

Prayer

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Preacher: Chris Fry

[0 : 00] What's your reaction to a week of prayer? Excited, curious, puzzled? Or maybe you're just unmoved or indifferent, bored?

! And all of those reactions I'm sure will be present in this gathering this morning!
Perhaps for many people, you might be in the latter category, unmoved or indifferent and bored. A week of prayer! What is the point of a week of prayer?
Shouldn't we be sort of out there doing something, using our gifts and facilities, praying?
That's the first day when the Amex Stadium was open?

[1 : 31] And it just happened that Brighton was playing at home this afternoon. And it just happened that you had a few hours to spare.

And it just happened that you wandered into this building to kill the time. I think in an interesting way, you would find quite a few things with which you might be able to connect.

If you're keen on football, you might be a student of the game. You know the rules, you know the offside rule.

You know the players, you know the history. You know the predictions of the pundits. You would study the game.

And maybe, maybe if you came through that door and sat in this seat at this particular time, and I pick up this book, you might say to yourself, well, in some sort of way, these people seem to be looking into history and maybe some rules to get better understanding.

[2 : 44] If you're a football supporter, it may be the one time in the week when you sing at the top of your voice.

You cheer your team on. And it may be that you come here today that this might be the one time in the week when you sing a song. You might be impressed by the enthusiasm with which we sing. And after the match is over, you meet for a drink. And after we finish this meeting, we will also have tea and coffee.

And we will talk to each other. And we will rejoice. And we will sorrow together. Just as Brighton and Ovalvian will rejoice in a victory and sorrow over a defeat.

But the one thing that you would find most perplexing if you were to come in as a football supporter this morning is the person at the front saying, Shall we pray?

[3 : 51] What a moment that would be in the Amex stadium, wouldn't it?

If over the last speaker system came the message, Quiet. Let's pray. Revival.

At this point, you might struggle to find any connection. You search hard for any memory of this in your life.

And you can't find any. Prayer is odd. And it's weird. And it's unlike anything else. And that's what we're going to be thinking about this morning. and why because I'm very keen to make you interested to make you want to know more and to encourage you to pray because prayer is for everyone it's not a specialist sport it's not for a few gifted people prayer is for everyone from the very youngest to the oldest we can all pray just hold the thought for that this moment just to think about that idea that we can all pray whatever kind of person we are whatever background we have whatever physical circumstance we can all pray and if you do not pray you are missing out on a fundamental of what it means to be a human made in God's image now turn to the Bible Luke chapter 11 and verse 1 it's on the screen one day

Jesus was praying in a certain place when he finished one of his disciples said to him Lord teach us to pray just as John taught his disciples the second verse gives a real prayer it's actually a prayer that Jesus taught the disciples and it's one of the most well-known Christian prayers of all time but we're not going to look at that prayer this morning we're just going to look at this particular verse

and try to get ourselves into the shoes of that disciple and to see the scene as that disciples saw it we're just going to linger with that to try to make sense and get encouragement for what's taking place the behavior of Jesus what's going on in the followers mind it's interesting that Jesus who says very clearly in one place when you pray go into your room close the door and your father will see you in secret although he did do that and quite repeatedly and often in the Bible record there are quite a few occasions when the prayers of Jesus

[7 : 29] Jesus are audible to those who are around him he could have separated himself he could have put himself into that quiet place even at that seminal prayer of Gethsemane in the garden of Gethsemane on the night before he died that prayer which is so prominent in the Bible record even then he prays in a place where the disciples his followers could actually see him gospel writer says it was just a stone's throw beyond where they were so this disciple had heard Jesus prayers there's an example of Jesus prayer in chapter 10 the previous chapter and verse 21 Jesus had sent out 72 others we know later these are disciples and he says in verse 21 when they have come back and they've reported to him the great things that God has done it says at that time Jesus full of joy through the Holy Spirit said I praise you father Lord of heaven and earth because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned and revealed them to little children yes father that this was your good pleasure and he goes on then it says in verse 23 he turned to his disciples that they heard him pray that prayer although it was extremely personal prayer they heard him pray the prayer and so this disciple has heard the prayers of Jesus who is this disciple of Jesus he's nameless he's just one of a number but someone familiar enough with Jesus to get close and ask him a question quite brave perhaps someone who had been near Jesus for a while because this particular time is well into the ministry of Jesus he has already been hard at work in a public way for many months maybe this disciple is one of those who was sent out in chapter 10 one of those one of those 72 but we don't know his name and we don't know anything more about him and in a way that's rather good because we can say of this particular person he's nameless so any of us can identify with him he's just called a disciple and I want us to think a little bit about what it means to be a disciple because throughout the New Testament the gospel record this word disciple is used the word Christian is not used here in fact the word Christian doesn't come until much later in the early church as a kind of a nickname but he's a disciple so let's think about a disciple what is a disciple it might mean a follower but it actually means more than that a follower can be like a sort of a groupie just someone interested someone who's on the surroundings who's looking on maybe for entertainment and there were plenty of people in the time of Jesus who were followers like that interested to see what would happen next the next miracle the next extraordinary provocative statement

