

Text: Luke 11:1-10

Sunday 6th September 2020

Brightons Parish Church

Introduction to Reading

In our last teaching series, we explored in the book of Matthew the calling of Jesus to His disciples, both then and for us now. We saw that we are all called into a relationship with Jesus, and with that comes an invitation, a command even, to give our lives away for His purposes, as part of the family of God, such that we share the love of God and we mature in the character of God.

Back on the 15th of July I was praying and asking the Lord for guidance, and I believe He shared a number of things to help us enter into His purposes, His freedom, and the life He has for us. I noted these down in my journal and one prompting was a call to prayer, to grow in prayer, to become a more prayerful people, and this is as much for me because I know that I need to grow in prayer.

So, beginning today and through to the October break, we are going to look at some teaching on prayer and each week have a particular prayer or activity to use in helping us to pray. Because it's all well and good having a clear purpose and a sense of what Jesus has called us to, but without being a people of prayer, we won't change, and this world will not change either.

During my recent holiday I read a little on the issue of justice, and the concluding words focused on prayer. In particular, this portion caught my attention: 'we must [empower the pursuit of justice] with prayer. If we [rely on] willpower, hard work, protest and activism alone, we will become exhausted. Prayer gives the battle over to Jesus. Prayer fuels our action. Through prayer, Jesus will give us strength, truth, wisdom, peace, insight, love,

forgiveness and power. Through prayer, God wins the main battleground – the human heart.'

(Ben Lindsay, *We Need To Talk About Race*)

Whether it be the issue of justice, or the calling to 'invite, encourage and enable people to follow Jesus', we need to be a people of prayer, because our own finite resources are just not enough. So today, we begin a new series on prayer, and hear now our first reading from the Scriptures.

(PAUSE)

Message

Let us take a moment to pray before we think about God's Word. May the words of my mouth, and the meditation of all our hearts, be acceptable in Your sight, O LORD, our strength and our redeemer. Amen.

Prayer is one of those parts of life, parts of faith, which we know we should do, but often don't. That can be for any number of reasons: we don't know what words to use; we fear getting it wrong; we maybe don't think it does anything. There can also be other reasons, such as simple laziness or apathy.

This past week, Gill and I celebrated 15 years of marriage, and if I told you that we rarely talk, don't listen to each other, and generally get on with our separate lives, it

wouldn't matter than we lived in the same house, or had our marriage certificate, or shared our financial resources, you would still be thinking that the quality of our marriage was quite poor, even worrying. Thankfully, none of those things actually apply!

Yet, the same is true with our relationship with God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. You might come to church, you might have a baptism certificate or something that marks when you became a member or an elder, and you might give generously in finances or in time to the work of God's church. But if you are not praying, not relating personally and directly to God on a regular basis, then I would wonder about the quality of your relationship with Him.

In our day there is a prayer movement called '24-7 Prayer', and a number of years ago they produced a video which summaries 'why' we might pray, and I would like to play that for you, just now.

(PAUSE – play video)

I wonder what jumped out for you – do feel free to share it in the live chat just now. I was struck by the idea that prayer may be the most powerful thing we do to change our world, to change ourselves, because when we pray we are connecting with the living God, engaging in a two-way relationship, and as we do so, what we pray echoes into eternity. So, prayer is key, it is powerful, and sometimes the best way to learn to pray is simply to pray.

Nonetheless, one day the disciples **came to Jesus and** said, ‘Lord, teach us to pray...’ (v1) Clearly, they saw something – something in the way He prayed, or in what He prayed, something different. Or maybe they saw how Jesus had prayer underpinning all of life because again and again He would go off to pray. And so, the one and only thing they ever ask to be taught, is to pray.

In response, Jesus shares with them what we now call the Lord’s Prayer, which is probably the most famous prayer in history. **Martin Luther said:** “To this day I am still nursing myself on the Lord’s Prayer like a child, and I am still eating and drinking of it like an old man without getting bored of it.” Christian writer, **Timothy Jones, also** argued: “To cultivate a deeper prayer life all you have to do is say the Lord’s Prayer, but take an hour to do it.”

We know from history, that it was traditional for rabbis of the time to have their own unique prayer which brought together their foundational teaching. John the Baptist's followers likely had such a prayer because in our passage today **the disciples said, “Lord teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples.” (Luke 11:1)**

It's unlikely they were just asking Jesus for a few good prayer tips. They were saying: ‘We need know what You are about, we need a statement of faith!’ **As such, the Lord's Prayer is maybe our primary foundation for understanding life and faith, giving shape to everything else. In this way, the Lord's Prayer is like a model prayer: knowing what to pray and so we might simply repeat the words as given, because repeating it regularly can help its central truths to slowly shape our hearts and our minds.**

But the Lord's Prayer can also be like a map: teaching us the way of prayer, the route to take. Many of us find prayer difficult, don't we? We get distracted or struggle to know what to say. But praying each phrase, even a few words of the prayer, can spark ideas of what to pray. In this way, the Lord's Prayer helps us become **real with God**: real with Him about what we think of Him, of the needs we have for ourselves and the needs of others, as well as seeking His forgiveness for our sin and asking for His help in the difficult realities of life.

Here is a prayer that we often just recite without much thought, yet it can be a framework into which we pour all of the thoughts and concerns of our lives. It is possible to take the thing that is most burning in your heart at this time and pray about it using the Lord's Prayer.

Earlier in the service, I said that in each week of this season of prayer, we would have a prayer to pray, or an activity to use, and the Lord's Prayer is the one for this week. You can simply take the version you are most comfortable with and pray it in one of the ways I've described this morning. **Or, if you wish,** you can find an alternative version on our website, in the "Sermons" page, as well as from our Facebook page this afternoon. In that document there are various examples of the Lord's Prayer, sometimes using different language to express its meaning, or capturing the prayer from a particular angle. If you've been praying this prayer for many years, it may be helpful to try a different version because then may you to see and engage with it afresh.

But whether you pray in “Thee’s” and “Thou’s”, or take it a word or line at a time, may we choose to grow as a people of prayer, responding to this call to pray, and investing time in our relationship with God by using the Lord’s Prayer each day this coming week. **For Jesus has** promised: ‘ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.’ (v9) As we prayer, as we ask, seek and knock, may we know the reciprocal welcome and provision of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

We close our time together with our final hymn...

HYMN *MP-I’ll go in the strength of the Lord*