

Prayer

Good Morning, today we will be discussing prayer.

Prayer is a tool for communication with the heavenly Father. It is a mechanism by which we receive instruction from God and it is a tool of warfare.

This morning I want to emphasize some principles of prayer that have become confused, diluted and misunderstood over the years.

We are here to co labor with God. He wants us to actively participate with him in seeing his kingdom established here on earth. Martin Luther once said: "Pray as if everything depends on God, then work as if everything depends on you."

What was Martin Luther really saying here?

He was saying that as Christians we have a responsibility to see the will of God done.

There are situations where there is nothing we can do except hand it over to God and pray that he in his infinite wisdom and divine mercy will intercede in the situation. It is in these seemingly hopeless situations where we as Christians are to be still and know that he is God. Unfortunately, many Christians have decided to ignore their role and responsibility in many situations. Have we done all that we can do as his representatives here on earth or have we become apathetic and expected God to fill every need so that we don't have to show his love to his people.

If someone is hungry in the church today, do we pray for them and ask God to provide and send them on their way? Is that co laboring? Are we showing the love of Christ as his disciples?

Today so many are willing to say that they will pray for a situation and yet it is lip service and it never happens. The Lord is listening to every word and if you commit to praying for someone, he will hold you to it.

Today I ask the question: When is it appropriate to pray?

Always!

Next I ask the question: When is it appropriate to pray only?

When we are beyond our means, understanding or capability.

I hear the phrase let go and let God a lot. Yet, I believe it needs some clarification...

We let go and let God at a specific time... Hear me!

It is not when but while we have done what we can.

As Christians we bring God in immediately but do not forsake our responsibility as his sons and daughters. If we can do nothing, we must give it all to him and have

faith that He who is faithful will hear our prayers. Yet if we can do something, then we act. James 2:17 tells us that faith without works is dead!

If people are hungry: We must feed them! We must bless them! We must show them the love of Christ AND pray for them.

Let's review: When is it appropriate to bring God into the situation, before we act, after we act or while we act in accordance with his will?

The answer is that we immediately bring God into the situation, yet we do not hesitate to show his love as his disciples. We don't wait until we have done all we can do, but we don't hesitate.

He said in Matthew 25:31-43 NIV

When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.

Sheep here refers to those who follow the shepherd. Goats are those who are stubborn and refuse to be led.

"Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.'

"Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?'

"The King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.'

Well done brothers and sisters who are obedient to the will of God. Your faith and obedience pleases God...

Now to the stubborn, disobedient on his left...

"Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me

nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.'

Brothers and sisters the one thing I never want to here from my savior is: "Depart from me!"

This morning it is my responsibility to tell each person here that prayer is a vital aspect of your Christian walk. It goes hand in hand with the reading and studying of his word and the ministry for which he has established his church.

There are three vital, essential; I would even say elemental aspects to the growth of a Christian:

- 1) Relationship with God through prayer
- 2) Understanding God through the revelation of himself through his word
- 3) Relationship with mankind showing God's love and ours through care of his children

NOTE: These three aspects all work together. They are all essential, vital and key to growth and life in the kingdom of God.

In Matthew 22:36-39 Jesus is asked a question. Here is the discourse:

"Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?"

Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself. All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."

This is the moral law of God. It is the law of which Jesus said in Matthew 5:18:

For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished.

Jesus is emphatic. He tells us in John 15:12:

My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you.

Let me explain...

Prayer results in relationship. Reading results in understanding and discernment and from the root of our relationship in him, through prayer, love springs forth from his children.

Jesus is the cornerstone of his church and he declared his Father's house was a house of Prayer! (Matthew 21:13, Luke 19:46)

Let me change gears this morning...

Are you struggling? Are you having issues with intimacy? Are you frustrated? Are you coming under attack? Is your message of Christ being rejected?

If you see yourself in any of those categories... Ask yourself this question... It is perhaps the most important question you will ask yourself this year.

Is my prayer life a priority in my life?

You see prayer is a weapon against the attacks and distractions of the enemy. Sidlow Baxter once said: "... Men may spurn our appeals, reject our message, oppose our arguments, despise our persons – but they are helpless against our prayers."

