

SOLVING THE MYSTERY OF PRAYER

Text: Matthew 7:7-11

Key Word: Prayer

Key Thought: Prayer Does Not Need to Be a Mystery

*“Keep on asking, and it will be given unto you;
Keep on seeking, and you will find;
Keep on knocking, and it will be opened to you . . .”*

*Matthew 7:7
William Barclay
“The Gospel of Matthew”
Volume 1, p. 270*

Prayer has become a mystery to many Christians. We have oversimplified it on one end of the pendulum and also complicated it too much on the other hand. **Prayer will never be effective until we understand Who we are praying to.** Some people see God as one Who doesn't want to be bothered with our petty little requests. Others see God as someone far away and isolated from our needs. There are even people who think God is too busy to get involved - after all He's taking care of the whole world.

Once we better understand Who God is and how He works, we can solve the mystery of our concerns in reference to understanding prayer. Our text reveals a number of important facts when we try to unveil the mystery of prayer. By studying these truths for a few moments we will get a better understanding of God which will help us uncover some possible hindrances in our prayer life.

What was Jesus trying to teach those who had gathered to hear Him speak what has become known as the Sermon on the Mount?

Many commentators have chosen to key in on the need to be **persistent in our prayer life**. This is very important. Yet I also feel that Jesus was sharing a number of important truths which we need to comprehend in order to solve the Mystery of Prayer. **Our Lord was not only setting the record straight about the need to be persistent in prayer but also how to overcome the constant barrage of discouragement that many Christians face in their prayer life. Jesus spoke on . . .**

I. DISAPPOINTMENT IN PRAYER (Matthew 7:9)

II. DECEPTION IN PRAYER (Matthew 7:10)

III. DANGER IN PRAYER (Luke 11:12)

I. DISAPPOINTMENT IN PRAYER (Matthew 7:9)

One of the main hurdles we must overcome in prayer in Disappointment. If we don't see that prayer works, we will quickly give up on practicing it. Jesus used the illustration of a common household experience to clear the slate in the minds of the people.

Picture for a moment a typical scene in Palestine at the time of Jesus. Supper had arrived and a Jewish family had gathered around the table to enjoy their meal together. A common food for almost every meal was that of bread. If a young boy asked his father to pass him the bread, do you think the father would instead pick up a stone and hand it to him?

When we study the three main illustrations of our Lord, we quickly see a common thread of truth. All of the items He spoke about had certain resemblances to each other.

The small, round limestones that were commonly found around the seashore could easily resemble a small loaf of bread. They were often the same shape and color. They may look the same but there is a big difference when you try to bite into them.

I've heard many people over the years tell me that when they pray at certain "DRY TIMES" in their life that heaven seems like brass. They can't seem to break through. It's as hard as stones. I believe they are experiencing the problem that Jesus was confronting in this portion of scripture. If God won't DISAPPOINTMENT us with a stone when we ask for bread, then why does prayer seem so hard to break into at certain times. If the problem is not on God's end, then we must look on our end.

A. Rebellion and Continual Sin without Confession

*"But since you rejected me when I called and no one gave heed when I stretched out my hand,
25. Since you ignored all my advice and would not accept my rebuke,
26. I in turn will laugh at your disaster; I will mock when calamity overtakes you . . .
28. Then you will call to me but I will not answer; they will look for me but will not find me."*

Proverbs 1:24,26,28

"Although they fast, I will not listen to their cry; though they offer burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them. Instead, I will destroy them with the sword, famine and plague."

Jeremiah 14:12

I. DISAPPOINTMENT IN PRAYER (Matthew 7:9) (Contd.)

A. Rebellion and Continual Sin without Confession (Contd.)

“Then the LORD said to me: ‘Even if Moses and Samuel were to stand before me, my heart would not go out to this people. Send them away from my presence! Let them go!’”

Jeremiah 15:1

The reason for the Lord’s negative response was because they were rebelling against His Word and would not confess their sins before Him.

B. Idolatry

“When you offer your gifts - the sacrifice of your sons in the fire - you continue to defile yourselves with all your idols to this day. Am I to let you inquire of me, O house of Israel? As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, I will not let you inquire of me.”

Ezekiel 20:31

God does not want to disappoint us in our prayer times. Yet we must come before Him with a clean heart and a pure mind if we want to have an effective prayer life. God wants to bless His people with answered prayer.

*“‘For I know the plans I have for you. ‘declares the LORD, ‘plans to prosper you and not harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.
12. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you.
13. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.”*

Jeremiah 29:11-13

“Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know.”

Jeremiah 33:3

God also wanted His hearer’s to know that He is interested in fulfilling the prayers of those who sincerely seek after Him and asked in a childlike faith and trust.

