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## The Language of Faith: Sermons On Prayer

And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden.

### *“Speaking With God”*

June 9, 2013

Sermon Text: Assorted

Scripture Reading: Luke 11:1-13

#### Introduction-

In the Bible, *prayer* is hiding in plain sight. That is to say, it is everywhere and because it is, we often fail to see it. It's like living in Montana. Here in Oregon if you see a deer you point it out. In Montana if you see a deer and

you point it out you are immediately marked as “not from ‘round these parts.” Prayer is everywhere in the Bible and often it isn't even called prayer. It just happens. People talk to God.

Here is just one Scripture which in itself is enough reason for every Christian to know that our Lord would have us pray. Indeed, that He commands and desires us to pray:

Luke 18:1-8 And he told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart. (2) He said, "In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor respected man. (3) And there was a widow in that city who kept coming to him and saying, 'Give me justice against my adversary.' (4) For a while he refused, but afterward he said to himself, 'Though I neither fear God nor respect man, (5) yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will give her justice, so that she will not beat me down by her continual coming.'" (6) And the Lord said,

"Hear what the unrighteous judge says. (7) And will not God give justice to his elect, who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long over them? (8) I tell you, he will give justice to them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?"

And if this were not enough, consider:

Romans 12:12 Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer.

Ephesians 6:16-18 In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; (17) and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, (18) praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints,

Philippians 4:6 do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.

Colossians 4:2 Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving.

1 Thessalonians 5:17 pray without ceasing,

And of course we have not only the Lord Jesus' own example of fervent and regular prayer, but His instruction to His disciples as to how they are to pray –

Luke 11:1-4 Now Jesus was praying in a certain place, and when he finished, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples." (2) And he said to them, "When you pray, say: "Father, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. (3) Give us each day our daily bread, (4) and forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone who is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation."

Why are we to pray? Because God desires us to pray, he commands us to pray, and for some reason which is connected to His glory, He has chosen to work through the prayers of His people.

### **What is prayer?**

"The most generic expression for prayer may simply be 'to speak to God.'" [Louw-Nida Lexicon]

This speaking may be:

- Thanksgiving
- Requests (supplication)
- Praise and adoration
- Confession
- Intercession (praying for another person)
- And perhaps others

But all involve *speaking with God*.

The Bible opens with man and God speaking to one another. We are not told what the mode was, but it is presented as direct conversation with no mediator such as a unique class of person like a prophet or priest.

Genesis 1:26-31 Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." (27) So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. (28) And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth." (29) And God said, "Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed

that is on the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit. You shall have them for food. (30) And to every beast of the earth and to every bird of the heavens and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food." And it was so. (31) And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

This then was, and remains, God's plan for man. Open, face to face communion with God. It all went wrong of course-

Genesis 3:8-10 And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden. (9) But the LORD God called to the man and said to him, "Where are you?" (10) And he said, "I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself."

Communion with God as it had been was no more.

God continued to speak with select human beings:

- Cain
- Noah
- Abram

But as time went along, it seems that the kind of face-to-face intimacy that had existed in Eden became more and more distant. You have various means through which God spoke to His people – Melchizedek the mysterious priest to Abram; the angel of the Lord appears on occasion for example:

Genesis 18:1-3 And the LORD appeared to him by the oaks of Mamre, as he sat at the door of his tent in the heat of the day. (2) He lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, three men were standing in front of him. When he saw them, he ran from the tent door to meet them and bowed himself to the earth (3) and said, "O Lord, if I have found favor in your sight, do not pass by your servant.

These appearances are not explained to us in detail, but are simply presented to us. "And God said...". It is what is described by Hebrews 1 –

Hebrews 1:1-3 Long ago, at many times **and in many ways**, God spoke to our fathers **by the prophets**, (2) but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of

all things, through whom also he created the world. (3) He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high,

We do have an early example of what we would recognize as prayer:

Genesis 18:22-26 So the men turned from there and went toward Sodom, but Abraham still stood before the LORD. (23) Then Abraham drew near and said, "Will you indeed sweep away the righteous with the wicked? (24) Suppose there are fifty righteous within the city. Will you then sweep away the place and not spare it for the fifty righteous who are in it? (25) Far be it from you to do such a thing, to put the righteous to death with the wicked, so that the righteous fare as the wicked! Far be that from you! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?" (26) And the LORD said, "If I find at Sodom fifty righteous in the city, I will spare the whole place for their sake."

A prayer, you see.

