

Promises and Prayer

1. **Review:** Last week I spoke on the concept of promises and faith. We learned a few things I want to review.
 - a. God always keeps His promises. He is unlike us...and as such, He cannot lie, change His mind nor can he deceive us.
 - b. Faith is not a denial of evidence but a recognition that God is greater than the problem and trusting His resources to meet the need.
 - c. A promise is only as good as the one who makes the promise. Therefore, our faith really is not really in the promise but the promisor.
 - d. And one item that came up last Sunday evening:
 - i. The more you know someone the easier it is to trust them.
 - ii. As such, you really don't grow your faith but rather you grow your knowledge of God. That is what "Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God" implies. You learn who God is and you discover and trust Him and His resources for your needs.
2. Prayer and God - Illustration
 - a. Sometimes when I think about God answering prayer I am reminded of a movie I saw a few years ago called, "Bruce Almighty." The character of that movie is very frustrated with God and so God lets him "be god" for a little while. He has some fun with it for a short time but faces a huge backlog of prayer requests. So _ Carey does what any of us would do, he hits the YES key for all the prayer requests in the world!
 - b. Well, chaos is the result! 100 million people all prayed to win the 1 million dollar lottery, so each of them get 1 cent! It becomes clear that man just isn't cut out to be god!
3. Prayer & what God is like.
 - a. Anytime we look at prayer and the promises associated with it, we need to look at the nature of God Himself.
 - i. There are a variety of views of what God is like.
 1. Some think He is their cosmic errand boy from whom they should be able to ask for stuff.
 - a. But God is not standing by, waiting for our 'orders of the day'—sometimes with the implication that He had better get on with doing what we want Him to do or we will punish Him by rejecting Him.
 - b. This is a real trivialization of the nature of God, and there are folks who lose their 'faith' in God because He did not do what they wanted Him to do.
 2. Others think He is far off and uninterested in their needs.
 - a. I looked up what Islam believes about prayer and they figure God is going to give you what He is going to give you (fatalism) so you better just accept it. Sure you can ask Him for something, but don't really expect an answer. God is too holy to be concerned with the daily needs of people.
 - b. Agnostics believe that there is a God but that He isn't really interested in their needs.
 3. Still others think of Him as a big genie in the sky who will give you what you want if you "rub the bottle" just right....that is, ask for it in the magically correct way...
 - a. If you do the right stuff.
 - i. Light a candle,
 - ii. Fast from a meal
 - iii. Say prayers 5 times a day facing east.

- b. Say the right words or the right formula.
 - i. Some folks believe that if you don't say the words "In Jesus name" your prayer won't be answered. (I will address this today as well)
 - c. Are in the right place or position (knees)
 - i. If you are at a holy place like the Temple Mount
 - ii. Muslims believe that you will only be blessed ½ as much if you pray sitting down as opposed to standing.
 - iii. Some people believe you might get a prayer answered if you go to a place where an image of Jesus appeared in a water stain on a piece of wood.
 - d. I have personally known folks of another denomination who would pray to a particular saint instead of God because they figured it would increase the chances of their prayer being answered!
 - i. Can you imagine anyone else being more interested in our needs than God?
 - ii. Their rationale? God won't hear me because I am not holy, but He will listen to a holy person...ie., a saint who is already worshipping Him in heaven.
- ii. Each of us ought to contemplate how we view God, because whether we realize it or not, **The way we approach prayer really is a reflection of how we see God.**
1. If you are honest and examine your prayer life you might be surprised at how you are characterizing God by the way you talk to Him, how you ask Him for things and how you anticipate answers.
 2. **The Jews during the time of Jesus** had a view of God that impacted their view of prayer.
 - a. In John chapter 9, Jesus heals the sight of a man who was born blind. The religious leaders of the day got into an argument with the man about how Jesus did this.
 - i. This is what he says, "*We know that God does not listen to sinners.*"
 - b. The prevailing view of the day was that a person who was not observing the Law was considered a "sinner."
 - i. Most common people fell into that category, since only those who made their living studying the law could keep it to the letter.
 - c. Just about every Jew was pretty despondent about the possibility of God hearing and answering their prayers unless they were found to be ritually righteous.
 - d. It is to this mindset that Jesus teaches a different view of God.
 - e. You see, up to this point in Jewish History, the Jews didn't pronounce the Name of God, because He was viewed as so Holy, so separate, so unreachable.
 - f. But Jesus gives us a view of God that is dramatically different. He doesn't diminish the Holiness of God, but He increases our understanding of the relational nature of God.
 - g. Jesus teaches his disciples how to pray by telling them to address God as "Abba" or Father, or very literally, "Daddy."
 3. This familiarity must have been quite a shock to the disciples and those who overheard. It probably even had a feeling of irreverence to some who heard it.
- iii. This teaching can be life changing!

