

3-26-23

Sermon: The "What, Me Worry?" Prayer

Scripture: Philippians 4:4-9, CTW: Psalm 23

Hymns: 635, 634, 639

Theme: Paul's preaching on prayer and worry can be compared with Christ's words in the Sermon on the Mount...our anxiety is always surpassed by God's provision. Today we go deeper in our understanding of prayer.

I. Introduction: Prayer as a Powerful Spiritual Weapon

In the entire arsenal of spiritual weapons available to the believer, prayer is one of the most powerful; exceeded only by that of praise. Perhaps you've never thought of prayer as a spiritual weapon, but in Paul's letter to the Ephesians he speaks of our need to put on "the full armor of God". **Ephesians 6:10-18.**

And this is because we find ourselves embroiled in a spiritual battle; a battle over the hearts and minds of our fellow man. It is Paul's contention that: "... our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers of this present darkness" **Ephesians 6:12.**

A. The word "prayer," and its various derivatives, appears some 544 times in the Bible. It may surprise you to know that the Bible has more to say about Jesus' prayer life than either His healing or preaching ministry!

Repeatedly, the Bible speaks of Jesus going off by Himself to pray to His heavenly Father...**Matthew 26:36; Mark 6:46; Luke 6:12; Luke 9:29.** For although Jesus is the Son of God, He found it imperative to pray, and to pray often.

Yes, "prayer is one of our greatest blessings, but it is also one of our biggest struggles". Sadly, prayer has become burdensome to

many, awkward to most and seen as unnecessary to other Christians.

B. We actually spend relatively little time with God in Prayer. However, if we yearn to have a meaningful relationship with God, we **must** spend time with Him. And spending time with God means talking to Him, conversing with Him ... praying to Him. Perhaps more importantly, we need to afford time for God to speak to us!

As one Reformed professor declared: "Show me a church where the people are on their knees praying and I'll show you a church where God is at work."

In this Lenten season, let us examine our prayer life, both individually and corporately, so that we may come away with a better understanding as to why we should pray, how we should pray, and what we should pray for.

In this morning's passage, Paul lays out three questions we must ask ourselves: first of all, WHEN WE PRAY, WHO SHOULD WE PRAY FOR? Secondly, WHEN WE PRAY, HOW SHOULD WE PRAY? Third and finally, WHEN WE PRAY, WHAT SHOULD BE THE RESULTS? Put simply, it is the WHO, WHAT, and HOW as it applies to our prayer life.

II. WHEN WE PRAY, WHO SHOULD WE PRAY FOR?

A. When we pray the main motivator should always revolve around the motive(s) of our heart. At some point in time we've all asked ourselves: "Is it wrong or is it selfish of me to pray for myself?" Or, put another way, "Are my prayers more pious and noble when I am praying for others?"

In verse 5 Paul reminds his listeners to: "Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near." This phrase, "The Lord is near", has two implications. Paul may well have been referring to Christ's imminent return, which many first century Christians believed that the Lord would return during their lifetime.

However, the apostle might also have meant that the Lord draws near to us when we come to Him in prayer.

Throughout the pages of Scripture we are repeatedly assured of God's promise where He says: "Draw near to Me so that I may draw near to you" [Zechariah 1:3, Malachi 3:7, James 4:8]. In a word, God is near and dear to those who seek Him!

B. So, is it wrong for us to pray to God about ourselves? The answer is "No!" God wants to know the desires of our heart. We should be mindful that God is already acutely aware of our desires, but He wants us to ask Him.

And if we ask with **proper motives** God's answer will always be: "Yes," "No," or "Later"; never "Maybe!" And the more precise we are in our petitions, the more precise God will be with His answers! We may not always like His answer, but we can be certain that He will always uphold our best interests.

As for praying on behalf of others, it is also important to address our motives. In verse 2 Paul urges these two women, Eu-o-dia and Syn-ty-che, to resolve their differences amicably so as not to cause further strife among the brethren.

Keep in mind these were two godly women who were also quite influential. They may even have played an integral part in establishing this church at Philippi alongside the woman named Lydia. So Paul pleads with them to reconcile their differences in accordance with **2 Corinthians 5:18** which speaks of our being called to the "ministry of reconciliation."

C. Sometimes it is a matter of forgetfulness. And by that I simply mean we forget what to ask for! For example, there was a salesman who talked to a potential buyer who, after the salesman called on him for several months, never ordered anything.

One day the salesman got so fed up that he drove over to the man's business and marched right into his office without an

appointment. The salesman confronted him saying, "Excuse me, but what must I do to get an order?" He stepped back momentarily fully expecting to be thrown out of his office, but instead the customer looked up, smiled and said politely, **"Perhaps you can start by ... asking!"**

He then went on to say to the salesman, "over the last several months you've shown me samples of what your company can produce but you've never bothered to ...ask for an order!"

