TITLE: PRAYER

In the garden

TEXT: James 4:1-3; 2 Co. 11:22-28; Act 16:22-34;

2 Co. 12:7-10; Mt. 6:9-13; Gal. 2:20

INTRODUCTION: This morning I want to talk about prayer. If there is one thing lacking in most of our lives as a Christian it is probably in the area of our praying.

Let me start out by asking you a question this morning…

Why is it that you pray? What is the primary purpose of your prayers? What is it that motivates you to pray?

When you or someone that you love is hurting or in need?

When you run across an obstacle in your life that is just too big for you to handle?

 When the bottom drops out of your world, when you have hit rock bottom and the only way left to look is up, to God?

 Or possibly at the beginning or ending of the day to fulfill your religious obligation to God?

 What is the primary motivation of your prayers? What is it that will get you on your knees before God?

 It is interesting to me that two of the bestselling books of the last decade were entitled “The Virtue of Selfishness” and another was “Looking out for number One.”

 People seem to buy these kinds of books in droves..Why?

What does this tell us about the society that we are living in when books entitled “The Virtue of Selfishness” and “Look Out For Number one” get on the best seller list?

I Think, because, selfishness is a leading characterization of the age, the world in which we live…

 To a large degree our world has hurled God from the throne and crowned self as king.

Even we within the Church have been found guilty of this at times and that fact is often reflected within our prayer life.

How often do we treat God as if He were but a conduit to all of our desires?

 We “conjure up” God as if He were a Genie in a bottle, commanding Him to manipulate our world to our liking.

A way to test this out is to reflect upon just what our prayers consist of…

 How much of our prayers are centered upon request?

God do this or God do that?

 Now don’t misunderstand me, it is good and it is Scriptural to petition God.

But if petitions make up most or all of our prayer life then something is amiss.

We shouldn’t treat God as if He were only a means to get what we want, a means to our own an end.

But He Himself is the end that we should be seeking.

If we think otherwise, then we need to ask the Lord to change our selfish hearts.

Selfishness is at the root of many, if not most unanswered prayers…

 **James 4:1 - 3 (NIV) 1What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don’t they come from your desires that battle within you?  2You want something but don’t get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight. You do not have, because you do not ask God.  3When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.**

How many times when it seems that our prayers go unanswered by God it is because we are asking amiss, asking with wrong motives! We ask for the fulfillment of our own selfish desires instead of the furtherance of Gods Kingdom?

Do you realize that it is not always Gods will to heal the sick and infirm? It is not always Gods will to deliver us from the trials and tribulations that may come against us in this life?

That sometimes these things are actually a part of Gods will for our life for the specific purpose of furthering His Kingdom here on earth.

Let’s take the life of the Apostle Paul as an example this morning.

 We don’t hear of any adversity in Paul’s life before he came to Christ….

 Was there adversity in his life before he came to know Jesus? Probably, it is not mentioned in Scripture.

But after Paul came to Know Jesus there is a lot of testimony from Paul’s own mouth about adversity that he faced after he came to know Jesus as his Lord and Savior that Scripture evidently has a reason for recording…

**2 Corinthians 11:22 - 28 (NIV) 22Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they Abraham’s descendants? So am I.  23Are they servants of Christ? (I am out of my mind to talk like this.) I am more. I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again.  24Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one.  25Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea,  26I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers.  27I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked.  28Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches.**

OK, Let me ask a question here… Do you think that Paul ever prayed to God for deliverance from these specific things?

Three times he was shipwrecked! Don’t you suppose that at least one of the times, probably all three, that Paul cried out, Lord, don’t let this boat sink.

He says five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one! Don’t you suppose, especially after the first time he was whipped, knowing exactly the pain of what was coming cried out to God, Lord deliver me from these lashes?

 He says that three times he was beaten with rods…. Don’t you suppose that Paul prayed to God for deliverance especially as he faced the gauntlet the second and third time?

As he was in the process of being stoned don’t you think that he was praying that God would somehow stop the throwing of the rocks as they were biting into his flesh?

I have no doubt that Paul prayed for the Lords deliverance, yet his prayers, at the time seemed to go unanswered! Why?

