

The Paradoxes of Prayer

03 - Your Provider

Church in the City | 15 May 2022 | Glen Gerhauser

Text: “But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you” (Mt 6:33, NASB).

Theme: Prayer is full of paradoxes—seeming contradictions that are only resolved if we pray in the Spirit.

Intro: Today’s message is inspired by two events this week. First, we made a call to prayer at our Bible School, but we were struggling to pray. Through this experience, I realized we needed a renewed emphasis on prayer. Though I’ve taught on prayer in the past, there’s a new group of disciples among us. And it’s always good to not take for granted that we know how to pray as God intends.

The second thing was a conversation I had with Gideon. This week we went out for lunch, and he was concerned that my talk about ‘not worrying’ could be misinterpreted. He mentioned the Parable of the Ten Virgins (Matt. 25:1-13). Five of the virgins didn’t care. They weren’t worried about the future, and so when the Bridegroom came, they had no oil for their lamps. How does Jesus’ teaching about worry marry with his parable about the Ten Virgins? For example, in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus tells us not to worry about tomorrow, but then later on in Matthew, he teaches us to be concerned about tomorrow. Before I begin to answer this question, I want to say that these are the types of exegetical questions we should be asking ourselves and the Lord. It’s called rightly divided the Word (2 Tim. 2:15).

1) Keep watch but don’t fall into the trap of worry (Matt. 25:13; Matt. 6:33).

- Jesus concludes his teaching about worry with a call for seeking first the Father’s Kingdom and his righteousness.
 - Jesus teaching about worry and anxiety is not like what I heard from Anna Palaszczuk this week. But before I mention it, I want to pay my respect for all her hard work during a very difficult for our state, Queensland.
 - As the floodwaters were rising for a second time this week in Queensland, she said, “Do not be anxious.” And she called everyone not to worry.
 - However, Jesus’ teaching about worry is different than a human call ‘not to worry.’
 - Jesus offers the ultimate solution: HIS KINGDOM.
 - That’s why Jesus calls us to seek the Father’s Kingdom first.
- Jesus calls us to watch in prayer (Matt. 25:13; 26:41).
 - Watching is different than worrying.
 - What is watching?

- ‘Watch’—*gregoreo* in Greek—means to be alert, watchful, fully awake and vigilant.
 - Watching and praying means you are spiritually alert, seeing what the Father wants to do and how the enemy seeks to oppose it. Watching causes your prayers to be meaningful.
 - And this highlights the dangers of sin. Jesus forgives sin, but sin still dulls the soul. Now it's a battle to get back to spiritual alertness.
 - The Holy Spirit will help you to take back the ground lost. But then the battle is on a personal level, and you're not able to properly pray for others until you regain the ground lost.
 - In other words, you're spending all your time at the laver washing when you could be spending time in the Most Holy Place before the Ark.
 - Therefore, Jesus tells us to “watch and pray so that we fall not into temptation” (Matt. 26:41).
 - It's by watching in prayer that we guard our future.
- The good news is when Jesus calls us to watch, he is calling us into the Father's watchfulness.
 - The Father is watching over our lives. And prayer calls us into God's own watchfulness.
 - We see God's watchfulness in one of the classic word plays in Jeremiah.
 - “The word of the LORD came to me saying, “What do you see, Jeremiah?” And I said, “I see a rod of an almond tree [sha-KED].” Then the LORD said to me, “You have seen well, for I am watching [sho-KED] over My word to perform it” (Je 1:11–12, NASB).
 - In Hebrew, ‘almond tree’ and ‘watch’ are spelled the same way.
 - The only difference between them is that they are pronounced slightly differently.
 - The point of this whole vision is that Yahweh is taking care—watching over Jeremiah—to perform his Word. And Yahweh is doing the same for all his children.

2) Pray in the Spirit to unite the paradoxes of prayer (Rom. 8:26-28).

- We don't know how to pray as we ought.
 - Authentic prayer depends on the Spirit. Let the Spirit lead to pray right.
 - Praying in the Spirit cannot be faked.
 - However, religious praying—Pharisaical praying—can be faked because it's man's words rather than the Holy Spirit praying through you.
 - To pray as a church, we need to all be in the Spirit together.

- As Christ's body sails on the wind of the Spirit, those who are spiritually immature learn to pray through the community.
 - Praying in the Spirit takes the miracle of grace in action.
- What do I mean by the paradoxes of prayer?
 - Prayer calls for both silence and crying out, waiting and speaking up.
 - Prayer calls for rest and also warfare.
- This week I made a new infographic to help us pray and to aid us in teaching others to pray.
 - Show infographic: How to Pray: Seven Facets of Biblical Prayer (<https://www.brisbanefire.com/infographics>)
 - Notice the different paradoxes in this infographic.

3) You can't rush Kingdom growth, but you can water the Kingdom through prayer (Matt. 13:31-32).

- Psalm 13 highlights the paradoxes and frustrations of this life.
 - But if we understand God's ways, it will help us be patient and persevere.
- How long? Psalm 13 is small. It's only six verses, yet it says 'how long' four times. With all God's precious promises, how long will this thing take? The Kingdom takes time on this earth. You can't rush it. Like a mustard seed, the King's Kingdom grows at its own rate. But we can seek the Kingdom first, watering its growth. Yes, many times we will say, 'How long?'. Nevertheless, be sure that the Kingdom will grow and become the largest plant in the garden (Matt. 13:31-32; Psalm 13).

Conclusion: Authentic, watchful prayer is Jesus' solution to worry. It's the kind of prayer that seeks the Kingdom first and is empowered by the Holy Spirit. You can't rush the Kingdom growth, but you can water the Kingdom by Spirit-anointed praying.