

The Enemies of Prayer-Part 4

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[0 : 0 0] thank you Andy great job well this morning I want to finish up this series a four part series we started a number of weeks ago about prayer enemies of prayer and this morning I'm going to add two to that list we've talked so far about six enemies of prayer and when I say prayer I don't mean just you know bowing our heads and praying for a moment but really having an effective prayer life and my guess is that a lot of you in this room if you had sat down and given it some thought taken an hour or so and said well what do you think he's going to talk about you would have named some of these that I've named and so it came as no surprise to you I'm going to mention two this morning however that might there are two this morning I'm going to talk about that probably a lot of you in this room wouldn't have said necessarily would have come to your mind when you think about enemies of prayer but I think you'll see they may be two of our fiercest enemies that we've talked about yet the first believe it or not is success if you ever thought about how success in life could actually be a hindrance to your being effective in prayer believe me you're going to see in just a moment it can be now I want to be real clear about this

I hope everyone in this room considers themselves successful you know humility is not having a bad self image and think well you know I'm just no good to anybody that's not humility that's not true humility so I hope you look at yourself and I hope you have enjoyed success in your life and it doesn't mean because you're successful you can't have an effective prayer life I hope many of you have been successful in parenting I hope many of you have been successful in marriage that you're successful in being a grandparent that you're successful in your job you're successful perhaps in some area of interest that you hold in life there's nothing wrong with success so don't hear me saying that this morning I just want to caution you that success can be and often is a real hindrance to prayer let me show you what I mean if you have your Bibles look with me to Proverbs chapter 30 Proverbs chapter 30 and we're going to look at verse 8 the latter part and then verse 9 and then we're going to go to another text in just a moment but look at Proverbs chapter 30 verse 8 and verse 9 the writer of Proverbs he's asking God for two things and I want you to note what these two things are this is what he says give me neither poverty or wealth

I want you to think about that for a moment that sounds pretty noble right on the front end give me neither poverty nor wealth don't let me starve to death don't let me have to scramble to find something to eat to have shelter over my head please God don't leave me in a state of poverty but also don't give me wealth now probably we'd be way more hesitant about praying that second part right God don't make me wealthy but that's what he prays and then he adds this feed me with the food I need now a lot of us in this room kind of think of ourselves as being in that category we think well you know what really that's not so unusual that's kind of how I am I just want enough to get by right I bet many of you in this room have said I don't care a thing in the world about being rich

I really just don't want to be rich I don't have to have wealth it's not something that's really important to me now some of you said something contrary to that one time or another right you said well I hope one day I'm really rich and really wealthy I found as we get older as we age in life we realize it's not going to happen a lot of us kind of get over that and we say you know what I don't have to be wealthy I don't have to have everything we want enough to get by you ever say anything like that I just need enough to get by I just want to live comfortably right well I want to tell you I'm not sure we're being as honest in our assessment of that as we want to pretend we are because what the writer says here is I just need enough all I need is enough to get by today if you follow that line of thinking it's not necessarily being comfortable it's simply having enough to cover today's needs how many of us in this room honestly can say when we die we hope we die just two or three minutes before our banking account is depleted because that's what it is to have just enough to get by right you die and you don't have anything left over you don't have anything to leave family or friends or a charity that you'd like to perhaps leave in your will you just die and there's nothing left over that's what this prayer is about just give me enough for today so when we think about that we say well you know maybe you don't cut it quite that close you know let's live comfortably but what he prays for is just enough to get by who would pray a prayer like that don't surprise you

Solomon prays it and of course you know about Solomon and he tells us why he prays it look at the very next verse otherwise I might have too much and deny you saying who is the Lord or am I still profaning the name of my God you know what he's saying he's saying the problem with having too much is I'll come to place I'll say who is the Lord in other words who needs him who needs God in your life if you got everything and you can meet every challenge that ever arises by just reaching in your back pocket and pulling out your wallet who needs God so God don't give me so much that I become independent of you and self-sufficient and I don't need you in my life but Lord here's the other thing I don't want to be tempted to have to steal food I don't have to be tempted to take from someone else what is not mine and thereby profane your name or break your law that's what he's talking about and so Lord

