

## WITH CHRIST IN THE PRAYER BATTLE

by, HENRY BLACKABY

1

### With Christ In The Prayer Battle

Henry Blackaby

*The following is edited from a message given at the Midwest Prayer Conference of Harvest Prayer Ministries, in October 2006 at Maryland Community Church in Terre Haute, Indiana.*

In Matthew 26:36-46 we read of that very sensitive moment in Gethsemane when the Lord Jesus undertook one of the greatest battles of His life. He invited His disciples to go with Him to Gethsemane and then He invited three of them to go with Him as He went to pray. He simply asked them to *"Watch and pray."* Listen especially to the heart of our Lord as we read:

*"Then Jesus came...to a place called Gethsemane, and said to the disciples, 'Sit here while I go and pray over there.' And He took with Him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and He began to be sorrowful and deeply distressed" (vv. 36-37).*

Have you ever been with Jesus in prayer to that degree? Has there ever come a moment when you knew what was on the heart of God, you knew what you were facing – not just the pain, but what was eternally at stake, and where your praying would make an eternal difference? As you began to pray you were full of sorrow and great distress. There will never be a change in America until some of His own go with Jesus and experience this kind of praying.

*"Then He said to them, 'My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death. Stay here and watch with Me'" (v. 38).* Who carries the weight of the world, you or the Lord Jesus? The Lord Jesus does. That's why I entitled the prayer book I wrote this year, *Experiencing Prayer With Jesus*, not apart from Him. You'll never understand prayer with the dimension that it will take to change a nation unless you go into that kind of relationship. There is a moment when you start to pray and you are simply watching while He in you carries the weight of the world.

*"He went a little farther and fell on His face, and prayed, saying..." (v. 39).* A lot of people want to praise but don't want to fall on their face in prayer. There is a time when it is important that you stop all the praising and start doing some praying, especially when God's people meet together. Praising can never be a substitute for prayer or for repentance. The single greatest need of God's people is repentance!

If God's people don't repent, there will be no revival. Yet God's people are not being taught to repent. I would say that 85 to 90 percent of all God's instructions in the Bible to repent are directed toward God's people, not lost people. Yet God's people come to church Sunday after Sunday and never know that God's directive to them is to repent. Repentance is prerequisite to experiencing the fullness of God. What was the message that Jesus delivered to God's people? *"Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand [right next to you]" (Matt. 4:17).* The whole presence and power and fullness of God are right next to you waiting to be appropriated and received, but they're waiting on your repentance.

Repentance means you're going in the wrong direction and you have to turn around and go in God's direction. Most of us feel because we are in a worship service we're going in the right direction. During most of the worship of God's people in the Bible they were going in the wrong direction even while they worshiped. But they never acknowledged their need, and so they perished. Israel, Judah, Jerusalem, the Temple perished; the walls were torn down, and God's people were put in seventy years of bondage because they had sinned and

## WITH CHRIST IN THE PRAYER BATTLE

by, HENRY BLACKABY

2

never recognized their need to repent. That's why the first word out of the mouth of the Son of God to His people was "*Repent!*" because the full presence and power and kingdom of God are waiting to be distributed. Can I say that this is the same message He would give to you and me? If you are not experiencing the full measure of the presence and power and activity of God, it is not because He is not present to be that, but it's because we have not met the conditions to experience Him through repentance.

*"He went a little farther and fell on His face, and prayed, saying, 'O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will but as You will'"* (Matt. 26:39). Luke's passage has Jesus praying, *"Father, if it is Your will, take this cup away from Me"* (22:42). When Mark records Jesus praying in Gethsemane you hear Jesus crying out, *"Abba, Father, all things are possible for You. Take this cup away from Me; nevertheless, not what I will, but what You will"* (14:36).

