

# *Bryan Station Baptist Church*

INDEPENDENT

**ORGANIZED 1786**

MISSIONARY

# **THE PIONEER BAPTIST**

*"Preaching The Same Truth We Preached Before Kentucky Was A State"*

VOL. 9

LEXINGTON, KENTUCKY

OCTOBER, 1977

NO. 1

## **What Jesus Taught About Prayer**

BY THE LATE: C. D. COLE

Luke, the evangelist who presents Jesus as the perfect man, emphasizes His teaching on prayer. The Lord Jesus began and ended His earthly life in the attitude of prayer. He was praying at the time of His baptism, and His last word from the cross was a prayer. He spent the night in prayer before appointing the twelve. After feeding the five thousand, realizing a crisis, He withdrew into a mountain to pray. He was praying when He was transfigured. In Gethsemane, anticipating the horrors of the cross, He agonized in prayer. And on the cross, the Lord Jesus prayed. In Luke 18:1, He says that men ought always to pray and not to faint. In many a trial and difficulty we would soon give up if we could not resort to prayer.

### THE NEED OF PRAYER

To say that we need to pray is another way of saying that we need God. Prayer implies two things: our own impotence and God's omnipotence. The power of prayer is not in the one who prays, but in God to Whom prayer is made. Spurgeon once said, that if we do not pray about everything, we will worry about most things. Prayer ought to be a fixed principle in our lives. We are told to pray without ceasing. There may be vacation from preaching but not from praying. We need to live on the knees of our soul. We are sometimes told that we should not ask God to do for us what we can do for ourselves, but there is nothing we can do for ourselves. Did not Christ say, "Without me ye can do nothing?" To be a

fruit-bearing Christian, we must abide in Christ as the branch abides in the vine; and in this matter of abiding in Christ, prayer has a vital place. There is no abiding in Christ apart from prayer. Paul gives prayer as the prescription against anxiety or distraction. "Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your request be made known unto God" (Phil. 4:6).

When a doctor has a patient who is not improving, he is apt to call in another physician to help out. And this other physician may not know any more than he knows, and may not be of much help. But this is not the case with God. When we call upon Him, we are calling upon One Who is able to do exceeding abundantly above all we can ask or think. "Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us" (Eph. 3:20).

The Lord Jesus enforced His lesson on prayer by two parables: the friend at midnight (Luke 11:5-9), and the unjust judge (Luke 18:1-8). The purpose in these parables is to point a contrast. God is not like the neighbor who did not want to be bothered, and whose unwillingness had to be overcome by much begging. God is willing to hear us, and we are not bothering Him when we pray. Our importunity is to follow from the facts that He is both willing to hear and able to bless us, so that we can keep on asking, keep on seeking, and keep on knocking. We do not trouble God as the widow did the unjust judge. And so these parables point a contrast that we may be encouraged to pray and not to faint. Prayer is the only alternative to fainting.

The Syrophenician woman is an example of persistence in prayer. Jesus immortalized this woman by saying, "O woman, great is thy faith; be it unto thee even as thou wilt." Wherein was the greatness of this woman's faith? It was in the fact that she had little to base faith upon. She had little encouragement to faith, and she persevered in prayer in the face of discouragement. Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God, and Christ had not said much for her to build faith upon. However, there was a little hope held out in the words of Jesus, when he said, "Let the children first be filled: for it is not meet to take the children's bread, and cast it unto the dogs" (Mark 7:27). Here was a hint that there was something for her, and she grasped at this hint. She reminded Jesus that the little dogs—household pets—get the crumbs, and so there must be something for her as a dog. Read Matt. 15:22-28.

### THE NATURE OF PRAYER

Prayer has been defined as the sincere desire of the heart expressed or unexpressed. Hannah prayed though her lips did not move. God heard the desire of her heart and answered with blessing. Prayer must be sincere and not a hypocritical display of piety before men. Christ described the hypocrites of His day as standing in the synagogue or on street corners to advertise their piety—to be seen of men. And He says, They get their reward. They get what they want. They do not want anything from God; they want human praise and they get it. Let us consider my own definition of prayer: Prayer is coming to God as our Father, in the Name of Jesus Christ His Son, with a sincere desire for some blessing, believing that He is able to bestow it, but willing to be denied it if it is not His will to give it. Now let us analyze this definition. It is coming to God as our heavenly Father. The name father is so rich in meaning. It speaks of love, provision, and protection. We pray to a loving Father and not to an unjust judge. What a happy thought! And we come in the Name of His Son. What a humbling thought! It reminds us that we are sinners with no standing before God in our own name or on our own record. We plead Christ's righteousness and not our own, for we have none. Then we come with sincere desire for some blessing. If we do not really want what we ask for, then we lie in making our petition. And if we do not believe He is able to grant what we want, we will not pray much. Moreover, if we are not willing to be denied the blessing we crave, then our prayer is not petition but dictation. In much of our praying we do not know what the will of God is in that particular thing.

I like what Dr. Connor says about reverence in prayer. Prayer is not communion between two

equals. We must not talk to God as we would to other believers. We must not get chummy with God. I had a letter awhile back from a dear woman in Calgary, Alberta, in which she deplored the "comrade" attitude of so many people in their talk about God. We may come to God boldly, but we must come to Him humbly, remembering that He is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints, and to be had in reverence of all them that are about Him. Ps. 89:7.

