

THE RED LETTER LECTURES

LEARNING TO PRAY FROM THE WORDS OF JESUS

Faith and Prayer

I. **Then the disciples came to Jesus in private and asked, "Why couldn't we drive it [the demon] out?" He replied, "Because you have so little faith. I tell you the truth, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you. " — Mt. 17:19-21**

A. **drive it out . . .**

1. Speaks of deliverance—expelling a demon from a person.
2. Demons are mentioned 71X in the NT.
3. How does possession happen? A clue may be found in *Dt. 32:17; Psm. 106:37*.
4. Are there such things as demons today?
5. If so, do we have power over them?
See Mk. 16:17-18.

B. **so little faith . . .**

1. Define faith. *See Heb. 11:1.*
2. Types of faith.
 - a. Great faith (Mt. 8:10).
 - b. Little faith (here and also Mt. 6:30).
 - c. No faith (Mk. 4:40).
3. What is the connection between prayer and faith? *See Jas. 5:15.*

NOTES

Prayer Quote: Depend upon it, if you are bent on prayer, the devil will not leave you alone. He will molest you, tantalize you, block you, and will surely find some hindrances, big or little or both. And we sometimes fail because we are ignorant of his devices. I do not think he minds our praying about things if we leave it at that. What he minds, and opposes steadily, is the prayer that prays on until it is prayed through, assured of the answer." — Mary Warburton Booth

p.p. Mk. 9:14; Lk. 9:37-42

Dt. 32:16-17: They made him jealous with their foreign gods and angered him with their detestable idols. They sacrificed to demons, which are not God—gods they had not known, gods that recently appeared, gods your fathers did not fear.

Psm. 106:36-37: They worshiped their idols, which became a snare to them. They sacrificed their sons and their daughters to demons.

Mk. 16:17-18: And these signs will accompany those who believe: In my name they will drive out demons; they will speak in new tongues; ¹⁸ they will pick up snakes with their hands; and when they drink deadly poison, it will not hurt them at all; they will place their hands on sick people, and they will get well."

Heb. 11:1: Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.

Jas. 5:15: And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up. If he has sinned, he will be forgiven.

C. ***as small as a mustard seed . . .***

1. A proverbial phrase meaning the least, the smallest particle.⁹
2. Black mustard seed is native to southern Europe along the Mediterranean Sea and has been cultivated for thousands of years. It is believed to be the mustard seed mentioned by Jesus. *See photo in margin.*
3. The amazing fact about this little seed is that it could grow into a plant that could reach some 10 feet high. Birds are very fond of the little black mustard seeds it produces. A cloud of birds over a mustard plant is a very common sight. In fact, the full-grown wild mustard can overgrow the space allotted to it and often overcrowds the other garden plants next to it.
4. The kingdom of heaven is compared to a mustard seed. *See Mt. 13:31-32.*

D. ***move from here to there . . .***

1. A proverbial statement meaning to remove great difficulties. *See Isa. 40:4, 49:11, 54:10; 1 Cor. 13:2.*

E. ***Nothing will be impossible for you.***

1. In context, this refers to the accomplishment of the works of the kingdom for which they had been given authority.

F. Paraphrase of Mt. 17:19-21, from *The Message*:

When the disciples had Jesus off to themselves, they asked, "Why couldn't we throw it out?" Because you're not yet taking God seriously," said Jesus. "The simple truth is that if you had a mere kernel of faith, a poppy seed, say, you would tell this mountain, 'Move!' and it would move. There is nothing you wouldn't be able to tackle."

NOTES

⁹ Zodhiates, p. 1291



Mt. 13:31-32: He told them another parable: The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field. Though it is the smallest of all your seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and perch in its branches.

Isa. 54:10: Though the mountains be shaken and the hills be removed, yet my unfailing love for you will not be shaken nor my covenant of peace be removed," says the LORD, who has compassion on you.

1 Cor. 13:2: If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.

**II. Early in the morning, as he was on his way back to the city, he was hungry. Seeing a fig tree by the road, he went up to it but found nothing on it except leaves. Then he said to it, "May you never bear fruit again!" Immediately the tree withered. When the disciples saw this, they were amazed. "How did the fig tree wither so quickly?" they asked. Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, if you have faith and do not doubt, not only can you do what was done to the fig tree, but also you can say to this mountain, 'Go, throw yourself into the sea,' and it will be done. If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer."
— Mt. 21:18-22**

A. *he was hungry . . .*

1. The humanity of Jesus.
2. Fig trees grow all over Israel and their fruit is delicious right off the tree.
3. Fig trees do not produce their fruit until the fall. This was Passover season, which was in the spring.