[6 : 46] I don't want to fall in either one of those categories I want just enough in other words I don't really want to be that successful now I'm going to tell you if anybody could write this and know about this it was King Solomon when you read about Solomon in Chronicles and Kings I want to tell you many of you read Forbes magazine Fortune 500 some of you in this room keep up with that kind of stuff and and boy you know who are the ten richest people in the world and where they live and all that kind of stuff you've never read about any human being who succeeded in life financially as much as King Solomon when you read Chronicles and Kings and about his wealth I'm telling you it is opulent wealth it is mind-blowing you think to yourself how could anyone have a mansion when you read about his stables and the palace he was greater than the temple he built in Jerusalem for God when you read about his wealth you just say man that's just awful that's crazy kind of money and boy he had it he lived an opulent lifestyle and I think as he's writing this he's thinking back at times perhaps when that wealth didn't serve him well but this guy's got money he had a thousand wives a lot of us have trouble supporting one right I mean I had a friend in church a while back that he his credit card got stolen and he didn't report it he told me for six months because he found out the guy that stole it was spending less than his wife was right so here's a guy that's true by the way I mean it's true he told me that's not true she spends like that anyhow here's a guy who says boy there is danger in having too much we need just enough to get by because he recognized what happened in his life was this he himself turned away from God when he started out he had a whole heart for God but by the time he finished he had turned his back to some degree on the things he'd been taught in his youth

I want you to look at a second passage go with me to the book of Revelation chapter 3 and let me set this up for you in Revelation chapter 2 and 3 this is known as the seven letters to the churches of Asia minor Jesus is speaking to John and he's going to dictate seven letters he will send to these seven churches in Asia minor now many of you probably most of you in this room are somewhat familiar with these seven letters you know this already these seven letters are strikingly similar in form not in content the content of every letter is unique and individual and different from one to the next but the form is almost identical he begins with a greeting from the Lord Jesus Christ depicting Jesus in a certain fashion that is appropriate for that city in every individual letter he then talks about what he knows about them and he either commends them or he is critical of them in every single letter he makes a promise to them at the end of every one of these letters I want you to hear what he says to the church at

Laodicea let me just preface this by telling you this this is the letter in which there is not one word of commendation he doesn't say anything good about this church in Laodicea everything in this letter is of a critical nature look with me to chapter 3 and verse 14 and here's what we find to the angel of the church in Laodicea write the amen the faithful and true witness the originator of God's creation says I know your works that you are neither cold nor hot I wish that you were cold or hot now everybody in this room has heard this passage right you've heard it read you read it yourself you've studied it you've heard sermons about it I'm fearful when we come to this passage sometimes we bring our thinking modern thinking to bear on the words of Jesus and misunderstand what he's saying for instance let me give you an example how many of you have ever attended a church where there just wasn't much spirit or much life I mean it just it was just dull and boring and you left there and as you left you turned to your spouse and you said something like this man that place didn't have much life in it right have you ever said something like this it was as cold as a milkshake in there

I mean I don't tell you I preach in some of those places right I mean it's dead as three o'clock it was it was just lifeless it was cold there was no warmth of spirit that place just isn't on fire and then you've been to that place at some time in your life where man they preach the word of God and the singing is uplifting and there's the spirit of God that's moving in that place and we say something like this when we leave there man that place was on fire I mean those people are on fire for God the fires of revival are burning in that church you ever heard those expressions as a result I'll tell you something it taints our thinking about this passage because what we have the tendency to think is this that hot is good and cold is bad but I want you to look at the passage that's not what Jesus says he says you're neither hot nor cold you're in the middle you're tepid you're lukewarm you're neither hot nor cold I wish you were one or the other Jesus is not saying I wish you were good or bad why would he want them to be bad you understand that so what he's saying is this both are good to be hot is good and to be cold is good but you're not either you're lukewarm and that's good for absolutely nothing now what does he mean both are good because you see we got to divorce it from how we think in that spiritual realm about hot and cold have you ever been out working in the yard and it's 95 degrees and your wife comes out and she has pity on you and brings you a glass of cold lemonade boy doesn't that taste good you're outside and you come inside and it's air conditions blowing and it feels so good and it's so refreshing just kind of revives you when you felt like you're going to pass out or it's cold and you go inside and it's warm and cozy and you sit by the fire hot is good and cold is good but lukewarm it's just in between it's absolutely nothing and that's what

