

THE "WORK" OF PRAYER
July 20, 2001

Luke, Chapter 11. I want to mention that last week someone noted that I had referred to a passage about the wicked judge in Luke 11, and it is actually Luke 18; Verses 1- 8, if anybody was trying to find that later.

Men are quite different than women, of course, which is why men need, desperately need I should say, prayer. About two months ago, I noticed in the bathroom at the offices of Man in the Mirror where we have two sinks where two different soap dispensers are located, two of them were both about empty. This was two months ago. I only go to the office one day a week for staff and management meetings. The next week when I returned, I noticed that they were now not only both low, but one of them somebody had screwed off the top and put in a little water to swish it around to get the last bit of soap. I took note of that. The next week I went back and now both of them were empty and both tops were off, and I thought that was kind of interesting, an interesting insight into the male species. The next week I went back and noticed that now one of them was completely empty and the other almost empty. The next week I went back and both soap dispensers are completely empty. I'm wondering, you know, does anybody care? The next week I go back, and the next week, and I just decided not to say anything about this. I just wanted to see how long this would go on. It was eight weeks until finally I couldn't stand it anymore. I think that until Jesus returns, there would never have been any soap in there. Finally I asked that we put some new soap in the bathroom. Of course, the woman on the management team said, "Why didn't you just ask me, we've got all kinds of soap in the ladies room." Well, we knew that, we knew that. I should have prayed. I thought about this later as we were doing the series. I just thought maybe somehow the soap would actually appear, but now I realize that this is why we need to have a series on prayer. Not only do men not give two cents for things like cleanliness, I'm glad we're not some sort of clinic or something like that where people come in with diseases and, secondly, and most importantly, men just sort of need to pray more. Now where am I going with this? I'm going back over here to the board because that's not playing very well. It happens, it happens. I just thought it was consummately interesting.

Okay, I want to give a quick review here on this three-week series that we're doing on prayer. First week was, "Why Should We Pray." We talked about what happens when we don't pray, what happens when we do pray, and a little about why we don't. When we don't pray, then what we're doing is we're substituting our best thinking for what God might do. We did note that even when we tend to be at our very best, we are likely to look at the data and still come to the wrong conclusion. When we do pray, we release the promises of God, and one reason we don't pray is because we do doubt whether or not we have power when, in reality, the issue is not that we don't have enough power but that we have so much power that God has set limits around what we're doing. Last week we talked about "How Prayer Works," and we said that God can do four things with a request. He can grant the request, he can grant something else, he can deny it or he can postpone it. Now this morning, I want us to talk about what to pray for.

St. Francis of Assisi was the founder of the Franciscan Order of Monks 1209, and for whom the city of San Francisco was named. It was said of St. Francis, when he was still just Francis, that one day he was out hoeing his garden and someone said to him, "Francis, if you knew that Jesus Christ was going to return tomorrow, what would you do?" Francis said, "I would finish hoeing my garden." In other words, this man was so utterly certain that he had not missed anything that his conclusion was that he would simply do what he was already doing. The question or the problem I really want us to deal with this morning is, what do you and I want to be sure that we don't miss. What do you want to be sure in your life that you don't miss? Wouldn't you like, if you were to hear that Jesus Christ was coming back tomorrow, you would be so utterly certain that what you were doing, if you had not missed it, that you would simply continue what you're doing?

In this passage that we have before us today, I asked you to turn to Luke, Chapter 11. Let's read the verse here. "One day Jesus was praying at a certain place. When he finished, one of his disciples said to Him, Lord, teach us to pray." Then, verses 2 and following, is the response that Jesus gave. He also gave pretty much the same prayer when he was delivering the Sermon on the Mount. He flushed it out just a little bit more in the Sermon on the Mount, so we're going to leave Luke, Chapter 11, and we will not come back. Now I want you to turn where you had your finger to Matthew, Chapter 6; Verse 9, and we're going to look at the prayer that Jesus gave us this morning in order to know what to pray for. It is a model for prayer, and I'm going to give you a little paradigm here this morning that I believe can really be helpful to each of us. Most men already have some system of prayer. Some men are very satisfied with the system of prayer that they have, or the method of prayer, others do not. What I want to do this morning is to give you a three-pronged paradigm, and I've entitled this message, The "Work" of Prayer as an acrostic for these three parts.

The first element is going to be worship, and the second element is going to be renewal. I've been drawing this on the board, some of you might want to reproduce this as it is a great little mind map to help you get back into thinking about this later. The third element is kingdom.

