

We have spent five weeks examining Jesus' teaching on prayer, using what we know as the Lord's Prayer, as a framework. Last Sunday, we celebrated God's gift of the harvest, and discovered how tradition and culture distort our appreciation of God, and distracts us from worshipping Him; to avoid this, therefore, we would do well to practice the discipline of **being still and knowing HE is God**. We might be tempted to think, this is about physically withdrawing to a secluded place; it is that, but more than that. It is about pushing out and pushing away things that have crowded into our lives, and giving our total, undivided attention to the One to whom we owe our lives.

We have said this before, and it might be helpful to frame our study of Jesus' prayers: more than prayer being a conversation with God, more than listening to God first before presenting Him with our list of "do this" and "do that", prayer is first and foremost, **evidence** of a special relationship with the Author of Life, but above everything else, Prayer is a reflection of the **confidence** we have, not just in the person of God (which we must have), but **confidence in our relationship with him**.

Let me illustrate the significance of this. The Hollywood mogul, Harvey Weinstein has been in the news. He would have wished to be in the news for better reasons, but sadly not. Many people had confidence in him for what he could do for them. When news broke of the extent of his misdemeanours, his wife of 10 years announced she was leaving him, because she had lost confidence in **their relationship**. We can ask ourselves the same question: do I pray and worship God for what He can do for me, or do I pray and worship God because of the confidence I have in my relationship with Him?

Over the next month and a half, we shall embark on a journey to learn **How Jesus Prayed**; I hope we will draw lessons to enrich our lives, be enriched in our prayer life, and learn to value of confidence in our relationship with **Our Father**.

The first of Jesus' prayers we shall examine is found in both, Matthew and Luke¹. Luke being the more meticulous, medically trained and a scientific reporter, provides us with more background information.

Let's start with John the Baptist's death, beheaded at the whim of a jealous woman, who could not stand John's constant warning of serious issues in her life. Jesus grieved John's gruesome death (for 40 days as was the custom); they were after all cousins. He then continued His mission to preach the good news of the Kingdom of God, to teach people how to live, and heal people of all diseases.² Talk about *fake news*, as Jesus continued His work, some people told Herod that John the Baptist had been raised from the dead, some told him, Elijah had appeared, and others told him that a prophet of old had risen from the dead; Herod did not know whom or what to believe. He was confused and perplexed and wanted to see for himself, "this man Jesus", for no other reason, than to satisfy his curiosity.³

At this time, Jesus was simultaneously dealing with three sets of problems and meeting Herod to satisfy his curiosity was not a priority: first, an increasing crowd of people wanting to see Him for healing (if you think A&E on a Friday or Saturday night is busy, the crowds following Jesus wanting attention was at least 10 times larger, and only **ONE** Doctor to serve them!); the second problem was the growing opposition against Him by the religious elite who felt He was upsetting their control over the people by setting them free of the Law. And finally, perhaps the most important thing on Jesus' agenda was to "train" the disciples, people given to Him by God, that they may understand correctly, God's plan and purpose.

If I was to leave you with a lasting image of what confronted Jesus, imagine yourself being attacked by a swarm of bees buzzing around you, getting increasingly agitated and irritated as you swat them away, and with every swat,

¹ Matthew 11:25-30 and Luke 10:21-24

² Matthew 4:23

³ Luke 9:7-9

their determination to harm you increases, **WHILE you are** attending alone, to life-threatening injuries of all people living a mile down both sides of your street whose houses have burned down, **WHILE you are also** teaching a cohort of medical students to whom you are committed, teaching them what you are doing, how they should approach similar conditions, and what they should expect from their labours, ***doing all this at the same time!***

Jesus is no ordinary person; He is after all, the Son of God, and if He finds juggling these three things stressful, and needs to get away and be alone in prayer, imagine our predicament!

Amidst all this going on, Luke tells us Jesus appointed and anointed seventy two people and sent them, two by two, into every town and place He was planning to visit, to prepare for His visit by healing and to blessing them, and introduce them to the good news from God,. He added, ***Those who hear what you say, hear ME, those who reject your message, not only reject Me, but they reject the One who sent me.***⁴

Imagine Jesus' surprise when these 72 return and the only thing they could talk about was, "***even the demons are subject to us in Your Name!***" They rejoiced in a few miracles, but the more mature among them, probably confined to the eleven, or perhaps even to a smaller group of Peter, James, John and Andrew, may well have been disturbed because they had not seen mass repentance and surrender to Christ.

