

PRAYER

Intro: Appreciation for the opportunity.

My friendship with Ralph Johnson and Johnny Reinertson.

Prayer--its great importance, and our failure generally to understand prayer, and then actually to pray.

Three important things about prayer:

- 1) It is a family matter -- for those who are in the family of God. Cf. John 1:11, 12; 1 John 3:1, 2.

That is why we learn that the only way in which we can approach God is through our Lord Jesus Christ--and in His Name. We ought to form the habit of recognizing that whenever we pray by using His Name in our prayers at the end, and even at the beginning.

- 2) It is an personal and individual matter.

We pray together in our churches, and, hopefully, as families. But, if we are not praying privately and individually, we are not really praying.

Cf. Matt. 6:5-15.

- 3) It is a Biblical matter.

The Apostle Peter, in his second Epistle, has told us the following:

Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord, According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue (2 Pet. 1:3, 4).

Many years ago I read somewhere that the Christians in China used to have the saying (and maybe they still do) that if you want to learn how to talk to men, read the Proverbs; IF YOU WANT TO LEARN HOW TO TALK TO GOD, READ THE PSALMS.

I would expand that much more and say, "If you want to learn to pray, learn it from your Bible." There we not only have instructions about prayer, but we have many, many prayers. We see how Abraham prayed. How Moses prayed. Especially how David prayed. We can see there how Peter prayed, and how the Apostle Paul prayed. Even more important we have some of our Lord's prayers, and His teachings regarding prayer.

In this connection, from my own study of the Scriptures, and from what I have read from godly men in the past, I think that

I can truthfully say to you this morning that there are five kinds of prayers in the Bible:

- 1) Worship of God.
- 2) Thanksgiving and praise to God--the lack of which is one of the greatest sins of the people of God!
- 3) Confession of our sins.
- 4) Intercession for others.
- 5) Petitions--personal requests for ourselves.

Let us think this morning very briefly about each one of these.

I. WORSHIP.

Often when we begin to pray we go immediately to the requests we have for others, or for ourselves, without ever recognizing the One to Whom we come.

To me, the great tragedy of our day among those of us who claim to be Christians is that our lives have become more man-centered than they are God-centered. It seems that we know so little about God. We think about Him so little of the time. Even when we pray, we are not seeking Him, nor are we seeking to learn about Him. And so our prayers reflect this.

— This is where the prayers of the Bible will help you. Note what grand thoughts they expressed concerning God. And often they were literally overwhelmed with the contemplation of God as they approached Him.

Cf. Psa. 103:1 ff.

II. THANKSGIVING.

Most of us in prayer are so concerned about what we need that we forget to thank God for what He has done for us, and what He is continually doing for us.

Or we thank Him for the physical blessings we enjoy, or the material blessings, but we fail to thank Him for the spiritual blessings--for His Son, for the Holy Spirit, for His Word, for our salvation, for the Bible, for the fellowship we enjoy in our churches, for the forgiveness of our sins, and on and on. Cf. 1 Thess. 5:18.

III. CONFESSION.

Again, our prayers reveal that we have too little consciousness of sin. We somehow do not realize how we are continually displeasing God by what we think, what we say, what we do, and just by what we are. And we are

continually sinning by what we fail to do.

We talk about sins of commission and sins of omission. Psalm 66:18 says that, "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me." Often we go to the Lord in prayer with things in our lives which we know are not right, and which we have no intention of giving up. Whenever that is the case, we are not going to profit from our prayers. Nor will anyone else.

IV. INTERCESSION.

Let me ask you some questions at this point.

How many people do you pray for? Do you men faithfully pray for your wife, if you are married, and do you pray for the members of your family.

How many of your friends do you pray for faithfully?

Do you pray for your Pastor and his family each day? Do you pray for the other members of Central Lutheran Church?

We all tend to be very critical about our political leaders, but how many of them do you mention regularly in prayer. We have such great problems in our city and in our country that many of our leaders are saying that there is no solution for them. I am thinking about drugs, and crimes of all kinds, about immorality in sexual matters, about dishonesty and greed. Listen to what Paul wrote to Timothy:

I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; For kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty (1 Tim. 2:1, 2).

And then a few verses later he wrote,

I will therefore that men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting (1 Tim. 2:8).

Intercession! How very, very important that we be praying for others. There may be people in your life that no one else is praying for.

V. PETITION.

I know that, if you are praying at all, you are praying for yourself. But how are you praying for yourself? Do you pray just about what you want, or do you pray about what you are. Do you pray for greater understanding of

the Word? As you come to church do you pray that the Lord will really help you through what you hear from your pastor? Do you pray that you will be more godly in your life, and that your life will be a greater blessing and help for others?

We need to bring all of our needs to the Lord--our physical needs, our material needs, BUT MOST OF ALL OUR SPIRITUAL NEEDS!

It is most helpful to read the Psalms and to notice, among others things, how David prayed for himself.

Much more could be said, but I think you can understand what I am saying.

Concl: Let me say two things in concluding.

First, prayer is not just something that we are to do at certain times, but for the Christian, prayer is a way of life. Paul said that we are to "pray without ceasing" (1 Thess. 5:17). But sure to have your special times of prayer by yourself, but cultivate the habit of praying throughout the day.

Finally, let me encourage you to turn your Bible into prayer. This is one of the greatest lessons I have ever learned about prayer. When we read our Bibles, God is speaking to us. When we pray, we are speaking to God. And it is most reasonable to expect that, when we pray to Him, we would respond to Him concerning the things that He has been saying to us.

May the Lord help all of us to pray more, and to pray effectually. May we pray what the disciples prayed on one occasion when they came to the Lord and said, "Lord, teach us to pray" (Luke 11:1).