God had another purpose and plan for Paul through his adversity that was greater than delivering Paul from it.

 One of Paul’s references to being imprisoned and lashed with the whip was probably when he was imprisoned in Philippi with Silas.

**Acts 16:22 - 34 (NIV) 22The crowd joined in the attack against Paul and Silas, and the magistrates ordered them to be stripped and beaten.  23After they had been severely flogged, they were thrown into prison, and the jailer was commanded to guard them carefully.  24Upon receiving such orders, he put them in the inner cell and fastened their feet in the stocks. 25About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them.**

OK After being severely whipped and beaten and chained in the dungeon of the prison it says that Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God.

 I am sure that part of their prayers was devoted to asking God for deliverance.

 Yet that obviously was not the substance of their prayers it was just probably a part of their prayers?

 How do we know that it wasn’t the substance of their prayers?

Because their prayer for deliverance was not answered yet they still were praying and singing hymns to God.

We don’t know just what and how Paul and Silas prayed but I am sure from what happens that a part of their prayer was the same as Jesus prayer in the Garden the night of his betrayal and arrest…..

Lord, if it be possible please let this cup pass from me yet not my will but thy will be done.

Let’s move on through this text and see if Gods will is revealed to us through the adversity that Paul and Silas had to endure.

**25About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them.**

**26Suddenly there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the prison were shaken. At once all the prison doors flew open, and everybody’s chains came loose.  27The jailer woke up, and when he saw the prison doors open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself because he thought the prisoners had escaped.  28But Paul shouted, “Don’t harm yourself! We are all here!” 29The jailer called for lights, rushed in and fell trembling before Paul and Silas.  30He then brought them out and asked, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” 31They replied, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household.”  32Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house.  33At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his family were baptized.  34The jailer brought them into his house and set a meal before them; he was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God—he and his whole family.**

Let me ask another question here…Was it worth it?

Paul and Silas, falsely arrested, brutally whipped and thrown into the dungeon of a prison. Backs beaten until only raw meat would have been revealed. They had to be in excruciating pain from their wounds.

Why would God allow such devoted and committed servants to go through such a severe trial?

He had a bigger plan and a bigger purpose that was brought about through the suffering of his servants.

The jailer came in and fell down before Paul and Silas and said: sirs what must I do to be saved.

He and his entire household accepted Christ that night.

Had this not happened to Paul and Silas this Philippian jailer and his entire household may very well have ended up in hell, eternally separated from God, but through the suffering of Paul and Silas this man was convinced that God was thee one and only God and came to believe in Him as his personal Lord and Savior. He and his entire family were saved .

So was it worth it? I am confident that Paul and Silas both thought so.

Paul is afflicted with personal suffering... he describes it as a thorn in his flesh, a messenger of Satan sent to torment him.

 Scripture says that it is so severe a personal affliction that Paul pleads with God on three separate occasions for Him to take it away!

**2 Corinthians 12:7 - 10 (NIV) 7To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. .  8Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me.  9But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.”**

Paul’s response…

**Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me.  10That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.**

It was through this personal affliction that the Apostle Paul was able to recognize and fully embrace the sustaining and conquering power of the Grace of God in his life.

Paul describes his receiving this thorn in his flesh to keep him from becoming conceited, from becoming consumed with pride, consumed with self, because of all the wonderful revelations that God was giving him…

 It was through this adversity that Satan intended to weaken and destroy Paul’s faith in God that actually ended up strengthening Paul in his faith.

 Paul prayed that God would remove this thorn of the enemy but God saw that the thorn would be beneficial to Paul for keeping Paul dependent upon Him so he left the thorn intact.

Some will still say that they still don’t understand why God didn’t answer Paul’s prayer for healing…. God did answer Paul’s prayer! God said no.

Too often when we pray we have a pre-determined opinion of how God will answer our prayer! Most of the time when we pray a petition to God we expect Him to answer in a certain way and if He doesn’t answer as we see fit then we say He didn’t answer our prayer.

That is a very selfish attitude when it comes to our prayer life.

