

Praying Is the Key
Short Message for Ebenezer UMC
Sunday March 22, 2020

My brothers and sisters, I pray all is well after spending a lot of time away from the church. This is our second Sunday not worshiping together at Ebenezer and I know some of you miss that fellowship time together and you miss gathering to worship in your familiar space on Sunday mornings.

We have to understand this is unfamiliar territory for many of us. We are experiencing a period in our lives that is different from anything we have ever seen. It has caused us to really look at life itself and its importance, compared to the carefree way that we have usually taken for granted.

We have witnessed the fact that life has changed within a few weeks and we wonder whether it will ever be the same again. Some of us are very anxious, some are worried and I know some of you are fearful, and yes some of you may have other emotions or descriptions you may want to add.

But I declare to you today that God has not forgotten nor forsaken us. God is still on the throne and God is still in control. We know this because this is what our faith teaches us. No, we might not see him right now, but he is there, always has been, and always will be.

Many of you have had some moments in your life where you did not know if you were going to make it or not, but you learned to put your hope and trust in God in those situations. So, today, we will believe and trust God in the midst of this coronavirus.

I want to encourage us this morning by first of all reminding you of the thing that you have heard over and over and it has become a repeat and rinse type of cycle. Continue to wash your hands at least 20 seconds (it helps to remember by saying the Lord's Prayer while washing). Keep your hands away from your face and eyes

and your nose. (this has been hard for me to do, so pray for your Pastor). Stay away from large gatherings, remember to practice social distancing and please, let us check on each other. To me, that last one is the most important one. Let's keep a check on each other. Help each other if we can and remember the elderly around you and in your communities.

Now with that being said. This is a short message I want to share with you today. It reminds us to keep praying no matter what. Even when we are not able to attend church as usual, we are to keep praying. We know that the church really is not the building, and the church really is the people, and the church should be in our hearts.

So, I remind each of us to keep praying, no matter where we are and no matter what the situation might be.

In the Old Testament book of 2 Chronicles in chapters 6 and 7 you will find the story of King Solomon, the son of King David, who is now in control of Israel and has worked for years to build a house, or the temple for the Lord. The time has now come for the dedication of this magnificent place of worship and Solomon wants to do nothing more than to please God. He knows that God does not or has not lived in a house and yet he wanted the presence of God in the temple. He begins his prayer in Chapter 6, verse 14, and he prays throughout the rest of chapter 6. Since we are not at Ebenezer, take the time to read this prayer, for it truly is powerful. As you experience the prayer, notice all of the different situations and circumstances Solomon lifts up to God and how he asked God to hear from heaven, the prayers of the people towards that house of God, and to let God be open and his ears attentive to the prayers of the people from the temple.

There were all kinds of things that Solomon prayed about. He prayed about sinning against each other, he prayed about being defeated in war, he prayed about drought in Israel, he prayed about plagues and locust and blight and mildew. Things that

were happening during his time as king. He prayed about foreigners, the illegal immigrants of his day and other issues, but in each situation, he asked God for forgiveness and that God would hear from heaven and forgive the people of their many sins.

I said that to say this. Solomon knew there would be a time when people would not be able to worship in the temple, they would not be able to be physically present in the place of worship. But during that time, he wanted God to know and the people to know that even if they were not in the temple, they could still pray. If they could not attend worship, they could still pray. No matter where they were, if they could just look toward that place of worship and spend time in prayer, seeking the face of God and asking God for forgiveness, he prayed that God would continue to hear the cries of his people because he was and still is a God who sits high and looks low and knows about the affairs of his people.

You see Ebenezer, there are a few things that are happening right now that is keeping us from worshiping within the building at Ebenezer, but we can still pray and still worship God wherever we are. Yes, there is this Corona-virus in play that has seriously interrupted all of our lives. People are living in fear, hoarding up food and other essentials while others are in need. Many people have lost their jobs and children are out of school, Universities have shut down, and all sports have come to a screeching halt. Restaurants have gone to take outs or drive throughs; malls have shut their doors and many cities and tourist attractions have become ghost towns and places. We are all living in uncharted waters and we are becoming islands that are becoming more and more isolated.

The center of my life, the church, the place of worship, we find the doors shut and Sunday morning is eerily quiet. Yes, we miss the fellowship, we miss the choir singing, we miss the prayers, we miss the fellowship time together and we miss

seeing and hearing little Gatlin entertaining us all as I try to hold your attention during the message.

Yes, we are in uncharted territory, but I declare to you, that God still sees and God still hears the prayers of his people. So that is why I want to remind us to keep praying.

Getting back to Solomon, we find in Chapter 7 that God answers his prayer by sending fire down from heaven and it consumed the burnt offerings and the sacrifices and the glory of the Lord filled that place. They continued to worship God and God showed them his glory.

But this is the part I really wanted to emphasize from the text. After hearing the prayers of the people and of Solomon, after the temple had been dedicated and the glory of the Lord had filled the place, God came to Solomon at night and reminded him of what I want to remind you all about today.

God told Solomon, “I have heard your prayer and I have chosen this place for myself as a place of sacrifice. When I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or command the locust to devour the land, or send pestilence among the people, ***“If my people who are called by my name humble themselves, pray, seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land”***.”

Wow, does this sound familiar. We are in a period now where we need more than ever, to act as if we are the people of God called by his name, that we humble ourselves, that we pray and pray and pray some more. That we in this time of crisis, seek the face of God, turn back from some of ways we know that are not pleasing to God, and seek his forgiveness. If we ever needed God to act on our behalf, it is right now. God is able to bring an end to this plight we all find ourselves in right now. God said if we pray, seek his face and turn from our wicked ways, he would hear from heaven and will forgive our sins and heal our land.

Church, we need to be praying now more than ever, we need to seek the forgiveness of God and ask God to intervene in the midst of the world crisis. If God can do it for Solomon, he can do it for us. No, we can't worship together, but we can pray together. We may not be able to fellowship together, but we can seek the face of God together. We may not be able to see each other, but we can still pray for one another and ask God to take care of us.

That is my word for us today, for us to pray and to seek the face of God in the midst of this situation we are facing.

Let us pray: Dear God, we come to you today, humbly seeking your face and asking that you would hear us and forgive us. We know that there are many things that we cannot control, but you control everything. You are the God of sky and sea; you are the God of heaven and earth. You are the God who is over all circumstances and you sit high and you look low and you are familiar with all our ways. Bring peace where there is fear, bring hope in the midst of our hopelessness, bring about a calmness in the midst of our despair and forgive our sins and heal this land. I pray for the people of Ebenezer, for our homes, our families, our neighbors, our places of where we reside, our cities, our states, our country our world. Pour out your Holy Spirit upon us and grant us your peace. In your precious name we pray. Amen.

Don't forget that we need to continue to keep up our tithes and offerings during this difficult time for the church. You can send them through the mail or drop them off at the office. Thank you for your love and support of Ebenezer UMC at a time such as this. Be blessed all!!!!

Pastor Ronnie