

LEARNING TO PRAY

The Work of Prayer

PRIMARY TEXTS: John 5:19-20, 30; John 7:16-18; John 14:12-14; Dan. 10:12-13

INTRODUCTION: Prayer is worship, and prayer begins best with the worship we offer God through praise and thanksgiving.

“By prayer we enter into God’s holy temple, and penetrate at once to the throne of grace. Prayer is not only the shortest distance to God’s mighty throne; it is the only way in. To think that this supreme wonder could take place so suddenly with one bold, blood-bought step! There we see the Lord Jesus ever living to pray for us, and ready to give us of His own praying by His Spirit. Glorious discovery: He is only a prayer away! The veil of sense and space that hides Him within His temple-universe is suddenly removed as we pray. We enter silently into His temple, and lo, suddenly we are before His throne. Priests, before our great High Priest. Here too, we are suddenly in the presence of angels and archangels, and with all the company of Heaven we worship and adore Him. Only there do we discover the wonder of worship, that worship is before work, and that all His works are done in the spirit of worship. There are many churchgoers, but few worshipers, because there are few ‘pray-ers.’”¹

Prayer is indeed worship, but prayer is more than worship.

Prayer does not fit us for the greater works; prayer is part of the greater work.

I. THE WORK OF JESUS

John 5:19-20, 30 ¹⁹ Then Jesus answered and said to them, “Most assuredly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees the Father do; for whatever He does, the Son also does in like manner. ²⁰ For the Father loves the Son, and shows Him all things that He Himself does; and He will show Him greater works than these, that you may marvel. ³⁰ I can of Myself do nothing. As I hear, I judge; and My judgment is righteous, because I do not seek My own will but the will of the Father who sent Me.

How did Jesus decide what work to do?

How did Jesus know what work the Father was doing?

John 7:16-18 ¹⁶ Jesus answered them and said, "My doctrine is not Mine, but His who sent Me. ¹⁷ If anyone wills to do His will, he shall know concerning the doctrine, whether it is from God or *whether* I speak on My own *authority*. ¹⁸ He who speaks from himself seeks his own glory; but He who seeks the glory of the One who sent Him is true, and no unrighteousness is in Him.

What was the source of Jesus' teaching? The Father.

The implications of these verses of Scripture are life changing and lifestyle changing. Jesus did not do everything He could have done with the power and authority God had entrusted to Him. Jesus did not do everything we might classify as a "good" thing to do. For instance, He did not alleviate the poverty or hunger of all the poor although He certainly had the power to do so.

Here is the key thought. **Jesus only did what He saw His Heavenly Father doing; nothing more, nothing less.** Why did Jesus live in relative obscurity from birth to age thirty when He began His public ministry? It was not because He did not know enough. He astounded the rabbis in the temple at age twelve. It was not because He had no power. He was the Son of God in flesh from the moment of conception. Why did He not begin earlier and therefore have a longer time to preach the gospel, teach about the kingdom, train His disciples, and do more miracles? He waited because the Father was in those earlier years doing a work of preparation through John the Baptist. God was preparing hearts in Israel to repent and receive their Messiah. If Jesus had begun His ministry before the preparation was over, the preparation would not have been complete. In this case, He cooperated with His Father by waiting.

When God began the work of bringing in the Kingdom, Jesus began His public ministry. He was doing what He saw the Father doing.

Can you think of another illustration of Jesus waiting for the Father's timing in doing something very important?

John 7:6-8 ⁶ Then Jesus said to them, "My time has not yet come, but your time is always ready. ⁷ The world cannot hate you, but it hates Me because I testify of it that its works are evil. ⁸ You go up to this feast. I am not yet going up to this feast, for My time has not yet fully come."

Matt. 26:18 And He said, "Go into the city to a certain man, and say to him, 'The Teacher says, "My time is at hand; I will keep the Passover at your house with My disciples.'""

In addition, Jesus said only what He heard the Father saying. He could have taught us many things He did not. He could have told us the exact, physical location of heaven, the dimensions of Hades, a description of the cherubim; but He did not. Jesus taught us what the Father gave Him to teach us – that is all.

How do you think Jesus knew exactly what the Father was doing and saying so that He could do and say the same thing? Primarily through the Word and prayer.

II. OUR WORK ON EARTH

John 14:12-14 ¹² "Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater *works* than these he will do, because I go to My Father. ¹³ And whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. ¹⁴ If you ask anything in My name, I will do *it*."

