

“LORD, TEACH US TO PRAY!”

Introduction:

- 2002 has started with a fury for many carrying heavy burdens & heartaches:
 - Winds & bush fires
 - Unemployment – unable to find another job
 - Persistent ill health – living with persistent ill-health & weakness; watching loved ones suffer with no signs of getting better
 - Family heartaches – a rebellious teenager fighting against God – heading downhill with the crowd
 - Crises in the world: Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, Indonesia, Argentina – to say nothing of the dark night in those African and Asian countries where AIDS is out of control
- Our personal & world problems have no simple and easy solutions – some situations have no human solution. Is it all hopeless? Is there anything we can do?
- Many things we can't do. We can't solve our own problems – let alone the vast problems of the world. But THERE IS ONE THING WE CAN DO – WE CAN CRY OUT TO GOD AND ASK FOR HIS HELP – see Psalm 34:15-18
- WHAT TO PRAY? HOW TO PRAY? If only we can learn to pray effectually before Almighty God, we will witness God's mighty interventions – in our lives, in the lives of others, and in the nations of the world
- WHO WILL TEACH US HOW TO PRAY EFFECTUALLY (so that our prayers are powerful as were Elijah's prayers)? JESUS – He is our perfect Teacher – He taught His earliest followers to pray – His prayer is to be the pattern or the foundation for all Christian praying (the Lord's prayer/the disciples' prayer – how God's redeemed children are to pray when they pray to God) – Luke 11:1ff; Matt.6:9ff

Our theme: “Lord, teach us to pray”

See Luke 11:1; cf. Matt.6:9ff

- Let's give our minds and hearts to our Teacher, our Lord Jesus Christ, to give us a quick “refresher” course (revision) from His prayer – probably there isn't any lesson more important for us to learn and keep re-learning (almost daily) in 2002 than how to pray Jesus' way – so that we can become powerful for God amid all the crises of this world, working with Him to do great things to the praise of His glory

FIVE LESSONS:

(We'll major on the first two as they are most important!)

First lesson: The springs of all Christian praying are found in our new relationship with God

- **“(Our) Father” (“abba”)**
- Jesus came so that we might know God and have a personal and intimate relationship with God – not as a divine Being “far-off”, distant in the heavens

above, but as the God who is “near” – the God who was both infinitely powerful, who defeats the enemies of those who trust in Him (cf. the amazing rescue plan in the Exodus of His people from Egypt), who gives great glory and wealth to His kings like David & Solomon – but this God desires to draw near to even the most ordinary person in order that he might enjoy the most intimate relationship imaginable with Him

- Jesus came to make the unimaginable a reality – to remove the great barrier/wall that our sin and rebellion against God had put between man and God – so that man could draw “near” to this infinite God
- Even more wonderful than that, through Jesus’ perfect sacrifice, God adopts people into His family and calls them “children” (sons & daughters of the Most High God) – “the right to become ‘children’ of God” (John 1:11-13)
- Jesus then has brought us, ie those who put their whole trust in His saving work on our behalf, to God – to know this holy God in a totally new way – to enjoy a brand new type of relationship with Him expressed in the word: “Father” – intimacy, nearness, authority – just like Jesus experienced when He addressed His Father in this way – see John 17:1,11; Mark 14:36

APPLICATION:

- What does this mean to us – as we pray for bush fires & all the other struggles???
- We are praying to a God who has come “near” – the God who intervenes in the affairs of man – who is NOT far-removed from the things going on – cf. the media and their secular view of all that is happening – “good & bad luck”
- We are praying to a Father who listens to the cries of His children – to the God who has opened the way for us to draw near – who longs to help us in our struggles and show us His glory
- We are praying to the God of both the Old & the New Testaments – the God who is above all the forces of nature and who uses them to accomplish His purposes – *He* is our “Father”
- It is our privilege and our calling as His children to draw near to Him on behalf of others, in order that through our prayers, He might reveal His glory to man – that man might know Him and put their trust in Him
- It is also His desire that we bring praise to God through the witness of our words – boldly giving Him the praise for His mercies rather than just speaking about all that man & “Elvis” has done!
- The most important part of praying is to know our God – to remember who our Father truly is – and then to draw near to Him with bold, confident trust in our hearts, knowing that He is at work in this world – for our good but most importantly of all, so that people might behold His glory and majesty and power and put their trust in Him
- Is it possible that we do not see God working these great things because we fail to ask of Him? (See James 4:2 – “You do not have, because you do not ask God.”)

Second lesson: Christian praying must be first & foremost God/Christ-focused

- **“... May Your name be hallowed, may Your kingdom come, may Your will be done on earth as in heaven”**
- Jesus teaches us to pray – not, firstly, to “get” things for ourselves from God (as God is like Santa Claus) but rather to “give/bring” God what is due Him:
 - **“May Your name be hallowed”** – praying that God’s holy name be held highest (also against His name being profaned, especially among God’s “holy

people” through our unholy ways) – praying for His glorious reputation & perfect character be known among men

- **“May Your kingdom come”** – Jesus is asking us to join Him in praying urgently for the dawning/coming of the eternal & glorious reign/rule of Jesus – “Maranatha” = “even so, come Lord Jesus” (see 2 Cor.13; Rev.22)
- **“May Your will be done on earth, as in heaven”** – learn also from Mary (Luke 1:38) with her sincere trust and willing surrender to God’s plan & purposes, without any demands to understand God’s ways/plan, or attempts to manipulate/force God’s hand to follow their wishes

