

For surely
I KNOW THE
plans
I have for
YOU,
says (the)
Lord...
TO GIVE YOU A
future
WITH
Hope.
Jeremiah / 29:11, NRSV

September 16, 2007

Today: Part III

Two weeks ago we began a sermon series that explored how we can prepare for heaven or lead a righteous life. Paul reminds us in Philippians 2:12 that we are to, “continue to work out our salvation.” We are to work towards, not because we are saved by works, but because our works are an expression of our faith. This is why we work towards heaven. In the first week we saw that God commands, the Apostles encourage and Jesus Himself made it His custom to go to church on a weekly basis. If we are to be called Christians we too should be in God’s house on at least a weekly basis in doing so we follow His command and we experience a little bit of heaven on earth because as we saw heaven is defined as being with Jesus and the church is the body of Christ. So when we are in church we are with the body of Christ we are with Jesus.

Last week we saw that we are to have a pure heart in Matthew 5:8. A pure heart or mind motivates us to live a life for God, which then leads to our actions, which God will judge, based on the law. We saw that when we actively oppose the law it is a sin of commission. We also saw that when we don’t do what we should it is a sin of omission such as in Matthew 25 where Jesus talks about when I was hungry you did not give me anything to eat when I was thirsty you did not give me anything to drink. To sum up that whole section it can be summed up in three words; you did nothing. We also saw that our heart our mind will guide what we say. The Bible is clear we are not to use God’s name in vain and we are not to curse and we are not to swear because all of that is using God’s name in vain. We are also not to cuss or let any unwholesome talk come out of our mouths this includes gossip instead what we say or even write is to praise God and build others up.

Finally we saw that we are to do the right things we are to make our lives, lives of good actions. Again in Matthew 25 Jesus rewards those who when he was hungry give him something to eat when he was thirsty give him something to drink to sum up that section of Matthew 25 we can again do it in three words; you did something.

This week we will continue to look at how we are to prepare for heaven and lead a righteous life and we're going to focus on our prayers. What do we know about prayer? Well, we know this in Luke 18:1 Jesus told His disciples, "They should always pray and not give up." He then told them the parable of the persistent woman a widow who is particularly helpless and vulnerable because she has no family to uphold her cause. We don't know exactly what her problem was but she had an adversary and because she was a widow she had nothing that she could do on her own account to make her life better. Someone was probably taking advantage of her. Her only hope was to get relief through the court system but the judge was an individual who didn't believe in God nor did he care about men. In other words he had no respect for God's law and was unconcerned about the needs of others and really didn't care what people thought of him; sounds much like corporate America.

The scene that Jesus sets up would be like a homeless person seeking help from the CEO of a company like Enron a company that's not worried about taking care of others but taking advantage of others and making a buck off of it. Yet this woman continued to come day after day after day. Finally the judge says, "Even though I don't fear God or care about men yet because this widow keeps bothering me I will see that she gets justice so that she wont eventually wear me out with her complaining." What a worldly response I cant take it she's driving me crazy here let me take care of this I'll do this now go away. It really doesn't sound like sermon material does it? But that's exactly why Jesus used it so he could drop the bombshell. His very next words, "will not God bring about justice for His chosen ones who cry out to him day and night?" Jesus is doing a contrasting lesson here. Jesus is saying if a worldly judge will do the right thing out of annoyance how quickly do u think your loving God will act out of righteousness and love? But notice Jesus mentions the people who God will listen to it is those who cry out or pray to Him day and night. Jesus employs a classic strategy used by all college students on their term papers begin your term paper by introducing your thought; in this case, they should always pray verse 1. And then conclude with

your final analysis or confirmation of what you originally stated in your thesis statement. Notice it ends with the ones who pray day and night those are the ones who God attends to.

Am I taking this out of context? Is prayer really that important? Are we supposed to pray so much that it would be seen as badgering to a human? Is that how we come before the almighty God? Well Psalm 32:6 tells us, "Let everyone who is Godly pray." Again in the Old Testament Jeremiah the prophet of God says, "I know the plans I have for you declares the Lord. Plans to prosper you and not harm you. Plans to give you hope and a future then you will call upon me and come and pray to me and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart." God has plans for us. When we realize this we will do what? Jeremiah tells us we will call upon Him we will come to him we will pray to Him and how will we do this? With all your heart. This is not just a table prayer this is pouring out your soul to Him putting all your reliance on Him. In the New Testament we get the 1 Thessalonians 5:17, "Pray continually." 2 Thessalonians 1:11 Paul shows that it's his custom he says, "we pray constantly for you." Ephesians 6:18 we are to pray in the spirit in all occasions.

And similar to Luke 4:16 when we saw that Jesus' custom was to go to church we see in Matthew 14, Mark 6, John 6, Matthew 26 that Jesus made it a custom to pray. He prayed right after high moments like the feeding of the 5,000 in Matthew 14 everybody had to be pretty stoked after that Jesus went off by himself to pray. He also did it at solitary time such as in the early morning hours, which we see in Luke 4 and we see that he also went at times of great adversity such as in Matthew 26 Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. Like church attendance we are commanded in the Old Testament to pray. The apostles of the New Testament admonish us to pray and they themselves made it their custom and Jesus himself both tells us as we hear in the Gospel this morning and shows us that we are to pray because it was his custom.

Why is prayer so important? What comes from prayer? What can prayer do? Psalm 50:15, "Call upon me in the day of trouble I will deliver you. You will honor me." No matter where we are no matter what situation we're in God's there with us we can call on him and he will take care of us. Mark 9:29 Jesus is speaking to his disciples who have been trying to remove a demon. They can't do it. Jesus' response, "This kind can come out only by prayer." Through prayer

we have power over the demons we have power over Satan. Matthew 21:22, "If you believe you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer." If we come before God almighty in the name of Jesus Christ and we pray in His name and ask him for his will God's going to answer it each and every time.

Prayer its apart of preparing for heaven or living a life of righteousness which leads to the last Bible verse I have James 5:16, " the prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective." When it comes to prayer I think Del Tackett in the Truth Project says it best, too often Christians don't want to pray they don't have time but when you consider what prayer really is you are coming before the very throne of God you're there in the throne room with him because he is listening to us but more than that he is the one that says come to me all who are heavy burdened I will give you rest he's the one who says call on me come to me in the day of distress. He's the one who says come to me and say our Father. He's reaching his arms out and saying come to me my children come and talk to me I want to hear from you I love you. If that is truly your image of prayer whenever we pray it is a little bit of heaven on earth and if that is truly our image of prayer really would you ever want to stop?

In our Savior's name, Amen.