What work are we to do?

If we are to do the work of Jesus, we better do it the way of Jesus. We need to find out what God is doing and saying and get in on it!

A. Our work in prayer

Remember, **prayer is partnership with God.** God has chosen in a self-limiting action to share His authority over the earth with man by giving man dominion. Therefore in prayer we both find out what God is doing or desires to do and we cooperate with Him in the doing of it. **Our prayer is work – the work of cooperating with God in accomplishing what neither of us can do alone (us by our limited power, God by His self-limiting choice).**

E.M. Bounds says, "Prayer is not the foe to work; it does not paralyze activity. It works mightily."

B. Our work after prayer

Prayer is an important work, but not the only work. It is the first in both importance and in time because it necessarily precedes any other work. **Without**

discovering what God is doing and saying by spending time in His Word and with Him in prayer, we can only do things for God.

When we know what He is doing, then like Jesus, we can do things with God. Many things begin done in Christendom today are being done for God rather than with God.

There are essential differences between those things done with God and those things done for God.

With God

Born out of prayer

Empowered by the Spirit

Glorifies God

Always succeeds

For God

Born out of man's desire

Empowered by man's energy alone

Honors men

Ultimately fails

III. OUR WORK BEYOND THE EARTH

We will understand why prayer is so important in accomplishing what God desires on the earth if we realize what takes place unseen beyond the earth.

Dan. 10:12-13 ¹² Then he said to me, "Do not fear, Daniel, for from the first day that you set your heart to understand, and to humble yourself before your God, your words were heard; and I have come because of your words. ¹³ But the prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me twenty-one days; and behold, Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, for I had been left alone there with the kings of Persia.

Consider the comments of Paul Billheimer from an exciting and challenging book, Destined for the Throne.

"Daniel's Intercession

Another illustration of this truth is recorded in Daniel, chapter ten. Again the mission of the Messianic nation was in view. The vision concerning the future of the nation came to Daniel at the close of a three week period of fasting. During all of that time Daniel was in mourning for his people; that is, he was engaged in prayer and intercession concerning the future of Israel. When at last the angel appeared with the message from heaven, he revealed to Daniel the astounding reason for the long delay. Daniel's prayer was heard in heaven the very day that

he began his intercession and immediately this heavenly messenger was dispatched with the answer. But he was intercepted. The Living Bible paraphrases it this way: "That very day I was sent here to meet you. But for twenty-one days the mighty Evil Spirit who overrules the kingdom of Persia blocked my way. Then Michael, one of the top officers of the heavenly army, came to help me, so that I was able to break through these spirit rulers of Persia" (Dan. 10:12-13).

Battle in the Spirit World

Here is a historical account of a literal conflict in the unseen realms. It is doubtless the pattern of many similar conflicts that rage constantly in the spirit world. It is the story of an action on two levels. Down by the river is a man in fasting and prayer. He labors, he pleads, he insists, he persists, he importunes, wrestles, and agonizes. He is in mourning day after day. He has read Jeremiah's prophecy of the seventy years of captivity and knows that the time has almost expired. The time for the fulfillment is almost here. Although God is sovereign and could, if He chose, fulfill His prophecies unaided, Daniel evidently realized that intercession had a part to play in bringing the prophecy to pass. God had made the prophecy. When it was time for its fulfillment, He did not fulfill it arbitrarily outside of His program of prayer. He sought for a man upon whose heart He could lay a burden of intercession. Intercession is the most unselfish thing anyone can do.

As always, God made the decision in heaven. A man was called upon to enforce that decision on earth through intercession and faith. This part of the conflict, the prayer sessions by the river, is on a level which we can observe. But another part of the battle was invisible from earth. While Daniel was on his face interceding, a concomitant conflict, a related pitched battle, was raging in the heavens. Two angels, and possibly the spirit forces under their command, were engaged in a fierce combat which continued for three weeks. Since God does nothing but in answer to prayer, if Daniel had grown weary and become discouraged, God would have been compelled to find someone else to intercede or permit His messenger to suffer defeat. Although the answer to his prayer was granted and already on the way, if Daniel had given up it presumably would never have arrived. Therefore the real battle was fought and the victory won in the place of prayer down on the river bank. The decisive action was there." ²

Conclusion:

What are some things in Christendom that you observe that God is doing and some Christians are doing with Him?

What do you observe in our church that God is doing and some are doing with Him?

What is God doing in your life that you are doing with Him?