

June 7, 2020

Worship?

"Therefore, I urge you brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is our reasonable act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind..."
Romans 12:1-2

"They devoted themselves to the Apostle's teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer."
Acts 2:42



Prayers, as we have often discussed before, is our direct and constantly available connection through conversation with our loving Father in heaven. At any moment we can carry our concerns and our fears and our joys to a Father who is always there. And, we can access through our prayers his overwhelming power.

Ultimately, the effectiveness of our prayers, both personally and organizationally, is a direct reflection of the depth of our faith. Jesus told his disciples, ***"I tell you the truth, if you have faith and do not doubt, not only can you do what was done to this fig tree, but also you can say to this mountain, 'Go, throw yourself in to the sea,' and it will be done. If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer."*** (Matthew 21:21-22)

It is so, so hard for us to get our minds around this promise from Jesus to those of us who follow him. It is hard for us, I think, in a number of ways. First, it is hard for us to believe that God can, in fact, deliver on this promise. We struggle to comprehend the kind of power that can deliver whatever we ask because there are so many things that we know are beyond our own limited capacities and we struggle to believe that God is not similarly limited.

The events recorded by Luke in Acts 12 are a great example of this very struggle to believe. King Herod has arrested James, John's brother, and put him to death which pleased many of the Jews. Peter is also arrested and held for trial until after the Passover. The church, we are told, ***"...was earnestly praying to God for him."***

During the night before his trial an angel delivers Peter from jail and he makes his way through the dark streets to Mary's house. When he knocks on the door, the servant girl who answers leaves him there and rushes to tell the believers who praying earnestly for Peter's delivery that he is outside the door. These same believers then tell her that she is crazy. Like us, these believers struggled to believe in the possibility of answered prayers.

Second, asking God for anything demands that we surrender the how and when and where of the answer to him. Most of our prayers are, I am sorry to say, founded in our efforts to control not only the outcome, but also the way in which our Father must answer those prayers.

Jesus, in his 'Sermon on the Mount', asks, ***"Which of you, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him."*** (Matthew 7:9-11) When we ask our Father and God for anything we must understand that what he will do to answer those prayers may not always be what we had in mind.

The simple truth is, we are, on some level, afraid of what our good and loving God might have to do to answer our prayers. In these chaotic times I have seen a number of prayers begging God

to intervene in this pandemic and heal this world. I believe that our God is already working to answer those same prayers in his way, in his time, and ultimately for his glory.

When we pray for deliverance most of us are thinking in terms of something magical. But when our good God answers prayers he is doing so just as a loving parent would answer a child's requests...in the best possible way. Do I believe that God will deliver us from this pandemic? Absolutely!! Do I believe that God will deliver us miraculously as I might think he should? Probably not!

Finally we all struggle to see the answer to our prayers when we receive them. Jesus' promise is that God will provide whatever we ask. Like the perfect Father he is, God will always shape his replies in a way that is best for us. All faithful prayers are answered perfectly by our perfect Father.