Men, a lot of prayers are very trite, very shallow, don't really address the real things that are in the heart of God, the real deep profound needs that men have. All the little prayer formulas, I love them, I used them myself, the ACTS one and the CTA and all these, but as I've been thinking about prayer over these last few weeks, I've been asking the Lord to show me something that I could give you that would take you another step a little deeper in your prayer life. I think this is it this morning. I didn't have the first two weeks, but I think this is it. I want to show you through the Lord's Prayer how this little idea, The "Work" of Prayer worship, the WO renewal and K for kingdom can, perhaps, help you. You may want to adopt the whole thing as I give it to you. Everybody has their own grit already through which you filter things, and so you may want to pick and choose things, or you may not find this useful at all. Hopefully, at least it will be a benefit for you to have heard these ideas this morning.

The first thing is worship, and the question, of course, is why worship? In Verse 9 it says, "This then is how you should pray: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name," or may your name be sanctified or may your name be made holy, and the Lord's Prayer is a model. I have used the Lord's Prayer as my model for many years, but I use it more for catch words, so I'll read through "Our Father," then that will get me thinking. I use that as a catch word, and then I may go off for a minute or two minutes or sometimes five or ten minutes just thinking about my father and sonship and adoption and the glories of the eternal God. Or may your name be made holy, and I might be thinking about Isaiah 6 in the year when King Uzziah died. Isaiah saw the Lord high lifted up, and he heard the living creatures sing, "Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord God Almighty." Heaven and earth are full of your glory. When Jesus gives us this model prayer, I don't know, but I suspect that he was not saying just pray this prayer simply the way it is, but rather this is a model for prayer and you can use it as a way to help you think about the things that are important to God as well as important as well as important to us.

Keep your finger there and turn with me, if you would, to Ecclesiastes, Chapter 3: Verse 14. Over the years, some of you have heard me say on more than one occasion, based on this verse, what I think is one of the essential truths of the Christian faith. That truth is this. God will not force you to revere him, but he will make it impossible for you to be happy unless you do. How many of you have ever heard me say this? A number of you have. Good. For some of you, this is a new thought then. In Ecclesiastes, Chapter 3: Verse 14, we read this, and the verses above it basically have laid out how God is the one who makes men happy. In Verse 14 it says, "I know that everything God does will endure forever; nothing can be added to it and nothing taken from it. God does it so that men will revere him." The point here is that God will not force you to revere Him, but he will make it impossible for you to be happy unless you do.

Now the question I would ask you to consider is this true? Is it true that God will not force us to revere Him, but will make it impossible for us to be happy unless we do? I would suggest to you, that's what the scripture says. You have to make your own decision on this; whether or not you believe this is true. If so, what does it mean if it's true? If it is true it means we need to worship the Lord, and why do we need to worship the Lord? We need to worship the Lord because he is worthy of our worship.

Turn with me now, again keeping your finger at Matthew 6, we will not come back to Ecclesiastes. Turn to Revelation: Chapter 4 at the end of the biblical texts. We are going to be spending different amounts of time on each of these three rubrics. We're not going to have time to go as far as I would like to go into each one of them. Each one of them could be a book. Each one of them could be a library for that matter, but we're not going deep into each of them so heads up on that. We'll have different amounts of time allocated to the difference of these three.

Chapter 4, Verse 8, these heavenly creatures, the same ones probably that Isaiah had seen are saying, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come." Verse 11 to the twenty-four elders, "You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being." Chapter 5, Verse 9: "And they sang a new song..." because of Jesus. "You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and by your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth." That's us. Verse 12: "Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise." Then "...every creature in heaven and earth..." Verse 13: "To Him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever!"

One of the most uniquely successful Christian movements of all time is Promise Keepers. How many of you have been to a Promise Keepers meeting? How many of you would say that one of the unique distinctives of Promise Keepers is that you have the sense that you have been brought into the presence of a Holy God? To me, God's genius in raising our Promise Keepers is this whole element of worship that we don't see a lot of really for men, or worship in a way that is attractive to men. We can't go to Promise Keepers all the time, but we can worship the Lord all the time.