B. *nothing on it except leaves . . .*

1. Fig trees do produce a small, edible fruit that appears in the spring before the sprouting of the leaves, but this tree had no fruit at all.¹⁰

C. *May you never bear fruit again!*

1. Was Jesus expressing angst against a fruit barren fig tree or was there a deeper truth by this action?

D. *Immediately the fig tree withered . . .*

1. The deity of Jesus displayed and a lesson given.
2. The withering of the fig tree illustrates God's judgment on unbelieving Israel. See Lk. 13:6-9.

NOTES

Prayer Quote: The prayer power has never been tried to its full capacity. If we want to see mighty wonders of divine power and grace wrought in the place of weakness, failure and disappointment, let us answer God's standing challenge, "Call unto me, and I will answer thee, and show thee great and mighty things which thou knowest not!" — J. Hudson Taylor

¹⁰Nelson's, p. 1180.

Lk. 13:6-9: Then he told this parable: "A man had a fig tree, planted in his vineyard, and he went to look for fruit on it, but did not find any. So he said to the man who took care of the vineyard, 'For three years now I've been coming to look for fruit on this fig tree and haven't found any. Cut it down! Why should it use up the soil?' " "Sir," the man replied, "leave it alone for one more year, and I'll dig around it and fertilize it. If it bears fruit next year, fine! If not, then cut it down." "

NOTES

3. Does this message have any application to the church? To you? *Read Jn. 15:1-8.*

E. ***if you have faith and do not doubt . . .***

1. Faith works miracles and is the basis for answered prayer. *See Heb. 11:6.*

F. ***If you believe, you will receive . . .***

1. A person does not increase belief by trying harder to believe but by increasing the object and content of belief.
See Rom. 10:17

2. This is why we need to know the will of God in order to believe effectively.
See Jer. 9:23-24; 1 Jn. 5:14-15.

3. Where do we find the will of God?

G. Paraphrase of Mt. 21:18-22, from *The Message*:

Early the next morning Jesus was returning to the city. He was hungry. Seeing a lone fig tree alongside the road, he approached it anticipating a breakfast of figs. When he got to the tree, there was nothing but fig leaves. He said, "No more figs from this tree—ever!" The fig tree withered on the spot, a dry stick. The disciples saw it happen. They rubbed their eyes, saying, "Did we really see this? A leafy tree one minute, a dry stick the next?" But Jesus was matter-of-fact: "Yes—and if you embrace this kingdom life and don't doubt God, you'll not only do minor feats like I did to the fig tree, but also triumph over huge obstacles. This mountain, for instance, you'll tell, 'Go jump in the lake,' and it will jump. Absolutely everything, ranging from small to large, as you make it a part of your believing prayer, gets included as you lay hold of God."

Heb. 11:6: And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.

Rom. 10:17: Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ.

Jer. 9:23-24: This is what the LORD says: "Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom or the strong man boast of his strength or the rich man boast of his riches, but let him who boasts boast about this: that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight,"

1 Jn. 5:14-15: This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us—whatever we ask—we know that we have what we asked of him.

LUTHER'S PRACTICAL PROGRAM TO REVIVE YOUR PRAYER LIFE

The German Reformer, Martin Luther, taught that prayer should be living, powerful, strong, mighty, earnest, serious, troubled, passionate, vehement, fervent and ardent.

Luther described prayer as: "The hardest work of all – a labour above all labours, since he who prays must wage almighty warfare against the doubt and murmuring excited by the faint-heartedness and unworthiness we feel within us...that unutterable and powerful groaning with which the godly rouse themselves against despair, the struggle in which they call mightily upon their faith."

"Audacious prayer, which perseveres unflinchingly and ceases not through fear, is well pleasing unto God," wrote Luther. "As a shoe maker makes a shoe, or a tailor makes a coat, so ought a Christian to pray. Prayer is the daily business of a Christian."

REFORMING PRAYER

In 1535, Luther wrote and published: "A Simple Way To Pray," dedicated to his barber, Peter Beskendorf. His barber had asked him for some guidelines on how he might improve his prayer life. In response, Luther wrote this 35-page book which became so popular that 4 editions were printed that first year alone.

Martin Luther has been described as one of the most dedicated men of prayer in all of history. The historical records show that Luther prayed for 3 to 4 hours each day. In the 16th Century, the Church of Rome had buried Biblical prayer under layers of institutional, mystical and theological error. Prayer for most in the 16th Century was a mechanical, religious rite, a legalistic work, requiring little thought. Luther worked hard to reform prayer. He spent long, solitary nights in fervent prayer and fasting.