1. It reveals God not as a rule maker or a tyrant but as a relational Being.
 2. But the teaching was not new. It was in the bible all along!
 - a. Psalm 89:26 26 "*He will cry to Me, 'You are my Father, My God, and the rock of my salvation.'*"
 3. God has always been, is now and always will be interested in your needs.
 4. Our God is a relational God who desires a relationship with you and I, so much, that He was willing to give up His only Son so that we could enter into that intimacy and relationship with Him.
 5. When we realize that God is very much interested in us and our needs, it can profoundly affect the way that we talk to Him.
 - a. He is both God and Father; Savior and Friend.
- b. Folks, promises for prayer, in fact all prayer...is an incentive and an invitation to join God in relationship.
- i. Every need that draws us to look to God for help is an opportunity to grow with God in a relationship that lasts for eternity.
 - ii. Every crisis, every sadness, every joy, is a circumstance used by God to draw you towards His loving arms and enter His embrace.
 - iii. We often think about prayer is about "US" – about getting what WE want.
 1. But prayer is about relationship.
 2. That is why Jesus told us to call God "Father" so that we would learn to see God differently...so we could see and experience God as Father.
 - 3.
4. Why does God answer our prayers?
- a. We do not get answers to prayer by anything we say or do..
 - i. You don't get answers to prayer because you didn't cuss today.
 - ii. And you don't blow your chances to have an answer to a prayer because you yelled at your kids.
 - b. While these things might keep you from *wanting* to approach God...they in themselves are not the reasons for answered or non-answered prayer.
 - c. All answers to prayer depend on the death of Christ...for our sins.
 - i. The reason that our prayers are heard and answered is because Jesus, died in our place and now sits at the right hand of God and intercedes.
 - ii. He literally stands in our place before God.
 - iii. This is much of what is meant by the bible saying, "You are **in Christ**"
 - iv. If you have placed your faith in Christ...when God looks at you, what He sees is Jesus His Son and what He did for you at Calvary.
 - v. Therefore, **All answers to prayer are free gifts based on the merits of Jesus, standing in our place before God.**
5. Prayer and Promises
- a. *"The best praying man is the man who is most believably familiar with the promises of God. After all, prayer is nothing but taking God's promises to Him and saying, "Do as You have said." Prayer is the promise utilized. Prayer not based on a promise has no true foundation."* -- C.H. Spurgeon, *The Power of Prayer in the Believer's Life*, 41
 - i. Many of the greatest promises ever made by Jesus concern answers to prayer.
 1. When we have finished you will see that, contrary to popular opinion, astonishing answers to prayer are obtainable by everyday Christians.
 2. (Expand)

- b. How others used promises in prayer:
 - i. Moses reminds God: Exodus 32:11-14 after the golden calf was made:
 - 1. *11 But Moses sought the favor of the LORD his God. "O LORD," he said, "why should your anger burn against your people, whom you brought out of Egypt with great power and a mighty hand? 12 Why should the Egyptians say, 'It was with evil intent that he brought them out, to kill them in the mountains and to wipe them off the face of the earth'? Turn from your fierce anger; relent and do not bring disaster on your people. 13 Remember your servants Abraham, Isaac and Israel, to whom you swore by your own self: 'I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and I will give your descendants all this land I promised them, and it will be their inheritance forever.' "* 14 Then the LORD relented and did not bring on his people the disaster he had threatened. "
 - 2. Explain what Moses did!