### The Disciples Asleep

Returning to Matthew 26:40 we read: *"Then He came to the disciples and found them sleeping, and said to Peter, 'What! Could you not watch with Me one hour? Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.' Again, a second time, He went away and prayed, saying, 'O My Father, if this cup cannot pass from Me unless I drink it, Your will be done.'*

*"And He came and found them asleep again, for their eyes were heavy. So He left them, went away again, and prayed the third time, saying the same words. Then He came to His disciples and said to them, 'Are you still sleeping and resting? Behold, the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise, let us be going. See, My betrayer is at hand'"* (vv. 40-46).

Jesus invited His disciples to go with Him to this very sacred moment, when the eternal purpose of God was hanging in the balance. We do not know why He sometimes chose three out of the disciples to take with Him. When He went up on the mountain of transfiguration, Scripture says He met with Moses and Elijah and the Father, and they *"spoke of His decease which He was about to accomplish in Jerusalem"* (Luke 9:30-31). He was going to set free a whole world by His death in Jerusalem, and they talked together about that deliverance that God would accomplish through Him. Jesus invited Peter, James and John to go with Him so they could experience something of the intensity of the hour and something of the significance of prayer and something of how, when a child of God prays, heaven and earth are bound closely together and history is bound with that moment.

I believe this is a most sacred hour in the purposes of God. As I met with the business community and other leaders here, I sense there is a God-initiated cry for this city. Could this city become a "city of God," where God came to His own, and His own recognized that it was God, recognized what He was intending to do through the city and released their lives to Him so significantly that suddenly God has a people through whom He could work? Could it be that a great and sweeping revival could come to this city and out from this city to the state and out from this city to the rest of the nation? God can do that.

### God Visited Saskatoon!

God permitted me to be in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan two years before the presence and power of God rested on that city. I met with fellow pastors and others to pray, and I found that as we prayed, God dealt with my heart. He so identified sin in my heart and so

## WITH CHRIST IN THE PRAYER BATTLE

by, HENRY BLACKABY

3

drew me to release that sin to Him for cleansing that the experiences in the prayer time week after week were so real and so significant that I literally ran back to the church I was pastoring and shared it with the congregation. The congregation began to be cleansed and restored, and they all began to hear and to sense the mind and heart of God.

Then there came that moment when Bill McLeod called me and said, "Henry, that for which we've been praying seems to have happened!" In his church were two deacons who had not spoken to each other for a couple of years. The previous night one of them under great conviction, head down, began to make his way to the front of the church to meet God. Little did he know that on the other side of the auditorium, his brother had come under the same conviction and he was making his way to the front. When they got there, they realized they were there together, and in front of the whole congregation, who knew of their being at odds with one another, they fell on each other's neck and wept and repented and restored their relationship.

Bill told me that as that happened, suddenly a teenage girl on one side stood up and her mother stood up on the other side. The mother cried out to the daughter, "Oh, forgive me; I've not been the mother I ought to be toward you," and the daughter replied, "Oh, I haven't been the daughter I ought to have been to you." They ran across the auditorium and fell on each other's neck. That service lasted for several hours as God touched that congregation.

God touched the entire city of Saskatoon. For seven and one-half weeks, the Spirit of God was incredibly powerful over the entire city. Churches suddenly began to repent and return to God. For years, the presence and power of God rested on the people whose lives God had touched. I was ministering to a little congregation of ten people, all so discouraged when I had gone there, that they wanted to disband. When the presence and power of God touched their lives, they started 38 new congregations while I was there. Never in their history, dating back into the late 20's, had they started another congregation in another community. We began to pray for laborers. They had never reached university students, and yet I baptized 180 university students. They had never had people called into ministry, but over 100 felt called into the ministry. We started a theological college in our church to train those whom God was calling into ministry. We had over 480 people come through that school, and to this day they are impacting lives in the nation of Canada and around the world. In the midst of all of that huge touch of God, my four sons felt called into the ministry.