God continues to speak, but we recognize the distance:

Genesis 20:3 But God came to Abimelech in a dream by night and said to him, "Behold, you are a dead man because of the woman whom you have taken, for she is a man's wife."

Genesis 21:17 And God heard the voice of the boy, and the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven and said to her, "What troubles you, Hagar? Fear not, for God has heard the voice of the boy where he is.

Genesis 32:24 And Jacob was left alone. And a man wrestled with him until the breaking of the day.

Genesis 37:5 Now Joseph had a dream, and when he told it to his brothers they hated him even more.

Exodus 3:1-4 Now Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law, Jethro, the priest of Midian, and he led his flock to the west side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. (2) And the angel of the LORD appeared to him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush. He looked, and behold, the bush was burning, yet it was not consumed.

(3) And Moses said, "I will turn aside to see this great sight, why the bush is not burned." (4) When the LORD saw that he turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am."

And notice that Moses' interaction with God is marked as unusual –

Exodus 33:11 Thus the LORD used to speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend. When Moses turned again into the camp, his assistant Joshua the son of Nun, a young man, would not depart from the tent.

Deuteronomy 34:10 And there has not arisen a prophet since in Israel like Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face,

Well, here is the point – God desires to speak with His people. That is how the story began, and in the history of our redemption in Christ, that is where the story is going to end – or actually, begin once again.

And He desires that we speak to Him. Communion with God. Conversation with God. We have seen that in the history of redemption, God draws near. Nearer and nearer. At this point in this story, He lives in each one of His people by His Spirit, and we have, in

Christ, restored access to Him. We are moving back to Eden. And prayer is evidence that this is indeed happening.

Romans 8:26-27 Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. (27) And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

Where the Spirit of God is, there is prayer. That is what Paul says here. Where the Spirit dwells in a man, woman, or child, He intercedes, he groans in prayers for us, in us. Listen to J.C. Ryle on this-

II. In the second place, "a habit of prayer is one of the surest marks of a true Christian." All the children of God on earth are alike in this respect. From the moment there is any life and reality in their religion, they pray. Just as the first sign of life in an infant when born into the world, is the act of breathing, so the first act of men and women when they are born again, is "praying." This is one of the common marks of all the elect of God: "They always pray and do not give up" (Luke 18:1). The Holy Spirit, who makes them new creatures, works in them the feeling of adoption, and makes them cry, "Abba, Father" (Romans 8:15). The Lord

Jesus, when He saves them, gives them a voice and a tongue, and says to them, "Be silent no more." God has no speechless children. It is as much a part of their new nature to pray, as it is of a child to cry. They see their need of mercy and grace. They feel their emptiness and weakness. They cannot do otherwise than they do. They "must" pray.

I have looked carefully over the lives of God's saints in the Bible. I cannot find one of whose history much is told us, from Genesis to Revelation, who was not a man of prayer. I find it mentioned as a characteristic of the godly, that "they call on the Father," that "they call on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ." I find it recorded as a characteristic of the wicked, that "they do not call upon the Lord." (1 Peter 1:17; 1 Corinthians 1:2; Psalm 14:4). I have read the lives of many great Christians who have been on earth since the Bible days. Some of them, I see, were rich, and some poor. Some were educated, and some uneducated. They came from various denominations and some were Independents. Some loved a very structured worship service, and some liked it rather informal. But one thing, I see, they all had in common. They have all been "men of prayer."

I study the reports of missionaries in our own times. I see with joy that

heathen men and women are receiving the Gospel in various parts of the globe. There are conversions in Africa, in New Zealand, and in America. The people converted are naturally unlike one another in every respect. But one striking thing I observe at all the missionary stations--the converted people "always pray."

I do not deny that a man may pray without heart, and without sincerity. I do not for a moment pretend to say, that the mere fact of a person praying proves everything about his soul. As in every other part of religion, so also in this, there is plenty of deception and hypocrisy. But this I do say--*that not praying, is a clear proof that a man is not yet a true Christian.* He cannot really feel for his sins. He cannot love God. He cannot feel himself in debt to God. He cannot long after holiness. He cannot desire heaven. He has yet to be born again. He has yet to be made a new creature. He may boast confidently of election, grace, faith, hope, and knowledge, and deceive ignorant people. But you may rest assured it is all vain talk "if he does not pray."

