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Prayer Has Potential, Part 1

Matthew 4:23-25

And he went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction among the people. So his fame spread throughout all Syria, and they brought him all the sick, those afflicted with various diseases and pains, those oppressed by demons, those having seizures, and paralytics, and he healed them. And great crowds followed him from Galilee and the Decapolis, and from Jerusalem and Judea, and from beyond the Jordan.

We're in a five week series on prayer, and we're talking about this gift of prayer that God has given us. I was reflecting this week on some of what the Bible teaches us about the topic of prayer, and I found it interesting, as I was considering the topic of prayer in the scriptures, especially as it related to Jesus teaching his disciples to pray, that as Jesus was walking with his disciples, they were following him. He was leading them.

They never once in the recorded records of the gospel writings, they never once asked him to teach them how to teach. As he was teaching in the synagogues, they didn't ask him how to teach, or how to preach, or how to study the scriptures. They didn't ask him how to do the miracles that he was doing. There are many things that they didn't, we don't have record of them asking Jesus, their leader, their teacher, about.

But we do have record of them asking him about prayer. Teach us to pray. I think they rightly observed that Jesus life and his teaching, and the authority with which he spoke, and the miracles that came out of him, came from his connection with his Heavenly Father. All of this flowed out of the roots of his prayer life. And so they asked him, Lord, instead of all these peripheral things, would you teach us to pray like you do? Teach us to pray.

The Bible teaches us that the blood of Christ has given believers in the world, those that acknowledge Christ and come to faith in Christ, the blood of Christ has given us a doorway into a very unique realm. It's given us a doorway to come into the presence of the Most High God. When you read through the Old Testament, you saw that the presence of God was represented in the temple, in the tabernacle, and the priest could only go in there once a year. And they had to make sacrifices, and they had to go in there under certain stipulations. But the common people couldn't go into the Holy of Holies.

But the once and for all sacrifice of Jesus made it possible for anyone, anywhere, to enter the presence of God in any place on the earth. And not only enter the presence of God because of the forgiveness of our sins through the sacrifice of Jesus, but talk to him openly in prayer. It's a marvelous opportunity. It's a great privilege that God has bestowed on us, and God has empowered this gift of prayer with great clout and great responsibility for us. The Bible says, with great possibilities for us.

We saw in the lesson today that there is a power working in prayer, and I want to talk about why that is. Today, we've acknowledged the fact that all of us, when we gather here this morning, and last week as we talked, that we all come from different places in our prayer life.

Some of us maybe haven't prayed for some time. Others of us have been praying along the way, but don't have a very deep and or mature prayer life. And there are many at Nazareth as well who have a deep walk with the Lord. And we've said that it really doesn't matter where you're at in your prayer life this side of heaven. There's always room for growth in the way that we walk with God and talk with him.

We can mature in our faith, and God has said we shouldn't give up in prayer. We should keep asking. We should keep seeking. We should keep knocking. And sometimes we come to prayer out of inspiration, because we're inspired by someone or something that's said to go to the Lord in prayer. And other times we go to the Lord out of desperation in our lives.

It really doesn't matter how we are brought to the Lord, what the motivation is that driving us there. God likes to hear from us. Sometimes my own children come to me, sometimes out of desperation, sometimes out of excitement and enthusiasm. And I can tell you this about my own children. Whenever they come to me, I like it. I appreciate them coming to address me. And God is the same. No matter what reason we go to God, for he appreciates us drawing near to him in our lives.

The great Abraham Lincoln was said to be often driven to prayer out of desperation. He said this, I have been driven to my knees many times in the overwhelming conviction that I had nowhere else to go.

No matter why we go there, God wants us to come to him. He's invited us in many ways. He's opened up the doorway through Christ for us to come. And the Scripture tells us we can come boldly before the throne of grace.

And so we've been talking about what is then Jesus teach us about prayer. How has he instructed us to go about deepening our relationship with God and walking more closely with him?

We learned last week that in Jesus teaching in Matthew six, he said, prayer should be a personal thing between us and God. We should not pray like the hypocrites who, when they start to pray, they're on the street corners and they're praying as a demonstration to those around them, Trying to appear more spiritual maybe, than they really are. And Jesus said, as they do that, they're hypocritical in their heart. Acting like they're praying to God, but really, they're praying for the applause of humankind. And he said, if you're doing prayer in that way, that will be your reward. Whatever kudos you get from other human beings for appearing spiritual in some way, that will be the reward you get.

Instead, he said, as you start into prayer, you should go into the secret place and talk to God from the secret place in your heart to the secret place that he exists. And then God who sees in secret will reward you. He wants it to be a personal, private interaction with him.

I was thinking this week about my wife early on in our marriage. To appear like a good husband, sometimes I would, in a public setting, say something positive about her that I hadn't said in private. And over a little time of me doing this, I could tell she wasn't receiving it all that well. And she was discerning that I was giving her a compliment in public to appear maybe like a better husband than I really was. And it wasn't touching her heart.

God is like this. He wants to hear from us personally, in private. Like my wife wants to hear from me. And she doesn't want to hear a bunch of flattery words. Jesus said this as well. When you pray, don't use all kinds of words to sound impressive, for God already knows what's in your heart before you even speak to him.

