

July 10, 2016 “Getting The Agenda Right” Psalm 34

Because we are human, people, men and women, we are tempted to ask questions that really amount to, “Does What I do here in this or these circumstances, really matter?” As Christians, disciples of Jesus the question tends to multiply to the point where we can talk ourselves out of doing things we knew before we started thinking about them, that we should do. Like why pray? Does it really matter? If God is all knowing (and HE is!) what possible difference can it make that I run to HIM and pray about my problems, my difficulties, my questions...when HE already knows I am up to my neck in them. It is not like I will tell HIM something HE does not know about me...or where I am in all this. Prayer is not about informing God about our lot. It is about something far more profound and far more important.

I call it “getting the agenda right”. What agenda? The agenda for the day. The agenda for life, my life and the lives of people who really matter to me. My wife, my children (I know they are adults) but like Job who prayed for his children in case they got off the tracks, in case they messed up, in case they sinned...I remain concerned for my loved ones. And my friends. Especially when I know something of the challenges they are facing, the difficulties they are in, or the great joys that have come their way.

Prayer helps us get the agenda for life right because it begins with the simple recognition that the universe does not revolve around us. Prayer begins with the recognition that God is real and HE matters... in fact HE matters more than I do. In fact if I really want things to sort out right...whatever I think that might be...the most important thing I can do is to take a little time to talk to God about what concerns me, and my loved ones, and my friends, and

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even people I don't really know well...and yes even my enemies. It is when I pray that I recognize most clearly that Jesus Christ is Lord. In the act of praying and looking for an answer to prayer I am most open to the leading, the guidance, and the shaping that the HOLY SPIRIT can exercise in my life.

Psalm 34 teaches us a number of things that bare on this subject. In verse 7 it says, "I sought the Lord and HE answered me; He delivered me from all my fears." You know when I stop to think about some things I am surprised about what I learn about myself. There is a lot of time when I am afraid. Every time I set myself down to compose a message for Sunday Service, or any other place where I am asked to speak, I am afraid. I am afraid that this time it won't work. That this time it won't happen. That the words will not come. That the message will not be meaningful. That I will fail in the task I have set myself...to lead the church. And then I spend a moment in prayer and everything changes. What changes? The agenda changes for one thing.

I suddenly realize it is not my words that matter. Preparing worship is about finding what God would have us consider. I come to realize in just a few moments it is not about me...it is about Jesus. It's about being willing to serve the people by first serving God. And the HOLY SPIRIT never fails to show up. But that focus thing is so important. Setting the agenda so that it is not about what I must do...but rather seeking to do what God would have me do. And I have to learn that lesson anew every week. What I see when I read verse 7 of Psalm 34... "I sought the Lord and HE answered me; HE delivered me from all my fears"...what suddenly comes very much into focus for me is that prayer matters, because it matters to God that I pray.

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Taking a moment to pray is like pushing the reset button on one of these electronic devices that play a part in our lives. It is in prayer that I remember who I am because first of all I am remembering who God is. If you are looking for a reason to convince you that prayer matters then remember this. Prayer matters to God. HE touches us when we pray. HE shapes us when we pray. Not because our prayers are works of art, but because for a brief moment in the midst of a hectic day, we have remembered Who it is that really matters in the life equation. Pray, because it matters.

There is that marvelous portion of Psalm 34 that begins with verse 5. “Those who look to HIM, (who look to God, to Jesus, who seek the Spirit's guidance) are radiant. Their faces are never covered with shame. This poor man called, and the Lord heard him. HE saved him out of all his troubles.” The testimony of that portion of Psalm 34”5-10, is simply this: the Lord responds to prayer.

I said it last week, and I suspect it is going to be the refrain of this series of messages. Prayer is not a duty. Prayer is a privilege. It has to do with participating in a relationship. Praying as followers of Jesus has to do with drawing close to Him. And if we needed an example, Jesus is the best one we know. He would go off to a quiet place to pray. He participated in the relationship He had with His Father while He was on earth and among us. He modelled the relationship we are called to participate in with God when He prayed. He did that among the disciples and He does it when we read the stories in the Gospels about Jesus praying. In the Lord's prayer He gave us a recipe for prayer.