6. Actual Promises concerning Prayer:

a. **God knows our needs**

- i. In Matthew 6:8 "...for your Father in Heaven knows what you need before you ask him."
- ii. This isn't a new concept:
 - 1. Jer. 33:2-3 *"The Lord who made the earth, the Lord who forms it to establish it, the Lord is His name, says this: Call to Me and I will answer you and tell you great and wondrous things you do not know"*
 - 2. Isa 65:24 *Even before they call, I will answer; while they are still speaking, I will hear.*
- iii. So you might ask...well if He knows my needs, why do I need to ask?
 - 1. So that you will experience a growing intimate relationship with God
 - 2. And so that you know the answer is from Him.
 - 3. If you never asked, you would chalk up the need being met to "coincidence"

b. **Asking according to His will**

- i. 1 Jn 5:14-15 *Now this is the confidence we have before Him: whenever we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears whatever we ask, we know that we have what we have asked Him for.*
 - 1. Knowing God's will really requires being IN God's will.
 - 2. "We must not think that we can get God to do whatever we want if our hearts are not set on doing what He wants" (1 John 3:22; James 5:16; John 15:7; 9:31; Psalm 66:16-19; Proverbs 15:29; Isaiah 1:15, etc.).
 - 3. Imagine going 80 mph through Lyndhurst and praying that God will keep you from getting a ticket!
 - a. But that is how we live.
 - b. We step outside His will and yet expect God to bless us.

c. **Asking in Faith**

- i. Mt 21:22 *And if you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer."*
- ii. Undoubting faith is only possible if we know what God intends to do for those who believe.
 - 1. Or to put it another way, we can have undoubting faith if we know what God's will is in a particular situation.
 - 2. How can you keep from doubting if you don't know what God intends to do?

3. How can anyone have assurance that the answer to his prayer will come to pass if he is not first assured that this is what God intends to do in response to his faith?
 4. This is why it is so important to learn to “walk by the Spirit” and not by the flesh or the mind.
 5. Remember our discussion of “faith” last week: faith is not positive thinking nor is it wishing something to be. Faith is a knowing that something you can’t see is going to happen.
 - a. Faith comes from intimacy with the Father.
 - b. Begin there. If you have a need...get closer to God. Spend time with Him, listening, reading, praising, enjoying Him.
- d. **The promise of a loving Father**
- i. Luke 11:11-13 *"You fathers – if your children ask for a fish, do you give them a snake instead? 12 Or if they ask for an egg, do you give them a scorpion? Of course not! 13 If you sinful people know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him."*
 - ii. Remember the Father's love.
 1. God is more anxious to answer prayer than we are to pray.
 2. It is His pleasure to answer prayer.
 3. It brings Him great joy.
 4. He is anxiously waiting for His followers to pray for extraordinary results!
 5. He marvels that so few believe enough to ask for them.
 6. Alas! there are so few intercessors in His church. Most believers pray for themselves, their families and their friends – and so few pray for the lost!
- e. **Asking In Jesus Name**
- i. John 14:12-14 *I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. 13 And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father. 14 You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it.*
 1. This phrase, “My name” is used 17 times in the gospels by Jesus to describe someone who is either “coming in his name” or “speaking in his name” or doing works “in his name.”
 2. The apostles use the Name of Jesus in the book of Acts and in their letters as a reference to whose authority they are acting in.
 - a. (Jn 14:26) *"The Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.*
 - b. (Mark 9:37) *"Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me."*
 - c. (Mt 18:20) *For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them."*
 - d. (Mt 18:5) *"And whoever welcomes a little child like this in my name welcomes me.*
 3. The Bible tells us how important and powerful the Name of Jesus is:
 - a. Philippians 2:10-11 *For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, 10 so that at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE WILL BOW, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*