Jesus is saying here in verse 14 15 and 16 look at verse 16 so because you are lukewarm and neither hot nor cold I'm going to vomit you out of my mouth now I want to tell you you've heard that all your life you've heard the sermon preached this passage preached but I think sometimes we just kind of hurry through this we don't really think about it do you realize how repulsive an image that is your eyes how offensive that is to say to someone imagine tomorrow at work your boss does something that just really ticks you off how many gonna walk into his office 30 minutes later and say you know what I just want to tell you something you make me vomit better be careful about that one right because he probably gonna throw you out of his office try this today when you go home guys your wife works real hard she puts the meal on the table you take five six seven bites out of it you turn to and say hmm this makes me want to puke you think you get by all that very long boy it's pretty offensive thing to say to somebody you make me want to vomit and that's what Jesus says now get this these are not people we would think of as being his enemies these seven letters are to the seven churches of Asia minor this is one of his churches he has loved and died for and he says to this church you make me sick well I'm gonna tell you if he says that to the church the way out of Asia we ought to pause real carefully and say what in the world would make Jesus say something like that I mean that's so unlike Jesus it's so uncharacteristic of

[15 : 55] Jesus to say something so repulsive is that what is it in the world they have done that is so offended our Lord well look at the very next line if you will verse 17 because you say I am rich I have become wealthy and need nothing picture of arrogance isn't it and you don't know that you are wretched and pitiful poor poor blind and naked let me tell you about these people in Laodicea the church of Laodicea if you had looked at all seven of these churches this is where the fat cats were this is the wealthy church this is the one that has all the money they need it was a banking community they dealt often in gold they had three primary things they made their living from banking the production of clothing this white garment and an eye salve they ship this eye salve for medical purposes to other communities in Asia Minor Jesus capitalizes on that and this is what he says he says when I look at you I see how you see yourselves now you understand we see ourselves one way someone else sees us a different way oftentimes right we can be delusional and this is what they see we're doing just fine our bank accounts are full we got more than enough money all the goal we could ever want we're producing this white garment look at us man check out these threads I am really dressed to the nines right what about my vision nothing wrong with my vision we've got this eye salve we produce and I can see perfectly we're on top of our game that's what they see when they look in the mirror and see themselves but here's what Jesus sees he says when I see you I see people who are poverty stricken he's talking about spiritually bankrupt people he says when I look at you I see people who are in rags you're naked and you don't know it remember that children's book we read to our kids the king who thought he'd been convinced by this fellow that he had these beautiful clothes but really he's standing there absolutely naked for the people and he says you think you see so well but you know what I see I see somebody who is blind and miserable and naked now I just want to ask you you kind of upset you and alarm you and cause you pause to wonder how God looks at us today we see ourselves one way does God look at us another you see when you're on top of the world and you got everything going for you and you're successful in life as the world measures success it's pretty easy to get arrogant and think we never say this out loud in church we really just don't need you very much you say well we never think that here at first pickings well let me just caution about something it'd be pretty easy to think that because after all look at your building I mean look at this facility their church is out there meeting that all over this countryside who don't have a secondary place who don't have a primary place to worship as nice as this is let alone your primary house of worship I mean that's a beautiful beautiful edifice over there and it's as pretty as any place I've ever preached it's gorgeous right and look at your pastors you've had you've got a history of having had great pastors Fred one of my dear

friends there's not a better pastor in South Carolina it'd be pretty easy wouldn't it say you know what we have got some good preaching here at first pickings and not only that we've had a history of it going way way way back and what about your music I mean I've told Brian any number of times I'd rather work with him and about anybody I know he just he is gifted in music your pianist the instrumentalist the choir I'm not blowing smoke at you this one I'm telling you you've got an outstanding music program and I've heard many of you say we are loaded with town here at first Baptist Church of Pickings right and I know this about you you've got good key leaders and the people in the church love each other and that's a wonderful thing but I just want to caution you about something it'd be pretty easy to say well Lord you know what we don't really need to depend on you that much we've kind of got this I mean we're we're kind of good to go we got good preaching good music good leaders good building we're meeting our budget everything's everything's cooked we're rock along just fine right success can do you in in terms of prayer listen to what Jesus goes on to tell them I advise you verse 18 to buy from me gold refined in the fire so that you may be rich and white clothes so that you may be dressed and your shameful nakedness not be exposed and ornament to spread on your eyes so that you may see as many as I love I rebuke and discipline so be committed and repent now verse 20 get this listen I stand at the door and not if anyone hears my voice and opens the door I will come in to him and we'll have dinner with him and he with me verse 20 in my estimation is one of the verses in the New Testament that is misinterpreted as much as any verse in the entire New Testament in fact I don't mean to be a offensive to you today but probably many of you in this room I'd be surprised if many of you in this room have not used this verse in an incorrect fashion let me tell you why I say that when we read that verse most of us our minds go back to that time in revival when somebody came and said Jesus is knocking at your heart's door and if you will just open your life to him and open your heart to him he will come in and he will save you and he will give you eternal life because Jesus wants you to be saved and he's knocking at your heart and he's not going to force his way into your life but if you'll open that door the latches on the outside you've heard all those things and he'll just come in to you I want to tell you something spiritually that's true

