keep not silent, and give him no rest till he establish, till he make Jerusalem a place in the earth.

I want to isolate the first series of verse 7 and take them as our text for this evening.

Give him no rest. There are places where marvelous truths are drawn to our attention in almost a staggering way, with a boldness of language that any preacher would shrink from.

[1 : 20] And that would be unacceptable, were it not that the language we believe is language inspired by God himself. For example, the Apostle Paul, when writing to Corinth, and extolling the wisdom of the gospel, the marvel of the grace of God, and setting out the wisdom of the way of salvation over against all the worldly philosophies of men, he is bold to speak of the foolishness of God.

Startling language. And if I say language unacceptable. Whether it's not from the hand of God himself. And here, the very thought that his people should, if I can use the word, bother God, and give God no rest and no peace, until he hears and demonstrably answers the prayers, until he hears and the hearts of the people, until he does these things, that his people should give him no rest.

That's bold language. Give him no rest. And literally, don't keep silence with the foreman. Keep on bothering God.

Can I stop and ask you, my Christian brother or Christian sisters, how often you bother God in this way? Now, the exhortations to Christian living spread through the Bible come to us with very interesting sidelines sometimes.

And one sphere of Christian life was frequently set before us by the way of precepts and exhortations is Christian prayer.

[3 : 26] Now, as I was saying this morning, I don't think I have actually preached, even in a general way, about prayer here on our Lord's Day.

I've given several addresses about prayer meeting on Wednesday, about the obligation of God's people and the privilege of God's people, the example of the Lord Jesus Christ, and so on.

But I must say that I feel deeply constrained to bring this subject of prayer before your heart on my own this evening.

And I make no apology for it at all. If there is one place where Christian life knows failure, I believe that place is the place of prayer.

If there is one place where in our day the church of God is weak, and I'm not talking about the free church particularly, although I include it, Presbyterians, Episcopalians, Baptists, Brethren, the evangelical believing church of God.

[4 : 37] If there is one place where the church of God is weak in our land, I believe with all my heart that it is the place of prayer.

If there is one place where the church of God requires to be strong today, in our land it is in that very place. Comparatively speaking, relatively speaking, it is easy today to profess Christ, and to profess to be a spiritual man or a spiritual woman.

It was seldom, if ever easier, to attend a church where you will hear the word of God, faithfully preached by sincere men. And we thank God for that.

I would have little hope for you soul, if you do not attend a church where the word of God is faithfully preached by earnest and sincere men.

And there is no preacher who is ever sincere or ever earnest enough. It is comparatively easy to familiarize yourself to a great extent with the word of God.

[5 : 52] You can find the Bible in several versions of very clear, understandable English. You don't need to have higher English, or to have studied Shakespearean English, in order to understand the word of God in our day.

In that sphere, in that department, you are without excuse, and if you go to hell, it won't be because there has not been a Bible in your hand. If you don't prosper as a Christian man or a Christian woman, if you're not growing in grace, if you don't have daily, hourly communion with God, it is not because you don't have the word of God.

And it's not because you know that God does not, does anything but that he desires these things for you. Let me say it again, these things are comparatively easy.

And perhaps it was never easier to be known as a Christian. With a kind of superficial Christian profession, anybody has accepted.

In many churches today. May God save us from that too. It is easy, and I suppose in a sense it almost has been easy, to say that we have a name to live, and yet to be as dead as a soul that never came under the saving power of the Holy Spirit of God.

[7 : 35] Let me say that again. It is easy, and perhaps it has never been easier than it is in our day, to have a name, to live, and yet to be as dead as a soul that never, ever came under the saving power of the Holy Spirit.

And sadly, for young people growing up in Christian homes, especially, it is all too easy to be content with our name to live.

that's my greatest fear for young people brought up under praying, professing, Christian parents.

It's my greatest fear for my own sons and my own daughters. And at times, it is my greatest fear for my own soul that I have a name to live and I'm dead.

Now why do I say these things? I say it because we need the presence and the power of God in a way which we do not have them.

[9 : 03] And there is only one way in which we can have them. And that way is set before us here in the simple, straightforward, unambiguous words of our text.

Give him no peace until he come. And make Jerusalem his church of Christ, his church of earth, a place.

First of all, in Jerusalem, the city and the stronghold of your heart and your life. And then, in Jerusalem, of our congregation here in Edinburgh.