Matthew tells us of Jesus' frustration with the cities in which most of Jesus' miracles were performed, the cities of Chorazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum; all the residents of these cities saw the miracles of Jesus, yet they rejected Jesus and remained unrepentant. The voices of opposition to Jesus was loud, and they succumbed to these voices, despite the miracles they saw. This puts a new perspective on the line in the prayer Jesus taught us to pray, ***Please don't let us be drawn into the temptation of believing lies and fake news, and save us from***

⁴ Luke 10:1ff and v16.

the one who has nothing but evil in his heart, that we may see and recognise truth and obey God!

Jesus is being hassled by people, attacked by opponents and frustrated that the disciples don't seem to get the message!

In the midst of all this pressure, Jesus bursts into prayer, ***I thank you Father, Lord of Heaven and earth...***, imagine Jesus, in a spirit of thankfulness and gratitude, giving the Father credit for being Lord of Heaven and earth, when the pressure around Him is getting quite serious! He practices what He teaches; he talks the talk and walks the walk! He taught us to start our prayer with thanksgiving, ***Our Father, whose home is heaven, Holy is Your Name. May Your Kingdom be established on earth, exactly as it is in Heaven.***

In the midst of all the pressure, hassled by people, attacked by opponents and frustrated by the disciples' misunderstanding, Jesus pauses to thank Father God, ***that you have hidden truths about life in Your Kingdom, from those who value the wisdom of this world and all its knowledge and intelligence, and opened the eyes and hearts and minds of those who, like little children, are eager to learn and accept Your offer of unconditional love. This is your plan and will, that those who do not value You, Your Word, Your will, and Your plans, find themselves frustrated by the wisdom and knowledge and intelligence of this world, but those have childlike curiosity, who spend time with you and learn from You, to them You open the treasures of Your wisdom!***⁵

The history of the success of Christ's church depends on being a grassroots movement among those who are socially excluded, have only a basic education, are economically under-privileged, but open to learning and improving their lives.

When Jesus invited people to follow Him, it was never to exclude anyone, neither the religious leaders, nor the rich and famous, the intellectuals and the

⁵ Luke 10:21-24 and Matthew 11:25-26

wise, but the invitation was open to everyone who wanted a relationship with God, on God's terms, not ours. After all, it was His invitation into His Kingdom.

It may seem like the religious leaders, the rich and famous, the intellectuals and the wise are winning; it may appear these powerful forces are successful in their tirade and crusade against God, but in the end the power of Truth and Love have always been too strong to overcome, even for the strongest of God's opponents and critics.

The only *religion* (if one wants to call a personal relationship with God through Christ, a *religion* - I don't; I prefer to call it a relationship, but let's stick to *religion* which is commonly understood) which has grown in every generation, is the one which professes Christ as the Saviour of the human race, who achieved this by sacrificing His life to break the bondage, the grip of death. And those who in every generation, add to the numbers witnessing God at work, are those who are childlike in their faith, wanting to explore and find out more about God and His plans and purposes, who acknowledge Him as the Author of Life and the only One who opens the door to His home, for life in eternity.

We can, each of us and all of us, accept God's invitation. Why some of us do and others do not, is something we cannot understand in this life. It is a gift which is offered, never imposed; and no one can ever know, who accepted and who turned it down. But the offer remains always open. It can never be withdrawn, it cannot be sold nor discounted on "sale", it cannot be stolen nor can it be earned by anything we do.

In the midst of the greatest pressure you face in life, whatever it may be, praise God our Father, the Lord of Heaven and earth, and thank Him for revealing His Wisdom to you, even when all the wisdom of the world does not make sense.

The Christian life is about our confidence in the relationship we have with God, and is seen in our life of prayer. As this confidence grows, God gives us voice to praise Him, and He gives us a heart to listen to His voice, He tells us where to go, whom to serve, and He will use His blessings to us, to bless those around

us. He has confidence in each of us; should it not, therefore, be natural for us to reciprocate and have confidence in Him, and confidence in our relationship with Him?

Let's thank Him for this, this morning.

AMEN