There is a fullness of time in the economy of God. Jesus knew in Gethsemane when that was, and He didn't want His disciples to miss that incredible moment. It seems as you read through history, God's moment for great and mighty revival is always preceded by and accompanied by an unusual measure of prayer. God seems to do something in the hearts of His people to call them beyond anything they had ever known. Jesus knew His disciples would be the very essence of the people of God that the Father wanted to use to touch and change the entire Roman Empire, so He introduced them to a moment in God's timing when they could see the kind of praying that would be laid over their heart.

When God's heart has a burden, He lays that burden over the heart of His own. There is no question that the Father's hour was Gethsemane. For centuries, even back into eternity, the Father was planning this moment. It was the moment when He Himself would be in Christ reconciling a whole world to Himself. There was much at stake in how His Son read the heart of the Father and that was exposed in His prayer time. That kind of praying is

## WITH CHRIST IN THE PRAYER BATTLE

by, HENRY BLACKABY

4

unusual praying. Jesus could announce to these three, *"My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death"*(Matt. 26:38). They watched Him in agony, and in Luke 22:44 it says that the sweat came from His brow as it were great drops of blood.

Do you know why America does not have revival? We don't have revival prayers. We are content to let sin reign and then complain to God how awful sin is. God says that any hour you are willing to pay the price you can be the one who turns that around. But it is not ordinary praying. Would you be willing to let God take you to another level of praying? He will unite you with His Son and you will go through that hour and listen to every word and watch every move and hear Him say, "Would you not watch with Me one hour?"

### In Sharp Contrast

There is one of those tragic Scriptures (Psalm 78:9-11) which describes a group of people which are part of the people of God. This is another moment of God's choosing. God knew that His people would be facing incredible battles from the enemy. So He called Ephraim, a part of the people of God, and armed them for battle. But listen to the tragedy and then listen to the three reasons why this tragedy occurred:

*"The children of Ephraim, being armed and carrying bows, turned back in the day of battle."* Here are the three reasons why they abandoned their colleagues and abandoned the conflict: *"They did not keep the covenant of God. They refused to walk in His law, and forgot His works and His wonders that He had shown them."*

God had thoroughly equipped them, and they refused to accept the equipping work of God. And so, even though they were armed and carrying bows, fully equipped for the battle, when the battle came their hearts were not equipped. Their hearts turned them back, leaving a vacuum where they should have been, putting additional strain on the fellow believers. The other people of God had to make up the difference.

First, they did not keep the covenant; they forgot that they were a people chosen by God, called by God and equipped by God to be the people of God in God's timing. Did God know there would be moments of struggle and battle with the enemy? He did. Did He make adequate provision? He did. But they did not hold to themselves that calling of God which He had given them.

Second, they refused to walk in His laws, in the path that He had laid out for them. If they would have read what God had provided for them and walked in it, they would have been ready for battle, but they never read their Scriptures, so they were completely ignorant of what God required.

I've often asked at a pastors' conference, "How many of you believe in the Great Commission?" (Matt. 28:19-20). They all put up their hand. Then I ask the second question, "If you believe in the Great Commission, how many of you have systematically listed everything Christ has commanded, and have systematically taught all of the people of God how to practice everything Christ has commanded?" In twenty years of asking that question among pastors, I've found only one pastor who has ever done that.

My next statement is, "Regardless of what you say, you do not believe in the Great Commission. You have changed the Great Commission to be, 'Make disciples and baptize them.'" The greatest single aspect to the Great Commission comes in the third statement: *"...teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you."* That is what you see in Acts 2. The new believers *"...continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers"* (v. 42). Do you know why the early Church with new

## WITH CHRIST IN THE PRAYER BATTLE

by, HENRY BLACKABY

5

believers turned the Roman Empire upside down? They continued daily in letting the apostles teach them how to practice everything that Christ commanded.

