

Prayer

Brynmawr Family Church Sermon
Stuart Wheatman, Sunday 12th Feb 2012

Intro-

- What are you like at prayer? For many Christians the very mention of the word prayer brings about a guilt response, with a feeling that they are never quite making it, and never will. We know that guilt is not the best of motivators- it may cause us short-term to make changes, but these changes are usually short-lived. Rather I believe God wants to inspire us into prayer- that is what happened when the disciples came to Jesus to ask Him to teach them how to pray- they had been inspired by the example of Jesus Himself, and also by the answers to prayer He received. This morning we too will look at the example of Jesus, and we too will ask the Lord to 'teach us to pray'.

The example of Jesus

Jesus was and is the Son of God, God in human form, and yet He needed to pray. How much more do we need to pray! He set a wonderful example of a healthy prayer life. This life of prayer is particularly noticed by Luke in his gospel. We are going to read some snippets from Luke's gospel which give us a flavour of Jesus' prayer life.

Jesus' example

- When Jesus prayed things happened. Look at what happens when He prayed at His baptism:

Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heavens were opened, and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form, like a dove; and a voice came from heaven, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased." Luke 3:21-22 (ESV)

- Once Jesus had been baptised He is about to start 3.5 years of ministry. He has been declared by God to be His Son in a miraculous way at His baptism. You would think that would be a great starting point for ministry, but the Holy Spirit does not lead Him that way. Instead the Holy Spirit leads Jesus into a secluded place for 40 days. Although part of this was to resist temptation from the devil, the fact that Jesus was fasting also means it was a dedication to prayer right at the start of His ministry:

And Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness Luke 4:1 (ESV)

The result of this time of prayer was a release of power:

And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee, and a report about him went out through all the surrounding country. Luke 4:14 (ESV)

Jesus' ministry must have been a bit like the life of a famous person being chased by the paparazzi- He alternated between ministering in the power of the Holy Spirit to masses of people and being a recluse! Part of this was so that He would not get arrested before it was His time, but a big part was to pray. There seems to be a strong connection between the release of power and the commitment to prayer in Jesus' life:

Now when the sun was setting, all those who had any who were sick with various diseases brought them to him, and he laid his hands on every one of them and healed them. And demons also came out of many, crying, "You are the Son of God!" But he rebuked them and would not allow them to speak, because they knew that he was the Christ. And when it was day, he departed and went into a desolate place. And the people sought him and came to him, and would have kept him from leaving them, Luke 4:40-42 (ESV)

- As His fame continues and great signs and wonders are happening, Jesus still makes it a priority to get alone to pray. The next passage is just after Jesus has healed a man of Leprosy:

But now even more the report about him went abroad, and great crowds gathered to hear him and to be healed of their infirmities. But he would withdraw to desolate places and pray. Luke 5:15-16 (ESV)

- There seems to be a similar close connection between the wisdom Jesus demonstrated and His time spent in prayer. Jesus spent a whole night in prayer before choosing the 12 apostles:

In these days he went out to the mountain to pray, and all night he continued in prayer to God. And when day came, he called his disciples and chose from them twelve, whom he named apostles: Luke 6:12-13 (ESV)

- The 12 were used to Jesus praying. Here it says that the disciples were with Him, but He was praying on His own (remember also later when the disciples would later fall asleep whilst Jesus was praying in Gethsemane). Perhaps the questions Jesus asks the disciples come out of this time of prayer. It is here that Peter reveals that he believes Jesus is the Christ of God.

Now it happened that as he was praying alone, the disciples were with him. And he asked them, "Who do the crowds say that I am?" Luke 9:18 (ESV)

- Some people think of a prayer meeting as a boring place to be, but check out this prayer meeting:

Now about eight days after these sayings he took with him Peter and John and James and went up on the mountain to pray. And as he was praying, the appearance of his face was altered, and his clothing became dazzling white. And behold, two men were talking with him, Moses and Elijah, Luke 9:28-30 (ESV)

We know that in a similar way Moses' face was shining when we had spent time with the Lord! The presence of the Lord is a glorious place to be.

- The disciples must have been highly influenced both by Jesus' example and also by the results He saw. So they asked Him to teach them how to do it too:

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." Luke 11:1 (ESV)

In response Jesus gave them an example of a prayer, which we call 'The Lord's prayer', followed by a parable, or story. We will start with the story, as it will help us to understand the prayer.

Volunteers of the children to act out the story of **Lk 11:5-13**

It's a cold night in Brynmawr. It's snowing, it's midnight, and you have an unexpected visitor- the in-laws were just passing through and broke down, and walked to your house. Not only have you not dusted, hoovered, had time to hide the dirty washing or put any bleach down the loo, but you are down to your last pot noodle and were going to go shopping in the morning- you don't have any bread even to offer toast- crisis point! You ask them if they would like something to eat and they say they would love jam on toast. You say you're just nipping out the back to the freezer to get some bread.

You pop next door on the off chance. You could really do with a whole loaf, but decide just to ask for 3 slices and take your chances. Gentle knock. Nothing. Louder knock. Nothing. Do you ring the doorbell? Yes, but just once. Nothing. Should you ring the doorbell again? This is an emergency. You take your life in your hands and ring again. A Hilda Ogden-type face appears at the upstairs window, curls in, but still helmet hair, with bloodshot squinty eyes, creased face and dribbly mouth. A croaky voice creaks 'what's the matter?' You explain your predicament. 'It's midnight' you get told, 'the kids are all asleep, and the door is double bolted and the keys the other end of the house. Go back to bed I'll sort it in the morning'. The window closes and your hopes sink. Now the pressure is really on- you can't go back empty handed so you go for it. You ring the doorbell ten times! Dogs start barking. People start shouting. Babies start crying. Instantly the neighbour appears with the whole loaf of bread and bids you a very merry 'bon appetite'. The end.