How can we worship God? We worship God in prayer, and some of the different things that you might be able to do, I wish had more time on this. Some of the things you could do to worship the Lord are: One thing, and perhaps the greatest thing, you can do is you can meditate on the scriptures. You can meditate on the scriptures like the ones we just read in Revelation or the one in Isaiah 6, or the vision of Jesus given at the end of Ezekiel, Chapter 1, or the vision of the suffering servant Jesus has given in Isaiah 53, or David's incredible prayer about the greatness of God that's given in 1st Chronicles 29. You, perhaps, have if you've been around Christianity for a while you may have some of your own. If you're new to Christianity, just investigating Christianity, then you are not so familiar with some of these and you might write down some of those references I just mentioned and look them up on your own. As we apply ourselves in meditation to the scripture and pray, "Our Father in heaven, may your name be made holy," this is an act of worship that opens up a communion, a communication, a relationship with the God of creation who became a man who is our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, and whose holy spirit dwells in us right now, and He won't force us to revere Him, but he will make it impossible for us to be happy unless we do.

Another way is music. I love all kinds of music. I love some of these praise music things; the No Higher Calling CD that the National Coalition of Men's Ministries has put out. By the way, it's a best seller. Why? Because 80 men got together in the mountains of Colorado to worship the Lord, and they recorded what they did, and God showed up. To listen to music can release your spirit to worship and revere a worthy God. I would like to say a lot more about worship. I'm not going to because I am going to move now to renewal.

"Our Father in heaven, hallowed be thy name," Matthew 6 here. I'm going to come back to Verse 10. By the way, I don't think Jesus is given any temporal priority of what order you have to pray in here. I think he is simply suggesting the things that need to be prayed. If you feel that you need to pray it by rote, word for word as it is, that's fine. I don't think that's the only way to do it. I am going to come back to Verse 10 because the only way I can get my acrostic to work is to do it this way. Actually, that's not true. I believe that what we're going to talk about here is that worship has to do with how we connect with God; renewal has to do with self; then the kingdom has to do with others. I think you'll see this progression actually makes sense. That's why I'm doing it this way. By the way, this is the first time I've taught this. I just thought this up this week, so I'm not saying that this is all thoroughly flushed out.

Verse 11: "Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our debts," or sins, "as we also have forgiven our debtors," for those who have sinned against us, "And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one," or deliver us from evil. So we see four things there. What happens in the course of a typical day for most of us? We have our little devotional in the morning, if you do that. Lots of times we're too busy to do that. We have a little Jesus, a little worship, then over the course of a typical day basically what happens to most of us is that all day long we are tempted to exchange the truth for a lie.

Turn with me to Romans, Chapter 1, keeping Matthew again at your finger, Verse 21: You can read here with me. "For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened." In the course of the day there is this temptation to not give thanks to God and to not glorify Him. Verse 22: "Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools..." There is temptation every day to be wise in our own eyes. Verse 23: "And exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles." There is the temptation to make idols of success, money, sex, being in control. One writer makes the distinction between near idols and far idols; near idols are the things you kind of see, far idols are the things that stand behind that, a desire to be in control, a desire to have comfort, a desire for power, to achieve the power. In Verse 24, "Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator - who is forever to be praised. Amen."

And so the tendency in the course of a typical day is to exchange the truth for a lie and worship the creature, ourselves, instead of to worship the Creator. Does this make sense? Did anybody have this challenge recently? Of course, we all have this challenge every day. That's why we need to renew ourselves, and I suggest daily to renew ourselves because the temptation, here's the temptation, here's the lie. Everyday you're faced with your choice of believing the truth or believing the lie. Here's the lie. Jesus Christ is not enough to make me happy. I need something else besides Jesus. The scriptures tell us that we should pray, "Forgive us our sins."

The first step in renewal is repentance and faith, come daily to the cross of Jesus Christ in repentance and faith. Why do we come to Jesus and God our Father everyday in repentance and faith? Because repentance and faith is the Bible's only answer for sin. The Bible has no other answer for sin, except repentance and faith. So Jesus says, "Pray for forgiveness..." elsewhere to be found in Christ in faith. By faith you are saved. It's not by getting that idol. It's not by getting that other thing. That will never make you happy. God's not going to force you to revere him, and He sure is not going to let you stand in happiness for revering something other than Him. Pretty big point here!

What are your idols, men? What is the lie that you today will be tempted to believe? Take some time right now. Think about this. What is the lie that yesterday you decided to believe? Is it sin? If it's sin, what do you do with it? The only thing you can do with it is repent and believe that Jesus is sufficient. You don't need anything else. Bob Buford's little model about you can only have one thing in the box. What's in the box? It can be Jesus or this other thing, whether it's money or success, but you cannot have two things in the box. "No one can serve two masters," Matthew 6 said. Either you will love the one and hate the other or the other way around. You can't serve both God and mammon. This is the way it is. We need to renew ourselves day by day. Step one is to renew ourselves in the Gospel through repentance and faith.

