

Pastoral Letter October 2009

Only a prayer meeting!

That is the title of a famous address by C H Spurgeon, which begins with these words: ‘What a company we have here tonight! It fills my heart with gladness, and my eyes with tears of joy, to see so many hundreds of persons gathered together at what is sometimes wickedly described as ‘only a prayer meeting’.

We may never have attended a prayer meeting when literally hundreds of believers were present, or, if we have, it will no doubt have been only on very rare occasions. But however many are gathered, or however few, how vitally important prayer meetings are in the life of the church of Christ (just as prayer itself is so vital in every Christian’s life).

A glance at the Acts of the Apostles in the New Testament is sufficient to remind us that the early church was born in prayer. When the apostles returned to Jerusalem from the mount of Olives, following the ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ into heaven, we are told ‘they went up into an upper room’, where, along with other believers, they ‘all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication’ (1:11-14).

Matthias was chosen to take Judas’ place among the apostles at a prayer meeting (1:24). When the Holy Spirit came at Pentecost it was when ‘they were all with one accord in one place’ (2:1). Was that at a prayer meeting as well? And one of the fundamentals which the early Christians ‘continued steadfastly in’ was ‘prayers’ (2:42).

As Acts unfolds, it is the same story. What a thrilling account we have of a prayer meeting in chapter 4, following the release of Peter and John from the council, when those gathered ‘lifted up their voice to God with one accord’. We are told that ‘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’.

Corporate prayer surrounded the choosing of the seven in Acts 6, and the setting apart of Saul and Barnabas to missionary service in chapter 13. And don’t forget the special prayer meeting in chapter 12, when Peter was in prison – and how surprised the praying folk were when their prayer was answered and Peter was released!

All of which leaves this challenge with us, in our day: what place do prayer meetings have in our churches, and what place do they have in our lives, hearts and priorities? It is not enough that they be announced – they need to be attended. The prayer meeting really is the ‘power house’ and the ‘boiler room’, under God, in the life of any church. The fact is that you just can’t beat a good prayer meeting when you can find one. Oh! that such would be our regular experience – and that we shall not miss the blessing by not being there!