



ST. MATTHEWS
Experience God's Family

Sermon Title: **Why Pray? Churches Pray**

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Old photos...

...are such fun.

Have you ever looked at an old photo of a young person and wondered what they would look like now as an older person. Or looked at a person and wondered what they looked like when they were younger?

Look at these:

1. 1983
2. 2010 – 27 years later
3. 1956
4. 2010 – 54 years later
5. 1980
6. 2010 – 30 years later
7. 1978
8. 2010 – 32 years later
9. 1979
10. 2010 – 31 years later
11. 1990
12. 2011 – 21 years later

And this morning as we come to look at what a praying church looks like I want to go back to two snapshots of praying churches many, many years ago that still is the snapshot of any healthy church today.

These snapshots are recorded in the Bible and from them my main point for the message this morning is...

A praying church regularly prays together with a strong gospel focus and gospel fruit that follows.

A praying gospel church

Acts 11: 19 – 30 and 13: 1 – 3.

Our sister church at Antioch (Antioch was like the Las Vegas of the Roman Empire second only in size to Rome and Alexandria with about 500 000 people) was shaped by the Word, worship and by prayer – and that drove them to be concerned about what God was concerned about – the gospel growing where they were and anywhere else the Lord lead them too. And boy through their obedience was there gospel fruit.

While this passage is dealing with the growth of the gospel from Jerusalem to the world via the apostles... it is interesting to note that God chooses to use a local church like Antioch that gives itself to bible, worship and prayer to bear all this Gospel fruit – at home and further afield.

And I believe that is still true... this snapshot of gospel history can also be a snapshot of our gospel history if we give ourselves to these things... not least of all prayer.

A church that needed to keep prayer at the centre

Timothy was leading the church at Ephesus and faced a number of challenges – not least of all that some of his leaders were caught up in unnecessary conflicts and arguments... and it was getting real heated!

Paul writes to Timothy as says – **1 Timothy 1: 3 – 7.**

Paul writes lot of brilliant things to help Timothy sail these choppy waters including being careful in what kinds of leaders are put in place.

But at the heart of this help comes **1 Timothy 2: 1 – 8**.

These guys were big on talk but not the praying kind of talk and Paul tells Timothy to get that sorted out... get prayer (prayer that focuses on God and His purposes) back at the centre of things... and you will get a healthy church again that will bring glory to God and start doing what a healthy church ought to do and not be sidetracked with nonsense.

And that is prayer with a gospel concern – outward looking not inward focused, includes even the pagan Emperor – salvation.

And prayer is the antidote to all the angry disputing.

A praying church regularly prays together with a strong gospel focus and gospel fruit that follows.

And also fruit of the Spirit? Makes sense.

So what do we learn from these snapshots from our church family history?

A praying church prays!

They actually do it! It may vary from church to church in style and what happens around prayer based on culture and tradition... but a praying church prays regularly and doesn't just have prayer as a value on a piece of paper somewhere.

A praying church prays together.

A praying church means a group of people praying together. Not split up as individuals or couples but as the family!

A praying church has an outward Gospel focus

A praying church has a concern for those outside the church and outside the immediate community who need salvation as a significant part of their prayer together.

A praying church sets itself up to keep on being a praying church

That will keep us focused on our relationship with God (last week the pattern of prayer)

Help us to keep the main thing the main thing – as Paul reminded Timothy **1 Tim 2: 1 – 5**.

That will see powerful growth – like in the Antioch church!

Learn the lesson

When you looked at the old photos in the beginning it wasn't a surprise to see (without a few modifications) the new photo...

And if we do what Antioch did we will look like them just a different version... if we do what the Ephesian church did we will look like them...

Imagine – which one do you want?