

Prayer Mar 28, 2010

I would like to begin with a few words about the Israelites prayers for a new King. For decades, the Jews had been praying for relief from the brutality of Roman rule. As we know God had an entirely different answer to their prayer.

The verses in John 12: 12-13 read, "The next day the great crowd that had come for the Feast heard that Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem. They took palm branches and went out to meet him, shouting, "Hosanna!" "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!" "Blessed is the King of Israel".

The lesson to be learned from this is a very important one. The answer to our prayers, may not be the answer, God chooses. The Israelites were praying for a King who would take them out from under the brutality of Roman bondage, and God's answer was to give them a King, a Messiah. Ask yourself, what if, God had chosen to only answer their prayer to relieve them from Roman's brutality? Words can not describe how catastrophic that would have been for the future of mankind. Thank God, the answer God chose was to provide us His one and only son who died on the cross for the salvation of our sins.

Because this being Palm Sunday, and the Israelites prayer, I've included that as an entry into what has been on my heart. A number of months ago, I felt a leading to preach a sermon on prayer. Unfortunately, I didn't feel the same leaning on where to begin or end. It's still a work in progress. And if Pastor Paul lets me up here again, chances are you will hear more about prayer.

As you know, often out of the mouth of babes the truth is often told. The following is from an writing assignment given to 8 year old students and what they think about God. To help understand the meaning of prayer, I would like to quote a thought from an 8 year old named Danny Dutton. Let me say first that Danny thought that God's most important job was making people. Danny's wrote that God makes them to replace the ones that die.....Danny wrote that God's second most important job is listening to prayers. He wrote that an awful lot of this goes on, since some people, like preachers and things, pray at times besides bedtime. God doesn't have time to listen to the radio or TV because of this. Because he hears everything, there must be a terrible lot of noise in his ears....unless He has thought of a way to turn it off. God sees everything and hears everything and is everywhere, which keeps him pretty busy. Unquote.

I don't know if that was the best way to introduce a sermon on prayer, but I agree with Danny on the importance of prayer, and by the time I finish this morning, I hope you too, will agree.

In Matthew 21:21 Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, if you have faith and do not doubt, not only can you do what was done to the fig tree, but also you can say to this mountain, 'Go, throw yourself into the sea,' and it will be done. If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer."

And, John 15:7 says "If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you".

Now isn't that promise the greatest? Start making your list. You could ask for a million dollars in the bank, new car, new home, whatever came to your mind.....BUT 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". Knowing God's will is a tough one. Our prayer request may make complete sense to us, but does it make sense to God? Sometimes we can be pretty self centered and think only of ourselves. But in thinking about ourselves and our personal request, how often do we ask, is it God's will? As we all know, God has the big picture, past, present and future. Do you have any doubt then, that he knows what's best for us? He may, or may not answer our prayers for many reasons, unknown to us. Put your complete trust in God.

Again, scripture says, "In everything by prayer and petition put your trust in God" That doesn't mean half-heartedly, but whole heartedly! As imperfect human beings we often question, but we should never doubt. I'm reminded of the verse in Mark Chapter 9 where after Jesus heals the demon-possessed boy the father states: "I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!"

In praying there are a few questions we ask ourselves.

Will God answer our prayers? As Christians, we should let God direct our lives and do our best to be obedient and put our trust in Him. When you were a child, you trusted your earthly father because you loved him and knew He loved you.

I know there are exceptions to that statement, but hopefully it's been a true experience with you. When we have a personal and loving relationship with God and Jesus Christ our Savior, the more apt we are to have faith and put our trust in him. When you have this kind of relationship, a natural bi-product is to pray. To draw a simple analogy. When you were a child and needed something, you asked your earthly father, who provided for your needs, and gave you or denied you permission to do a variety of things. Be sure and know, that your heavenly father loves you and is more than ready to provide for your needs and concerns.

What we need to do is be able to discern and recognize the difference between our needs and wants. And, what God wants for us.

What may be one of the reasons God does not answer your prayers?

Not having a relationship with God may be one of the big reasons. Depending on the survey, national surveys indicate that 80% of Americans believe that God exists, and may even worship him from time to time. But, be real. To put it in terms we easily understand and to give a secular example, how can you expect something from someone you don't have a relationship with. You hardly know Sam, and you go up to him and say, Sam, I'd like you to loan me \$1,000? What kind of response do you think you would get? God is not Sam, but I think a verse from Isaiah may make the point to what I am trying to say. Isaiah 59:1-2 says "Surely the arm of the LORD is not too short to save, nor his ear too dull to hear. But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear.

So what am I saying. Do you come to the Lord with a clean and contrite heart? Do you ask forgiveness of your sins in seeking His face?

Mark 19: 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." When we have communion here at Wayside Bible Chapel, whether it's conducted by Pastor Paul or Pastor Ed, you usually hear a statement to the effect of setting everything right with the Lord before you take communion. You are usually given the time and opportunity to pray and ask forgiveness of your sins or for things you may have done which did not honor our Lord and Savior.