Let's look no further than ourselves. Now the exhortations to prayer, they're rampant in Scripture. God's Word moves with exhortations to prayer. And you know, I was looking through the last three weeks through the Word of God in relation to this, his words of exhortation to pray.

[10 : 08] And alongside every exhortation, almost without fail, there is an encouragement given. Sometimes the encouragement is very explicit by the way of promise.

When you seek me with all your heart, and he's talking about prayer, you shall find me. that's marvelous, isn't it? When you seek me with all your mind and heart and soul, and put all the energy of your being into it, God says you'll find him.

And then we're encouraged, not only exhorting, but encouraged by example. The Bible uses dozens of examples. It sets Jacob before us, for example.

And it shows us in Jacob a man who was so laid hold of by God that at last he called on God and said, I will not let thee go except thou bless me.

The Bible sets before us the exhortation of Elijah. Elijah was a man of like passions with you and me, says the Bible. He had the same weaknesses, the same failures, the same humanity, the same lowness of mind because of sin, the same unbelief plaguing his heart and his life.

[11 : 30] He ran away for his life one day. And we reached the end of his run. Do you know what he said after running for his life? Lord, let me die. Funny way to run for your life.

He knew what failure was. He knew what unbelief was. And yet the Bible says that when he prayed, heaven heard. When God's people pray, heaven always hears.

And here in our text, exhortation and encouragement are marvelously combined. They're linked and intertwined.

Give him no rest. There's an exhortation to prayer. But there, my friend, is an encouragement to prayer. That the Holy Spirit who inspired this one description should say to you and to me, give the Father no rest until he come and pray.

It is God himself speaking and saying, stir me up. Interest me, lay hold of my divine mind. Set before me my divine purposes.

[12:45] Bring to me my divine promises. Stir me up until I come and make you useful in my praise in the earth. Give him no rest. Give me no rest.

Now you and I know what the figure here is. It's a very homely sort of figure. We've said, I suppose, well, I gave it to him at last. He pestered me.

Got fed up with him. So I said, here you are, just take it. I got no peace from him. Now that was the idea.

That's the thought. The thought central to our text. That we give God no peace. Pester him. Bother him. Stir him. Stir him up. The plain implication is that God is willing to hear our prayers.

God never turns our deaf ears. You may sometimes, you may, for days on end, be silent as far as prayer is concerned.

[13:54] But God's ear is never closed. If God is not hearing your prayers, prayers, and if God is not hearing my prayer, the fault is not God's.

My friend, the fault is yours, and the fault is mine. I want to speak about prayer in a very general way from our text.

I want, first of all, to speak under this very simple heading. The Bible teaches us prayer and prayer. God has linked prayer and spiritual prosperity. prayer and spiritual prosperity. Not the church, not the ministers, not the Christians, but God himself has linked prayer with spiritual prosperity. prayer. There will never be spiritual prosperity without prayer. And reverse that, there can never be prayer without spiritual prosperity.

[15:11] prosperity. The two things are true. There will never be spiritual prosperity without prayer. Are you prospering in your soul? I want to look at two or three levels of spiritual prosperity, two or three fields of spiritual prosperity.

And first of all, look at this on the individual level. And my friend, my brother and sister in Christ, I ask you to be honest with yourself. Ah, I'm not interested in you being here tonight to hear a sermon.

I am interested in you being here tonight to deal with God for your eternal good. That's why I'm here. And God granted that's why you're here.

Because eternal issues on earth. On an individual level, prayer, let me say it again, is inevitably, invariably, linked to spiritual prosperity.

Men and women will not prosper as they should prosper if they do not pray. No man or woman I was saying this morning, and I've said it in pulpits before and it's often troubled me when I've had to say it.

[16:29] It troubles me when I say it tonight. But my friend, I cannot but say it. No man or woman who's a sinner by nature and under the wrath and curse of God can expect to be saved apart from prayer.

I've read my Bible from cover to cover and I would no further find a single line or a single phrase which would encourage a sinner to believe he or she will be saved if that sinner does not pray.

God has no dumb children. Now I'm not saying that they will pray easily.

I'm not even saying that they will pray regularly and earnestly and spiritually as they should. But they will pray. Can you imagine a sinner being dealt with kindly and graciously and savingly by God who never asks God to deal with him or her in that way?

I cannot. Now don't make a mistake. I'm not saying that prayer saves a sinner. I'm not saying that at all.

[17:52] You can be on your knees from now till doomsday and that will not save your soul. Prayer will not save a sinner but a sinner who does not pray will be will not be saved.

