

A PASSION FOR PRAYER

Jun 20, 2010

For decades, the Israelites prayed for a King to lead them out of under Roman rule. As we know God had an entirely different answer to their prayer. The lesson we can learn from that event is a very important one. The answer to our prayers, may not be and immediate, or the answer God chooses. One thing you can know for sure is, the answer he chooses is the best one for us. In John 15:7 it says "If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you".

As you know there is a caveat. And that could best be answered from scripture in 1 John 5:14-15 which says "This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us—whatever we ask—we know that we have what we asked of him". For me and perhaps for you, knowing God's will is a challenge. Our prayer may make a great deal of sense to us, but does it make sense to our all knowing God, who knows what is truly best for us.

Will God answer our prayers? The answer is yes, in His own way and in His own time. While waiting for an answer, as Christians, we should do our best to be His humble servant, be obedient to His calling, and put our trust in Him. Again, it's important to understand, God's answer may not be the one we were asking for.

What may be one of the reasons God does not answer your prayers? You may know that the Pew survey indicated that 90% of Americans believe there is a God. But of those who believe there is a God, how many have a personal relationship with Him? If a person has not accepted Jesus Christ as their Savior can they realistically expect God to answer their prayers? Don Williams, attends our small group study on Friday nights. He spent a great deal of his life in the military and he tells of soldiers in their foxholes with shells flying over head and landing around them, and their praying for God's protection. In that situation, We know that God may or may not have answered the prayers of those who had not accepted Christ as their Lord and Savior. Far be it from us to know the mind of God. We don't have the big picture, He does. We need to keep our trust in Him, knowing that although His answer may not be the one we want, His answer is the best one for us.

Mark 11: 24-25 tells us "Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours. And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins."

I believe that it is reasonable for us as Christians to retain the hope and belief that God will answer our prayers. In our prayers I believe we should express our thankfulness for what he has already done for us, and ask forgiveness for our sins for anything we might have done that may have offended Him or is against His will.

What is one of the big reasons God answers our prayers? Because God loves us more than we could ever imagine. Imagine how much you love your spouse, your father or mother, your best friend, then multiply it a thousand times, and it still won't come close to how much God loves us.

Here are some verses to consider: Numbers 14:18 "The LORD is slow to anger, abounding in love and forgiving sin and rebellion. In Nehemiah 1:5 it reads, "O LORD, God of heaven, the great and awesome God, who keeps his covenant of love with those who love him

and obey his commands”.

What about our love? If we could only love Him like he loves us! I believe God only expects us to do our best...not second best, our very best. We need to heed this command found in Matthew 14:21 which says; Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him.”

Do you sometimes wonder what to pray? Need not worry!! Scripture answers that question in Romans 8:26 In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will.

What should we pray about? Everything....no limitations! How many times have we thought to ourselves, that something is too small or too unimportant to bother God with, or more often, and I think this is a man characteristic, I can do it myself.

That, I can do it myself routine is so common to us men, me included. How many times has your wife asked you, why don't you stop and ask for directions? And, you continuing driving, hoping beyond hope that you will end up at your destination.

How often should we pray? Simple stated, as often as time avails itself. At every opportunity. anywhere, anytime.

Lets look at some prayers of godly men found in the Old Testament: David, Solomon, Hezekiah, Nehemiah, Daniel, Jonah, and Habakkuk. All of these men had a close, and personal relationship with God. They prayed with great passion, and are examples we would do well to emulate.

As you know David was very special to God. A man after God's own heart and God richly rewarded him. But as you know David was not perfect, and did his own share of messing up. Does that sound like us? Regardless of his messing up God still loved and richly blessed him. I believe one of David's greatest strengths is that he knew how to pray, perhaps this is one of the reasons He was so special to God. Don't we all want to be special to God?

DAVID'S PRAYER: In 1 Chronicles 17:16-27 David prayed “[16] Then King David went in and sat before the LORD, and he said: “Who am I, O LORD God, and what is my family, that you have brought me this far”?

By this statement David showed his humbleness before the Lord. An attribute we would do well to emulate. David goes on to say in verse “[17] And as if this were not enough in your sight, O God, you have spoken about the future of the house of your servant. You have looked on me as though I were the most exalted of men, O LORD God”.