To the degree to which I have gotten through the trials of the last 13 months, cancer surgery and radiation, I am aware that I

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have emerged at this end of things not only because I prayed, but because of the number of those who prayed on my behalf. I am going to say something that will really seem strange. Perhaps even foolish. Having cancer has been a blessing. I have never known a time in which I was so aware, that the Lord was with me. And I have no doubts about the fact that is because of the prayers offered on my behalf. Discomfort? I told you that word is too soft. The word was Pain with a capital p. And God gave me not only relief in the midst of those trials, but a sense of being blessed in the midst of those trials. Pray because God responds to our prayers. Jesus heals. Jesus saves. Jesus loves me, and HE loves you every bit as much as HE loves me. Pray because when we do, the agenda changes, the focus shifts, and God is present and powerful.

In verse 11...the writer of Psalm 34 says, “Come, my children, listen to me. I will teach you the fear of the Lord. (I will teach you the life of faith in God). Whoever of you loves life and desires to see many good days, keep your tongue from evil, and your lips from speaking lies. Turn from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it.” Again it is about getting the agenda right. And a major part of getting the agenda right has to do with finding God's will, aligning our wills with HIS will and setting out to live within the boundaries of HIS will for us.

There can be no denying that one of the best things we can do as Christians, disciples of Jesus is to read HIS word. Read the Bible. Read Psalm 34. Pray about what you find in the word. Pray for God's guidance. Yield your will to His way, wherever that road leads. And I will say it again. Pray to be aligned within the will of God. If you want peace that is the secret. If you want a sense of wellbeing, that is the way to achieve it. In prayer the needle of our

spiritual compass changes direction. It finds true north. We set aside what we want and search for what God wants of us and with us. And that is why so many of the saints...believers...have written about prayer as a freeing experience. Letting go and letting God. “Jesus be the captain of my soul, and direct me to the way you would have me go.”

Pray, because when you pray, regardless of what your agenda was, it will become to find the will of God, to abide in the will of God and to remain in the will of God. You see....prayer matters. It really does!

I have left the most obvious lesson on prayer to the last. Verse 22 “The Lord redeems his servants; no one will be condemned who takes refuge in HIM.” Do you feel cornered by life? Like there is no escaping your problems, no way to get free? Pray to receive God's help. Psalm 34 states the best guarantee you will ever find anywhere regarding anything. “The Lord redeems His servants; no one will be condemned who takes refuge in Him.” I want you to notice what that guarantee does not say. It does not say one word about being good enough to receive God's approval. What it says is God saves people. And no one who turns to HIM will be condemned for what they have done.

Prayer is a simple act of faith. “Hi God. Its me. I'm in trouble here.” The Lord redeems. And yes that is all about the cross, Jesus being crucified, to save us. And because that event took place anyone who seeks refuge in the Lord will not be condemned. Prayer is about getting the agenda right. It is about letting go the agenda we are tempted to set for ourselves and working the agenda that God has had for us all along. Pray. Why? Because it matters. Pray. Why? Because God responds to prayer. Pray! Why? To be aligned with and

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abiding in the will of God. Pray. Why? To receive God's help. To be redeemed. To be safe from condemnation.

In the end, that is all that really matters.

Let us Pray;

Dear Lord, we bow before you in this moment of prayer. Our words are not many. And we will not try to convince you of how good we are. We want to recognize you as the One, Almighty Lord God. We recognize the importance of who YOU are. We also recognize that YOU hear us, and YOU draw near to us. Lead us in YOUR Way, and reveal to us YOUR will for our lives. Lord help us. Save us. Grant us the pleasure of your saving grace. In Jesus name we ask. Amen.