

THE LUDICROUS COMMAND

By Dr. Steve Daily

The story is told of an archeology professor in a prestigious university who was always trying to stump his best graduate students with questions they could not answer. So after one expedition to the middle east he returned to the campus with the skeletal remains of a man that was thought to be approximately 3,000 years old. He then presented a lecture to his graduate class in which he conjectured that this man had died of a heart attack. Then he challenged the class to determine if this was a scholarly speculation or not. Several of his brightest students insisted that it would be impossible to find any evidence on such a skeleton, that cardiac arrest was the cause of death. To which the professor replied, “Not so, my young scholars, for in right hand of the skeleton, I found a piece of parchment, which read, 10,000 talents on Goliath.”

Any betting man in David’s day, with an ounce of sense would have put his money on Goliath. Even Saul and the Israelite army didn’t think that David had a chance when he went up against the giant, because in the natural realm, and to the natural mind, he didn’t have a chance. In the natural realm this was an impossibility, just like crossing the Red Sea or taking down the walls of Jericho. This is why David wasn’t interested in fighting in the natural realm. 1 Samuel 17:45, “You come to me with a sword, and with a spear and with a shield, but I come to you in the name of the Lord God, Almighty.” David’s saying, I’m not coming against you in the flesh, I’m coming against you in the Spirit of the Living God.

Why are so many professed Christians struggling today? Why are so many discouraged, depressed and defeated? It boils down to one simple thing, going up against our circumstances in the flesh. In the flesh, Israel was up against a hopeless situation and they knew it. Soldiers are typically courageous people, if there was even one chance in a thousand that one of them could have taken this guy, someone would have stepped up to the challenge. But, this was an impossibility, especially for a small teenage boy with no armor. The only reason King Saul and his officers even allowed it to happen was because they saw a faith in God, in this young man, that put them all to shame. Our biggest problem in life is that we won’t trust God with the impossible. A lot of us have circumstances right now that seem impossible. God has us right where He wants us, but then we try to solve the situation through our own devising.

The sermon title, today, is “The Ludicrous Command.” The Bible is filled with ludicrous commands, and many of them come from the mouth of Jesus. You need to “hate your father, mother, spouse, children, family and even your own life or you cannot be my disciple” (Luke 14:26). “Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you” (Matthew 5:44). Are those who give us the most grief, the people we pray for the most? Today, we consider the third fruit, on our kingdom life tree, which focuses us on 24/7 prayer. There are many ludicrous commands in Scripture concerning prayer, but I want to focus on just two this morning that are closely related. The first is in 1 Thessalonians 5:17, where we read the overwhelming words, “Pray without ceasing.”

I once preached on this text at the university church where I pastored for twenty years, and after the sermon, one of the professors on the campus said, that is why we can't take the Bible literally, because if we do it is filled with absurdity. But, if you don't take the Bible literally, except in those places where it is clearly symbolic, which was the position of the reformers and most Christian leaders down through the centuries, we end up making the Bible say whatever we want. So let us look at this verse and see if we can take it for what it says this morning. “Pray without ceasing,” the NIV says, “Pray continually.” One of our biggest problems in the western world is that we live under the banner of radical individualism. And this causes real problems when we read the Scriptures, because we tend to apply them individually when they were written to a corporate body.

This letter is not entitled, Paul's letter to Mr. Thessalonica, and yet that is the way we commonly read it. Paul is addressing the believers, speaking in the plural tense, when he writes this letter and gives the Lord's commands. So, pray without ceasing, is not intended to be an individual command that would demand that we each do nothing but pray continually. Rather, it is a command that recognizes the primacy of prayer, and calls the body to take this priority seriously. Like Moses on the Mountain as Joshua fought the Amalekites, as long as Aaron and Hur held up his hands in intercession Israel prevailed, but as soon as they dropped, the Amalekites prevailed (Exodus 17:11). This story illustrates the truth of what Paul is saying to the Thessalonians about the importance of intercession, namely that prayer is much more powerful than human effort.

