

Opening Scripture

Psalm 24 (ESV)

Honoring Dr. King

This coming Monday is a Federal Holiday. It is the Martin Luther King, Jr. holiday. Dr. King's birthday was January 21. Our government established the 3rd Monday in January as a day to remember and honor the memory of Dr. King. Most of us are familiar with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Martin Luther King Jr. was a man of deep conviction and exceptional courage who became the most visible spokesman and leader in the American civil rights movement. While controversial during his lifetime, Dr. King was fundamental to ending segregation, combating racism, and affirming the right to equality for citizens of all races and colors. His actions and words continue to resonate around the world.

Dr. King gave many sermons and speeches in his work of making America aware that all people, regardless of race, or ethnicity should be treated fairly and equally. As we remember his work today, I want to share a quote from his writing, **Letter from a Birmingham Jail**.

"I have almost reached the regrettable conclusion that the Negro's great stumbling block in the stride toward freedom is not the White Citizens Council or the Ku Klux Klanner but the white moderate who is more devoted to order than to justice... Shallow understanding from people of good will is more frustrating than absolute misunderstanding from people of ill will. Lukewarm acceptance is much more bewildering than outright rejection."* — **"Letter from Birmingham Jail"*

Dr. King's statement is a challenge to all of us who identify ourselves as followers of Jesus to not just give "lip service" to the idea of justice for all people, but to take action and do what we can to live out the values and principles of the Kingdom of God.

Prayer for our Nation.

Scripture

Ephesians 6:10 – 20 NIV

Message: Some of you who watch these weekly videos are aware that I will be retiring from the ministry here at Germantown Church at the end of January. I will no longer be producing the weekly video recording. I hope that at some point in the future, the video recordings will be back. I do appreciate all of you who regularly watch these recordings. I'm glad that during this Pandemic when our "In Person" Sunday morning services were impacted, that we were able to provide an opportunity to participate in a weekly worship experience. Thank you for being a part of these services. I would ask for your prayers for our Church as we transition to a new season of ministry with a new pastor. Thank you.

For these last few weeks that we will have together, I am sharing some thoughts that I believe to be a great importance. In a sense they are my "Last Words" to you. I am sharing some things that I hope you will be able to keep in your heart and live by.

I have entitled today's message, "**Pray without Ceasing.**" That statement is taken from one of the final verses in the book of 1 Thessalonians. ***1 Thess. 5:16-18 – Be joyful always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.*** I want to focus my thoughts on that statement: ***Pray Continually.*** Some translations say it like this: ***Pray without ceasing.*** I want to take a few minutes and try to understand why Paul said that and what he meant by it. If it was important for the Church at Thessalonica, it is probably pretty good advice for us today. I would suggest that a key to your effectiveness as a follower of Jesus, and the effectiveness of this Church or any Church is found in following that instruction, to **pray without ceasing.**

I believe that if we are going to live by this instruction, that we may have to have a different understanding of the word **Pray**. If our understanding of the meaning of the word “**Pray**” is to go to God and present our lists of requests, our lists of things we would like Him to do for us I would imagine that praying would soon get “old” and cumbersome. We would run out of things to say, or ways to say it. That is probably how many people understand what it means to Pray. But prayer is so much more, much deeper than that.

Richard Foster in his book “**Prayer**” shares a quote from a contemplative named Isaac the Syrian. Isaac writes this: “**When the Spirit has come to reside in someone, that person cannot stop praying; for the Spirit prays without ceasing in him. No matter if he is asleep or awake, prayer is going on in his heart at the time. He may be eating or drinking, he may be resting or working – the incense of prayer will ascend spontaneously from his heart. The slightest stirring of his heart is like a voice which sings in silence and in secret to the Invisible.**” So prayer is more than just our talking to God. It refers to the ongoing awareness of God’s presence with us. Praying without ceasing means to intentionally live with the awareness of God’s presence with us. To be constantly interacting with Him as we go about our daily activities.

Paul writes about prayer in Ephesians 6. His words there will be helpful to our understanding of the statement, “**Pray Continually**”, or **Pray without ceasing**. We must look at these verses against the backdrop of his introductory words, in verse 10 -12. “**Finally, be strong in the Lord and in His mighty power. Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realm.**” Paul then describes this spiritual armor with which we must clothe ourselves. He concludes the passage with this challenge: “**And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.**” (6:18). A very similar challenge to “**Pray Continually**”, or **Pray without ceasing**. It is Paul’s understanding that our life in this world is a constant spiritual struggle. The enemy of our souls is always opposing us. He threatens our spiritual condition. He threatens our relationship with God. He threatens our safety. In order that we are not overcome by evil, we must be in a constant state of vigilance. We must be seeking strength constantly from God. Richard Foster, quoting Kallistos, a Byzantine spiritual writer who says: “**Unceasing prayer consists in an unceasing invocation of the name of God.**” So prayer is much more than simply presenting our list of requests to God. Certainly we are to do that. But the kind of prayer the Paul is talking about in these passages, is to engage in an ongoing awareness of God’s presence. We think about Him and His care for us. We have an ongoing conversation within our heart with the Father.

Praying continuously is not something that comes naturally or easy. We must discipline our hearts and minds to think of God, to interact with him at the deep level of our soul. There will come moments when the thought of God slips from our minds, but when we become aware of that, we must renew our awareness of Him and our silent conversation with Him. So to pray without ceasing is to live in an ongoing interaction with God. We present our requests to Him, but listen to His heart as well.

My prayer for you and our Church is that we will all grow in the practice of Praying without ceasing.