

Prayer As Worship

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The title for today's sermon is "Prayer As Worship". So you might surmise that the subject is going to be about prayer, and yes, that's true, but as I continued the preparation for the sermon it began to expand beyond just that. That will become apparent as we go.

Let's start in Luke 11; with regard to the subject of prayer, I think we all realize we need to do it. It's interesting that every Christian tradition, wherever it's from, is quick to point out the need for prayer. It's a spiritual discipline, something we need to do. You go to a place like christianbookdistributors.com and you search the term "prayer", and you'll get all kinds of volumes about prayers in all different situations. There's a lot written about it and it's certainly worthy of our consideration. In Luke 11, you'll recognize the account.

Luke 11:1 *Now it came to pass, as He was praying [that is, Jesus was praying] in a certain place, when He ceased, that one of His disciples said to Him, "Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples."* (NKJV)

Prayer is evidently something that can be taught. There are basic situations and issues that we can discuss, and we might as well do it correctly. I assume if it has to be taught then maybe there is an incorrect way. At any rate, it's to be done. What did He say?

2) *So He said to them, "When you pray, say:*

Not if, but when, so it's something that is a part of our Christian experience, as I mentioned earlier. It's a spiritual discipline and something we need to make a part of our regular activity. When you pray, say,

2 continued) *... Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.* (NKJV)

One could say this underscores the fact that prayer is indeed worshipful, because we begin our prayer by pointing out that we are in tune and harmony with the one true God; He is our Father. Father implies family, children, and of course that has implications all across the fellowship. Hallowed be Your name—not some other. There is one true God and we are hallowing His name; we are acknowledging Him as our Creator, our Sustainer, the one who guides and directs us.

Your Kingdom come—see, there is another kingdom at work. How many times have you prayed, Thy Kingdom come? I reckon in my experience, over the course of fifty years or more, it mounts up into the thousands. I don't suppose we go through a meal, and when asking the blessing, we don't make some reference to the fact that we're

looking forward to the Kingdom of God: Dear God, won't You please relieve us of this current situation? We struggle pursuing God's way in a dominion that is not harmonious with the true God. Thy Kingdom—Your Kingdom come, Your will be done. There's a lot of options out there to the will of God, and it's something we have to diligently and deliberately pursue. Do it on earth as it is in heaven; how is that going to work? The will of God, in the main, is not being done on earth, yet He has called certain individuals to do the will of God; to do the work of God.

So there you have it, the beginning portion of instruction is all about worshipping God, acknowledging your place relative to God. I think that's an important thing. You may have all kinds of issues on your mind that you are seeking God's intervention for but the first step is to get ourselves right with God—that's the first step.

Then when we're in harmony and alignment with God and His purpose and place in the grand scheme of things, and our place in the grand scheme of things—He is Spirit, He is eternal, we are flesh, having this very little, short lifespan in which to work, and it's good for us to comprehend that—that we need to look to God for our daily guidance. There is no petition made here as to what might be on your mind in terms of the crisis of the day—those come and go pretty regularly, and there is always something we're dealing with, and somebody we know who has issues that need attention. So here it is, the opening salvo, if you will; it is a matter of harmonizing ourselves with God—the proper perspective we should have with Him as we go forward.

Then we get into other things.

3) *Give us this day our daily bread.* (NKJV)

God recognizes that we have needs—we're human beings after all. He created us that way, so we have to have our needs: Give us this day our daily bread. I don't think the average American would be happy with just the daily bread, right? We want the full smorgasbord, three times a day, and so many other things along with it. I think in Jesus' day this was probably the status quo, and the daily bread maybe wasn't quite so certain as we have it and experience it, in today's culture and society, where we have so much abundance.

Give us this day our daily bread; have you ever had to actually pray that God would grant your daily bread because you didn't know where it was going to come from? I've never been in that situation. Seventy-five years and I've never had to go to God and say, please, dear God, I'm hungry; would you please provide my daily bread? So what do you do instead? You express thanksgiving, then, don't you? That would be the appropriate response in a situation such as ours. I suspect in Jesus' day this was a critical issue: Give us this day our daily bread.

Forgive us our sins. What does that say? It says you will sin. God expects that you will come up short from time to time, and that those you know—loved ones, those we are in fellowship with—will also sin and come up short. Forgive us our sins. This is kind of a

sobering situation. Jesus looks at His disciples and realizes there will be shortcomings. We're dealing with human beings, we're dealing with creatures who need to be perfected, we're not there yet. Notice verse 4.

4) *And forgive us our sins, For we also forgive everyone who is indebted to us.*
(NKJV)

Forgiveness is not an option, it is something that is required of us. It's right here in the basic instruction. This is something you need to take note of from the very beginning, otherwise you're going to be somewhat shocked. You're going to encounter somebody who sinned—Jesus said right here that it's going to happen. Prepare for it; you will sin as well. There is a need for forgiveness back and forth. Just recognize it because it's a part of our existence. We are called into God's Kingdom but still living in the world dominated by the devil.