APPLICATION:

- What do these truths mean as we pray amid life’s crises and trials?
- Naturally we tend to focus our prayers on man’s needs – all very “natural” and in a way right because God is compassionate – we pray for people’s safety, for the fires to be put out, for people to be quickly healed, for wars to cease et al – why? because we see “sufferings” as very NEGATIVE
- Jesus teaches us to pray first and above all else – that His name will be honoured, His kingdom expand, His will be done in all these things
- We are to pray as those who belong to God’s kingdom – not from our human feelings & but on the basis of what God has revealed of Himself and His ways in His Word
- What this means in reality is that sometimes God would have us FOCUS MORE ON HIS WORKING THROUGH HUMAN TRAGEDIES for the eternal well-being of man rather than upon a quick cessation of conflicts and problems – think of Joseph; Jesus

Transition: If we are to concentrate on GOD’S desires & needs, where does that leave our needs? Is God less interested in them? The simple answer is: The more we come to know God, the more we discover His heart of love for US – and His desire to minister to even our smallest needs – so that we might learn to love Him even more.

Third lesson: We are totally dependent upon God and His mercy for all our daily needs

- **“Give us this day our daily bread”**
- Christian praying to “Father” is rooted in the fact that His children are to live in total dependence upon Him confessing that “For in Him we live and move and have our being” (Acts 17: 28) – that apart from Him we in truth have nothing without God and can do nothing
- Worldly men think differently – they pride themselves in what they can do, how they are the masters of their own fate – how with their superior know-how they can overcome any crisis – and we can be easily fooled to think in this man-centred way
- Be reminded this morning of the truth! If we fail to see it, it’s most likely because our spiritual eyes are being blinded by our pride – then come to God in repentance, and let Him show you what life in reality is like

APPLICATION:

- What does this mean to us in our crises?
- Yes, we are very thankful for all that God has enabled man to accomplish – for the modern equipment (medical, fighting fires, planes to destroy terrorists et al) – but who is our Helper? To whom do we look for help?

- Our role as God's people in our secular society is to put our trust only in God – and to tell this to others around us – so that they might know God instead of trusting in man & man's resources

Fourth lesson: We are to approach God in prayer on our knees, confessing our sins & receiving His forgiveness

- **“Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who have sinned against us”**
- Another very basic & essential aspect of powerful, effectual praying – coming humbly to God confessing our sins – not focusing only on what we have done outwardly but above all what lies in the heart – our unbelief, our pride, our self-righteousness & hypocrisy, our lovelessness, even our prayerlessness
- Furthermore, our praying for ourselves and others will only be effectual in God's presence if and when we have practised forgiving those who have sinned against us – recent past or distant past – whether they are aware of their sins or not (cf. Jesus on the cross: “Father, forgive them for they do not know what they are doing”)
- As we pray, let us ask God to examine our hearts – be ready to repent of grudges, bitterness et al so that your prayers will not hindered – otherwise your praying will be nothing more than a lot of empty noise

APPLICATION:

- What does this mean as we pray for our nation & for the crises of our world?
- God calls us like Ezra & Daniel of old to pray with a contrite and broken spirit – not condemning others for what they have done (eg those who have help lit these bush fires, or people who have caused the pain in our lives) – rather confessing our sins, the sins of others including our nation who has turned away from God, asking God to forgive us and to forgive them – realising that none of us deserve any of His mercies – see Is.66:2b

Fifth lesson: We have an evil enemy bent on destruction, but through prayer, we may power to overcome him

- **“And lead us not into temptation (the fiery trial) but deliver us from the evil one”**
- Jesus teaches His disciples that they are involved in a very real battle with evil – but that through prayer they can overcome
- Satan's power as “destroyer” is very real manifesting itself in man's rebellion, terror/fear, destruction, bloodshed, death, hatred et al
- And in a particular sense, Satan is bent on using all demonic forces and powers at his disposal to bring down the church of Jesus Christ – to destroy it through persecution, to weaken it through divisions and disunity, to defile the name of Jesus by bringing down the reputation of Christian leaders, et al – but through our praying we may be rescued from the grip of the tempter so that he does not use to *his* advantage all the havoc and troubles he has caused
- Rather through our prayers, his evil intentions & works can be turned in his face right against him – to bring even greater glory and praise to God – “For Yours is the Kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen.”

APPLICATION:

- What does this mean as we pray in the face of our fiery trials?
- We may pray that we will as God's people be rescued from Satan's powers – that any fiery trials will NOT result in God's people running from

Him in unbelief (which is what he is aiming at) – but rather that Satan's evil purposes will be utterly turned upside down – just as they were when the Jews put Jesus on the cross (cf. Acts 3:14ff)

Conclusion:

- Can you see what awesome power before God and man we have as God's people – if only we will pray?
- Yes, you and me – little, ordinary people – simply through praying as the Master has taught us to pray
- There is NO SITUATION in life for God's people that is beyond prayer – each situation, no matter how bad is a new possibility to prove God's greatness – giving our Father the opportunity to reveal more of His glory and wonder – both to ourselves and through us to the nations

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