Jesus wants men and women to be saved he'll not force himself upon you he's inviting you in the book of revelation other places to come to him but here's the cold hard truth that's not what this verse is about Jesus is not talking to an individual and he's not talking to people who are lost he's talking to his church remember that and the door he's knocking at is not the door of your heart it's the door of the church you got to ask yourself what would bother him so much that he says i want to vomit you out of my mouth you make me sick it nauseates you here's what it is he's on the outside of his church looking in instead of on the inside directing the life of the church they have shut him out you know why they have shut him out because they have become all sufficient we've got everything we need we're okay and i'm going to tell you something there are a lot of churches around the country today mostly the successful ones who are suffering from that same exact problem because god at one time they were dependent on him and god blessed and with that blessing they became arrogant and they came to the place that they said god we don't really need you anymore we're capable of running the show on our own and god has been left out of the church i believe all this country this morning there are places where people are meeting and sermons are being preached and singing is taking place and god is standing on the outside looking on the inside wanting in could that have happened here at first baptist church of pickens you say well no no we really do pray really look at all the things you do and then ask yourself this how much time do we spend praying and how much time do we spend entertaining and meeting and doing all the other things that we do you see success can sneak up on it's happened to me in my life before where with one victory and another victory and another victory it's pretty easy to think you know what we got this we know how to do this and we thereby exclude god from the picture all together let me mention a final enemy of prayer and i close and this one likewise is going to surprise you perhaps not only a successful life but an ordinary life james chapter five before the guys put it on the screen don't put it on the screen just yet guys and before you turn to it let me just ask you how many of you in this room know what james chapter five those verses i talked about verse 13 and following are about does anybody here know i'm sure i'm betting half of you you don't trust yourself to say it but i'm betting at least half of you probably know what james five is about you know what it's about you're not going to say are you but i know you know it it's about prayer he's going to cite elijah as an example and he's going to say here's why you ought to pray because look how elijah prayed and what resulted from that prayer right but here's my question if prayer is so effective and we need god to answer prayer why don't we pray that's what this series has been about why don't we pray what are the hindrances to prayer the enemies of prayer can i tell you the biggest reason we don't pray and none of us want to hear this i don't even want to say this but it's true it's because we see so few prayers answered isn't that right because if we were seeing prayers answered all the time we'd be encouraged and we'd say well let's just pray more that's what happened in acts chapter two

the more they prayed the more god did the more god did the more they prayed but we suffer from the opposite we pray and we don't see anything and so as a result we say what's the use so we pray these little namby pamby prayers and we're content to do that and just move right along saying hey we'll handle all this ourselves well let me show you what the problem was look at james five go ahead and put it on the screen and turn to it if you have your bible james 5 verse 17 elijah was a man with a nature like ours i like that you know what that means he was ordinary just like we are he put his pants on same way you do he got up in the morning did everything he did throughout the day went to bed got up the next morning he's an ordinary guy yet he prayed earnestly that it would not rain and for three years and six months it did not rain on the land then he prayed again and the sky gave rain and the land produced its fruit if you want to understand the scripture clearly can i give you a tip on something one of the things i do is this and i'm i was blessed to be able to do this because i'm not a quick study like a lot of you i was a slow reader so i just read things real slow and as i'd read them i'd stop and think well what would that do what would that be like and try to insert myself in that situation and just flesh it out we read this so quickly we miss it do you hear what he said he prayed it wouldn't rain for three and a half years and it didn't rain not two weeks not a month not three months not six months three and a half years and we've had some droughts in south carolina remember a few years ago i can remember that weather map and it had us all in red you know how long it didn't rain about two and a half months two and a half months you multiply that to where it's three and a half years you've never seen a drought in south carolina three and a half years do you know what it would do it would devastate i don't mean it would hurt it would devastate our economy there wouldn't be a creek bed around that had a drop of water in it our lake levels would plunge like you have never seen before remember that drought we had back somewhere in the early teens 2012 13 14 owned a lake house down on lake hartwood small little place shallow lot bad for that drought i'm gonna tell you they could have clemson could have played a football game between my dock and where the water began right i mean it was long long long way out there to where the water was you remember driving over there that was about a two or three month drought can you imagine how lakes would dry up there wouldn't be anything green in the upstate how would that affect agriculture well you'd lose tomatoes and beans and soybeans and all that but let me tell you something else every cattle farmer because they couldn't afford to buy hay they'd have trouble even finding if they could buy it and afford it they'd be selling off all their cattle prices would go through the roof you could go to the grocery store and not find groceries that's what happened in israel it didn't rain for three and a half years you know why god was bringing ahab in israel to their knees he wanted to get ahab's attention and bring him absolutely to his knees and so he says he prays and for three and a half years it doesn't rain why did this ordinary guy pray and god did incredible things and we pray and nothing happens

