

Thursday Morning Bible Study:

What It Takes To Pray

Hymns:

347 – I Know Not How To Pray;

37 – The Love Of The Father Is Seen In The Son

1. The Struggle To Pray

Series Overview:

- 1. The Struggle to Pray**
- 2. Prayer: Love, Faith, Hope and Intercession**
- 3. Self-Discipline and Perseverance in Prayer**

Praying should, but doesn't, come easily. Praying should be, but isn't, as natural to us as breathing. We are engaged daily in both prayerfulness and prayerlessness with the reality of the struggle of prayer. The good we want to do we don't do, and the evil we don't want to do we find right close at hand. We are made for converse with God, and yet we are mute and deaf. We know not how to pray and yet we know that we must pray!! Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!

Luke 11:1-13

It was seeing and hearing Jesus pray that moved the disciples to ask him, 'Lord, teach us to pray.' We could add '...like you pray.' There must have been something attractive, desirable about the way Jesus prayed. I'm sure we have met people like this – people who when praying betray a long intimacy with God, an openness and communion with Him that speaks of a long-term, significant, substantial encounter and life with him. (I wonder how they think of themselves. My guess is not this way!) And having been with them in prayer, we find ourselves crying out to God, 'Lord, teach me to pray!'

Learning to pray is not at all easy – it is not (despite the shelves and shelves of Christian books trying to say it is!) a matter of technique or methodology. It's not simply a matter of getting the right rules, the right words, the right pattern.

Prayer is a heart conversation with God – a true dialogue in which true words are exchanged. It is dynamic and comes from the depths of both God and the praying person/community. It is deeply *friendly* – an entering into true friendship with God (and this may mean it can be deeply wounding: see Prov. 27:6.)

Jesus' answer to his disciples' request is in two parts:

- i. A pattern: The Lord's Prayer
- ii. A parable: The midnight emergency

The parable shows us that the Lord's Prayer is not simply a method, or a magic form of words (just imagine!)

The Lord's Prayer

The prayer that the Lord teaches his disciples shows us the things that will be in our hearts when we truly pray. The Lord's Prayer helps us realistically measure what is most important in our lives. Is it:

- ❑ The glory and honour of the Father throughout the whole world
- ❑ The necessities of life so we may live for that glory and honour

Having been measured and found wanting by this prayer, we may ask ourselves how do we begin to pray like *that*?

The Strange Parable

In this strange parable (like Luke 18:1-8), Jesus uses the story of a reluctant and unwilling, a lazy and begrudging person to encourage prayer! What a strange approach!

In the ancient culture of Jesus' time, hospitality was a *deep* virtue; and failure in hospitality was *deeply* shameful. So, in this story of a sudden and unexpected midnight visitor and the host's need for bread to feed him, it was perfectly right and proper that this host should take his need to his friend next door: 'Friend, lend me three loaves; I've got nothing for my visitor.' His neighbour's response is shocking: 'Don't bother me; I'm in bed, the kids are asleep (...etc etc...)' He is reluctant to help, and even though friendship doesn't count for much, the *impudence* of his neighbour forces the lazybones to act to save face.

Do we have a view of God like this? Reluctant, unwilling, but will act to make sure He doesn't lose face? No - Jesus teaches this parable so that we expect not the same but more of God than this! He is the good, good Father; we are loved by Him. Even the best of us as fathers or mothers though being evil can give good gifts to our children. How much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him?

This parable is not telling us that it takes desperation to get us to pray. The thing that really teaches us to pray is discovering the overflowing, overwhelming love for God the Father. To become pray-ers we must discover the Fatherhood of God.

Discovering the Fatherhood of God

Humanity as male and female is made for intimacy, communion and dialogue with God. We are made to hear His word to us, and to speak back to Him as doers of that word. This is the picture in **Genesis 2** of life in the garden. Genesis 2 speaks of God as the LORD God – this is the covenant name for God, God who calls us into relationship with Him. He creates man, breaths into him His own holy breath, and the man becomes a living creature. He creates a home for him – a garden the man is to tend and protect. He places the man in the garden and gives command and warning – He speaks words that direct and protect the man. Then He creates the woman – for it's not good for the man to be alone. When the man sees the woman, he speaks! His words are to God, to the woman, to himself, to all creation! And then as an implied norm we hear (3:8) that the man and the woman would walk with God in the cool of the day, a time for conversation and communion to take place.

But in **3:8** where we hear of the norm it is in the setting of a breach in that norm. God comes to meet with them, and they are not there. This is the beginning of

silence, of angry outburst, of words drawn out like pulling teeth, of dishonest, misrepresentative talk. In all this, the basic problem is fear: 'I was afraid when I heard you.' 'I was naked and I hid.' How did the man come to that point? Had he done what the LORD God had commanded him not to do? 'You gave me a woman and she made me do it.

Prayer is creationally natural to us – we can't escape prayer. We must have deep converse with something, anything. Something has to fill the God-shaped, Father-shaped blank in us. We must pray – but to whom? Idols, ourselves, evil powers... but none of this is true prayer. (Self-talk leaves us in the chattering company of the person we despise the most!) True prayer only arises from being directed to the true Hearer of our prayers. What makes our prayers true is the One who hears them. True praying arises in true relationship with God – giving honour and glory to Him, and thanking Him for the provision of the things we need to be able to give Him honour and glory. **Romans 1:21** ties the descent of humanity into dread and dark evil from this deadly seed: "For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him..." *Every* problem with sin that you have is linked to prayerlessness – not rightly honouring God as God, nor giving Him thanks. **1Thess. 5:16-18** – what is left when we cease rejoicing in God and giving him thanks?

Jesus comes – sent by the Father: the Son of the Father come as man, the true man living before God for us to the Father. Jesus, the new Adam to be the source of a new Eve. Jesus is, especially in Luke who focuses in on Jesus being the new Adam, a man of prayer. We see especially his prayefulness at his baptism, temptation, transfiguration, crucifixion. 5:16, 6:12 'He would withdraw to lonely places to pray.' In the busy-ness of ministry he always wanted to know and to do the Father's will, to be led by the Father. Never did he pray to impress others, or to prove himself. There was no showiness in his praying. [Spurgeon: Call him, 'Father!' and ask for something.]

At his baptism (3:21) not in the garden but in the wilderness, praying Jesus; heavens opened, Spirit descended, Father speaks! In the temptation (4:1-13) – Father's word leads him there, Holy Spirit leads him there. Satan's strategy is to put a divide between the Father and the Son. Every temptation is towards prayerlessness. Turn these stones into bread cf. Give us this day our daily bread. I'll give you all this authority and glory cf. Hallowed be Your name... Your kingdom come. Throw yourself down, let the angels catch you cf. Lead us not into temptation.

The praying Son is led by the Father to his coming departure (Luke 9:28-38) through the transfiguration to the suffering and cross. He was glorified for his suffering, to suffer for the Father's (and our!) glorification. The night of his arrest he prayed deeply for the Father's will to be done (22:39-46.) On the cross he prayed for the forgiveness of those who had acted so brutally towards him (23:32-38.) He prayed as he died, commending Himself to the Father's care (23:44-48.)

And all this to draw us to the Father. Today, you will be with me in Paradise! His answer to a man who prayed perhaps for the first time in his life. A man who discovered the love of the Father in the Son.