**Pray without ceasing**  22/1/23 dkm

Read: 1Samuel 12, James 5

Text: 1Samuel 12:23

Psalms: 34:1-9, 130, 18:1-10, 72old

Prayer marked the life of every faithful servant of God in the Bible, including and especially Jesus; intercessory prayer to be more specific. Intercessory prayer means praying or pleading on behalf of another. Do you prayers include intercession? You pray for your children I hope? You pray for people who are sick? A friend recently told me he was challenged to pray for his wife. The Bible tells us to pray for those in authority (1Tim 2:1, 2). We must not only preach the gospel to the lost, we must pray for them that they might be saved. If the lost are sick or hungry or in some other need we do what we can to heal or feed them, but even in healing their bodies we must pray for their souls.

As we look at some key verses in 1Samuel we come to verse 23 of chapter 12: ‘Moreover, as for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you’. Do you think your failure to pray for others is a sin against the Lord? Prayer is not easy, but we give up too easily. We make lack of time an excuse, but the truth is we fail to see the importance of prayer; we always make time for things that are important. A student friend of mine said he prayed as he walked to class each day but prayer requires our full attention- uninterrupted by traffic lights! I always close my eyes when I pray- except on Indian railway stations when watching that our luggage was not stolen! If you have an audience with the king or queen you will give them your full attention, so do not allow yourself to be distracted during your prayer time. And please do not distract others when they are praying during a church service; moving in or out of the building is distracting.

Before looking at Samuel in prayer, and moving on to Jesus and then the apostle Paul, let us briefly look at Abraham.

**1. Abraham**

Abraham was a man who believed in the Lord and obeyed the call of the Lord. He knew God as the ‘Most High God, possessor of heaven and earth’ (Gen 14:22), and ‘Judge of all the earth’ (Gen 14:22, 18:25). When the Lord told Abraham he was going to destroy Sodom, Abraham believed him, and interceded before the Lord on behalf of the righteous people living in Sodom; his nephew Lot was living there with his family. Abraham also prayed for Ahimelech, and God healed Ahimelech and his wife and his female servants (Gen 20:17). The words of James 5:16 come to mind: ‘The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective’.

Job probably lived in the same era as Abraham, although no lineage is given for Job in the Bible. Job was blameless and upright, a man who feared God and shunned evil. Job prayed for his children; we read that he would rise early and offer burnt offerings for each of his children in case they had sinned (Job 1:5). Should we not do the same for our children, namely intercede for them before the Lord. You probably pray that they have good health or that they do well in their studies, but do you pray for their salvation? You remember Job’s perseverance when afflicted, but do you remember how he prayed for his children. Job also interceded for his three friends when commanded to do so by the Lord (Job 42:8).

**2. Samuel**

Prayer is an essential part of a believer’s life. You cannot be a Christian and not pray. The prophet Samuel declared that failing to pray for the people would be a sin against the Lord (1Sam 12:23). When you think of sin, do you think of your failure to pray as a sin? Because the Ten Commandments are put in negative terms like, do not murder, do not steal, do not tell lies, and do not commit adultery, we tend to think of such things as the real sins. We might admit that coveting things belonging to our neighbour is sin. Ask someone in the street if they have sinned and they will claim not to have stolen anything or told many lies, or been unfaithful in their marriage. We call these sins of commission, doing things that God has told us not to do.

But what about sins of omission, of failing to do things that God tells us to do? There are many sins of omission. The Lord says to worship in spirit and truth- do we do this (John 4:24). Failing to pray is another sin of omission according to Samuel. Do you feel guilty when you fail to pray? I trust that as a believer you are in the habit of reading your Bible and praying every day. As a believer you will look forward to this time with the Lord each day. You will miss this time if you miss this time! The Lord will also miss this time of hearing your prayer. Those you usually pray for will miss you missing this time also because you will not have brought their name before the Lord.

I recently attended the funeral of a most humble and faithful Christian lady; she gave her life to prayer and missionary service. A nephew had turned away from the Lord at a young age, after both grandparents died, so he told me. He went on to tell of his conversion in 1991 when he was about 30 years old. This aunty asked him to drive her to church, so he heard the word of God. The next day the cassette player in his car broke, so he turned on the radio and heard a message about two ways to live. He knew he had to choose, and by the grace of God, and through the faithful prayer of this aunty over many years, this man came to faith in Jesus Christ.

