

Sermon Text for December 4, 2016

By Rev. Robert K. Bronkema

“Pray for what you need”

Interesting that what Paul thought he needed was to be able to go to Rome to see the Roman church. He does get to Rome, but in prison, not in the way that he had hoped.

How are the 5 minutes going? I want you to continue the 5 minutes and if you feel that it just isn't enough go ahead and spend 10 minutes. I hope you have been able to find a quiet time and a quiet place to fill yourself with God's presence. I hope I wasn't too hard last week but I believe so strongly that if you do not pray and if you do not have a consistent time to be with God then you do not have a relationship with God. Prayer defines our relationship with God.

If you are new here then you don't know that my normal style is to take a Scripture and then work my way through that Scripture. I very rarely speak topically, almost all that I say I try to have it come directly from Scripture. We are in a topic over Advent. That topic is prayer. It is an area in the life of this church that I feel we can and we need to improve upon. So, we are not only using Romans 1:8-15 where Paul speaks very directly, but not extensively about prayer. We are also using John Calvin's words of insight into prayer to help guide us along this Advent season. Advent is about Jesus coming back again to release us from this world. But if we don't know Jesus through our prayer time, Advent serves no purpose to us.

Let's hear again Calvin's 4 rules for conducting prayer in a right and proper manner. 1) Dismissing all foreign and external cares, by which the wandering mind may be hurried hither and thither, and dragged heaven down to earth. Basically find a quiet time and place, without distractions, to pray. That was last week. 2) Week two, that's today, we must pray for no more than God permits. Seriously consider our necessities of all that we ask. 3) Those who pray must relinquish all confidence in themselves. 4) We need to be animated to pray by the certain hope of obtaining our request.

Learning how to pray correctly is not something that you are born with or even that when you are saved God implants the prayer chip in your brain and heart. No, even Jesus' disciples who had prayed all of their lives approach him and ask in Matthew: Lord, teach us how to pray. Effective prayer must be taught. These Sundays you can consider yourself in school, in a biology lab where you are conducting research on how do we come to know and abide in Christ with all that we have. But don't wait until you think you have it all figured out before you put it into practice. You can read all the books and hear all the sermons that you want on prayer, but unless you actually start praying it is not

going to help you at all. Like the Nike commercial says, just do it. Just pray. Romans gives us some consolation in 8:26-27 read. Thank God, even our inability to pray is covered by God.

But Calvin does give us some very basic, simple steps, four of them, that if they are followed will lead us to a relationship with Christ based on prayer that is unmatched. Today we will learn that crucial to prayer is praying for what you need.

When the kids were growing up at dinner time we sometimes would take turns and the kids would pray. One evening it was Bethany's turn and she automatically went into her bedtime prayer mode. Thank you for this day, help us have a good sleep, Amen. The girls thought it was hilarious and one of them said, she prayed wrong, she didn't even pray for the food.

Have you ever thought of the theological implications of what it means if it is possible to pray wrongly? If prayer is our lifeline with God and we pray wrongly is that lifeline cut off? Calvin states that only sincere worshippers of God pray aright and are even heard. Look at James 4:3: You ask and you do not receive because you ask wrongly, in order to spend what you get on your pleasures. This verse speaks directly to our theme today. Do not pray just in order to amass pleasure or just to satisfy what your desire might be.

Here is what is at issue in praying not for what we need, but for what we want to satisfy our own pleasures. James here is speaking particularly of finances. I've heard people say that they don't believe in prayer because they have prayed to be millionaires and it hasn't worked yet. Remember when Moses and the Israelites prayed to be provided for and they were given enough food for one day? Some tried to hoard that food so that they could have more than the others, but God made it go rotten.

There is a theology in some churches that wealth is a sign that God is blessing you. So if the pastor drives a Cadillac you should go to that church because God will bless you like he did the pastor. Y'all are voting on my salary today...keep that in mind. Our Mazda is paid off, maybe we just might upgrade to a Cadillac. We pray give us this day our daily bread and if I'm not mistaken Jesus has some harsh words about a camel and a needle for those whose theologies of blessings are tied with wealth.

We pray for financial stability and we have a \$150 cable bill, we pray for healing and we are eating foods and taking part in activities that will kill us, we pray for our marriage and yet we continue to be unfaithful, we pray for our kids and we don't give them an example to follow or the time of day that they need, we pray for our jobs and we continue to talk behind the back of our co-workers. Are we really praying for what we need or are we just praying for damage control to what we have already done and continue to do?

How do we know what God permits, how do we know how to pray for what we need? David in Psalm 63:1 states: O God, you are my God, I seek you. The Hebrew tense is such that it really implies I constantly seek you. We ought to be constantly seeking God and trying to discern God's will in our life. In real prayer we begin to think God's thoughts, we begin to desire the things God desires, we begin to love the things he loves, we begin to will the things he wills.

We know what God permits because we allow ourselves to abide in Christ and to be silent and hear God's call in our lives. You know the words of John 15:7: If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. Whatever you wish, when we are one with Christ, what we wish will be what God wishes.

Have you ever noticed that you never find in Scripture Jesus, or the Apostles, or the prophets, or any person of faith for that matter praying: if it is your will, implying that they don't know what God's will is so basically it is up to God to do whatever. In Scripture there is no room for indecisive, tentative, half-hoping prayers. We ought to know what God's will is. If we don't know what God's will is, then we shouldn't be praying for an outcome, we should be praying for a revelation.

David prays for protection God protects him. The disciples pray for the release of Peter from prison and when he knocks on their door they are so overwhelmed that they forget to let him in. Jesus heals and performs miracles not with the words, I guess if it is God's will he will be healed but rather he tells the storm, be still, he tells Lazarus in the tomb Lazarus, come out.

Paul here in Romans tells the people that he is not only praying for them continuously that their faith might be strengthened, but that he might also one day come to them. He does, in the form of prison, but he does. The King of Nineveh prays to God that his wrath would be stayed and even makes the animals wear sackcloth, and they do and God relents and changes his mind. People of prayer are people of faith and when people of faith pray, they pray with confidence knowing what they need. People of faith who are abiding in Christ know what the will of God is before they pray. The biblical characters show us that we need to be so immersed in the Holy Spirit that when we are encountered with a specific situation we know what should be done.

Jesus when he is in the garden prays to have the cup removed, but then he does not end it with, well, whatever you want Father, but rather: thy will be done and not mine. Can you imagine our Savior recognizing that at times our will, our desire conflicts with God's, of course. But it is when we pray for what we need, and when we pray for what God wants us to have that we are in God's spirit.

There needs to be a time and place in our prayers for discernment as to what God's will is. We discover what we need by praying. What is your will, what would please you. These 5 minutes allow us to pray that and be silent and watch the day unfold with an answer. Jesus went off to the mountain to discern God's desire.

Family, people of prayer, our relationship with God is defined by our prayer with God. We do not manipulate God, or tell him what to do, in fact it is quite the opposite, we are asking God to tell us what to do. I once heard someone say that coincidences happen much more frequently when we pray. Pray for what you need. Amen.