II. DECEPTION IN PRAYER (Matthew 7:10)

The second part of this explanation by Jesus dealt with deception.

“Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake (serpent - KJV)?”

Matthew 7:10

The word used for “*snake*” is translated “*serpent*” in many older versions. The “*serpent of the land*” was considered a “*snake*” while the “*serpent of the sea*” was usually an “*eel*.” In this case it appears that Jesus was speaking of an eel. According to the Jewish dietary laws the eel was considered as an unclean fish.

“Anything living in the water that does not have fins and scales is to be detestable to you.”

Leviticus 11:12

It would never enter the mind of a Jewish father to deceive his son into breaking the dietary laws that they were bound to keep. These were strict laws that had to be followed without question. **These were not suggestions from God - they were His commandments, statutes and abiding laws.** God considered breaking this Law to be a detestable act.

“Keep all my decrees and all my laws and follow them. I am the LORD.”

Leviticus 19:37

With this principle in mind we can be assured that God will not deceive us when we come to Him in sincere prayer. **He will neither mock us nor give us something that will become a snare to us and cause us to be separated from Him.** In other words, we must learn to trust God when we come to Him in our prayer of faith. **Deception is not part of the nature of God.** He will not treacherously poison us with venom when we are expecting to receive a blessing.

II. DECEPTION IN PRAYER (Matthew 7:10) (Contd.)

*** The Greeks were famous for their mythical stories. Some of these stories evolved around how the gods who answered men's prayers often did so in a deceptive manner. One such story spoke about Aurora, the goddess of dawn who fell in love with Tithonus a mortal youth.

I came to pass one day that Zeus, the king of the gods, offered Aurora any gift she might choose for her mortal lover. She chose to have him live forever. But she forgot to ask that he not age with the passing of time. So it was, as the mythical story concluded that Tithonus grew older and older, but he could never die. **The gift became a curse.** ***

III. DANGER IN PRAYER (Luke 11:12)

"Or if he asks for an egg, will he give him a scorpion."

Luke 11:12

In the final part of our Lord's illustration He used the comparison of an egg with a scorpion. At first glance there doesn't seem to be any similarity. Yet there is a scorpion which lives within the region around Palestine that is pale in color. When it is in its folded position, it looks quite similar to an egg at a quick glance.

Scorpion, the common name for arachnid having a flat, narrow body, two lobster like claws, eight legs, and a segmented tail. Terminating in a venomous stinger supplied by a pair of poison glands, the tail is usually curved upward and forward over the back. About 1400 species of scorpion exist; about 40 of them occur in the United States. Scorpions are usually brown in color and range from about 2.5 to 20 cm (about 1 to 8 in) in length.

When capturing a victim with its claws, the scorpion inflicts a disabling sting with its tail. In most species the sting is painful, but not fatal, to humans, although the sting of one species found in the United States has proved fatal to young children and is potentially fatal to adults. Other areas of the world have more dangerous scorpion species; the poison involved is a neurotoxin, attacking the nervous system.

"Scorpion," Microsoft (R) Encarta
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III. DANGER IN PRAYER (Luke 11:12)(Contd.)

Jesus used this illustration to ensure the people that God would not answer our prayers in such a way that it would lead us into a dangerous position. He will not only keep us from deception, but He will also keep us from danger, when we persistently call out to Him in times of prayer. Those who truly hear the voice of God can be assured that God will not intentionally lead them into dangerous situations. It is not His nature to act in this manner.

God wants to answer our prayers in a manner that is according to His perfect will and wisdom. Our part in prayer is to be persistent and truly desire to have the Lord's will done in our lives. We must trust in Him that He will never play games with our prayers or our lives. He will be faithful to His Word and His will.

C:\My Documents\WPWin(X7)\Sermons.2016\Prayer\Matthew 7_7.11.wpd

Date: Jan 24/16

Place: FCA

Time 10:30 Am

Song: In Your Presence (Father I am Waiting) - Bb

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What was one thing was Jesus trying to teach those who had gathered to hear Him speak what has become known as the Sermon on the Mount?

Jesus spoke on . . .

I. Disappointment in Prayer (Matthew 7:9)

A. Rebellion and Continual Sin without Confession - *Proverbs 1:24,26,28; Jeremiah 14:12; Jeremiah 15:1*

B. Idolatry - *Ezekiel 20:31; Jeremiah 29:11-13; Jeremiah 33:3*

Jesus also wanted His hearer's to know that He was interested in fulfilling the prayers of those who sincerely sought after Him and asked in a childlike faith and trust.

II. DECEPTION IN PRAYER (Matthew 7:10) - *Matthew 7:10; Leviticus 11:12; Leviticus 19:37*

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