And furthermore, I say, that of all the evidences of the real work of the Spirit, a habit of hearty private prayer is one of the most satisfactory that can be named. A man may preach from false motives. A man may write books,

and make fine speeches, and seem diligent in good works, and yet be a Judas Iscariot. But a man seldom goes into his closet, and pours out his soul before God in secret, unless he is serious.

The Lord Himself has set His stamp on prayer as the best proof of true conversion. When He sent Ananias to Saul in Damascus, He gave him no other evidence of his change of heart than this, "he is praying" (Acts 9:11) I know that much may go on in a man's mind before he is brought to pray. He may have many convictions, desires, wishes, feelings, intentions, resolutions, hopes, and fears. But all these things are very uncertain proofs. They are to be found in ungodly people, and often come to nothing. In many cases they are not more lasting than "the morning mist, and the early dew that disappears" (Hosea 6:4). A real hearty prayer, flowing from a broken and repentant spirit, is worth all these things put together.

I know that the elect of God are chosen to salvation from all eternity. I do not forget that the Holy Spirit, who calls them in due time, in many instances leads them by very slow degrees to an awareness of Christ. But the eye of man can only judge by what it sees. I cannot call any one justified until he believes. I dare not say that any one believes until he prays. I cannot

understand a silent and speechless faith. The first act of faith will be to speak to God. Faith is to the soul what life is to the body. Prayer is to faith what breath is to life. How can a man live and not breathe is past my comprehension, and how a man can believe and not pray is past my comprehension too. Let no one be surprised if he hears ministers of the Gospel dwelling a lot on the importance of prayer. This is the point we want to bring you to--we want to know that you pray. Your views of doctrine may be correct. Your love of evangelical religion may be warm and unmistakable. But still this may be nothing more than head knowledge and party spirit. *The great point is this-- whether you can speak "to" God as well as speak "about" God.*

Ryle, J.C. (2010-08-06). Practical Religion (Kindle Locations 1063-1107). . Kindle Edition.

***Prayer, then, is an intimate child to Father, friend to Friend conversation with God. Prayer speaks to God in the second person ("you"), not about God in the third person ("him").***

Remove prayers from the Psalms and you would have nothing left! The Psalms is not only the hymn book of Scripture, but even more so, it is the Prayer book:

Psalms 4:1-8 To the choirmaster: with stringed instruments. A Psalm of David. Answer me when I call, O God of my righteousness! You have given me relief when I was in distress. Be gracious to me and hear my prayer! (2) O men, how long shall my honor be turned into shame? How long will you love vain words and seek after lies? Selah (3) But know that the LORD has set apart the godly for himself; the LORD hears when I call to him. (4) Be angry, and do not sin; ponder in your own hearts on your beds, and be silent. Selah (5) Offer right sacrifices, and put your trust in the LORD. (6) There are many who say, "Who will show us some good? Lift up the light of your face upon us, O LORD!" (7) You have put more joy in my heart than they have when their grain and wine abound. (8) In peace I will both lie down and sleep; for you alone, O LORD, make me dwell in safety.

This is a prayer, you see.

Psalms 5:1-3 To the choirmaster: for the flutes. A Psalm of David. Give ear to my words, O LORD; consider my groaning. (2) Give attention to the sound of my cry, my King and my God, for to you do I pray. (3) O LORD, in the morning you hear my voice; in the



morning I prepare a sacrifice for you and watch.

thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened.

Psalms 17:1-2 A Prayer of David. Hear a just cause, O LORD; attend to my cry! Give ear to my prayer from lips free of deceit! (2) From your presence let my vindication come! Let your eyes behold the right!

Notice that when we are sinning and fighting against repentance, we stop talking to God –

*Prayer is the language of faith. Where there is no prayer, there is no faith. A living, genuine faith in Christ speaks not only about Christ, but to and with Christ.*

Psalms 32:1-6 A Maskil of David. Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. (2) Blessed is the man against whom the LORD counts no iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit. (3) **For when I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. (4) For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer. Selah (5) I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not cover my iniquity; I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD," and you forgave the iniquity of my sin. Selah (6) Therefore let everyone who is godly offer prayer to you at a time when you may be found; surely in the rush of great waters, they shall not reach him.**

*Prayer is the language of worship. Where there is worship, praise is given with the lips.*

*Prayer is the language of true repentance. How is it possible to confess our sin to the Lord while remaining silent?*

*Prayer is the language of confession of Jesus as Lord.*

Prayerlessness is the mark of an evil heart. Prayerlessness is the characteristic of a man who hates God:

Romans 1:21 For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their

Prayerlessness then is unbelief. It is a refusal to worship. It is unrepentance and it evidence of being ashamed of the name of Christ. Prayerlessness is sin, in other words.