- b. Over and over again throughout the New Testament we find demons fleeing, sickness submitting, the blind seeing and the deaf hearing, the crippled walking at the pronouncement of the name of Jesus.
 - c. What is it about that name? We sing that song as well, don't we?
 - i. How is it that you can talk about God in the public arena and not get much notice but if you mention the name of Jesus everyone looks at you as if an elephant just walked into the room?
 - ii. Jn 16:24 *Until now you have asked for nothing in My name. Ask and you will receive, that your joy may be complete.*
 - iii. Over and over again we are told to use His Name when we need something.
4. Name-dropping:
- a. Have you ever been told by someone who is very influential to go somewhere and tell them that so and so sent you?
 - b. It is as if we are asking Jesus Himself to do something for us.
 - c. In a very real sense we are. Because we are seeking to bring the Father's will in heaven into reality here on earth.
- ii. This brings up the other side of this...the misuse of the name of Jesus:
1. To ask in our Savior's Name does not mean that we must tag the name Jesus, Emmanuel, Yeshua or any other variation of the name onto the end of every prayer to guarantee results.
 2. Some of us think that if we DON'T say that at the end of our prayer that it won't be heard. But that is not what these passages are saying.
 3. If it were so, it would reduce the use of the Name of Jesus to a magical formula.
 4. **Jesus' Name is not magical.**
 5. In Acts 19:13-17, there were a group of Jews who did not have faith in Christ who were trying to cast out demons in the name of Jesus. They were using the name of Jesus as a magical formula, kind of like in the movie the Exorcist.
 - a. *13 Some Jews who went around driving out evil spirits tried to invoke the name of the Lord Jesus over those who were demon-possessed. They would say, "In the name of Jesus, whom Paul preaches, I command you to come out." 14 Seven sons of Sceva, a Jewish chief priest, were doing this. 15 [One day] the evil spirit answered them, "Jesus I know, and I know about Paul, but who are you?" 16 Then the man who had the evil spirit jumped on them and overpowered them all. He gave them such a beating that they ran out of the house naked and bleeding. 17 When this became known to the Jews and Greeks living in Ephesus, they were all seized with fear, and the name of the Lord Jesus was held in high honor.*
 6. In fact Jesus even warned that there would be some who would do miracles in His name and at the last day He would tell them that He "never knew them."
 - a. Why is that so?
 - b. To use the Name of Jesus you and I must be in relationship with Jesus.
 - c. We must "know" Him!
 7. In other words, **To ask in the Saviour's Name means to ask as he would ask, with the right motives, the right attitude and for the right things.**
 - a. Only when this condition is met, will you receive the **astonishing** and unimaginable results promised because they will be done in the power of God and not in your own.
 8. Those results occur because they are done in His interests, His authority and His power and not in your own.

- a. *We can be confident that he will listen to us whenever we ask him for anything in line with his will. And if we know he is listening when we make our requests, we can be sure that he will give us what we ask for.* 1 John 5:14
- b. Jn 16:24 *Until now you have asked for nothing in My name. Ask and you will receive, that your joy may be complete*
- c. John 15:7 *“Abide in me and my words abide in you, ask what you will and it will be done for you.”*

7. Prayer and promises are not about us.

- a. They are always a call to relationship.
- b. Perhaps this morning you have realized that you have been going through motions with God, you have been mechanical, you have been rote and routine and not relational.
- c. Maybe you have seen God as a menacing Being instead of the loving Father that Jesus tells us about.

Maybe you have never trusted Jesus, you have never surrendered to Him, you have never let Him love you and let Him in your heart. “God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten So that all who believe in Him (trust Him) will receive everlasting life.”

Today, you can begin that relationship. If you want to do so, you can pray this prayer right now.

Father God...I have been running from you. I have been living life on my own terms. I have not let you be God of my life. I need you. I need your love. I need to know you. I accept what Jesus did on the cross for me...I receive the forgiveness of my sins right now. I receive the eternal life You promised. In the person and name of Jesus, amen.

If you prayed that prayer, you have become a new creation in Christ. Let us know that you have done so before you leave here today, so that we can support and encourage you and help you in your journey and relationship with God.

Others of you need prayer. The bible says that whenever 2 or more gather in my name I will be there. Let us claim that promise today by praying with you.