but in the gospel record here the idea of disciple means more than that it means a learner it means a learner a teacher and a learner and we know what he's learning because he is not just any disciple but he's a disciple of Jesus he might have gone after someone else he mentions in this verse that there were disciples who learnt of John that's Jesus's cousin called John the Baptist but he is not a disciple of John the Baptist he's a disciple of Jesus this man is a disciple of Jesus this man is a disciple of Jesus he's listening very carefully to Jesus words he's watching Jesus behavior because he wants to learn and he wants to be like him later on another disciple of Jesus put that experience in this way he says that's which we have heard which we have seen with our eyes which we have looked at and our hands have touched he's speaking of Jesus and Jesus was that close to that disciple that he said we saw him we heard him we touched him these disciples of Jesus were that close to him and they were mightily impressed in fact they were transformed by the experience Christians Christians are disciples of Jesus because although we can't see and touch him physically we may know him as well and as truly as these first disciples we are learners of Jesus Christ so that we might be like him so if you're a Christian put yourselves in this man's shoes this morning but I like this thought that this man is a learner of Jesus and you may not categorize yourself this morning as a Christian you may not think of yourself as a Christian but you can be a learner of Jesus all of us has to make a first step a start and Jesus is saying come come close to me come and listen come and watch come and learn become a learner of Jesus and Jesus would also say to each one of you this has nothing to do with your background nothing to do with your age nothing to do with your nationality it is just that you are a human being and he invites everybody to come and be a learner a learner of Jesus it would be wonderful if you were to go away from this place this morning and put your hand up to this and say I want to be a learner of Jesus secondly

learners of Jesus want to pray this disciple wanted to pray he had that in him already he had surely prayed before it was not unusual in those days this is one of the surest clearest marks that you are turning a corner in your life when you find it in your heart to pray the prayerless person becomes a prayer a prayer we are it's one of the most beautiful and striking marks of the work of God in someone's life when they utter a prayer to God is there such an experience in your life would you like that sort of experience in your life would you like to become a prayer it's fundamental and it's necessary

I don't ask the question would you be happy to pray in a group because some people feel a bit frightened or embarrassed to do so but if like Jesus says if you were to go into your bedroom by yourself is it in your heart to pray to God if you don't find any desire like that I need to say you need to think again if you call yourself a Christian but do not pray you must question the reality of your relationship with God so what is this prayer well many have given very lengthy explanations but I'll suggest a short one to be going on with this morning here it is prayer is to speak to God and let God speak to you prayer is to speak to God and to let God speak to you and many people here might say there's a lot more to it than that and I would agree but this is a starting point this is a starting point it's not just being still although there can be prayer and stillness and it's not just meditating meditating although I'm sure that if we were to think about God's word we might also turn some of that into prayer prayer but it is about communication and communication within a relationship and this is what learners of Jesus want to do they want to pray they want to communicate with the God who has made them the God who has loved them and the God who in Jesus has saved them and they also want to hear from him because in the most wonderful and special way

God can speak to each one of us learners of Jesus want to pray better please notice what this disciple says Lord teach us to pray he has prayed before but he hears Jesus prayers and his reaction is well if that is prayer Lord teach me to pray this is a cry of every learner of Jesus when they get serious about spiritual life Lord teach us to pray this is the cry of every learner of Jesus when they realize their spiritual poverty

[20 : 11] Lord teach us to pray if wanting to pray is one of the best signs of early spiritual life wanting to pray better is one of the best signs of a growing spiritual life if you are quite settled and content with your prayer experience I suggest that you have probably stopped growing as a learner of Jesus fourthly learners of Jesus want to pray together the disciple speaks for himself but he speaks on behalf of all of them Lord teach us to pray us to pray we are together in this even when as Jesus recommends we go into our own room and cry out to God by ourselves we are still part of a group a body so Jesus responds to this one disciple with a prayer that actually covers all of us our father give us forgive us lead us do you see it there verses 2 to 4 we are in this together it is good for us to be praying in this week of prayer by ourselves and I hope that we can do that but even by ourselves we remember that we are part of a body we are praying for those things that concern us all so how good it is to actually be present in prayer together there is something extraordinarily right and necessary for us to pray together if you look in the book of Acts we won't look now at that but in the book of Acts which is the very start of the Christian church after Jesus had died resurrected and gone back to heaven the Christian church began on the day of Pentecost and it is really striking to see how those early