The church has generally not understood this truth, much less practiced it. Yes, we know we're supposed to pray, but if we really understood the

importance of an interdenominational prayer covering over this region, we would not be struggling to get our 24/7 prayer sheet filled out, nor would the other churches in our ministerial fellowship. I have no question that the biggest factor that led to revival in South Korea, revival at Toronto, revival at Pensacola, revival at Lakeland, revival at IHOP and revival at Bethel has been their commitment to Spirit-led 24/7 prayer, praise and worship. And I want to emphasize the phrase Spirit-led, because this is the key. We were talking about the 24/7 prayer effort in a recent ministerial meeting, and one of the pastors, brought up an effort that had occurred in our area that he felt was strongly contaminated by legalism and spiritual pride.

That is the last thing we need, prayer and worship that is motivated by guilt, obligation or pride. I don't want anyone signing up to participate in this prayer covering who isn't called to do so by God's Spirit, in the spirit of excitement, faith and great anticipation. After Meri Crouley was here, I read her book, and was very pleased to see how her ministry was birthed and has been maintained by prayer. When the Lord called her and a group of other ladies to rent a 4,000 seat auditorium and to put on a major concert for young people, they were overwhelmed. None of them had ever been involved in such a venture and didn't know where to start. They ran into all kinds of crazy obstacles, but they kept inquiring of the Lord, and He directed them to establish a 24/7 prayer covering that resulted in amazing miracles and supernatural success. What I loved about the story was that they had women waiting in line for the privilege to be part of this prayer covering.

It is so important to understand that the greatest promises concerning prayer are given to the unified body of Christ, not to individuals. Our Lord's greatest desire was to see His kingdom body come into a true unity (John 17:21). And it was in this spirit that He made the promises about prayer that were given to His body, not lone ranger Christians. In the chapter before, when Jesus promises that His followers will receive whatever they ask from the Father (John 16:23-24), He is giving a corporate promise to His unified body. The prayers which brought the revivals that I referred to before, were prayers that were offered in a spirit of interdenominational unity. This is why we are inviting all the churches in the area who are willing to participate in this prayer covering to be a part of it. Otherwise there is a very real danger for spiritual pride. "Look what our church did, look at the revival we brought through prayer." "I thank **you Lord** that we are not like other men – who fail to engage in 24/7 prayer." "But, Lord, did we not pray 24/7 in your name, and cast out all the devils from our valley."

Jesus will say, I don't know you, because there is no place for spiritual pride in My kingdom. Humility and unity were the two factors that produced an environment where the Holy Spirit could fall with power, and Pentecost was born in this reality. This is why we truly must desire to see the other churches in our building, in our ministerial association, and in our region succeed, just as much as we want to see God bless our body. This kind of love, unity and humility are not born of the flesh. They are not born of the natural mind. This is why Jesus calls us to be Spirit-led (John 3:6), and Paul calls us to have a Spirit-controlled mind (Romans 8:6), or a Spirit-renewed mind (Romans 12:1-2). This leads us to the second verse that I want us to explore this morning, which is also a ludicrous command.

Let's turn to Ephesians 6:17-18. Paul says, "Take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God; praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints." These are the two verses that follow Paul's description of the whole armor of God. His introduction to this passage reminds us that we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, therefore, we cannot be effective functioning in the flesh or with the natural mind (Ephesians 6:11-12). So let's unpack verses seventeen and eighteen in the context of our topic this morning. First of all, I want us to notice that the word of God is defined as the sword of the Spirit. The Bible is only the word of God as it is interpreted by the Spirit. Religious teaching in general, does not recognize this fact, therefore, it often does more harm than good.

The letter kills. The Pharisees who memorized the Scriptures put Jesus on the cross. The religious spirit does more harm than good, because it is the spirit of the enemy, it functions in the flesh or soulish realm, and its' fruits are the polar opposite of the Holy Spirit. As Hebrews 4:12 puts it, the word of God is sharper than a two-edged sword that divides between the Spirit and the soul. Everything that is accomplished in the kingdom of God is accomplished through His Spirit. That is why prayer that claims God's promises through a Christ-centered, Spirit-filled understanding of His word, is the foundation of living the kingdom life. Let's go back to verse seventeen, "praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit." Here we see that same expression, "praying always." Again, Paul is speaking to all the saints, concerning all the saints. We are all called to be intercessors who participate in a prayer covering that benefits all the saints.