### PRAYER AND THE WILL OF GOD

Prayer must respect the will of God, Who is sovereign over all. We are not to try to change God's will in prayer. When we say, "Thy will be done and not ours", we must mean it in our heart. In much of our praying we do not know what God's will is in the matter before us. Take the matter of service. Shall I answer this call or that call? Or will there be any call? How will I know God is in the call? I had to face this in coming to Toronto for this period of service. How could I know God's will in the matter? One cannot always go by impressions for they are apt to fluctuate. It has long been my policy in facing decisions that must be made, to endeavour by prayer to surrender my will to the will of God, and have no choice of my own. As long as we have a will of our own, we are not subject to His will. And finally, in making decisions, I try to turn the whole thing over to God, and trust His providence in leading me to make the decision. I find myself saying to Him, "O gracious and all wise God, do not let me get out of Thy will; see to it that I make the right decision."

Take the matter of health. When we are ill, there is no way for us to know whether or not it is God's will to heal us. We may believe He is able, for His word assures us there is nothing impossible for Him. But how can we know that He is willing to heal us? One cannot open his Bible and find that healing is promised in this particular case. One can only say, as did the leper, "Lord, if Thou wilt, Thou canst make me clean." May I give two illustrations of what I am trying to get over to you. David had a sick child. He prayed for God to heal it. He was so earnest in prayer that he had no appetite for food. He was so deeply distressed that he wept and lay all night upon the ground. He must have believed that God was able to heal the baby, else he would not have continued to pray. In seven days the baby was dead. The servants were afraid to tell him the sad news. They were afraid it would be too much for him. But when he saw them whispering, he asked them plainly, "Is the child dead?" And they said, "He is dead." Then to their surprise, David changed his behaviour. He arose from the ground, washed and anointed himself, changed

his apparel, and went to the house of the Lord and worshipped. When the servants asked for an explanation of his behaviour, David said, "While the child was yet alive, I fasted and wept: for I said, Who can tell whether God will be gracious unto me, that the child may live?" As if to say, "I did not know God's will until the Lord took the child. But now I know and am submissive to His will. I cannot bring the child back, but I can go to him." II Sam. 12:15-23.

Paul had a thorn in the flesh and he prayed three times for it to be removed. He did not know God's will, but he certainly believed God was able to take it out of his flesh. God revealed that it was not His will to remove the thorn by saying to him, "My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness." Paul submitted to the will of God and was glad to keep the thorn. II Cor. 12:7-10.

### PRAYER AND FAITH

There is a vital relation between prayer and faith. James says that we must ask in faith, nothing wavering. We must distinguish between charismatic faith and saving faith, or between miracle working faith and justifying faith. One of the gifts of the Spirit to the early church was faith. This was not faith in Christ for salvation, but faith bestowed on the saints for working of miracles. See Paul's discussion of the gifts of the Spirit in I Cor. the 12th chapter. The power to work miracles was possessed by some who did not have saving faith. The Lord says that on the day of judgment, many will remind Him that they had prophesied in His Name, cast out demons in His Name, and done many wonderful works in His Name. But He will reply, "I never knew you: depart from Me, ye that work iniquity." Matt. 7:22,23. When Jesus commissioned the twelve, He gave them power to cast out demons, and heal all manner of diseases. Matt. 10:1-8. And remember that Judas was one of the twelve, and yet he never had saving faith. John 6:64.

Miraculous gifts were found in the church of Corinth. These gifts were sovereignly bestowed and distributed. Some had one gift and others had a different gift. I Cor. 12:30,31. In I Cor. 13, the apostle compares these gifts of the Spirit with the graces of the spirit, faith, hope, and love. He says one may have faith to remove mountains—miracle working faith—but if it does not work by love, he is nothing. He says that the miraculous gifts of the Spirit will cease to be given, but that the graces of faith, hope, and love will abide. These gifts of the Spirit were to accredit Jesus as the Christ to the Jews, and when the nation rejected Him and the Gentiles were turned to with the Gospel, these gifts ceased—they were no longer given.

It is my conviction that much confusions

and heartbreak and shock to faith have resulted from making Matt. 21:22 and Mark 11:24 apply to our time. They were promises to the early church in the Pentecostal era when public miracles were the order of the day. And to plead them as promises today is to claim possession of the miraculous gifts. And those who do claim to possess miraculous gifts, never claim the power to raise the dead. Matt. 10:8. Another gift to the early church was the ability to speak in a foreign language without any study of that language, and yet those who claim that the gifts to the early church are still possessed never go to a foreign country and speak to the natives without learning their language. It is too obvious to need any argument, that we do not have public miracles in our day.

I have personally known of several cases where faith was based upon Matt. 21:22: "And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive." When I was a young pastor at Mortons Gap, Kentucky, little Mary Orange, a sweet and charming child, was taken ill. There was much prayer at the church, and by individuals privately. One day, Brother Chester O'Bryan, an uncle of Mary's, came to me in high hopes. He said that he had the assurance in his heart that Mary would get well; that he had pleaded Matt. 21:22, and by faith had claimed the promise. But in a few days Mary was dead. Had God refused to keep His word? One can well imagine the shock to the man who had based his faith upon what Christ had promised in Matt. 21:22. Brother Boyce Taylor, long time pastor of the First Baptist Church at Murray, Kentucky, and one of the great preachers of the Southern Baptist Convention, was burdened with many afflictions. He was voted out of the pastorate of his church. He published a paper, "News and Truths", and operated a book store. His bank failed and tied up his deposits. He became ill and was taken to the Baptist Hospital in Memphis, Tennessee. He was a great man of prayer, and pleading the promises of Matt. 21:22 and Mark 11:24, he believed he would get well and be restored to a useful ministry. But Brother Taylor died. Had God gone back on His Word? No, a thousand times, No! Our dear brother was basing his faith and prayer on a promise for a particular time—the day of public miracles.

The kind of praying inculcated in the New Testament epistles is found in Phil. 4:6: "Be careful for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Jesus Christ." We are to make known our requests to God and be at peace. We are to tell Him our feelings and our wishes, and then leave the matter entirely in His hands, remembering that He is wiser in giving than we are in asking.