The second thing is to pray for the daily bread. It's to come as the humble beggar to Jesus for spiritual, emotional and physical bread. Turn with me to John: Chapter 6. I think I am just going to basically give you a snapshot when we get to the kingdom, but it doesn't make any sense to give this message and not talk about what it says here in John: Chapter 6; Verse 35: "Then Jesus declared, 'I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry. And he who believes in me will never be thirsty. But as I told you, you have seen me and still you do not believe.'"

The prayer that we make to renew ourselves day by day is because part of the lie is not to believe in Jesus, to really not believe in the sufficiency of Jesus. Why do we have anxiety? Because we don't believe in Jesus. Why do we believe the lie? Because we don't believe the truth. What is the truth? That Jesus is the bread of life. Verse 37: "All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away. For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of Him who sent me. And this is the will of Him who sent me; that I shall lose none of all that he has given me, but raise them up at the last day. For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in Him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day."

One of our brand new table leaders, I don't even know if he's got his table started yet, Mark Crumblish, is a very humble beggar before Jesus this morning. His seven-year old daughter, Chandler, is fading in and out of consciousness with spiral meningitis for the last six days. The doctors still haven't actually given that diagnosis, that's a preliminary diagnosis. They did the spinal tap and so forth yesterday. Not only that, on top of that, he was let go this week. What I would suggest to you is that you feel the gravity of Mark's life. Do you think that anything else is important to Mark beside little Chandler? Nothing else matters to him anymore. The only possibility of God meeting his needs is through the grace of a kind and merciful God. There's nothing he can do, and, men, there's nothing you can do either. You felt for a moment what Mark is feeling. That's the way we are all the time, we just don't realize it because we believe the lie. We're always that way. We're always humble beggars before a Holy God. That's why Jesus says, "Forgive others their sins." That's why Jesus says, "Pray for protection."

The third piece of this is the kingdom. Once you have worshipped God, once you have renewed yourself in the Gospel, you want to do something. You want to respond to that. Point yourself in the direction of God's kingdom program. God has a "to do" list, too, did you know that? We just read it in John: Chapter 6.

I'll close it up with this. Verse 40: "For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in Him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day." Not as redeeming of people to himself, and so we should pray for God's kingdom program. We should pray for believers who are trying to do the will of God and that they would do the will of God, and we should pray for non believers that they would come to know the kingdom of God. That's the deal.

Sherry McKenzie is one of my professors at Seminary, and he's on my Board of Directors. In the 1950's as a young Lieutenant in Germany, as a Chaplain, he began to preach the Gospel on the base and nobody was responding. Finally, one day a young man came to him and said, "You know, I think I'm missing it." And Sherry said to the young soldier, "After the service today, I am going to be out underneath this tree out here, why don't you come see me if you want to talk about it." The young man came, and they began to pray. They just began to pray that God would reveal himself to this young man. The young man brought a couple of other young men, and those two men brought a few other young men. Before a few weeks had gone by, there were 40 men meeting every week out under this tree to pray. This whole military base, which had been devoid of spirituality when Sherry came, by the time he left there were prayer groups going on every floor in every barracks of this military base because one young man was afraid that he would miss it.

St. Francis was certain that he had not missed it. Let us also be sure that we don't miss it. Let us daily worship the Lord and renew ourselves and plug into the kingdom program. Does this make sense to you?

Let us pray:

Father, my sense is right now that the most striking thing here is many of us have realized that we have been believing the lie. We've been making idols. We need to worship you. We need to be involved in your kingdom program, but right now I sense, Lord, that the deepest need of our hearts is to renew ourselves through repentance and faith into the good Gospel of Jesus Christ. If you have been believing the lie, men, take a moment and repent. Now take a moment and believe the truth of Jesus Christ. Amen

It is so, so easy to, wouldn't it make sense you have the will of the flesh and the devil, right, and all day long, twenty-four hours a day, the will of the flesh and the devil are presenting idols, presenting sexual immorality, presenting pride. The will of the flesh and the devil is presenting you with lies all day long. Basically, to convince you that Jesus isn't enough to make you happy that you need this other thing. Then we have a little quiet time of fifteen minutes. Is there any man who really thinks that fifteen minutes with God is enough to fully counterbalance twenty-three hours, forty-five minutes with the will of the flesh and the devil? We really need to walk with the Lord all day long, and I do believe that if you would practice this model, The "Work" of Prayer, if you did it for fifteen minutes a day, I really believe this would begin to change your thought pattern about what takes place during the day, that the Lord would help you see the lies and cling to Jesus and the Gospel.

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