Most of God's people may attend only a worship service once a week on a Sunday morning, and they feel they can be an adequate disciple of Jesus with no teaching on how to practice. Some may go to prayer meeting, but I'm finding that even elders and deacons don't go to prayer meeting, and most of the rest of the church doesn't either. How can you be a leader among God's people and be absent from the prayer meeting when the people of God gather to intercede in the presence of God? We need to repent! We're going in the wrong direction.

Fellow believers, we are equipped by the Holy Spirit, equipped by the presence of the living Christ, equipped by the fullness of God in our life, equipped by the Scriptures, and have been granted an opportunity to come before God in prayer, which is another equipping, and He's put His people around us to help us. Yet, even though we're equipped and carrying bows, we're turning back in this day of battle. There is no possibility of winning this battle with that kind of involvement. We have abandoned our brethren who are in the battle, and we've left them alone to fight the battle.

### Practical Ways to Get Involved

Let me give some very practical illustrations. One of the ways in which God invites you into the battle will happen during the worship service where you attend. At the beginning of our worship service, we always have a prayer time and our pastor will say, "We want you to come, and if you have a burden or if there is something on your heart, even praise, you can come and meet the Lord." Usually the altar is filled with people.

I noticed one Sunday a young adult probably in his early 20's who fell at the altar, and I could tell he was in distress because his shoulders were heaving. God said to me, "Henry, why don't you join that battle?" We ought not to withdraw and say, "That's none of my business. I can't get involved." So I made my way to the front and knelt beside him, and when I thought it was appropriate to pray, I hadn't had three words out of my mouth, and this young man threw his arms around me and said, "Dr. Blackaby, it's you!"

I said, "Tell me what burden you're carrying." He said, "This week I graduate in law from the university, but God is calling me into the ministry, and I'm here before God, pleading with Him if He would only send somebody to come alongside me and help me know what I ought to do, and God sent you!"

Was that a spiritual battle? It was. What was at stake? The eternal destinies of many. Did God want me to join Him in that battle? Could I have sat back there and used a thousand excuses why I couldn't get involved in this man's life? I didn't know him, but he's part of the family, and I'm part of the family. I am fully armed and with a bow and I must not withdraw in the moment of battle.

There was another Sunday and I looked across the aisle from me, and there was a mature, adult lady with tears streaming down her cheeks. The Lord put it in my heart to just step across and see if there was anything I could do. So I put my hand on her shoulder, and she turned with her tear-stained cheeks, and I said, "It's obvious you're carrying an awful burden today." She looked at me so pathetically and said, "This is the first anniversary of the death of my husband, and I've just not been able to get over it." I said, "Do you feel like you're in a bondage?" She said, "Oh, yes, for a whole year I've been in a bondage. I don't know how to get over it."

## WITH CHRIST IN THE PRAYER BATTLE

by, HENRY BLACKABY

6

There I was, fully armed by the Lord. I said, "Would you like me to pray?" If you feel you don't know what to pray, then read Romans 8:26: "*...we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.*" Quietly in my heart I said, "Lord, I don't know how to pray. Would You help me?" So I began to pray. That is the way to pray with the Spirit's help – start to pray. He'll show you what to pray. Something happened in her heart and life and countenance. When I finished praying she looked at me through her tears and said, "I'm free! I'm free!" God had set her free.

I know Christmas is very hard on widows. So when Christmas came, I said to her, "How are you doing?" She looked at me and said, "I'm free. It has been a glorious Christmas. I remember my husband, but I'm not in a bondage to that. I'm free!"

### Further Illustrations

There was a church in east Texas which asked me to come and teach them how to recognize the presence and activity of God. So I was preaching one Sunday morning, and I always give an invitation to see what God might be doing so I can join Him. I noticed a little ten-year-old girl come from the back to the front and kneel to pray. Not one person came to join her. I was so distressed that I left the platform and knelt beside this little girl, and it was obvious she was praying for a lost friend of hers. I turned to her and said, "You need to know that this morning is a wonderful time in the presence of God. He has heard your cry and you can count on it that your friend is going to be saved." I could say that because the Bible says that.