David had confidence that he was exalted before the Lord, but have you ever considered as a Christian, that you also are exalted before the Lord.

When you are down in a valley and feeling dry as a bone, and your emotional state is not the best in the world, think.....God is the same yesterday, today and forever, and that you personally are exalted before the Lord. David goes on to say in verse [18] “What more can David say to you for honoring your servant? For you know your servant, [19] O LORD. For the sake of your servant and according to your will, you have done this great thing and made known all these great promises. [20] “There is no one like you, O LORD, and there is no God but you,

as we have heard with our own ears”. In these verses David makes a very profound statement that all of us should take to heart, “There is now one like you, O LORD, and there is no God like you.” First, regardless of what the new Aggers or others may say in today’s new religions there is no other God but the God we serve. Secondly, we need to be careful we don’t make a god out of material things, our earthly possession, no matter how important they may seem to be to us. We can never forget that from an eternal perspective, they are nothing.

In Psalm 4:1 David say, “Answer me when I call to you, O my righteous God. Give me relief from my distress; be merciful to me and hear my prayer.” Is that a heartfelt prayer, or isn’t it? How often do you feel a need for relief from your distress, and beg God to be merciful to your circumstances? Sometimes it takes those kind of situations to make us truly humble to seek his face.

In Psalm 17:1 David continues that theme when he says, “Hear, O LORD, my righteous plea; listen to my cry.” Give ear to my prayer—it does not rise from deceitful lips. [2] May my vindication come from you; may your eyes see what is right. [3] Though you probe my heart and examine me at night, though you test me, you will find nothing; I have resolved that my mouth will not sin. [4] As for the deeds of men—by the word of your lips I have kept myself from the ways of the violent. [5] My steps have held to your paths; my feet have not slipped. [6] I call on you, O God, for you will answer me; give ear to me and hear my prayer. When I read David’s eloquent words I can’t help but think that the Holy Spirit must be speaking through David in his prayer...recalling the verse from Romans 8:26 “In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God’s will”.

Do you have to be eloquent as David in prayer. The answer is a definite NO in Psalm 55:1-2 David prays “Listen to my prayer, O God, do not ignore my plea; [2] hear me and answer me. Simple and very to the point. Further on David prays in Psalm 66:[19] but God has surely listened and heard my voice in prayer. [20] Praise be to God, who has not rejected my prayer or withheld his love from me!

In Psalm 86:6 David prays, “Hear my prayer, O LORD; listen to my cry for mercy.

Is it difficult for you to cry out to the Lord, to truly beg for his mercy, to put everything else out of your mind and focus on Him during your prayers? It is for me and I’m sure for many of you. This is where perseverance comes into play, In Romans 5:3 we read “And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. [3] Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; [4] perseverance, character; and character, hope. [5] And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us”.

James 1:2-4 Continues the theme on perseverance “Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, [3] because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. [4] Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.” If there’s anything we should desire and pray for, is faith for God to give us perseverance.

SOLOMON’S PRAYER: Now let’s look at how Solomon prayed. In 1 Kings 8:22-53 it

says, “Then Solomon stood before the altar of the LORD in front of the whole assembly of Israel, spread out his hands toward heaven [23] and said: “O LORD, God of Israel, there is no God like you in heaven above or on earth below—you who keep your covenant of love with your servants who continue wholeheartedly in your way”. Does that prayer sound like his father David? Fathers and Grandfathers, never take too lightly, or under estimate the influence you have on your children, and grandchildren.

In Chronicles 6: 12-13 it says “Then Solomon stood before the altar of the LORD in front of the whole assembly of Israel and spread out his hands. [13] Now he had made a bronze platform, five cubits long, five cubits wide and three cubits high, and had placed it in the center of the outer court. He stood on the platform and then knelt down before the whole assembly of Israel and spread out his hands toward heaven”. As you have all observed we have numerous folks in our congregation that raise their hands in worship. As a reminder, you have heard many times Lynne, in our praise and worship time say for you to worship in they way you feel comfortable and lead by the Holy Spirit. I believe this is just one more thing that makes worship at Wayside Chapel so special.