One of the things I miss in our new sanctuary is our prayer wall from the other church. My wife and I saw four of the six names we put on that wall make decisions for Christ, and I know that many of you saw similar answers to prayer. James 4:2 says, “You have not, because you ask not.” We need to keep asking God for souls and posting our requests so that others can support us and we can support them, and so that God can visibly get the glory. Every time I prayed over that wall and saw a new cross by a name, indicating a new breakthrough in another life, my heart exploded with joy. We need to make it a point to openly celebrate what God is doing in our midst, and at the same time, have a dimension to our prayer life that is not seen or known by others, what Jesus calls “praying in our closets. And this is where my last point comes in this morning.

Paul not only tells us to pray without ceasing, to pray continually, to pray always, but he tells us to do so in the Spirit. Praying in the Spirit generally refers to praying in tongues. Paul is not only calling the church to participate in a 24/7 prayer covering that releases an open heaven, and by that I mean continually calling His kingdom down, on earth as it is in heaven. But, he even calls us to have a prayer covering made up of people who are praying his perfect will by continually interceding in tongues for His church and His unsaved children. We can pray to the best of our ability, hopefully through an openness to the Spirit and not out of the flesh, but even these prayers can’t compare to what God’s Spirit prays through us when we pray in tongues.

Romans 8:26, says, “The Spirit helps us in our weaknesses, for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings that cannot be uttered.” As we attempt to become a congregation that moves in the fullness of the Spirit, it is critical that we understand what the Bible teaches about praying in tongues and moving in the prophetic spirit. In 1 Corinthians 14:5, Paul says, “I wish you all spoke with tongues, but even more that you prophesied, for he who prophesies is greater than he who speaks in tongues, unless indeed he interprets, that the church may receive edification.” Both of these gifts are crucial in a Spirit-led church, which is why I am currently teaching a class on the gift of prophecy every Sabbath morning, and why I’m going to spend the rest of this sermon talking about praying in tongues.

There are five important points in relation to the Biblical gift of tongues that we apply at Kingdom Life Fellowship to keep us functioning in faith and not fear when we consider this subject.

1. The Bible clearly teaches that there is more than one kind of tongues.

In spite of the fact that many Christians are taught that the only legitimate gift of tongues in Scripture is the miracle God performs when He allows people who speak different languages to communicate, like on the Day of Pentecost,” this is simply not true. Any careful study of 1 Corinthians 14 will reveal that there is a God-given gift of tongues that has nothing to do with human languages. In verse two of this chapter, Paul says that “He who speaks in a tongue does not speak to human beings but to God.” He does not speak in a language that is known by people but in a heavenly, Spirit-inspired language that is only understood by God. Therefore, we accept the gift of ecstatic utterance, but do not see this as a requirement for God’s people or as a necessary sign of the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

2. The New Covenant gospel is the key to understanding tongues.

There are two kinds of people who speak in tongues: Those who have received the New Covenant gospel of grace and those who have not. What is built on the true gospel stands as opposed to everything else which has been built on sinking sands. Anything that undermines Christ’s finished work on the cross puts us under the bondage of the law and its condemnation. For when we declare that we are under law as sinful human beings, we give the devil permission to trash us with the condemnation of the law. By contrast, when we declare that we are in Christ and under His blood, we are no longer under condemnation (Romans 8:1). This is why Scripture declares that “the power of death and life” resides in our tongues (Proverbs 18:21). It is Calvary that births Pentecost. It is only the Gospel that can free us from condemnation and release the Spirit, for the Spirit of the Lord can only thrive in liberty (2 Corinthians 3:17).