III. WHEN WE PRAY HOW SHOULD WE PRAY?

A. Have you ever gone to a prayer meeting and felt uncomfortable? People often do; especially if they're not used to praying aloud or in groups. I can remember occasions when I would bow my head in prayer and then when I thought it was safe, I would look up to see what everyone else was doing!

When it comes to praying I think sometimes we get so hung up on "methodology" that we forget the importance of just being ourselves! For instance in Old Testament times, priests assumed a standing position while praying. It was also customary for people to bow down, or to lay prostrate in reverence to God.

Today, people typically bow their heads and close their eyes when praying in spite of the fact that the Bible has little to say about "how" we should pray.

As we found out in the message the other week, the best advice we have comes from our Lord in His famed "Sermon on the Mount." But again His words were directed more towards one's "motives" rather than "methods."

Remember, in Matthew chapter 6, beginning in verse 5, the Lord draws a clear distinction between the religious Pharisees who prided themselves by praying in public so as to be noticed, as opposed to our need to find a quiet room in which to pray.

The Lord cautions us to pray in secret, so that God, who sees us in secret, will hear us and answer our prayer.

B. As to “manner and form” things haven’t changed very much over the years. In some forums I’ve heard people pray aloud in what I call a “horizontal” mode. In other words, these people seem more concerned with being heard by others, rather than by God.

But through the years I have also been privileged to know genuine “prayer intercessors”; people who pray in what I call a “vertical” mode. Such people, whether alone or surrounded by others, direct their prayers solely toward Almighty God.

A true prayer intercessor should be oblivious to his/her surroundings. They are not in the least bit distracted when being ushered into the throne room of God!

But when it comes to prayer perhaps the most important question confronting us is this:

IV. WHEN WE PRAY, WHAT SHOULD BE THE RESULTS?

This, I believe, is the main point of what Paul is saying here. Beginning in verse 4 he reminds his readers to: “Rejoice in the Lord ... always; again I will say rejoice!”

A. All too often when we pray our fears keep us from being totally honest and open.

Paul emphasizes the need for us to remove any and all anxiety which, in the final analysis, brings into question doubts concerning God’s ability to provide for our welfare. Instead, in all things, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, we should let our requests be made known to God.

To my way of thinking, Paul here is telling me that I must have an attitude of thankfulness before presenting my petitions. In a word, I need to put faith before sight! And when I can do this, I

become enshrouded with an incomprehensible peace; an abiding peace which the world cannot comprehend.

B. Paul is telling us to develop an inner peace attitude about prayer.

And this “inner peace” comes as a result of knowing intuitively that no matter what I ask for, either for myself or for others, God will surely answer me at just the right time and in just the right way!

One the best ways I can describe what I mean by this kind of “inner peace”, is the time when my oldest daughter, Maggie, who was about four years of age, was riding in the car with me when a nostalgic song came over the radio. You may remember it: “The Leader of the Band” by Dan Fogelberg.

Listening to the words I welled up with tears in my eyes. A very concerned little Maggie looked over at me and asked if I was sad. I assured her, “No, sweetheart.” Maggie then asked: “Daddy, are these the kind of tears that make you feel good inside?” I smiled and said, “Yes, dear, these are the good kind of tears; tears that make you feel happy!”

And that, my friends, is the “rejoicing thing” that Paul is talking about...the way God will make you feel when you go to Him in prayer ... when tears of joy, unspeakable joy, will overflow!

So, by all means and every means ... let us keep that in mind!

For a closing on this message today, let us together pray the prayer that we have highlighted and included in your bulletins throughout the Lenten season:

Psalm 51: 1-17

¹ Have mercy on me, O God,
according to your unfailing love;
according to your great compassion
blot out my transgressions.

- ² Wash away all my iniquity
and cleanse me from my sin.
- ³ For I know my transgressions,
and my sin is always before me.
- ⁴ Against you, you only, have I sinned
and done what is evil in your sight;
so you are right in your verdict
and justified when you judge.
- ⁵ Surely I was sinful at birth,
sinful from the time my mother conceived me.
- ⁶ Yet you desired faithfulness even in the womb;
you taught me wisdom in that secret place.
- ⁷ Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean;
wash me, and I will be whiter than snow.
- ⁸ Let me hear joy and gladness;
let the bones you have crushed rejoice.
- ⁹ Hide your face from my sins
and blot out all my iniquity.
- ¹⁰ Create in me a pure heart, O God,
and renew a steadfast spirit within me.
- ¹¹ Do not cast me from your presence
or take your Holy Spirit from me.
- ¹² Restore to me the joy of your salvation
and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.
- ¹³ Then I will teach transgressors your ways,
so that sinners will turn back to you.
- ¹⁴ Deliver me from the guilt of bloodshed, O God,
you who are God my Savior,
and my tongue will sing of your righteousness.
- ¹⁵ Open my lips, Lord,
and my mouth will declare your praise.
- ¹⁶ You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it;
you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings.
- ¹⁷ My sacrifice, O God, is^[b] a broken spirit;
a broken and contrite heart
you, God, will not despise.