GUIDELINES FOR PRAYER

In "A Simple Way To Pray" Luther wrote: "First, when I feel that I have become cool and joyless in prayer, because of other tasks or thoughts (for the flesh and the devil always impede and obstruct prayer), I take my Psalter, hurry to my room...and as time permits, I say quietly to myself and word for word the Lord's Prayer, The Ten Commandments, The Apostles Creed and ... some Psalms...

"It is a good thing to let prayer be your first business in the morning and the last at night. Guard yourself carefully against those false, deluding ideas that tell you, 'wait a little while. I will pray in an hour, first I must attend to this or that'...Those

who work faithfully, pray twice...Christ commands continual prayer: ask and it will be given to you, seek and you shall find; knock and it will be opened to you...pray without ceasing... we must unceasingly guard against sin and wrong doing, something one cannot do unless one fears God and keeps His Commandments...we become relaxed and lazy, cool and listless towards prayer. The devil who besets us is not lazy or careless, and our flesh is too ready and eager to sin and is disinclined to the spirit of prayer.

“When your heart has be warmed by such recitation to yourself (of The Ten Commandments, the Words of Christ, etc)...Kneel or stand with your hands folded and your eyes towards Heaven and speak or think as briefly as you can.

“O Heavenly Father, dear God, I am a poor, unworthy sinner. I do not deserve to raise my eyes or hands toward You or to pray. But, because You have commanded us all to pray and have promised to hear us and through Your dear Son, Jesus Christ has taught us both how, and what, to pray, I come to You in obedience to Your Word, trusting in Your gracious promises.”

Luther recommended that our prayers be numerous but short in duration. Luther taught that we should pray: “Brief prayers...pregnant with the Spirit, strongly fortified by faith...the fewer the words, the better the prayer. The more the words, the worse the prayer. Few words and much meaning is Christian. Many words and little meaning is pagan.”

The Lord’s Prayer and the Psalms were tools which Luther considered most important for any Christian’s prayer life. “A Christian has prayed abundantly who has rightly prayed the Lord’s Prayer.” The Lord’s Prayer is the model prayer of Christianity and it is not essentially a prayer of one individual, but a common prayer that binds all Christians together, uniting us with all believers, past, present and future, whether in Heaven, or on earth, in a Biblical Kingdom focused prayer.

PRAYING THE PSALMS

Luther taught that praying the Psalms brings us: “into joyful harmony” with God’s Word and God’s Will. “Whoever begins to pray the Psalms earnestly and regularly will soon take leave of those other light and personal little devotional prayers and say, ‘Ah, there is not the juice, the strength, the passion, the fire which you find in the Psalms. Anything else tastes too cold and too hard.’”

STRUCTURE PRAYER

Luther also recommended that we structure our prayers according to The Apostle’s Creed and the Catechism, to connect doctrine and devotion. He also recommended praying according to The Ten Commandments, meditating on

each item as instruction, thanksgiving, confession and petition. By meditating on the instruction, giving thanks for the blessings that flow from these principles, confessing where we have personally failed in obeying and applying these commands, and as petition to being able to honour and obey God's Word in our daily lives, would revive our prayer lives.

SPIRITUAL WARFARE

Luther lived daily exposed to what he called the "Anfechtung," the unbridled, vicious assault of Satan. At times, it seemed as if the whole world was against him, as well as the flesh and the devil. In the midst of this spiritual warfare, Luther's enriching approach to prayer strengthened him. The Apostle's Creed, The Lord's Prayer, The Ten Commandments, The Catechism and the Psalms deepened and focused his prayer life.

In his preface to the "Larger Catechism," Luther wrote: "We know that our defence lies in prayer. We are too weak to resist the devil and his vassels. Let us hold fast to the weapons of the Christian; they enable us to combat the devil... our enemies may mock at us. But we shall oppose both men and the devil if we maintain ourselves in prayer and if we persist in it."

OUR FIRST PRIORITY

Luther recommended a set time for personal devotions, early morning or at night, and warned against postponing them for any "more urgent business."

FLINT FOR THE FLAMES

He thought that one should see The Ten Commandments as a school textbook, a songbook, a penitential book, and as a prayer book. He advised that that one take The Ten Commandments as one's structure for prayer on one day, a Psalm or a chapter of the Holy Scripture for another day, and use them "as flint and steel to kindle a flame in the heart."

