

Three Thoughts on Prayer

17 And as he taught them, he said, "Is it not written:

"My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations'? But you have made it 'a den of robbers.'"

18 The chief priests and the teachers of the law heard this and began looking for a way to kill him, for they feared him, because the whole crowd was amazed at his teaching.

19 When evening came, they went out of the city.

20 In the morning, as they went along, they saw the fig tree withered from the roots.

21 Peter remembered and said to Jesus, "Rabbi, look! The fig tree you cursed has withered!"

22 "Have faith in God," Jesus answered. 23 "I tell you the truth, if anyone says to this mountain, 'Go, throw yourself into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart but believes that what he says will happen, it will be done for him. 24 Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours. 25 And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins."

Mk 11:17-26 NIV

In a span of 10 verses in Mark we can learn three things about prayer.

First, Jesus is very passionate about God's house being a house of prayer. Prior to verse 17 we see Jesus going into the temple complex and throwing out those buying and selling at the temple.

In the Gospels, we see Jesus doing amazing things in subtle ways. He says "Come" and enables Peter to walk on water. He says "Talitha kum" and a 12 year old girl rises from the dead. He says, "Pick up your mat" and a paralytic is healed. In countless other instances he speaks but a few words and miraculous things happen. But in Mark 11 we find Jesus being more physical than he normally is. No words are recorded prior to his dispersal of merchants. Just action. Perhaps it is because no words can express the passion Jesus displayed for God's house.

A house of prayer.

Is this how we feel about God's house? Today, we don't have a temple but we have God's church. Is our church a house of prayer? Perhaps it's just a social club where friends meet and talk. Perhaps it's a political rally or a movie where we come to be enthralled or entertained. Perhaps it's a museum where we view relics we once valued but now largely forgotten. Perhaps it's a charity ward where we come to have our physical needs met but offer nothing in return. Perhaps it's a library where we come to learn but not necessarily change.

A house of prayer. Is this our passion? How much are we really like Jesus in this way?

Second, Jesus told his disciples that they could throw mountains in the sea through prayer if they have the faith. It would seem then that it would be an understatement to say that a prayer uttered with faith is powerful. It is one thing to pray and quite another to pray with faith.

A prayer offered in faith requires an understanding of God. How can one pray in faith without being familiar with the power of God and being confident that the request is consistent with the will of God? If a person truly knows God, how can he not offer a prayer in faith?

It would seem then that the presence of faith in our prayers speaks volumes about the quality of our relationship with God.

Third, Jesus explained that a time of prayer is a time to forgive. Often our prayers are centered on our needs and problems. Sometime we remember to praise God and give thanks (usually after we feel guilty about asking so much, or prior to making requests as we want to flatter God first before asking him for anything). But how often do we forgive when we pray. How often do we resolve our hurts against people as we pray?

It would seem that as Christians there should really be no bitterness or grudges. For if we pray daily, we should daily forgive. The hurts of the previous day should not carry over into the next. It's not enough that they be forgotten, but they must also be forgiven.

Do we have a daily habit of forgiveness?

It should be easier to forgive as we pray. As we approach God in prayer we come to terms with our own sins. If we ask God for forgiveness, how can we not also forgive? It seems this is the part of the Lord's prayer we often forget.

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