In 2 Chronicles verse 7, reads, “That night God appeared to Solomon and said to him, “Ask for whatever you want me to give you.” [8] Solomon answered God, “You have shown great kindness to David my father and have made me king in his place. [9] Now, LORD God, let your promise to my father David be confirmed, for you have made me king over a people who are as numerous as the dust of the earth. [10] Give me wisdom and knowledge, that I may lead this people, for who is able to govern this great people of yours?” Ask yourself, what would you ask for if God asked you the same question? It reminds me of the story you may have read as a kid or was told to you, about the genie in the bottle and getting one wish....But this is so much more serious, obviously Solomon is one wise guy. Then God said, in verses 2 Chronicles 7: [11] “Since this is your heart's desire and you have not asked for wealth, riches or honor, nor for the death of your enemies, and since you have not asked for a long life but for wisdom and knowledge to govern my people over whom I have made you king, [12] therefore wisdom and knowledge will be given you. And I will also give you wealth, riches and honor, such as no king who was before you ever had and none after you will have.”

I believe that today, we too should ask for wisdom. And I am personally absolutely convinced that if we put God first, we will be blessed far beyond what we deserve.

HEZEKIAH’S PRAYER: To understand Hezekiah, we need to understand the circumstances. Even while people worshiped the Lord they were also serving other gods. Assyria was laying waste to their land. Their saving grace was “Hezekiah who scripture says, “who did what was right in the eyes of the Lord” in 2nd Kings, Chapter 18 verse 5 to 7 it says “Hezekiah trusted in the LORD, the God of Israel. There was no one like him among all the kings of Judah, either before him or after him. He held fast to the LORD and did not cease to follow him; he kept the commands the LORD had given Moses. And the LORD was with him; he was successful in whatever he undertook. He rebelled against the king of Assyria and did not serve him.”

This is Hezekiah’s prayer found in 2 Kings 19:15-19 Hezekiah prayed to the LORD: “O LORD, God of Israel, enthroned between the cherubim, you alone are God over all the kingdoms of the earth. You have made heaven and earth. Give ear, O LORD, and hear; open your eyes, O

LORD, and see; listen to the words Sennacherib has sent to insult the living God. “It is true, O LORD, that the Assyrian kings have laid waste these nations and their lands. They have thrown their gods into the fire and destroyed them, for they were not gods but only wood and stone, fashioned by men's hands. Now, O LORD our God, deliver us from his hand, so that all kingdoms on earth may know that you alone, O LORD, are God.” And we know by reading scripture that God answered Hezekiah's prayer.

NEHEMIAH'S PRAYER : Nehemiah was in great distress when Nehemiah heard that the walls of Jerusalem were broken down and it's gates had been burned. He prayed this prayer. starting in Nehemiah 1: 5 “O LORD, God of heaven, the great and awesome God, who keeps his covenant of love with those who love him and obey his commands, [6] let your ear be attentive and your eyes open to hear the prayer your servant is praying before you day and night for your servants, the people of Israel. I confess the sins we Israelites, including myself and my father's house, have committed against you”. I find this last verse interesting in that he confessed the sins of Israel. I'm not a theologon and don't know how to interpret that....I know we can confess our own sins, but can we confess the sins of our brother, sisters, or our best friends, or do they need to confess their owns sins?? Nehemiah closes his prayer in verse 11, “O Lord, let your ear be attentive to the prayer of this your servant and to the prayer of your servants who delight in revering your name. Give your servant success today by granting him favor in the presence of this man.”

JEREMIAH'S PRAYER: Jeremiah is known as the the prophet who endured. His audiences were usually antagonistic or apathetic to his messages, He was ignored, his life was often threatened but he persevered. But all that is minor, for Jeremiah was successful in the eyes of the Lord. The following is know as Jeremiah's prayer found in Jeremiah: 10:23-25, “I know, O LORD, that a man's life is not his own; it is not for man to direct his steps. [24] Correct me, LORD, but only with justice—not in your anger, lest you reduce me to nothing. [25] Pour out your wrath on the nations that do not acknowledge you, on the peoples who do not call on your name. For they have devoured Jacob; they have devoured him completely and destroyed his homeland”. Notice that Jeremiah prayed for the Lord to pour out his wrath on the nations because they were not acknowledging the Lord. I can't help but wonder of if that does not also apply to today's America.

