

The Gospel Message

Silence In Prayer

The reading is taken from the Old Testament: **1 Kings 19: 11-13**

11. Then He said, “go out, and stand on the mountain before the LORD.” And behold the Lord passed by, and a great strong wind tore into the mountains and broke the rocks in pieces before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake.

12. And after the earthquake a fire; but the LORD was not in the fire; and after the fire a small still voice.

13. And so it was, when Elijah heard *it*, that he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood in the entrance of the cave. Suddenly a voice came to him and said, “What are you doing here Elijah?”

This is the first of a series of teachings on prayer. Prayer is basically being in communion with God. Prayer is listening to and talking with God. Prayer develops our relationship with God. As with any relationship it is important to know something about the person that we desire to be close to. What better way there is than the word of God as contained in the Holy Bible? Although there are no special formulas of how to pray, Scripture is full of examples of how Yahweh’s people prayed.

Our Lord Jesus taught His disciples, to go into their rooms, shut the door, and pray. When in public, He cautioned them not to use meaningless words, as the Scribes did, for the sake of impressing those around them and trusting in their own righteousness. Our Lord knows the secrets and desires of our hearts before we even speak it!

“The Lord’s Prayer” as it is commonly known, is a pattern of prayer set by Jesus (Matthew 6: 6-7). The prayer covers every aspect of how to approach and petition God.

Jesus told parables to provoke His listeners to think for themselves and to make the right decision for their salvation. He never ever forced anyone into a particular mould or structure. In Luke chapter 11 verse 8, Jesus tells the story of the person who wakes his friend in the middle of the night to borrow 3 loaves of bread. The person would not go away until his friend gave him the loaves. In this parable Jesus encourages believers to be persistent in prayer (Luke 11:8).

In Luke chapter 18 verses 1-7, we find another parable encouraging persistent prayer and not to get disheartened should answers seem a long time in coming. Jesus tells the story of the widow who pleads for justice before a judge, who had no regard for either God or man. The judge initially ignored her pleas. No timescale was given, but we know it was for “a while” (Greek term ‘*chronos*’ ‘uncertain duration’). The widow did not lose heart, nor did she pray against the judge’s ungodliness.

Rather, she repeatedly and steadfastly put her request before the judge, until he finally gave her the protection she required. Christ demonstrates the power of persistent prayer, as those who cry to Him day and night. The widow had no one to plead her cause, she was alone. We are God’s chosen

ones, we have the Holy Spirit as our advocate and Jesus as our Mediator – our pleas will be heard! We have the assurance that though our requests may be long in coming, mercy will come through (Psalm 20:6).

Prayer can take many forms – for instance, we are called to be intercessors. To praise and worship God, to petition Him for our needs; to give Him thanks; to seek God’s wisdom; to repent of our sins or to rest silently in the presence of God. We can pray privately and constantly or we can pray corporately. It is crucial when praying, to ‘listen’ to the leading of the Holy Spirit, because the Spirit Himself guides us into all truth and intercedes for us, as clearly revealed in Romans chapter 8 verse 26.

Corporate prayer is generally done within a set time, place and day, although sometimes it can be spontaneous when a group of believers are gathered together. Praying silently is generally done when we are alone, but it can also occur when in public, even when in conversation. Whichever way we find ourselves in prayer, it is crucial to ‘listen’ to the leading of the Holy Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit who guides us and intercedes for us, as clearly revealed in Romans 8:26.

Elijah was at the point of despair, because the people were still followers of the pagan cults of Jezebel. In the first book of Kings Chapter 18 verses 23-39 - Elijah had demonstrated that the pagan gods were of no worth. Over and against the inability of their Baal gods (small g) to produce fire, Elijah’s relatively short prayer of petitioning Yahweh for His glory to be made known, caused the fire to fall and consume Elijah’s offering on the altar that he had rebuilt. The people were convinced that Yahweh is God, but it is likely that they were not all converted.

Jezebel sought to kill Elijah and he fled to Horeb. Just like Moses centuries earlier, Elijah too received a vision of Yahweh on Mount Horeb, which is the northern Israelite name for Mount Sinai.

It was in the solitary confinement of the dark cave, feeling quite desolate, a failure and alone that Yahweh spoke to Elijah. Although Elijah experienced a tornado, earthquake and fire, God was not in the midst of the great roar and shakings. Rather, it was in the silence that followed, that Elijah was able to perceive what Yahweh’s plans were for him. The winds and eruptions did not frighten Elijah, but he did hide his face, in the presence of the glory of God. Elijah’s faith and tenacity was restored by the word of Yahweh and miracles followed!

Be encouraged, my brothers and sisters, that in many instances God uses the most humble to further His cause. Elijah was not a priest or some high ranking person, he was simply known as Elijah the Tishbite. There were times when he was fearful and felt very isolated, but he was fiercely passionate for and totally dependent on God. Elijah was in constant communion with Yahweh.

Often times, Jesus having ministered to the multitudes, would find time to withdraw into the wilderness for solitary prayer (Luke 5:16). In the garden of Gethsemane, despite being surrounded by his disciples who had fallen asleep, Jesus Christ in His humanity, prayed so intensely that His sweat became drops of blood falling to the ground (Luke 22:44). At His hour of need, an angel did minister to Him and He prayed even more earnestly, but alone! Jesus did chide His disciples for their inability to pray at a time of need and sorrow, thus exposing them to temptation.