A sinner is saved by trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ and his finished work. A sinner is saved by calling upon Jesus to become his or her savior and that call is the very heart of prayer.

Reading now I've mentioned reading I guess that some people could be saved who have never read the scriptures and have never read a single commentary.

In fact they're in heaven tonight and I'm bold to say it who never read the Bible because they couldn't read and they never read Hendrickson or Matthew Henry or anybody else because they couldn't read a commentary but somehow they heard the gospel and they believed in Jesus. Reading even reading the Bible will not guarantee your salvation although it's good to read the Bible. A person may well be saved without reading and a person may even be saved without hearing the gospel.

[19 : 25] Deaf as a post. Not able to hear the preacher and yet God dealing with them in one way or another. A person may be saved without Christian fellowship and Christian fellowship is a marvellous thing.

If you're saved you'll want it and if you're saved you'll look for it. A person can be saved without coming to church although if you're saved you will come to church and you'll be there twice a day and you'll be at Wednesday prayer meeting if you can be.

A person can be saved without any of these things singly but a person will not be saved who never calls upon the name of the Lord and that is prayer.

And that makes prayer very important. It links on the individual level prayer and spiritual prosperity together. there are some things we must do for ourselves.

Recently in hospital I was hearing an old man being exhorted by a nurse. Come on man eat it. It wasn't very tasty I have to confess. Come on eat it.

[20 : 41] Won't do you any good if you didn't eat it. Good broad rough fat and brax won't do you any good if you don't eat it. And that was absolutely true. In order to benefit from the nourishment that was being held out to him he had to eat it.

Nobody can eat your dinner for yourself by yourself if you're going to prosper by it. Nobody can repent for you. Nobody can believe for you.

And there's a sense in which nobody can call upon God for salvation but yourself. People can pray for you and pray for your salvation but if God is to be called upon in a personal intimate way by each individual sinner ah my friend you'll have to do that for yourself or all the prayer in the world may not do you any good at all.

Now in order not to label the thing I'll leave it there. individual prayer and spiritual prosperity are linked together.

And then on a ministerial level prayer and spiritual prosperity are also linked together. Now I'm not just talking about preaching or about ministers as we speak of them.

[22 : 05] I'm talking of Christian service. Any ministry. No matter how exalted no matter how humble. Whether you are teaching to a great congregation or whether you're ministering to down and outs in our streets and trying to help them, lifting them, encouraging them, speaking to them.

No matter what sphere of Christian service or ministry you're engaging in and I would regard all these things as ministry. ministry. My friend, there is only one thing that will make that ministry prosperous and that is prayer.

Let me concentrate on ministry in the sense of preaching the gospel and pastoring the people of God, especially preaching. We all know as we look back over church history, men who stand out as having been signally and unusually blessed of God.

I can go back through history, I won't go very far. Tertullian Augustine, their names stand out because they preached Christ and because under their preaching of Christ, multitudes of men and women were brought to Christ and their lives were transformed and the transformation of these lives, history was altered and history was changed and the world became a different place.

It was just two men. Take another two men, Ambrose and Chrysostom. Chrysostom was a nickname given to him, the golden mouthed one, because of the way he could preach the gospel and hold the attention of people.

[23 : 53] Come nearer ourselves, come into the 18th century, for example, and you get another two men standing out in the United Kingdom. Wesley, Arminian and the Holy Wars, what a power he was under God for godliness in our land.

Reputable historians have reckoned that he saved England from the bloodshed that scars the history of France. And Whitefield, it's a good job we can put a Calvinist alongside the Arminian, isn't it?

Wesley and Whitefield. And then last century, Thomas Chalmers, wherever he went, crowds gathered to his preaching.

He said to a fellow minister once, I've told him I'm preaching the next sermon, the same sermon I had this morning, next Sunday again, because they couldn't all get in. And do you have to do that, is it? No, I guess nobody else but Thomas Chalmers ever has had to do that.

Thomas Chalmers and alongside him Spurgeon preaching to three, from a congregation of from three to five thousand people for over thirty years.

[25 : 07] And there are other men we could mention, the Boners and McChain. And what's true, they're all different, they belong to different eras of history, I guess they all had different faces, they preached the gospel in a different way, they sounded different, they were their own individual persons, but you know, there was one thing characterized all of these men, they were men of prayer.

