**Chapel Class**

**12.15.19**

**“Providence and Prayer: If God Already Knows, Why Pray?” Week 3**

REVIEW: Jesus intercedes for us *in heaven.* Heb. 7:24-25.

The Holy Spirit intercedes for us *from within*. Rom. 8:26.

“The Spirit takes what Jesus is praying and makes (causes) us to pray for it. The is how our intercessions re-echo the intercession of the great High Priest who appears in heaven for us. Then the secret will, known to the great High Priest and the Father is re-echoed in some way in our praying by the Spirit who comes from the Father and the Son. This explains how our praying on the basis of God’s reveled will begins to get in line with the secret will.” (cited in D. Kelly 65)

**The Silence of God: When God Appears to Say ‘No’**

* + 1. *“Besides, even if God grants our prayers, he does not always respond to the exact form of our request but rather seems to hold us in suspense. Nevertheless, in a remarkable way, he eventually shows us our prayers have not been in vain. This is what John’s words mean: “And if we know that he hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions we have asked of Him” (1 John 5:15).”*

*“Now this may seem to be a rather repetitive collection of words! But the assertion in fact is extremely practical, because it tells us that God, even when he does not comply with our wishes, is still attentive and kindly disposed towards our prayers. This means that any hope based upon his word will never disappoint us. So believers need to be patient, sustained by this truth, since they could not stand for very long if they did not rely upon it.”* Calvin, *Institutes* iii. 20.52

1. “Those things we have been pleading are not ultimately denied by God. Instead he gives us the true underlying intention of our prayer which was whatever the Holy Spirit was asking for within us…. Our mistake was that we interpreted the restriction he placed on our wants as being something he denied us. Yet the real blessing was conveyed in another form which perhaps prevented danger or trouble that would have resulted if we had received it in the form we first requested.” (B. M. Palmer sermon cited in Kelly, 138).
2. “When you struggle in prayer, you can come before God with the confidence that he is going to give you what you would have asked for if you knew everything he knows.” (T. Keller)

***What happens when God doesn’t answer our prayers or doesn’t answer them right away?***

1. Other things have to happen first. Gal. 4:4

Luke 18 context: the coming of the kingdom in Luke 17. God waits until the time is ripe;

“God will not delay one moment longer than necessary" (Andrew Murray)

Activity behind the scenes; prayer rearranges seen and unseen factors; God may not be ready to bring about those particular changes until we have prayed long enough for all the component parts to be in place. (Kelly)

1. Our sin. James 1:6-8; 4:3; Psalm 66:18
2. God’s sovereign purposes. Jesus’ prayer on Mount of Olives (Luke 22:42)

“When we pray on the basis of the revealed will, we are lining ourselves up with the person of God and thus with the secret purposes of God. His secret purposes are carried out through the praying of his saints on the basis of his revealed will on Scripture.” (Kelly 56-57)

***Why are answers to specific requests delayed so long?***

***How long are we to pray for a particular request or desire?***

*How long, O Lord, must I call for help?* – Hab. 1:2

*Save me, O God, … I am worn out calling for help. –* Ps 69:1, 3

* + 1. “We should be willing to pray with temerity and perseverance, waiting months and even years for God to answer some things.” T. Keller 236
    2. “Our prayers for an unbeliever to turn to Christ or for a straying fellow believer to repent of his or her sin and to become obedient to the Lord should probably never cease as long as we have life and breath for we know that God loves to save and we know that it is his peoples growth in righteousness.” (J. Barrs 80)

1. What about health and such troubles in this world? We don’t know the precise nature of Paul’s thorn in the flesh (2 Cor 12:7-10). Paul prayed three times for removal – then stopped when he sensed God telling him that he would have to endure the thorn. His calling was to pray for grace to endure the thorn, to pray for God’s strength to sustain him in his ongoing weakness.
2. Here words of encouragement from Luke 11apply. Jesus promises that God always gives the Holy Spirit to those who ask him. That is true about our prayers for one another to endure trials and to grow in faith in and obedience. (J. Barrs)
3. “God may answer yes, no, not yet or beyond all that we ask or even imagine. When it’s obvious that God’s will is not to answer our prayer as we are offering it, then altering our prayer without doubting his goodness expresses our submission to his lordship and love.”
4. “We can always trust that the Good Shepherd has a perfect and loving plan for our lives. When our prayers reach a dead end the Bible assures us that God has a better path. We continue to pray in accordance with God’s will when we redirect our prayers to asking for his help to walk faithfully in the new path with confidence that he will never forsake us.” (B. Chapell, 151)

The ultimate answers are hidden in the wisdom and goodness of God, but Scripture offers some insight that may encourage us in hard circumstances.

1. One of the reasons we have to keep on praying is that in some mysterious way, Satan hinders our prayers. He is active in the unseen world but cannot not stop them from being answered if we continue with perseverance. See Daniel 10:12ff reference to ‘Prince of Persia’ (Kelly 123)
2. Prayers are never wasted. ILL: water mill – water into pond flow over dam into buckets to turn wheel. Our praying is like drops of water that fill pond to overflow and turn wheels (Kelly 125)

***How can we really believe that God is hearing and responding to us if he denies desperate, heartfelt requests?***

*Will the Lord spurn forever, and never again be favorable?*

*Has his steadfast love forever ceased? Are his promises at an end for all time?*

*Has God forgotten to be gracious? Has he in anger shut up his compassion?”—*Ps. 77:7-9

Paul MILLER:

* “I find that the closer my prayers are to the heart of God, the more powerfully and quickly they are answered.” 137
* “I often find that when God doesn’t answer a prayer, he wants to expose something in me. ... We are in dialogue with a personal Divine Spirit who wants to shape us as much as he wants to hear us.” 168
* “God takes everyone he loves through the desert. It is his cure for our wandering hearts, restlessly searching for a new Eden.” 184-5

* “When we don’t receive what we pray for or desire, it doesn’t mean that God isn’t acting on our behalf. Rather he’s weaving his story. … Watch for the story God is weaving in your life.” 187
* “When you persist in a spiritual vacuum, when you hang in there during ambiguity you get to know God.” 190
* “Sometimes when we say, ‘God is silent,’ what’s really going on is that he hasn’t told the story the way we wanted it told. He will be silent when we want him to fil in the blanks of the story we are creating. But with his own stories, the ones we live in, he is seldom silent.” 201

**PRAYER SUMMIT First Tuesday of month – starting Jan 7**

**6:00 – 7:00 p.m.**

**Facilitator: Tony Giles**

“Martyn Lloyd-Jones wrote, ‘There is nothing that tells the truth about us as a Christian people so much as our prayer life,’ meaning that our practice of the demanding, countercultural, invisible and uncomfortable work of prayer is an excellent test of our attitude toward the God who calls is to do it. The same could be said for churches. The local church tells the truth about her corporate spiritual condition by her practice of prayer together.” (Megan Hill)

“The Bible encourages corporate prayer because when God’s people unite their hearts they are more likely to encourage one another to pray, to examine the appropriateness of their prayers, to maintain their prayers and to express thanksgiving for God’s answers.” (Bryan Chapell, 115)

Each monthly session includes brief teaching on a different aspect of prayer, followed by guided prayer based on that lesson. Our aim is to “pray until we pray” (while ending on time)! Come join us!