Now, we all continue to fight this sin, don't we? I am not presenting this sermon series on prayer because I am so good at it! Exactly the opposite. I do not pray as I should. I press on with my day without acknowledging the Lord – without speaking to Him. I worry and fret instead of praying and handing things over to Him. And yet the Lord is faithful to His people, seeks us out, reminds us of our need of Him – even if the reminder can be a bit hard – and renews our conversation with Him.

Our intent will be to examine prayer in the New Testament – not exhaustively, but with reasonable thoroughness. And our goal is to have the Lord convict us where we need it – for careless neglect of prayer, but also to be encouraged as we come to understand in better clarity this fact:

***The Creator of this universe desires to speak with us, and for us to speak with Him. Regularly, continually, at any time and about any subject. He wants us to tell Him everything! He wants us to ASK Him for help, for provision, for rescue, for – everything. And He is never annoyed no matter how often we come. This is what we were created for – communion with Him.***

Listen to John Owen as he helps us understand what a HUGE privilege it

is that we can *pray*. He puts it here in terms of *communion with God* which is broader than just prayer, but prayer surely is a direct privilege and benefit that is a blessing given us in Jesus Christ:

By nature, since the entrance of sin, no man hath any communion with God. He is light, we darkness; and what communion hath light with darkness? He is life, we are dead, -- he is love, and we are enmity; and what agreement can there be between us? Men in such a condition have neither Christ, nor hope, nor God in the world, Eph. ii. 12; "being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them," chap. iv. 18.

Now, two cannot walk together, unless they be agreed, Amos iii. 3. Whilst there is this distance between God and man, there is no walking together for them in any fellowship or communion. Our first interest in God was so lost by sin, as that there was left unto us (in ourselves) no possibility of a recovery. As we had deprived ourselves of all power for a return, so God had not revealed any way of access unto himself; or that he could, under any consideration, be approached unto by sinners in peace. Not any work that God had made, not any attribute that he had revealed, could give the least light into such a dispensation.

The manifestation of grace and pardoning mercy, which is the only door of entrance into any such communion, is not committed unto any but unto him alone in whom it is, by whom that grace and mercy was purchased, through whom it is dispensed, who reveals it from the bosom of the Father. Hence this communion and fellowship with God is not in express terms mentioned in the Old Testament. The thing itself is found there; but the clear light of it, and the boldness of faith in it, is discovered in the gospel, and by the Spirit administered therein.

By that Spirit we have this liberty, 2 Cor. iii. 17, 18. Abraham was the friend of God, Isa. xli. 8; David, a man after his own heart; Enoch walked with him, Gen. v. 22; -- all enjoying this communion and fellowship for the substance of it. But the way into the holiest was not yet made manifest whilst the first tabernacle was standing, Heb. ix. 8. Though they had communion with God, yet they had not a boldness and confidence in that communion. This follows the entrance of our High Priest into the most holy place, Heb. iv. 16, x. 19. The vail also was upon them, that they had not eleutherian, freedom and liberty in their access to God, 2 Cor. iii. 15, 16, etc. But now in Christ we have [8] boldness and access with confidence to God, Eph. iii. 12. This boldness and

access with confidence the saints of old were not acquainted with.

By Jesus Christ alone, then, on all considerations as to being and full manifestation, is this distance taken away. He hath consecrated for us a new and living way (the old being quite shut up), "through the veil, that is to say, his flesh," Heb. x. 20; and "through him we have access by one Spirit unto the Father," Eph. ii. 18. "Ye who sometimes were far off, are made nigh by the blood of Christ, for he is our peace," etc., verses 13, 14.

Upon this new bottom and foundation, by this new and living way, are sinners admitted into communion with God, and have fellowship with him. And truly, for sinners to have fellowship with God, the infinitely holy God, is an astonishing thing.

Owen, John (2012-01-07). *The Essential Works Of John Owen* (Kindle Locations 42140-42163). . Kindle Edition.

Might I suggest to us all that if we will once get a firm hold on this fact, that because of Jesus Christ and our union in Him, we are the beloved children of God who can run into the Holy of Holies at any time, and not only not be consumed, but be welcomed joyfully and eagerly by the same God who shook Sinai and whose voice made the Israelites plead for it to stop – that if

we can get hold of that, our entire way of thinking about and seeing ourselves, our circumstances, our world – will be radically changed for the better.