That comes through in the writings of Tertullian, that comes through in the Confessions of Augustine. I wonder if you've ever read the Confessions of Augustine. It's one of the great Christian classics books, of experimental self-exposure as to how God deals with us all.

I am sad that so few free church Christians seem to have read the Confessions of Augustine. Marvelous stuff. And one thing shines through, he was a man of prayer.

You can take Wesley and Whitfield and Spurgeon and Chalmers and McChain and Lloyd Jones and other men we could mention whom God has blessed and what has been true of them.

They have been men of prayer. On the individual level, on the ministerial level of service, prayer is the most important thing of all.

[26 : 39] Now it's important for a preacher to do his work and his study, to know his scripture and to know his commentators and all the rest of it. One doesn't decry these things. But there is something in preaching, there is something in every sphere of Christian service which only God can give and which God will only give in answer to prayer.

What is it? Well I could summarize it like this, the Holy Spirit. And my friend, what encouragement you have as a Christian believer, to ask for the Holy Spirit. If ye who are evil know how to give good gifts to your children, and we do, we leave ourselves penniless sometimes in order to give good gifts to our children.

How much more, said Jesus, will your Father in heaven, give the Spirit to them that ask him.

What do we need? What do I need as a minister? What do you need to be an effective Christian wherever God has called you to live and serve? You need the power and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

You need to pray the prayer of Robert Murray chain. Oh God, give me as much of the Holy Spirit as a saved sinner can have and can hold.

[28 : 08] Just the same as he prayed, Lord, make me as holy as it is possible for a saved sinner to be made on this side of eternity. The individual level, the ministerial level, the congregational level, this morning I was really wanting to say a few things about the congregation as a family and our attitudes within the congregation that I didn't say because time as always was pressing me.

But here again is the very heart and centre of a real family life within a congregation, prayer. Let me ask you a very simple question.

Not this time do you pray for the minister, I'm always asking that. Do you pray for your fellow believers in this congregation? Do you continually lift them up before God and pray that God will adorn them with grace and make them beautiful in your eyes and beautiful in the eyes of their fellow believers and beautiful in the eyes of their saviour?

Do you pray that God will make them as bright shining lights in the darkness of this world? Do you pray for your fellow believers here in Bucleu that they'll be the salt of the earth?

Do you pray that love in all its power and intensity would fill our hearts so that we really loved one another and cared about one another and spoke to one another and bore one another's burdens and got to know each other?

[29 : 57] Isn't it terrible that people can go in and out of a church where the gospel is preached listen to a minister preaching and leave that church and that service and have not one Christian person speak to them I don't know if it happens here but I was here in just through the days of this week of a church a congregation where it does happen sometimes I was in the brink of saying that never happens in Bucleu when I cut my boldness it may well happen perhaps as far as you're concerned it could happen I don't know do you pray that people not just that they'll feel comfortable and at home and so on under the word of God but do you pray that people will come under the power of God when they come in here in a sense and I've said this before and perhaps been

misunderstood by it

I'll just say it again in a sense it doesn't matter so much that a person be spoken to by another person even at the close of a service or rather supremely is that God should speak to them and that they should hear the voice of God and live and you see without prayer there'll be no prosperity on a congregational level I don't know what you expect of this congregation I know what I expect of it I expect this congregation to grow in grace and in the knowledge of Christ I expect it to be a warm caring Christian congregation I expect it under God to be a congregation to which unconverted people will come and be immediately conscious that here there are men and women who have something which they lack they have

God I expect it to be a congregation where there are conversions I said in the two previous congregations of which I was minister and I said it often if there are not going to be congregations conversions here in this congregation I'll not stay on as minister I'm getting too old to say that now very few congregations might have me at my age and in the risky state of my health for my friend I don't want to be the minister of a congregation where sinners are not being converted do you want me to be the minister of a congregation where you never hear of young people or old people being born again of the Holy Spirit there's only one way to avoid it it's not the minister it's you in the place of prayer or largely so then finally

I want to move from thinking about how God has linked prayer and spiritual prosperity together to this and I'll do it much more quickly this is just really a closing section of our sermon to move on to this because God has linked prayer and spiritual prosperity together and because we can trace it out scripturally in all these realms let's use prayer for our own spiritual progress now because God has linked these two things together prayer and spiritual prosperity let us determine by God's grace to use prayer for our own spiritual progress and when I sense you could the theory of this just as perfectly perhaps even more so than I have myself the difficulty is to put theory into practice one way to help that and to encourage that move from theory and head knowledge into practice and heart knowledge one way to do that is just to look at our text again give him no rest what an encouragement that should be for us now if we were to go back through the chapter and I won't do this except very briefly we would see that the chapter begins with the