Sunday night I was preaching again and gave the invitation. Down the aisle came this same little girl but she had a little girl with her. I knew who that girl was. The pastor sat the little girl down and said, "This is so-and-so. She has come to put her faith in Christ and for baptism. How many of you..." and he was going to say, "...would receive her?" I jumped to my feet and I said, "Pastor, pastor, you're hiding the presence of God from your people! This morning the God of the universe visited this place when that little girl was praying, and now the God of the universe has just taken a little girl out of the kingdom of darkness and put her into the kingdom of His dear Son, and you have hidden all of that from your people."

That pastor was a very sensitive man and he began to cry. When he gathered composure he said, "O dear people, forgive your pastor for hiding the activity of God. Week after week God has visited us and touched lives and we've never acknowledged that it was God. Pray for me, because I never again want to be in the presence of Almighty God and not announce to you that He has just done a great work."

So I turned to the congregation and said, "You have heard the request of your dear pastor." That congregation surrounded their pastor. They wept and prayed and covenanted together, and the service went on for another hour.

Could you join God in a battle that may be taking place at the altar of your church? Would it not be a most tragic moment if God equips you as one of His children to enter into the spiritual battle that will release people out of bondage, but you turn back and say, "It's none of my business"? I want to speak directly to some of you senior adults. If you see a couple go hand in hand to the altar, could you not join them? There may be a spiritual battle going on. Don't say, "One of the elders should go or one of the deacons, or the pastor ought to go." You ought to go. You have been fully equipped by God to make a difference in any battle that is going on where God invites you to join Him in that battle. I've found that when

## WITH CHRIST IN THE PRAYER BATTLE

by, HENRY BLACKABY

7

I pray with someone, the battle seems sometimes to rage, but then there is that incredible victory and you get to be present to see the enemy driven and Christ is Lord in the life of individual after individual.

It might be one of your own children. One Sunday when my children were in university and I gave the invitation, my second son came down to the front sobbing. He is very controlled but he was sobbing his heart out on this Sunday. I went down to speak to him, and he said, "Dad, there are three or four others who have come. You need to give attention to them." I said, "Son, not today. I'm the only dad you've got, and I must spend time with you today. I don't know all that is going on, but I think I have something I can contribute to you." I put my arm around him, and we went back to the office. He poured his heart out. That was the moment he was struggling with God's call on his life.

I'm so glad I didn't say, "Well, this is not my battle," and turn it over to someone else. I'm glad God said, "Henry, don't you withdraw from this battle. You've prayed for your son; you've watched over him, and now he's in a battle for the rest of his life. You need to join into that battle and help him gain the victory." Out of that time in my office, he settled his call from God, went on for two years to Norway, went back to seminary, and now is back in Norway as a senior pastor. I was present when all five of my children sensed the call of God, and I'm grateful that the Lord has armed me so that when I see a battle I can enter that battle and see the victory come.

### **Will You Watch and Pray with Jesus?**

You may need to make a decisive move in your life toward God. You may need to go at the Lord's invitation to His Gethsemane. You may hear Him ask, "Will you be one of three who will go with Me and watch with Me? Will you watch and pray with Me while I carry the load of the nation in this your day?" He is still looking for those who will go with Him. Could you be one of those, and would you say to Him in the decisive moment on your knees before Him, "Lord, I'll go with You. I'll not withdraw in this my hour of battle. I will watch You bring the victories, but I want to be with You. I don't want to stay where I am in my prayer life. I want a deeper level of prayer with my Lord. I want to move from where I have been to where You want me to be."

It is going to take some unusual commitments in prayer for God to work through us mightily. Don't be like the Ephraimites. Though you are fully armed, you withdraw in the day of battle. You forget that you are a covenant child of God. You forget the mighty works of God that He has done when others have prayed. Don't leave a vacant spot where God assigns you to be so that others have to make up the difference.