

The Importance of Prayer and the Word for Spiritual Health

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A few weeks ago, I spoke about the importance of having faith in Jesus Christ to a young woman who is trying to mend the broken pieces of her life back together. She told me that she doesn't believe though she has tried to have faith. Every time she prays for something it doesn't happen so she doesn't have confidence in prayer. I want to speak about prayer and the fact that God is not one to be tested by someone saying, "If you are real, then do this or that." If you read the New Testament, you will find examples of the Pharisees and Sadducees doing this very thing. Even on the cross, people used this tactic to try to force Jesus to prove that he is the Son of God on their terms.

It was also Satan's tactic to destroy Jesus. In Matthew 3, God revealed to John the Baptist that Jesus is the Messiah. Jesus came to John to be baptized and as soon as He came up out of the water, the heaven opened, and God's Spirit came down on Jesus in the form of a dove. A voice spoke from heaven saying "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased." Following this event, Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil. Satan used the words, "If you are the Son of God, turn the rocks into bread." Jesus had fasted for 40 days and was hungry, so the suggestion was presented. Jesus used the Word of God "Man shall not live by bread alone" to resist the temptation of Satan. He then took Jesus to the holy city of Jerusalem and put him on a high place of the temple. Satan told him that if he is the Son of God then jump off and allow the angels to rescue him. Satan used Scriptures to back up this request but he misquoted the Scriptures in order to twist the meaning. Jesus answered, "You shall not put the Lord your God to the test." Satan then took Jesus to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world with all their splendor. He offered Jesus all the kingdoms of the world if he would just bow down and worship him. Jesus could have it without going to the cross was Satan's bargain. Jesus answered, "Be gone, Satan, for it is written, Thou shall worship the Lord thy God and him only shall you serve." In Matthew 27:40, people mocked Jesus and said, "If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross." They threw the words of Jesus back in his face reminding him that he had said that the temple would be destroyed, but he would build it in three days. The temple he spoke of was his body, but they interpreted it to mean the temple where they worshipped. In 70 AD that temple was destroyed also. The prophesy of "not one stone left on another" was fulfilled.

In Luke 11:29 and Matthew 12:39, people often asked Jesus for a miracle sign proving that He is divine. They demanded Jesus to prove to them that he was indeed the Son of God, the Messiah, and they would believe if he bent to their demands and beck and call. Jesus responded by saying that evil and sinful people ask for a sign. He told them that the only sign that generation would receive would be his resurrection. He would give them a sign, but one that they would not accept, his resurrection. He compared it to Jonah being in the belly of the fish for three days and three nights before he was again sent to Nineveh to warn the people of God's wrath that was going to be poured out on that city. The people repented and God changed his mind concerning destroying them.

As Jesus hung on the cross suffering untold agony, the chief priests, scribes and elders mocked him saying, "He saved others but he cannot save himself. If he is the King of Israel, let him now come down from the cross and we will believe him. He trusted in God; let him deliver him now, if he will have him; for he said, I am the son of God." Jesus could have called legions of angels to rescue him, but did not.

Jesus prayed, "Father forgive them, for they don't know what they are doing."

There is a right way to approach God concerning our requests. Communicate with God in prayer and follow the Word and you will find the right path and answers to your prayers.

Look at Genesis 18 and 19.

Abraham walked with God. He was called a "friend of God." God trusted Abraham because he obeyed God. When Abraham left his homeland as God had commanded, he took his nephew, Lot, with him. Lot was not of the same mindset as Abraham and when the herdsmen of Lot and the herdsmen of Abraham quarreled, Abraham spoke to Lot and suggested that they part company. Lot was given the first choice of the land and Abraham took whatever was left over. Lot chose the lush grassy plains that were next to Sodom and Gomorrah and Abraham took the mountain areas. God blessed Abraham and Sarah and promised them a rich heritage that would last forever including a son.

In Genesis chapter 18, the Lord came to Abraham by the oaks of Mamre while he sat in the tent door in the heat of the day. Three men appeared to Abraham and he invited them to share a meal. He asked Sarah to make some bread and instructed a young man to kill and dress a young calf and cook it. He brought some sweet milk and butter and presented the meal to the men while he stood by them under the tree while they ate. The Lord told Abraham that it was now time to fulfill the promise of a son for them. Even though Sarah and Abraham were old, God was going to give them a son. When Sarah heard that, she laughed as she was very old. However, God asked "Is there anything too hard for the Lord?" Sarah tried to convince him that she didn't laugh at his words, but she was told that she certainly did laugh, but she would soon be a mother. Isaac means "laughter" and he was born the following year.

Then God asked, "Shall I hide from Abraham the thing which I do seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him?" Look at verse 19 for it reveals the intimate relationship that God had with his servant. The LORD said, "I know him that he will command his children and his household after him and they shall keep the way of the LORD to do righteousness and justice; that the LORD may bring upon Abraham that which he has spoken of him." The LORD said that the cry of Sodom and Gomorrah was great and their sin was grievous. He had come down to earth to check it out to see if it was as bad as it appeared. If not, he would know. The men turned their faces and headed toward Sodom, but Abraham stood yet before the LORD.

Abraham knew that his nephew Lot and his family were in that city. He asked the question, "Will you destroy the righteous with the wicked?" He began to ask God for mercy. What if there are 50 righteous people there? Will you spare the cities for 50? The answer was "Yes". Abraham began the countdown, next 40, 30 20 and finally, 10. Would God spare the city if there were 10 righteous people? The answer was "Yes". God said, "I will not destroy the city if there are 10 righteous people found there." Sadly, there were not 10 people, but for Abraham's sake, God delayed the destruction until the angels escorted Lot, his wife, and two daughters out of the city. They were told to leave the city quickly lest they be consumed with the destruction that was going to fall. The sons-in-law were warned of the destruction, but they mocked and refused to leave. See Genesis 19:14. While the family lingered, the angels took Lot, his wife and two daughters by the hands and led them out of the city. The LORD was merciful to them. Lot's wife turned into a pillar of salt when she looked back to the city after being told not to. She loved this present world.

Faith comes from hearing and hearing from the Word of God. Romans 10:17. God chose preaching as an effective channel to cause people to respond to the message of salvation. There is no substitute. (Luke 16:27) When the rich man was in hell, he pleaded with Father Abraham to send Lazarus to bring water to cool his tongue. Abraham told him that he could not do that for the rich man had enjoyed luxury and comfort in his lifetime and refused to ease the suffering of Lazarus. The man then asked if someone would go and warn his brothers so they wouldn't come to this place of torment. Abraham said, "They have Moses and the prophets, let them hear them." He said, "No, Father, but if one went from the dead, they would listen to him." Abraham said, "Even if one goes from the dead, they won't be persuaded." That proved true when Jesus rose from the dead. There were many who refused to believe.