

PASTROW BENEFICE YEAR OF PRAYER 2017

MAY - WHAT DOES JESUS TEACH US ABOUT PRAYER?

'Lord teach us to pray'

At the time of that request by one of Jesus' disciples (Luke 11.1) devout Jews would have recited daily the eighteen Benedictions; in many ways beautiful, though at the centre there is a call for damnation of the nation's enemies and the wicked.

It may well have surprised the disciples that in response Jesus gives them what we call the Lord's Prayer. It was simple, yet profound, with no more than sixty words - the Benedictions had over six hundred.

Jesus warns his disciples more than once against parading personal piety in public, and such a warning precedes the Lord's Prayer in Matthew 6. We should add that Jesus also says that we are not to be ashamed of the words. So Jesus says, 'Pray in this manner.'

Our Father in heaven. Not only the Lord of Hosts, Master, King, the awesome Jehovah, but the one we can relate to in confident love. 'Abba Father' was an almost child-like phrase revealing a natural closeness, whereas 'Father' in Jewish devotions normally meant 'Father of the nation.' The words 'in heaven' remind us of God's transcendence, but Jesus shows us an intimacy with our heavenly Father not expressed before. We then are taught to ask three things relating to our Father:

- 1. Hallowed be your name.** We need to venerate Him, for obedience should always come before requests for ourselves.
- 2. Your kingdom come.** To recognise God's hand in the world and to share our Lord's call for justice, peace and love for all.
- 3. Your will be done** That God's will may be accepted willingly, not only in the supernatural world, but also here on earth. These words, of course, foreshadow our Lord's experience in the battlefield of Gethsemane. It implies not only talking to God, but seeking and listening to Him.

Three more requests follow - for ourselves:

- 1. Give us today our daily bread.** Not all we want, but what we need as the basic resources for life.
- 2. Forgive us as we forgive those** We can sincerely ask for His forgiveness if we can forgive others 'from our hearts'. Acknowledging we are not always good at forgiving others could be a positive step on the way to repentance.
- 3. Lead us not into temptation** We ask that we are not tempted beyond our strength to resist evil. We recognise our weakness and God's willingness to help us overcome it.

More teaching by Jesus

- We are taught to persevere in prayer (Luke 18.1-8 & 11.5-13).
- He contrasts human reluctance to pray with God's willingness to respond to prayer - 'ask, seek, knock' (Matthew 7.7-8)
- We should not pray to impress God with either our words or deeds, but to develop a right relationship with Him (Matthew 6.5-8; Luke 18.9-14).

- Jesus teaches us that when bringing our offerings to God (and that includes our prayers) knowing that we are not at peace with someone, we should leave the 'offering', seek to be reconciled and then return to God. Our relationship with God and with people are two sides of the same coin (Matthew 5.23-24).

Jesus' personal example of prayer

- He was willing to pray all night before making an important decision (Luke 6.12-16).
- He rejoices in the Holy Spirit that ordinary people can be used by God (Luke 6.12-16).
- Ordinary folk recognised our Lord's prayerfulness; they brought children to Him so he could lay hands on them and pray for them (Matthew 9.13-15).
- He gave thanks to God, be it sharing loaves and fishes, or bread and wine.
- He prayed for Simon Peter, that his faith would fail; although Peter lost his nerve, his faith still helped him persevere.
- He prayed for all believers - including us! (John 17.20-23).
- We end with Jesus' words from the Cross - all prayers - while he suffered the agonies of the ultimately cruel death for us:

'Father forgive them, they don't know what they are doing'

'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' The words are from the start of Psalm 22, which begins in desolation and ends in triumph with 'People not yet born will be told - The Lord saved His people.'

So Jesus could finally pray: 'Father into your hands I commit my spirit.'

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