Christians are recorded as praying together in fact I struggle hard to find any instance in the whole of the book of Acts where there is prayer of one person by themselves it is almost like the Holy Spirit is putting his fingerprint on this and saying to each one of us do you realise this is what prayer is about you are part of a body you are part of a body you are part of a body even some of the most personal and traumatic experiences that we may go through are those that can in a very real sense touch the whole of the body because we are a unit we are together so I make this point this morning because we are going into a week of prayer and we do so together fifthly

Jesus is our best teacher about prayer he is the very best person in the whole world to teach us about prayer if ever this subject has puzzled you before and you might have looked at a bookshop maybe and just wanted to understand or gone onto the internet you know google prayer well I say to you today so pleased you're here so pleased you're here because I'm going to point you in the direction of the very best teacher about prayer it's the Lord Jesus Christ so when that disciple said Lord teach us to pray he asked a very powerful important and right question praise God he did because Jesus gave him an answer if you want to know about prayer you should learn of

Jesus and his experience of prayer his attitudes his words and his example and how blessed we are that we are not left ignorant about the prayer life of Jesus Christ because it's recorded for us in Matthew Mark Luke and John you can read it it doesn't tell you everything about the prayer life of Jesus because Jesus prayed a great deal more than is recorded in these gospels but the interesting point is that what is recorded in these gospels about the prayer life of Jesus gives us a very deep and helpful insight into the realities of prayer so when it's recorded here it's recorded not just that we might admire

Jesus but we might learn from him so that disciple might have been thinking as any good Jewish disciple might ask of any rabbi and teacher give us the rules of prayer Jesus tell us the rules of prayer now let's see let's see what is recorded in the gospel record about the rules of prayer so he might say when should we pray in some religions it's at certain points of the day but the gospel record says that Jesus spent a whole night in prayer and he certainly prayed in the daytime as well he prays at any time of day and night and we might ask how should we pray

[27 : 01] Jesus speaks of those Pharisees who stood on the street corners and stood to pray but it's clear that Jesus stood and kneeled and sat and on one occasion was prostrate on the ground and most shockingly of all at the moment of crucifixion dying on the cross he prays and what kind of voice should we use Jesus when we pray does it have to be a kind of a church like voice no in the prayer we read from chapter 10 it speaks of Jesus full of joy I can only imagine that when he opened his mouth to speak to his father it came bubbling out with enthusiasm!

Later on in the Gospel of Luke we read of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane says and being in anguish he prayed more earnestly and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground and then on the cross the moment of his dying he says with a loud voice Jesus called father into your hands I commit my spirit well Jesus how long should our prayers be and if you were to take this prayer in Luke 11 as an example you might say prayer must be very short but if you were to read the Gospel of John and to see the way Jesus prayed on the last night before his crucifixion you would see it takes a whole chapter where should we pray well actually anywhere alone and in a crowd all of which tells us there are no rules at least no physical rules because it's about a relationship a relationship to be enjoyed a relationship which is not to be restricted by time or space or emotions so in this record here in the

Bible of Jesus prayers we see him praising God giving thanks for bread and fish seeking God about important decisions like calling 12 disciples agonizing over God's will for him praying for all who were and will be his disciples asking God's forgiveness for those who are putting him to death and committing himself to God at the moment of his death so it's a good question for all of us to say Lord teach us to pray and it's a good answer of each one of us to become familiar with what is recorded about the prayers of the Lord Jesus Christ as we see his example we will learn and as we learn we will grow and as we grow we will pray here is a prayer oh

God please help me to be a learner of Jesus Lord teach us to pray shall we pray Lord Jesus Christ just refreshing and rehearsing in our minds this morning all those occasions on which you prayed and the thought that you who had been with the father in heaven from all eternity came down to earth lived as a man and called out to your father in life and in death how this strikes us and how this stirs us how this encourages us help us ourselves not to be rule bound help us rather to be refreshed in our relationship with you bless everybody here today we pray that all of us may be learners of

Jesus Christ Amen Amen