

## THE NATURE OF PRAYER

Lk. 18:9-14

**Introduction:** Jesus was very clear about the need of prayer. We must either pray or lose heart (faint). If we are praying, then we are not losing heart. If we lose heart, then we are not praying.

- Is life dull, lustreless and shallow, all surface and no depth? Are you bored, unchallenged, defeated? If so then you are not praying. But you say, "I am praying, etc....." but life is still not satisfying. Or do you find it hard to pray and easy to find something else to do?

The problem is not that you need to pray more - not of the same kind of prayer that you've been praying. You need to discover the true nature of prayer. True prayer is the key to God's power and glory.

- God is not like the unjust judge in the parable before this one (read), but true prayer is the only channel we have to the eagerness of God to help and bless us.

1. Jesus is showing us what real prayer is by contrasting two men in prayer. Error and truth.
  - The Pharisee was a man of prayer.
  - The Publican was not accustomed to praying.
2. There is a form of prayer which is not prayer. Note the Pharisee's form of praying. (He prayed with himself)
  - He was wasting his time.
3. It is not prayer when we approach God reminding Him of our own "virtues." (v11)
  - This man felt that he was different from all other men thus God needed to listen to him.
  - We also pray like that. Describing what we can and have done and with God's **Help** can do even more.
4. Often we pray the reverse of the Pharisee. Instead of listing all our virtues, we list all our short comings and sins hoping to impress God with our honesty and humility.
  - The simple truth is that we have **no virtues** whatsoever. We have **nothing** to contribute to God's cause and any abilities, talents, etc. that we do have are in themselves gifts of God.
5. We forget that God's protective grace has saved us from some of the terrible things we see in others. (There but for the grace of God, go I).
  - It's so easy to see our own "virtues" and then blame our faults and failings on others.
  - We look down on others in our prayers when we are glad that it is them and not us. (A fine line?)
6. It's not prayer, said Jesus, when we ask God's help because of our own accomplishments.
  - The Pharisee expected God to act because he felt God could hardly do otherwise in view of the fine record of faithful service he lay before God. Don't we also do this?
    - "Lord, I've been faithful to you...faithful to teach...faithful to tithe...faithful parent..given up so much to serve you...now please give me this one little thing I ask of you..."
7. Story of the old missionary couple returning from years on the mission field..penniless..no place to live, etc.... boarded a ship on which President Teddy Roosevelt also was on....such a big-to-do about the president.. nobody even knew the missionary couple were there...the man began to feel so bad that nobody even said hello to them and they had given all their lives for the Lord....he brooded all the way back to America..the

president will have a big welcome too..he said..sure enough...upon reaching the American port, there was a big reception...the man went to their room and began to pray....later he came out all smiles..what happened his wife asked...The Lord told me that **we weren't home yet!**

- There are rewards for believers, but not necessarily down here. We have no claim on God by faithful service. We have no right to go to God and demand He do this or that.
- Jesus says that when we list our accomplishments before God we are not praying.

8. Look at the Publican now. Everything he is doing is wrong..doesn't lift up his eyes, doesn't assume the proper position, his hands are wrong, etc.....everything he does is wrong....compared to the righteous Pharisee.

The Prayer of Cyrus Brown:

"The proper way for a man to pray," said Deacon Lemuel Keyes, "And the proper attitude is down upon his knees." "No, I should say the way to pray" said Rev. Doctor Smart, is standing straight with outstretched arms and rapt and upturned eyes." "Oh, no, no, no" said Elder Slow, such posture is too proud. A man should pray with eyes fast -closed and head contritely bowed." "It seems to me his hands should be austere clapsed in from with both thumbs pointing toward the ground" said Rev. Doctor Blunt. "Last year I fell in Hidgekins's well headfirst, said Cyrus Brown, with both my heels a-sticking up and my head a-pointing down. And I made a prayer right then and there, the best prayer I ever said. The prayingest prayer I ever prayed, A-standing on my head."

- Real prayer, authentic prayer is an awareness of our helpless need. "God be merciful to me, the sinner." Lord, I don't have a thing to lean on but you.
- The Publican didn't look down on anyone - he looked upward to God - saw no one but God.

9. The Publican teaches us something else - Real prayer is always an acknowledgment of divine adequacy.

He was looking at no one or anywhere else for help but God.

- Prayer is more than asking, it is taking.
- Prayer is more than pleading, it is believing.
- Prayer is more than words uttered, it is an attitude maintained.

### Conclusion:

- How many times a day do you have a need? How many times do you lack? That is the number of times you ought to be praying. Whenever there is an awareness of need, then pray. "God be merciful, meet this need."

- Prayer is the opposite of losing heart (fainting). Have you ever **really** prayed?

**"Holy Father, help us to take these words seriously. They are not intended merely to entertain us, or even to instruct us, but to change us, to set us free, to make us live, to turn us from weakness and emptiness and barrenness and fruitlessness, unto truth and life and joy and warmth and power. We ask now that each one of us may, in this quiet moment, begin to live a life of prayer. We have no other help, but thou art fully adequate. On this we rest. In Jesus' Name, Amen."**