Perhaps it was being angry with a friend, an unresolved dispute with your spouse, not loving your neighbor as yourself...this list for myself and I suspect for you, could be a very long one. The bottom line is this, before we ask God to answer our prayers, we need to be thankful for what he has already done for us, and ask forgiveness for our sins or anything we might have done that may have offended him or is against his will. I hope I've said that right?

What is one of the big reasons God answers our prayers? Because God loves us more than we could ever imagine in our wildest dreams. Here are some verses to consider. Numbers 14:18 'The LORD is slow to anger, abounding in love and forgiving sin and rebellion. 1 Chronicles 16:34 says "Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his love endures forever."

King David called God's love "unfailing love". Psalm 6: 4 says "O LORD, and deliver me; save me because of your unfailing love." Nehemiah in Chapter 13

verse 22 calls it "great love" Nehemiah 1:5 says "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". When the Lord makes a covenant, you know that it's written in stone with unerasable ink, and good for all time.

What about our love? If we could only love Him like he loves us! It is my belief we can only do our best...not second best, our very best. And, 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."

I hope I have made my point on these two items: How much God loves us and how much we should love him. Now back to prayer.....

Phil 4: 6-7 reads "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

These verses could be called a test of our faith. God said it, we should take it into our hearts and believe it, completely. Do not be anxious about anything. Do everything with prayer and petition. Does that mean we only pray about what troubles us at the moment? I don't think so! I've read the story about a pastor asking a little boy if he said his prayers every night. 'Yes, sir.' the boy replied.

And, do you always say them in the morning, too?' the pastor asked. 'No sir,' the boy replied. 'I ain't scared in the daytime.'" Do you only pray when your troubled?

Be thankful. Remember the story of the 10 lepers who were healed and only one came back to thank Jesus. What a sad statement. But, how many times have you forgotten to thank God for something He has helped you through... God's peace transcends everything. In our daily lives we have numerous distractions...daily occurrences, events, problems with personal relationships, sickness, financial difficulties.....Satan loves to use these earthly things to steal the peace which God so willingly provides. We have such a very limited worldly view, in time and perspective. God's view has no limitations. Simply, He sees the big picture.

For example, what may appear to be trouble in our lives today, may be the experience that God provides us to overcome more difficult troubles tomorrow. And finally, if we are willing and let Him, God will guard our hearts and minds.

Do you sometimes wonder, how, what to pray, and how often? When my

youngest daughter came to know to Lord, she asked me how to pray. Among other things I told her, was not to worry, and I read her the scripture 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.

What should we pray about? Everything....no limitations! Remember the scripture from Philippians Chapter 4 "but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God." For a long time, I was of the view that I didn't want to bother God with the small stuff. Maybe that's a man thing, but I was wrong. God wants us to pray about everything.

How often should we pray? Simple stated, as often as time avails itself. At every opportunity. Anywhere, anytime. As a naive, new born Christian, I believed you always prayed with your eyes closed. I learned a great lesson from one of my employees named Cella. She was talking about praying as she drove to work. And, my thought was, doesn't she avoid getting into a lot of accidents?

If you would like to relate some examples of prayer, none could be better than reading a few excerpts from the prayers of godly men found in the Old Testament, like Solomon, Ezra, David, & Daniel, and there are many more: These men prayed with great passion. I've narrowed list and their prayers down as much as I could with these examples.

SOLOMON'S PRAYER: 1 Kings 8:28-30 Yet give attention to your servant's prayer and his plea for mercy, O LORD my God. Hear the cry and the prayer that your servant is praying in your presence this day. May your eyes be open toward this temple night and day, this place of which you said, 'My Name shall be there,' so that you will hear the prayer your servant prays toward this place. Hear the supplication of your servant and of your people Israel when they pray toward this place. Hear from heaven, your dwelling place, and when you hear, forgive.

EZRA'S PRAYER: Ezra 8:23 "So we fasted and petitioned our God about this, and he answered our prayer." When was the last time you fasted, and committed yourself to fervent prayer?

DAVID'S PRAYERS: Psalm 17:1 "Hear, O LORD, my righteous plea; listen to my cry. Give ear to my prayer-it does not rise from deceitful lips.O God, for you will answer me; give ear to me and hear my prayer.

And from Proverbs 15:8 "The LORD detests the sacrifice of the wicked, but the

prayer of the upright pleases him."

DANIEL'S PRAYER: Daniel 9:3-4 "So I turned to the Lord God and pleaded with him in prayer and petition, in fasting, and in sackcloth and ashes. I prayed to the LORD my God and confessed:"O Lord, the great and awesome God, who keeps his covenant of love with all who love him and obey his commands."

Did those men know how to pray, or did they know how to pray! Don't you wish that we all could pray with such fervor?

I would like to leave you with these verses from Philippians 4:5-7 Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Gary Alden, Elder
Wayside Bible Church