I am going to let a secret out of the bag this morning... When I have couples come to me with intimacy issues in their marriage, there is a piece of advice I will give without fail... I tell them: "Every night I want you to earnestly pray aloud for each other. Do not miss this or skip this step, it is vital"

There are many reasons why I do this, but here are just a couple: If you do not have intimacy in your prayer life with God, the intimacy in other areas of your life starts to fade. Another key reason is that there is absolutely no way to remain angry with a person when we open our hearts and pray sincerely for that person. In fact, the more you pray for a person, the more you will accept them and love them. Don't believe me? Try it!

I create programs and plans for the church. We do what we can from an earthly perspective to make the church a desirable and open place in which to fellowship, but as important as all that is, I believe that what the church needs today more than anything else is obedient men and women of God that the Holy Spirit can use. It needs people of prayer! It needs mighty men and women of prayer!

Prayer changes things...

Did you know that Mary, Queen of Scotland once said: "I fear John Knox (Founder of the Presbyterian church) prayers more than an army of 10,000 men."

Let me ask us all a question this morning... How is it that our Lord Jesus Christ walked more readily to the cross, than many of us to our prayer closets? Does that seem right?

If we do pray are we asking or demanding? Do we listen for an answer?

I am reminded of a quote by Bill Hybels from his book to busy not to pray...
"If the request is wrong, God says: "NO."
If the timing is wrong, God says: "Slow."
If you are wrong, God says: "Grow."
But if the request is right, the timing is right and you are right, God says, "Go!"

The problem is we approach the throne of grace telling God what to do... We are to ask in his name and wait for his answer... Prayer is not one-way communication. He has told us that his sheep hear his voice. If you are having trouble with hearing his voice this morning, download the sermon "Here Ye" from the web site.

Here at Crossroads, I have heard many people express a desire for the church to grow. This being the case I ask how important is faithfulness in prayer? Let's look at the experiences of Dr. Wilbur Chapman:

Dr. Wilbur Chapman often told of his experience when, as a young man, he went to become pastor of a church in Philadelphia. After his first sermon, an old gentleman said to him, "You're pretty young to be pastor of this church. But you preach the Gospel, and I'm going to help you all I can." Dr. Chapman thought, "Here's a crank." But the man continued: "I'm going to pray for you that you may have the Holy Spirit's power upon you. Two others have covenanted to join with me in prayer for you." Dr. Chapman said, "I didn't feel so bad when I learned he was going to pray for me. The 3 became 10, the 10 became 20, and 20 became 50, the 50 became 200 who met before every service to pray that the Holy Spirit might come upon me. I always went into my pulpit feeling that I would have the anointing in answer to the prayers of those who had faithfully prayed for me. It was a joy to preach! The result was that we received 1,100 into our church by conversion in three years, 600 of whom were men. It was the fruit of the Holy spirit in answer to prayer!"

Psalms 127:1a - Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain.

Growth = Faithfulness in prayer

Real leaders have come to recognize this principle... Even honest Abe Lincoln said: "I have been driven many times to my knees by the overwhelming conviction that I had nowhere else to go. My own wisdom, and that of all about me seemed insufficient for the day."

My friends, I have learned to hear the voice of God when I pray. I listen and wait patiently for his answers. I have even heard him change my question or request as necessary. I am totally okay with it, because his answers are always far wiser than my petitions.

This morning, think about some of the close personal relationships in your life. Do you ever talk to your wife or husband? Do you ever sit down and speak with your children? How about your friends or family, do you ever talk to them?

What would happen if you did not spend time with them or talk with them? What would happen in your marriage if you didn't ever communicate with your spouse? How would your children respond to you if you never spoke to them?

What would happen if when you never listen or pay attention when your spouse talks to you? What would happen if you never listened to your children? What would happen if at work you ignored your boss and didn't speak or listen to what they have to say?

What would happen if you stopped showing your love to those in your life you really care most about?

Let me summarize in the most succinct way I know how...

A real relationship with God exists on prayer.