So parents, aunties and uncles, grandfathers and grandmothers, keep on praying for the salvation of members of your family. And do not forget to pray for colleagues at work, and neighbours in your street. I urge you to say with Samuel, ‘Far be it from me that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for ……’- you can insert the name of someone you know! You probably pray for those who are sick, but Samuel was concerned that the people walk in ‘the good and upright way’ (1Sam 12:33).

Jeremiah was a prophet like Samuel in that he prayed for the people of Israel. We know this because the Lord had to tell him not to pray for them when they became so wicked and idolatrous that the Lord determined to give them up to their enemy (Jer 7:16). Some seventy years later, the prophet Daniel was reading the prophecy of Jeremiah and was moved to pray to the Lord. Do you find that reading your Bible helps you to pray? Sometimes we don’t feel like praying, but when we sit down and read our Bible it becomes easier to pray. In Daniel 9 we have a record of what Daniel prayed as he interceded before the Lord on behalf of himself and all the people of God who were in exile. Daniel prayed, ‘We have sinned’, before pleading forgiveness and mercy from the Lord, and in particular for the restoration of the Lord’s house and honour.

**3. Jesus**

Jesus is unique in that he is both God and man, but we still read of him praying to God his Father while in this world (Luke 6:12, John 17:1). From the beginning of his ministry, Jesus was in the habit of praying. He got up a long time before daylight and went to a quiet place to pray (Mark 1:35). One of the biggest decisions Jesus had to make was choosing his disciples. On this occasion he went to a quiet place and continued all night in prayer (Luke 6:12). Knowing that Satan was going to test Peter, Jesus said to Peter, ‘But I have prayed for you that your faith should not fail’ (Luke 22:32). I wonder if Peter remembered these words of Jesus. How wonderful it would be to know that Jesus was praying for me! Actually, he is interceding for us according to what we read in Hebrews 7:25: ‘He always lives to make intercession them’, for those who come to God through him.

Early on in his ministry Jesus taught his disciples how to pray, even giving them words to use. He told them to go into their room and shut the door and not use vain repetitions like the heathen (Mat 6:5-143). In the upper room where he celebrated the Last Supper with his disciples, Jesus prayed in their presence; we know this because John records what Jesus said in this prayer (John 17). This prayer is often called Jesus’ high priestly prayer because he prayed for his disciples and for all believers. Jesus initially prayed that his heavenly Father would glorify him, along with himself. He prayed this knowing that he would be on the cross the next day! His prayer for his disciples, and for us who believe, was that we might also bring glory to the Father.

**4. Paul**

The apostle Paul was a great missionary and preacher of the gospel, but was also a man of prayer. We know this because when writing to a particular church he starts by giving thanks to God for his grace towards them (1Thess 1:2). He writes of praying for them ‘always’ or ‘without ceasing’, and of praying in the Spirit (Eph 6:18). Paul was not above asking for prayer for himself, ‘that utterance may be given to me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel for which I am an ambassador in chains’ (Eph 6:19). Church leaders must not presume that they do not need prayer, and you must remember to pray for them, ‘that they may be given boldness to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ our Lord’.

Just as Paul prayed ‘without ceasing’, so he urges us, as fellow believers and members of Christ’s church, to ‘pray without ceasing, and in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you’ (2Thess 5:17). It is God’s will for you to pray, so if you fail to pray you are failing to do the will of God. This seems to be Paul’s way of saying what Samuel said, namely, that ceasing to pray is to sin against the Lord.

In prayer it is important to identify God’s blessings towards you and to thank him for these. In prayer it is important to identify your sin and confess your sin before the Lord. By failing to pray you are saying that you have no sin to confess, and no blessings from the Lord. In failing to pray you are showing yourself to be self-righteous and ungrateful.

James endorses the teaching of the apostle Paul when he writes, ‘Confess your sins to one another and pray for one another that you may be healed’ (James 5:16). Prayer is not a waste of time; prayer is not an optional extra for a true Christian. Pray is an absolute necessity is you want to walk in the ways of the Lord as a child of God. Before you give yourself to any ministry or any work, give yourself to the Lord in prayer. Let us all remember that the prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective. Remember the prayer life of Abraham, of Job, of Jesus, and of Paul.