PRAYING THE LORD'S PRAYER

"A Simple Way To Pray" gives some examples of the intercessions Luther was inspired to pray on the basis of The Lord's Prayer: "Hallowed be Thy Name. Yes, Lord God, dear Father, Hallowed be Your Name, both in us and throughout the whole world. Destroy and root out the abominations, idolatry and heresy of all false teachers and fanatics who wrongly use Your Name and in scandalous ways take it in vain and horribly blaspheme it...Dear Lord God, convert and restrain them... restrain those who are unwilling to be converted so that they may be forced to cease from misusing, defiling and dishonoring Your Holy Name and for misleading the poor people. Amen.

“Thy Kingdom Come. O dear Lord, God and Father, convert them and defend us... so that they with us and we with them may serve You and Your Kingdom in true faith and unfeigned love and that from Your Kingdom which has begun, we may enter into Your eternal Kingdom. Defend us against those who will not turn away their might and power for the destruction of Your Kingdom so that when they are cast down from their thrones and humbled, they will have to cease from their efforts. Amen.

“Thy will be done on earth as it is in Heaven. O dear Lord, God and Father, You know that the world, if it cannot destroy Your Name or root out Your Kingdom, is busy day and night with wicked tricks and schemes, strange conspiracies and intrigues, huddled together in secret counsel, giving mutual encouragement and support, raging and threatening and going about with every evil intention to destroy Your Name, Word, Kingdom and children... for Your sake gladly, patiently and joyously enable us to bear every evil, cross and adversity, and thereby acknowledge, test and experience Your benign, gracious and perfect Will...

“Give us this day our daily bread. Protect us against war and disorder. Grant to all rulers’ good counsel and a will to preserve their subjects in tranquility and justice. O God, grant that all people be diligent and display charity and loyalty towards each other. Give us favourable weather and good harvests...

“Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. O dear Lord, God and Father, enter not into judgment against us because no person living is justified before You. Do not counter it against us as a sin that we are so unthankful for Your ineffable goodness, spiritual and physical, with that we stray so many times each day. Do not look upon how good or how wicked we have been but only upon the infinite compassion, which You have bestowed upon us in Christ, Your dear Son. Amen. Also, grant forgiveness to those who have harmed or wronged us, as we forgive them from our hearts...we would much rather that they be saved with us. Amen

“Lead us not into temptation. Keep us fit and alert, eager and diligent in Your Word and service, so that we do not become complacent, lazy and slothful as though we had already achieved everything. In that way the fearful devil cannot fall upon us, surprise us and deprive us from of Your precious Word or store up strife and factions among us and lead us into other sin and disgrace...

“And deliver us from evil. This wretched life is so full of misery and calamity, of danger and uncertainty, so full of malice and faithlessness... but You, dear Father, know our frailty. Therefore help us to pass safely through so much wickedness and villainy...”

WARM WHOLEHEARTED WORSHIP

Luther warned: "I do not want you to recite all these words in your prayer. That would make it nothing but idle chatter and prattle. Rather do I want your heart to be stirred and guided concerning the thoughts, which ought to be comprehended, in The Lord's Prayer. These thoughts may be expressed, if your heart is rightly warmed and inclined toward prayer, in many different ways than with more words or fewer... listen in silence, and under no circumstances obstruct them. The Holy Spirit Himself preaches here, and one Word of His sermon is far better than a thousand of our prayers. Many times I have learnt more from one prayer than I might have learned from much reading and speculation."

He warned against: "A cold and inattentive heart", teaching that prayer required "the full attention of all one's senses and members... concentration and singleness of heart..."

SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINE

Luther taught that in praying through The Ten Commandments "I think of each Command as first, instruction , which is really what it is intended to be and consider what the Lord demands of me so earnestly. Second, I turn it into a thanksgiving; third a confession ; and fourth a prayer ."

He taught the importance of Spiritual disciplines, including solitude, silence, listening, meditation, journaling, praying and obeying.

DEEPER DEVOTION

May God be gracious to use the example and teachings of Martin Luther to revive our prayer lives, to discipline, sharpen and focus our prayers in a Biblical and Kingdom focused way. As we work through The Lord's Prayer, The Ten Commandments, The Apostle's Creed, The Psalms and The Catechisms, may the Lord be merciful to revive our prayer lives, deepen our devotional lives, and use us more effectively for the extension of His Kingdom and for His eternal glory.

"Lord, teach us to pray..." Luke 11:1

The Greatest Century of Reformation, by Peter Hammond

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