Lord saying I believe it's the Lord saying although some commentators think it's the prophet speaking especially modern commentators and especially modernistic commentators but I believe it's the Lord speaking perhaps through the prophet and saying this for Zion's sake I will not hold my peace and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest here is God saying that he will not rest and if you go on to look at what follows he's speaking of individual blessing and of corporate blessing and of making the church on earth under Jerusalem or Zion he's speaking of great prosperity the work and church of Christ and the kingdom on earth being like a crown of glory in the hand of the Lord a royal diadem in the hand of thy God you'll be no more turned forsaken there are beautiful Hebrew words behind these things that I won't bother you with that forsaken when we look out on the church today this is one of the things we feel about it in almost any land in the western world that the Lord has withdrawn his power from it and forsaken it he says there's a time coming when you'll no longer be like that because they have been in similar circumstances you'll no longer be called desolate but [36 : 15] Hesibah a delightful community Beulah and so on married accompanied blessed made fruitful and then our text is introduced by the thought of watchmen on the walls of Jerusalem in verse 6 these watchmen are probably the preaching prophets of Isaiah's day and the preachers of the gospel in our day I'm not sure they may also be just the praying people of God watchmen the watchmen was usually there on the walls of a city to warn of dangers coming invasions and so on that's why I think it was probably the prophetic preaching that was in mind yet they're never to hold at peace they'll not be quiet and then there's an exhortation ye that make mention of the Lord keep not silent now that phrase which is translated in the authorised version ye that make mention of the Lord is very interesting in the margin of the Bibles if you have a marginal reference

Bible of the authorised version it says this all the Lord's remembrances keep not silent the Lord's remembrances now that's a marvellous statement those who are remembering thinking about concentrating on praying to and asking the Lord and the NIV I think catches it really quite well you who call on the Lord and that phrase that's translated keep not silence at the end of verse 6 is literally don't take rest don't take rest to yourselves again the NIV has translated this I think very helpfully I must say that in the Old Testament especially the NIV is often advantageous good translation anyway there is something not only

God is to be stirred out of his rest and to be given no rest but you and I are to stir ourselves up in order to do that what gives a resting God using that phrase in a very special sense a God who is not hearing or answering prayers a God who is not being stirred up to bless his people and his church what is the cause of arresting God you know what it is arresting people when you rest he rests that's how closely prayer and blessing are linked together so don't you rest don't ease up on your prayer and believe me I would never have said this in the first ten years of my preaching of the gospel I would never have said it but I say it now believe me the easiest thing to do in the Christian life is to rest from the urgency and the energy of true prayer there is nothing easier than to fall out of the habit or there is nothing easier than to make it merely a habit there was a time when I thought that once people were ten or twenty or thirty or forty years converted prayer would be no bother to them it would be very easy

I looked at godly people when I was newly converted and although I was praying almost constantly all day myself I thought oh these people are far far ahead of me in prayer and maybe they were but if there is one thing I have learned in thirty six years of trying to follow Christ it is that prayer is not easy and I've learned this too to forsake prayer to forsake prayer and give up praying is the most fatal and deadly thing to your Christian profession or mine it is the most deadly thing of all you want to back slide you want to get cold you want to make sure that you put a big distance between yourself and god there is a very easy way to do it stop praying regularly I have never met a young Christian or an old Christian who has known the experience of back sliding and falling into sin but they have confessed when they came back that their back sliding began when they forsook a place of prayer and that has been my experience too prayer does see things and with this I close prayer takes us to three places it takes us to a place where we know our continual dependence upon god takes us to a place perhaps the only place where we'll ever come to a just estimate of self we are apt to think more highly of ourselves than we ought and it will take us to the only place in this world where we'll find god perspective on what our life should be prayer will do constant prayer will keep us in these three places a place where we know continually and daily our dependence upon god where we will have a just estimate of what we are dust of the air and a true perspective on what our life should be as we journey towards the judgment seat of our holy god speaking of prayer the psalmist said and I close with this he said this in psalm 5 and verse 3 may be true for every one of us here this evening lord thou shalt early hear my voice i early will direct my prayer to thee and looking up unanswered will expect that's why we pray because we get an answer ■ bye re you