

Jesus tells his disciples to pray that they would be considered worthy to escape the judgment and to stand before the Son of Man. When Jesus tells you to pray, this is something you should take great comfort in. After describing the signs and the anxiety overtaking the world, our Lord doesn't say, "Fare well!" or "Good luck!" No, he teaches us to pray. And his invitation to pray always carries with it a promise. When he tells us to address God as "our Father," he is teaching us to believe that God is our true Father and we are his true children, so that, with all boldness and confidence, we may ask him as dear children ask their dear father. When he teaches us to pray that God's name would be holy, he is teaching us that God has given us his own name. In the same way, God has given us his own kingdom. We can rely on his will to be done among us, that he will provide for our daily needs, forgive us our sins, lead us out of temptations, and deliver us from evil. When Jesus tells you to pray for something, he is teaching you to rely on God's promise.

So in our Epistle lesson, Paul prays (Rom 15:5-6): "May God, who helps you to endure and encourages you, give you such harmony with one another as you follow Christ, that together with one voice you praise the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." God helps us endure. God gives us patience. He encourages us. He is the God of patience and encouragement. Right there in Paul's prayer is the ground and foundation for his prayer. It is the object of our faith. It is that God gives you patience. God comforts you. God will see you through to the very end. You will escape the judgment and be found worthy to stand before the Son of Man. When you pray for this, you are resting on this sure promise.

God gives us this patience and encouragement through the Scriptures. The Holy Spirit has inspired the prophets and apostles to write his Word down. And everything written in the Bible was written to teach us. It teaches us by the examples of those who went before us. It warns us against falling into the same unbelief of those in the days of Noah, of the people of Sodom, and of the people of Israel in the wilderness. It strengthens us by the example of Joseph as God remained with him after he was sold into slavery in Egypt, or by the example of David who took comfort in the forgiveness promised by God after his sin with Bathsheba. The Bible teaches us through its commandments as we learn to honor our parents, protect our neighbor's reputation and property, and walk in the duties to which God has called us. The Bible teaches us through the promises to trust in Christ who took away our sins and presents us righteous before the Father. The Bible teaches us everything we need to live the Christian life.

The Bible isn't just a list of principles. Of course, it sets before us more good works than we know what to do with. It teaches us about great virtues like humility and patience. But the Bible doesn't just tell you how to live and then leave it up to you to be humble and patient. No, the Bible itself is patient and encouraging. It is God's living voice, which gives us faith and keeps us in the faith. It teaches us with patience. It teaches us with encouragement. And it gives us hope. It gives us a sure hope, a confidence that we will be found worthy to stand before Christ on the last day. This worthiness is not found in our own qualities. It isn't in our ability to understand the Bible. No, our worthiness is found in the promises the Bible itself reveals. It is in Christ who was born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem us who were under the law's condemnation. Christ is worthy. And he invites you to pray that you would be found worthy. In other words, he is inviting you to rely on the patience and encouragement of the Scriptures. This is the same patience by which he suffered and died for you, the same encouragement he himself received from the ministry of his holy angels, the same endurance and comfort he gave to the man on his right, to his mother, and to John when he spoke words of peace from the cross.

Rely on what God has spoken and caused to be written down for your sake. Look at the example of God's saints, and see how God saved them and preserved them through all sorts of troubles. Above all, see how God preserved his own Son in the womb, in the cradle, and even as he bore your sin and guilt on the cross. Listen to how the Psalms, prophets, apostles, and evangelists assure you of God's protection and the care of your Lord and Shepherd Jesus Christ. Listen and take to heart the words of Jesus, "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away." As much as the words of Jesus warn us of the destruction coming upon the earth, much more do they strengthen us in the sure hope of everlasting life.

When you pray, you are relying on what the Bible says. Jesus tells us to pray that we would be found worthy to stand before him on the last day. The Bible says that those who trust in Jesus will not be put to shame. The Bible says that there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. So when you pray that you will endure the hardships and temptations of this earthly life, you are relying on these sure promises of the Bible. The very patience and encouragement of these words of God give you the same patience and encouragement to fight the good fight of faith to the very end.

Now, let's return to Paul's prayer in our Epistle lesson. Again, he says, "May God, who helps you to endure and encourages you, give you such harmony with one another as you follow Christ, that together with one voice you praise the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." Paul is praying for the unity of the church. The church prays together. The church praises God together. With one voice, the church glorifies the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. When Jesus says, "Watch and pray," he isn't speaking to one person. He is speaking to his whole church. When you pray, you are relying on the same words of the Bible your fellow Christians rely on. Your hope is the same as theirs. You are declared righteous by the same righteousness Jesus won for them. As Peter writes in his second epistle, "to the people who by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ were given a faith as precious as ours. (2 Pet 1:1)" And as Peter also writes in his first epistle, "Resist the devil, firm in your faith, knowing that your brothers in the world are going through the same kind of suffering." You don't go through the trials of this life alone, no matter how much it might feel that way. Your prayers are not spoken alone, no matter how much they may feel that way. You are, with the same voice, praising the same God and Father of the same Lord Jesus Christ with the one, true church.

This unity is only seen in part here on earth. False teachings, threats, divisions, and all sorts of wickedness cover up the unity we have. We see the signs described by Jesus. The eclipses, falling stars and meteors, earthquakes and storms all testify that the heavens and the earth will someday pass away. The nations in distress and the people fainting out of fear teach us that the strength of men can't save us. If we dwell on the troubles of this life, the divisions, the fears, and all the trials, then we will only despair with the rest of the world. Our hearts would only become burdened with drunkenness and worries of this life. We also can't ignore these things, pretending that they don't exist. There are all sorts of false hopes being promoted. But Jesus teaches us to stand ready and look forward cheerfully, because he is coming soon to rescue us from this valley of sorrows. Jesus directs us to his promise. He assures us that his kingdom is very near.

This assurance and promise of Christ is what our prayers rely on. Our prayers rely on his Word, which will never pass away. This is how our prayers are united to one another in one voice. We don't achieve unity simply by getting up and having joint prayers with people. When tragedies happen, this is often what the world likes to do. So called "people of faith" get together for joint prayer services. But they all

teach different things about God. Some even worship completely false gods. This is not the kind of unity Paul prays for. This is not the kind of praying Jesus teaches us. Prayer isn't just expressions of your religious feelings. True prayer rests on the Word of God. It rests on the Scriptures. And this is why it gives you comfort. This is why you are encouraged in your prayers. This is how you are given patience as you beg God to lead you not into temptation but to deliver you from evil.

The prayer of the church rests on God's Word. It rests on God's promise. It rests on what Christ has accomplished. So when you pray and confess this saving Word of God, you are joining in with all those who are called by the same gospel. The gospel is the power of God to salvation for all who believe, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. Jesus became a servant to fulfill God's promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He didn't do this only for their physical descendants. He was born in the flesh, pierced on the cross, and risen from the dead to give blessing to all nations. He is the hope of the nations.

So when you rely on his Word, when you pray to be found worthy, when you learn patience in your suffering, when you are comforted and encouraged by Christ who forgives you of your sins, then you should know that you aren't alone. Saints from all around the world are joining you with the same voice. God has not abandoned his church, no matter how dark the signs of this age get. He will strengthen our faith with the power of his Holy Spirit, making us steadfast in hope. This is his promise in his Word. Therefore, let us pray these words with confidence:

O God of hope, fill Your servants with all joy and peace as we believe in Your Only Begotten Son, and make us overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.