 It would be like our child asking us for something that they want but we may see it as something that would not be beneficial to them, so we say no and don’t give it to them and they walk away saying that their request was not heard and they got no answer.

 The request was heard, the answer was just not the one that they wanted to hear.

 I believe that God hears and answers every single prayer that is offered up to Him by one of His children.

 He will either say yes or no or not now.

Often, it seems, if He says no or not now to us we respond as if He didn’t hear us or answer us at all.

What does that say about us? It tells us that often we approach God as a spoiled child would approach their earthly parent expecting a pre-determined positive response that meets our pre-determined desires.

When we do this we reduce God to our “Genie in a bottle” who is there for nothing more then to meet the every whim of our will.

It is ok to petition God, to ask him for things, even to expect Him to do great things in our life.

But we also need to develop our spiritual hearing so that we can discern His answers especially if that answer is No or Not Now.

In teaching us how we should pray Jesus says this:

 **Matthew 6:9 - 13 (NIV) 9“This, then, is how you should pray:     “‘Our Father in heaven,     hallowed be your name, 10your kingdom come,     your will be done     on earth as it is in heaven. 11Give us today our daily bread. 12Forgive us our debts,     as we also have forgiven our debtors. 13And lead us not into temptation,     but deliver us from the evil one.’**

What I want to focus upon in closing this morning is the first three parts of this prayer, the first three petitions of Christ to the Father….

If this prayer is structured in order of priority, and I believe that it is, notice the first three top priorities of prayer from the perspective of Christ…

Jesus says pray like this:

Priority #1. Our Father in Heaven, Hollowed be Thy name.

**Hollowed= hag-ee-ad'-zo**

**From****G40****; to make holy, that is, (ceremonially) purify or consecrate; (mentally) to venerate:—hallow, be holy, sanctify.**

The #1 priority of prayer is to praise and worship and honor God! To sanctify His name, that is, to set apart His name as Holy within our lives.

 The second petition of Christ and our #2 priority in prayer… THY KINGDOM COME.

We need to diligently be beseeching God to bring His kingdom into our world and into our lives.

 Father, May the second most desire of my heart and being, second only to hollowing Your precious name, setting You apart as holy, be to strive, to establish and further Your Kingdom on earth and establish Your eternal Kingdom within my life.

The third petition of Christ and our #3 priority in prayer ..

THY WILL BE DONE!

We need to lay our will at the feet of Jesus and ask Him to fulfill His purpose and His plans through our lives.

 This is what Paul meant when he said:

**Galatians 2:20 (NIV) 20I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.**

**20I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me.**

This is how we assure the will of God will be done in our life! This speaks of dying to self in order to live for God.

It is interesting that the first three petitions, the three top priorities of Jesus prayer, have little to nothing to do with us but they have everything to do with God.

The last three petitions of Jesus prayer do have to do with us as we relate to God.

**Give us today our daily bread.**

1. **Forgive us our debts,**
2. **3And lead us not into temptation,  but deliver us from the evil one.**

We do the first three ….

#1 Making the name of God hollowed, holy in our life.

#2 Declaring to establish His Kingdom within our life and within our world.

#3 Laying our very will at the feet of the Lord and determining to become a living sacrifice to Him.

We do this…..and it will insure that God will respond with giving us our daily bread---feed us both physically and spiritually.

 We will have the assurance of God’s forgiveness!

We will be delivered from temptations and all evil Delivered by either not having to face them or given the power to resist them..

We do this and we will have a powerful and wonderfully fulfilling prayer life.

We grasp this and it will open a whole new dimension to our communication with God.

It will help us put to death the deterrent and detriment of self in our prayers! And open our spiritual ears so that we can truly hear that still and quiet voice of the Lord.

This morning….

Do you desire to set apart the name of God as holy in your life?

Do you desire to have Him establish His kingdom within your life and be used as an instrument to further His kingdom within your world?

Is it your desire to lay your will, your desires at His feet, to surrender yourself unto Him. To crucify self on the cross of Christ to the place that Jesus can truly live His life vicariously through you?

Do this and you will experience a wonderfully fulfilling and dynamically powerful prayer life.