Ask- Did the neighbour give the bread because they were generous? No, but because that person kept persisting. Is God more generous than that neighbour? Yes. Then why don't we believe He wants to give us things? The Bible says 'you don't have because you don't ask God (James 4:2)'. Have you stopped asking God for things? Have you given up at the first hurdle? Identify the distractions and discouragements that have stopped you asking and believing God for things and choose to press through any discouragements or distractions. Maybe there was an unanswered prayer and it has made us stumble- give it to God- some things we will never understand this side of Glory, but we know God is good.

Say 'I wonder who the most generous father is in here today. I'm going for the father of the year award, so I'm going to do something nice and give out some nice things to eat to the kids'. Get children to pretend to be very hungry and come to ask for food- announce 'I have various bits of food here for very hungry people':

- Who wants some bread?- give them a stone
- Who wants some fish?- give them a snake
- Who wants an egg?- give them a scorpion

This is ridiculous isn't it? I may not be father of the year but I know how to give to my kids when they are in need- how much of a better father God is. He IS father, not only of the year but eternal father (Isaiah 9:6). He knows how to be a good dad!

With these lessons in mind let's turn to the Lord's example prayer with fresh eyes.

The Lord's Prayer (Lk 11:2-4)- a response from Jesus about how to pray effectively

- **Our Father in Heaven,**
- This relates directly to the story of fathers giving gifts. Jesus called God 'dad', Abba. The first principle is to know God is your dad and He is a good father to you. If we know God as a loving Father we are able to approach Him in prayer- to ask Him for things. He gave His Son Jesus for us, would He ever withhold anything from us- the Bible says He will give us all things.
- **Hallowed be Your name**
Hallowed means 'set apart', 'holy', 'honoured, precious'. The second principle in this teaching on prayer is that to pray effectively we are to have a passion for God's name. A hebraic concept of 'name' is more than just a person's name- it is everything about them- their character, their honour, their renown. We are to have a passion for Him. People who are passionate for God's honour and glory will break through in prayer. It was said of Jesus that 'zeal for (God's) house' consumed Him. The opposite of this is both hating God's name, but also being apathetic towards His name. Lack of passion towards God leads to ineffectual prayer life. The cure is to repent and ask God to give us increasing passion for Him. Worship and thanksgiving are ways we can honour God's name- there is a strong link between worship and prayer and one flows into the other.
- **Your kingdom come Your will be done On earth as it is in Heaven**
The 'kingdom' means the rule and reign of God. When the Bible used the term 'kingdom of Heaven' it was another way of saying Kingdom of God (Heaven was used as Jewish way of honouring God's name by not using the word 'God'). The next principle is that our prayer life is more effectual when we submit to God- to His kingship in our lives. We can then pray for His kingly reign in situations around us. It is all about God's kingdom and fame- this means dealing with pride in our own lives- it's not about us! The kingdom of God is expressed particularly by signs and wonders- miracles, healings and people being delivered- it is God's kingdom invading earth and we, like Jesus, are to go from praying for His kingdom to manifest into a demonstration of the kingdom of God through signs and wonders. Jesus prayed for it and then did it- this is our model.
- **Give us day by day our daily bread**
The most common thing which hinders answered prayer is not praying. We don't have because we don't ask! This relates directly also to the story of the person needing bread. Whatever we need from God we can have a confidence that He will hear us and provide. Sometimes what we think we need is not always what He thinks we need and the answer is 'no' and the provision is His grace to get through. 'Day by day, daily'- our needs are ongoing and we are to habitually ask God. Develop a prayer habit. Like Jesus, find your quiet reclusive time and location.

- **And forgive us our sins**
Unconfessed sin hinders an effective prayer life. God knows anyway- get it out and say 'sorry'. Forgiveness is available, put it 'under the blood', then our conscience will not condemn us and we can have confidence in what we ask of Him.
- **For we also forgive everyone who is indebted to us**
Bitterness is another reason for ineffectual prayer life. We get offended by people and situations and it puts us out of sorts with God and our prayer life is affected. Bless and forgive, pray blessings on those who have offended you and you will know a release and a freedom and a confidence in prayer. 1Pet 3:7- if husbands don't treat their wives with respect it hinders their prayers- we need to keep short accounts with God and each other.
- **And do not lead us into temptation but deliver us from the evil one**
Flirting with danger, flirting with sin will hinder our prayer lives. As we are single minded in our devotion to God we will have a greater desire to pray and also see greater results.
- This is a prayer of intimacy. God is addressed as Father, Abba, Daddy. The Aramaic term 'Abba' was an intimate term. Under Roman rule or a slave was never allowed to use the term 'Abba' or 'Imma' (mummy). However, if the slave was adopted, they had the privilege of using this term. This is what Paul speaks about in the book of Romans when he says that we are no longer slaves, but can cry 'Abba' to God. When we come to God in prayer, we need to remember that we are his children and he loves to give good gifts to us.

Summary

- Jesus modelled a life of prayer for us. He saw amazing results and so can we.
- Jesus told a story to encourage us not to give up praying and to trust in God's goodness to us as a loving father.
- Jesus gave a model prayer highlighting important ingredients to effective prayer lives

Application- time of prayer asking God to help us pray more effectively, and committing ourselves to do so.

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