well i gotta be honest with you i purposefully left out verse 16b i want you to look at that text read verse 16b the intense prayer of the righteous is very powerful the intense prayer that's part of it fervent prayer the righteous is very very powerful the other thing is this the righteous this was an ordinary man in terms of he was a human being like all of us but i want to tell you something and this is part i hope you'll get as i bring the message to a close there was nothing ordinary about elijah's spiritual life at all he was an ordinary flesh and blood human being but i'm going to tell you something his spiritual life was exemplary it was extraordinary i mean this is a guy who listened to the voice of god obeyed the voice of god was obedient to god lived a holy separated consecrated dedicated pure life and i just wonder is that the problem we have i wonder if today in the church we have become so ordinary we look like everybody out there in the world in fact can i tell you something there are a lot of churches working their hardest to try to convince the world we're just like you there are a ton of churches out there selling themselves today on this idea you can come here and be comfortable because we're just like you we're no different than you are i'm going to tell you something when people come in the church of the place they look just like everybody they pass on the street boy something is bad wrong with the church our language shouldn't be the language of the people on the street our actions shouldn't be the actions of the people on the street our holiness and purity shouldn't be like the purity and the holiness of the average guy on the street i'm not talking about living a puritanical legalistic life i'm talking about a life that's simply dedicated to god that says hey you know what i'm going to listen to god i'm going to obey him i'm not going to be influenced by my culture i'm going to influence my culture i close by reading you this verse in isaiah look at isaiah 59 1 and 2 surely the arm of the lord is not too short to save that's what isaiah writes he says surely the arm of the lord is not too short to save he can reach us it's not he's got a short withered arm and he's incapable of reaching us nor his ears too dull for hearing some of you are going through a stage in life right now you've gotten older and you don't hear as well you need hearing aids right and your grandchildren they speak to you and they say boy papa dad mom they need some hearing aids that they can't their ears dull their hearing's dull and isaiah saying surely god's arm is not too short that he can't reach us and surely his hearing is not so dull he's not so ancient he hasn't been here so long that he doesn't hear us and this is what he says no but your iniquities have separated you from your god and your sins have or your sins have hidden his face from you so that he will not hear isaiah concludes this yes he says no the reason we're being punished god's not listening to us pray it's not because he can't hear us he can't see us he doesn't know we're in need

[34 : 51] it's because we have so much sin in our lives we have become repulsive to him and we're just not holy and pure and so i'm going to tell you something until we address our own spiritual poverty the real problem and need in our life he's not going to be concerned about these other things about which we're praying i'm telling you that if you haven't already come to know this we've got much bigger fish to fry spiritually than most of the things that we pray about we're far far in greater spiritual poverty than even we know do you realize how much the world has impacted the church how much we look like people everywhere else in the world do people see anything about your life that they say well you know what that's somebody who's dedicated to god i don't mean they said that guy you know he follows this bunch of rules and regulations no not that kind of thing i'm saying they just know there goes a man who is holy committed pure clean heart clean spirit clean mouth clean life he's dedicated to god i'm going to tell you something either james lied or what he said is true the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much and that may just be your problem and my problem that we don't fit that category anymore there's a way to fix that it's not an easy path but you know what the path is is it's recognizing that about yourself recognizing that the world has influenced you and impacted you that you're not as sold out to god as you once were and it's a path of repentance that leads to confession where we fall on our face and we say oh god i want to know the truth about me i don't want to look in that fake mirror anymore that causes me to look one way the way the i'd like to see myself i want to see what you see would you dare to ask yourself that during this invitation time brian's going to come and he's going to lead us in a song a beautiful song just as i am listen would you ask god god show me right now in these verses we'll sing show me just how i am to you let me see the truth about me i don't want to i don't want to live in the dark anymore i don't want to be delusional anymore i want to know what you see when you look at me let's stand he's going to sing you pray if you need to come here the front you do that if you want to just kneel right there at your seat or sit there at your seat you just do business with god just as i am without one plea but that thy blood was shed for me and that thou bidst me come to thee oh lamb of god i come i come just as i am and waiting and waiting and waiting to rid my soul of one dark blood to thee whose blood can cleanse each spot oh lamb of god i come i come i come i come