DANIEL'S PRAYER: If there's nothing else we remember about Daniel, it's his three friends Shadrack, Meshach, and Abedego being thrown into the fiery furnace for refusing to worship King Nebuchadnezzar's Image of Gold. Daniel was one of King Darius's most trusted advisers. Other advisers convinced Darius to outlaw prayer (does that sound like outlawing prayer in today's schools?) Regardless of King Darius edict, Daniel continued to pray to the Lord, and this is one of his prayers of note found in Daniel Chapter 9. It's quite a long prayer so I would like to start near it's end with verse 17. Daniel 9: [17] “Now, our God, hear the prayers and petitions of your servant. For your sake, O Lord, look with favor on your desolate sanctuary. [18] Give ear, O God, and hear; open your eyes and see the desolation of the city that bears your Name. We do not make requests of you because we are righteous, but because of your great mercy. [19] O Lord, listen! O Lord, forgive! O Lord, hear and act! For your sake, O my God, do not delay, because your city and your people bear your Name.”

Just as God answered Daniel's prayer, we can have confidence that God hears and answers our

prayers.

JONAH'S PRAYER: We all know the story of Jonah and the whale., and why he ended up in the whale because he ran from the Lord. If you or I were in the stomach of a whale I suspect each of us would have prayed desperately for our life. Starting in Jonah 2:1, we find Jonah's prayer. "From inside the fish Jonah prayed to the LORD his God. [2] He said: "In my distress I called to the LORD, and he answered me. From the depths of the grave I called for help, and you listened to my cry. [3] You hurled me into the deep, into the very heart of the seas, and the currents swirled about me; all your waves and breakers swept over me. [4] I said, 'I have been banished from your sight; yet I will look again toward your holy temple.' [5] The engulfing waters threatened me, the deep surrounded me; seaweed was wrapped around my head. [6] To the roots of the mountains I sank down; the earth beneath barred me in forever. But you brought my life up from the pit, O LORD my God. [7] "When my life was ebbing away, I remembered you, LORD, and my prayer rose to you, to your holy temple." And as you know God answered Jonah's prayer and the whale spit Jonah out of his mouth.

HABAKKUK'S PRAYER: Habakkuk was a man who asked difficult questions and sought answers. Habakkuk saw a dying world that broke his heart. Why is there evil in world? Why do the wicked seem to be winning? Does that sound a lot like our questions. Habakkuk boldly took his complaints directly to God and God answered Habakkuk's whys. Here is just one part of Habakkuk prayer starting in Habakkuk 1: 2-4: "[2] How long, O LORD, must I call for help, but you do not listen? Or cry out to you, "Violence!" but you do not save? [3] Why do you make me look at injustice? Why do you tolerate wrong? Destruction and violence are before me; there is strife, and conflict abounds. "[4] Therefore the law is paralyzed, and justice never prevails. The wicked hem in the righteous, so that justice is perverted". I believe we can relate in today's world much of what Habakkuk said in his prayer.

I know I may have included too many verses in today's sermon. And, I probably put in too many of my own thoughts about these scriptures. I think of an analogy of how companies make ice cream. They put in all the ingredients, cream, milk, sugar, flavoring, then they whip in air. I look upon what I have said in this sermon as the air, and the ingredients of the sermon is scripture. And as scripture says, God's word will not return void. The key to this analysis of the prayers of great men in the old testament is: That we need to learn from their prayers and commit ourselves to prayer. I don't know how many of you have read Jim Cymbala's book, "Fresh wind, Fresh Fire" Among other things, it tells of how he started his church with just a small group in prayer. The Lord answered their prayers and now the Brooklyn Tabernacle attendance runs into thousands.

There's a group of people from several churches who meet for prayer every Monday morning. I don't think anything is missed, they pray for our Pastors, our churches, our country, their prayers are all inclusive. I know we will all be blessed by their perseverance in prayer. As you are aware, there are so many things we do not have any control over, but God does. That is yet another good reason that we need to turn to God in prayer. If that is not enough reasons, do we have a choice but to by prayer and supplication turn to our God to whom we worship. I pray today that you will commit yourself to more prayer in your daily lives, and I assure you, guarantee you, that it will result in a most satisfying closer relationship with the Lord we serve.

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