When you observe different charismatic groups, there is a big difference between those who speak in tongues under the law and those who speak in tongues under grace. Under the law, you will be told that you need to speak in tongues to be saved or to be an effective Christian. Under the law you will be told that you can only receive the Baptism of the Holy Spirit by speaking in tongues. Under the law people will try to teach you to speak in tongues by having you repeat their own tongue, but none of this is Scriptural or ordained under the freedom of the gospel. It is an acceptance of the full gospel that makes tongues attractive and effective, and it is in this context that we will explore three very valuable functions of this gift in the Spirit-filled life.

3. Tongues play an important role in our personal worship and praise.

Many people in our congregation speak in tongues, and I believe this is primarily because we place such a high priority on the gospel and on praise. Praise is rooted in the gospel. When we truly come to understand that we have been freed from the law of sin and death (Romans 8:2) and that all our sins have been forgiven, past, present and future – the spirit of praise is released in us. Ecstatic tongues are first and foremost about personal worship and praise. This is why Paul says, “He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself, but he who prophesies edifies the church” (1 Corinthians 14:4). The gift of tongues as a praise and prayer language is given as a personal gift to facilitate our intimate time with God. It is not a language for others to hear unless God chooses to use it in a manner that will edify others. This is why Paul counsels us not to use tongues in a public forum such as church unless an interpretation is given so that the heavenly language can have meaning by being interpreted into a human language.

4. The gift of tongues plays a major role in receiving Divine downloads.

Our biggest need as fallen human beings is to hear God’s voice and to be guided by His will. Jesus said, “The Son can only do what He sees the Father do” (John 5:19). Jesus continually walked in the Spirit (Romans 8:14) and calls us under His New Covenant to do the same. He says, “My sheep hear my voice” (John 10:27). They don’t just read my Word, they hear my voice. This is the difference between friends and servants. Friends “know what their Master is doing” (John 15:15). They enter into fellowship and intimacy with Him. In our prayer meetings, when we don’t feel sure about how God wants us to pray for a certain individual, we often pray in tongues, and the Lord gives us insights or “words of knowledge” that allow us to pray more effectively for this person.

This fits with what Paul says in Romans 8:26, “The Spirit helps us in our weaknesses, for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercessions for us with groanings.” As we speak in an unknown tongue seeking wisdom for a specific situation, the Holy Spirit will sometimes download information to us that is very valuable. Just spending time privately speaking in our spiritual language for extended periods can be extremely valuable. Many individuals today, have committed themselves to privately praying in tongues for extended periods, only to find that six months or a year later God begins to work through them in miraculous ways, downloading gifts that may or may not be used with a public expression of tongues, which leads us to the final point.

5. Tongues can play a prominent role in public ministry and in the function of miraculous gifts. On more than one occasion we have had gifted speakers, healers and evangelists minister effectively in our church, who have combined the gift of tongues with other gifts to accomplish God's purposes. One example of this is Gayle Rettig, who speaks and ministers through music, and then when it comes time to minister in the congregation, she often speaks in tongues and then provides an interpretation in the form of a "word of knowledge" that is followed by a healing miracle or a prophetic word. This kind of ministry, demonstrates how God can use a combination of the gifts, and how tongues and prophecy can be interrelated. As we noted earlier, Paul says that the gift of tongues is equal to the gift of prophecy when there is an interpreter, and that this interpretation can come from the one who receives the gift of tongues (1 Corinthians 14:5).

So in conclusion I want to say that praying in tongues is important and interceding for this valley is essential. I believe God has called us to make interdenominational 24/7 prayer a priority of this house. The praying can be done at your home, in the church, or at any place of your own choosing, as long as it occurs during the time period you have signed to cover. The focus of this prayer time is for revival in this valley and interdenominational unity, but I believe that those who participate in this prayer covering will see God bless them and their families with supernatural blessing and favor, that always comes when we give ourselves unselfishly to kingdom priorities. Jesus said, "My house shall be called a house of prayer." His word calls us to continual intercession, but when understood through the Spirit it is not a ludicrous command.