So come to him in private from your authentic self, and speak honestly and openly and vulnerably before him, because he already knows everything about you. So we should pray privately with God in the first and foremost part of our praying. And we should be vulnerable and honest and open before him, for he knows everything about us.

And then he said, for the third time when you pray, and he launched into what we know of as the Lord's Prayer. We prayed it earlier in this service.

It might also be called by some the Our Father. And I mentioned last week that this is not a prayer that's designed to really be prayed word for word. There's nothing wrong with doing that. But Jesus was giving an instruction to us about how to structure or frame our prayers, our mindset around prayer, and things we ought to be praying about as we come before the father.

And so he demonstrated this with his words, saying, when you pray, pray like this. Our father, as in God being like a heavenly father who art in heaven, and speaking to him like we would another human being that's also in a different location, and also to hallow his name. He set apart different from an earthly father.

I had a gentleman come to me after the last hour and say, you know the difference between an earthly father? One of the differences in Heavenly Father is this, as an earthly father, we slowly want our children to grow independent of us. And I acknowledged with a head shake, yeah, that's true. I raised two children and I'm thankful that they have moved out of the house and that they're seeking their Heavenly Father to provide for them. I do want them to become independent, but it is in my heart as well that they're not just out there on their own in the world, but they grow just as God wants them to, to grow more dependent on their Heavenly father.

In a sense, as a parent, as a father, I'm slowly handing the baton to my children so that they might run with it and become more and more dependent on their Heavenly Father. So when I'm not around, they're still being provided for and cared for and thriving under his authority and rulership and fatherhood.

And so God wants us to come to him as a father, as children who are dependent upon him, and to Revere him and respect him and honor him.

And then Jesus said, when you pray, pray like this, your kingdom come, your kingdom come. It's interesting. We pray this so often when we repeat the Lord's Prayer. And I don't know how often you yourself, when you've prayed it, have thought about the Kingdom of God. But the Kingdom of God is an eternal kingdom that has no end. And it's a kingdom, as in all kingdoms has authority and rulership and power in it.

And he's talking about us asking the kingdom of God, the authority of God, the power of God, to come and have its way here on the earth as it has its way in heaven. It's a fascinating prayer. Your kingdom come.

Sometimes in Christian circles, I hear a lot of people asking God to bring about the rapture, to bring us out of this world and to be with him. And I understand that prayer. The Bible talks about the glory of heaven, where the kingdom of God reigns, and there's no pain and suffering and no hurt and heartache.

But it's interesting that Jesus didn't, in his teaching on prayer, initially teach us to pray about being raptured out of this world. But he taught us to pray that his rulership and his authority would come, and his power would come here on the earth as it rules in heaven.

Jesus talks a lot about the kingdom in his teaching. You can read about the axioms and the principles and the ways of the ruling of God. He's perfect in his justice and righteousness. He's very fair. He brings about personal responsibility to those that live under his reign in his kingdom.

And you can look at all the principles and the teachings of the Kingdom of God there. But there's something more and unique to the kingdom of God than what we experience in the kingdoms of this world. Certainly there is rulership and power and authority in the kingdoms of this world, but not like the power and authority in the kingdom of heaven.

Matthew chapter four tells us when Jesus started his ministry, he started talking about the kingdom of God and the kingdom of heaven. Before him was John the Baptist who came, and his message was to anyone who would listen to him, have a change of mind about your life, have a change of mind about the world, because the kingdom of heaven is coming near.

And then Jesus, as he began speaking, he said, repent, same thing. Have a change of mind. The kingdom of God is at hand. It's here. It's near us.

And when he started his ministry, he went through Galilee, teaching in the synagogues and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom. And tied in closely with that, he was healing every disease and sickness among the people. He was demonstrating not only the ways of the kingdom and the news of the kingdom being open to anyone for all eternity, where there's joy and fullness of life and peace and health and wellness forever.

Not only that, but even here on the earth, the Kingdom of God can come and its power can be displayed in writing what's wrong here on the earth. Healing diseases when it comes. Healing sicknesses among the people.

Yes, there is power in the kingdoms of this world, but nothing like the power that exists in the Kingdom of God. Friends, this is a power that surpasses all human power. This is a power that surpasses any weapons or military we have. This is a power that surpasses the power of dynamite. This is the dunamis of God, the kingdom of God.

Paul wrote in first Corinthians four verse 20, is not a matter of mere talk or chatter, but it is a kingdom of power, of mighty work, of strength.

Sometimes when I get discouraged in life, I do so because I've forgotten about the nature of God. God is good. He's kind. He's patient. He's merciful. He's loving, and he cares for us.

But I can tell you, there are things that I have come before him with day after day, year after year, month after month, that he hasn't yet answered in the way I think he could, in line with the kingdom of God. And I sometimes grow weary in prayer when I forget about his power.

But when I remember that this God who has invited us into his presence is the God of all eternity, who's the ruler not only of this earth, but he's the ruler of heaven and earth. He's the ruler of the cosmos. He's the one who put the stars in place.

When I'm reminded of his dunamis, his power, I'm stirred again to come before him. And he has said, keep seeking, keep asking, keep knocking. Sometimes he says no. Sometimes he says yes. Sometimes he says wait. But he always says keep persisting in prayer. Keep coming. Keep knocking. Keep asking. Keep seeking.

And if you've grown discouraged in your heart and mind over something you're dealing with in your life today, I just want to remind you that no matter what it is, God is able. He's able to help.