The clinical term for the blood mingling with the sweat is ‘*hematohidrosis*’. According to Dr. Frederick Zugibe (Chief Medical Examiner of Rockland County, New York) severe stress and anxiety

activates the “sympathetic nervous system to invoke the stress-fight or flight reaction to such a degree causing hemorrhage of the vessels supplying the sweat glands into the ducts of the sweat glands and extruding out onto the skin.

Jesus Christ could have in His divinity, chosen not to suffer on behalf of us sinners. He could have commanded a legion of angels to protect Him (Matthew 4:1-6). Instead Jesus chose to be led as a Lamb to slaughter (Isaiah 53: 5-7). To think that God Himself died for us is incomprehensible! Jesus’ death and resurrection is a victory over sin and death.

Following the death and resurrection of Jesus, the disciples stayed focussed and single-mindedly devoted themselves to praying continuously - united in prayer and supplication before the throne of grace for their needs to be met. On the day of Pentecost, they received in all its fullness, the gift of the Holy Spirit – as promised by Christ - that made their joy full and they were empowered for the ministry that lay ahead for them (Acts 1:14; 2:1-4).

What is interesting is that we discern forms and patterns of prayer in the Acts of the Apostles chapter 1 verse 14 and chapter 2 verses 1-4 – we are told that the disciples prayed continuously (Greek term *proskartereo*, which can also mean in earnest, with perseverance) praising God and making supplication (entreating God). One would imagine that in order to pray continuously or earnestly, they would have continued to pray when separated from each other- brief as it may be- laying bare their hearts, their hopes and weaknesses before God.

When together in the Upper Room and on the day of Pentecost, they prayed corporately and in all instances in unity. I would imagine that although the disciples verbalised their prayers and praise, they would not have been shouting out loud in different directions on different issues. Rather, in one voice – in gentle harmony the sound of their prayers would almost seem like incense ascending heavenward. The ascending prayers signalled action! It was out of heaven that came the rushing of a mighty wind filling the whole place as each one of them was filled with the Holy Spirit!

Recall in Genesis chapter one, the Holy Spirit moved upon the face of the still waters. I personally cannot imagine the Holy Spirit descending into the hearts of believers amidst noise and clamour!

In the eighth chapter of Revelation, we see the amazing picture of the seventh seal being opened by the Lamb - Jesus, followed by half an hour’s silence in heaven – no one moved! The seven angels, each with a trumpet in hand were waiting in silence – in expectancy. Another angel was standing by the altar with a gold censer, but presents no offering. Breath-taking and awesome was the vision before John. There was profound silence, everything was suspended in heaven!

John’s vision in Revelation Chapter 8 verses 3-4 informs us that the angel “was given much incense that he should offer it with the prayers of all the saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne. And the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, ascended before God from the angel’s hand.” The ascending prayers mingled with the incense signalled action!

It is the prayers of believers, mingled with the merit of our Lord Jesus Christ, who made atonement on our behalf that result in effectual prayer. The ascending prayers of saints are accepted in heaven and do produce great changes on earth (Revelation 8:6).

In Psalm 141 verse 2 - King David, cried out to Yahweh for protection in this manner; “May my prayer be counted as incense before you; the lifting up of my hands as the evening offering”. The Apostle Paul - in the first book of Timothy chapter 2, urges us to repent and lift up holy hands before the throne of grace. We are to plead with petitions and thanksgivings, not just for ourselves, not just for those we know, but for all humanity.

Note the lifting up of holy hands occur both in the Old and the New Testament and is not a new charismatic invention as some may say!

God is holy; we are called to be holy. Prayer is communion with God and involves repentance. How else can we stand before a holy God if we first do not seek to cleanse ourselves from self-centeredness and sin? It is only when we bow down before our Holy God, acknowledging our sins and repent of our weaknesses can He strengthen us.

God speaks to us through silence. It is impossible to hear God's voice when there are too many distractions. Perhaps we fear silence in case we hear God speaking to us and calling us to face personal issues that we really do not want to let go of. God cannot be found in noise and restlessness, but in the stillness and silence of time.

When God speaks, it may not be audible speech; it may be a conviction of what He has already laid upon our hearts and minds. When we rest silently in His presence, we are in close communion with God, and able to discern His will for our lives, which ultimately becomes our desire.

We need to train ourselves – not only to lay our needs before Him, but to praise and worship Him persistently and also to learn to listen in silence to His small still voice. So that when trouble comes, we are fully trained to leap over barriers and run ahead to victory!

God wants us to communicate with Him, at all times – in joy and when in sorrow. Not by fancy lengthy words but with heartfelt emotions. We can approach the throne of our great and mighty God through Christ Jesus, our only mediator (1Timothy 2:5)

Recall the prophecy of Isaiah in chapter 7 verse 14, that a child would be born and be called Immanuel- meaning “God with us”. Because of Jesus Christ, we don’t have to travel to tops of mountains or search in temples or churches or hide in caves. God is in our midst right here and now. Indwelling all believers is the Holy Spirit who helps us in all things, as Jesus had promised (John 14:16-18).

The prayer of Jabez as recorded in 1 Chronicles 4:10 is simplicity in itself. Jabez asked God to bless him, to increase his endeavours, for strength and protection and to keep him from evil so he may not hurt others. God granted his request! O that we too may cry out as Jabez did – “O that You would bless me indeed!”

Let us pray:

Lord Jesus, thank you for making it possible for us to draw near with confidence to the throne of grace. Please Lord teach me to be patient and to understand fully that You do hear my cries of need. You and You alone are my help and deliverer. Blessed be Your Name. Amen.