4 continued) ... *And do not lead us into temptation ...* (NKJV)

Elsewhere in scripture we recognize that temptation does not come from God; God doesn't test us that way.

4 continued) ... *But deliver us from the evil one.*" (NKJV)

Temptations are out there and I've come to understand a little better what this might mean. It's like we're thinking, I just don't have the willpower to overcome this, that, or the other thing. Brethren, it's not a matter of willpower. No, you don't have the willpower to deal with the devil. Our human frailties and shortcomings are of such a nature that there's no doubt some set of circumstances will cause us to cave in and we will be embarrassed by the outcome.

The key to the whole business is to not be tempted in the first place—to make some effort at avoiding the temptation in the beginning and then you don't have to worry so much about it. We pray that God would guide and direct us in that way but we need to be alert because the devil is always out there, providing an alternative to doing the will of God. You see it everywhere you go. And now, with the technology we have, we are constantly being bombarded with messages to distract us, to keep us away from doing the will of God. Willpower is weak, oftentimes it is. All of us probably have something or other we don't want to acknowledge, that where we are is a little short of God's expectations. That's probably what we're going to run into from time to time. It's good for us to recognize that. It's a basic instruction, the kind of thing we need to deal with.

Luke 11:5 *And He said to them, "Which of you ...* (NKJV)

We're going to talk about persistence now and the importance of that.

5 continued) ... *shall have a friend, and go to him at midnight and say to him, 'Friend, lend me three loaves;*

6) *for a friend of mine has come to me on his journey, and I have nothing to set before him*'; (NKJV)

So here again, we're back to: Give us this day our daily bread. Here's a good example of it. This fellow is out of bread; I don't know where he'll get tomorrow's bread but evidently he has wayfarers that show up in the middle of the night, and he has nothing to offer them. So verse 6 then says, friend, lend me three loaves. Late night hospitality was sufficiently supplied by three loaves of bread. That was the nature of the situation.

6 repeated) *for a friend of mine has come to me on his journey, and I have nothing to set before him*';

7) *and he will answer from within and say, "Do not trouble me; the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot rise and give to you"?* (NKJV)

Try to imagine the setting. From outside, the friend somehow gets the attention of his friend inside, then hears, "Do not trouble me, the door is now shut, my children are with me in bed, I cannot rise and give to you." Picture the main room of the modest dwelling. We take our straw mats off the wall and spread them on the floor and we're all gathered together there on the floor—the children don't have private bedrooms. It's a little different situation than the way we live today. Then it was, look, don't you realize how much trouble it is to get the children all bedded down, and everybody quiet at the same time and sleeping? Don't bother me! It's late, go away! Verse 8.

8) *I say to you, though he will not rise and give to him because he is his friend, yet because of his persistence he will rise and give him as many as he needs.* (NKJV)

Evidently he decides it's less trouble to give his friend what he needs than it is to have him hang around, pestering him, as it were. So that's the scene. He's using this to illustrate what? Verse 9.

9) *"So I say to you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.* (NKJV)

Certainly it's appropriate to seek, to ask, to knock, and it will be opened.

10) *For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened.*

11) *If a son asks for bread from any father among you, will he give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent instead of a fish?*

12) *Or if he asks for an egg, will he offer him a scorpion?* (NKJV)

That's an interesting little commentary here. Jesus is telling us a story to illustrate a point; then the conclusion, verse 13.

13) *If you then, being evil ...* (NKJV)

Uh-oh, back to this “forgive us our sins” thing. Let’s modify it and say, if you come a little short of what God expects, perhaps a good deal short, nevertheless, if you know how to give good gifts to your children,

13 continued) ... *how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!*” (NKJV)

In this particular account—Luke’s account—he’s very specific. For all of your seeking, finding and asking, he’s very specific about what it is you’re going to get in return, and what you’re going to receive is the Holy Spirit. There are other things of course that we have need of, obviously, from the commentary, but the priority is, in all of your seeking, knocking and asking, don’t forget the most important thing is the presence of God’s Holy Spirit. How much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him—it’s something you ask for? Have you ever noticed how the candle can burn rather dim from time to time? We need to stir it up, right? Stir up the spirit that is within you. It’s extremely important.

Here it is, in this particular account—we’ll see in a later account we’ll deal with other things. I always say to people, if you’re wringing your hands over some particular issue, whatever it happens to be, in my experience if it’s worth worrying about (grinding your teeth over, pacing the floor, losing sleep) if that kind of thing is occurring, then it’s worth taking it to God and asking for His help and guidance in the matter. Don’t fret, stew and fuss; take it to God and look to Him for guidance. That’s something we learn to do over time, and in the process we learn certain things.

Let’s go to chapter 18 now, another common reference to prayer. It’s the story of the widow and the unjust judge, what she does to get his attention, and how that might apply to us.

Luke 18:1 *Then He spoke a parable to them, that men always ought to pray and not lose heart ...* (NKJV)

Okay. *Always* to pray, regardless of the circumstances and the difficulties you may encounter. Don’t give it up, don’t lose heart. Brethren, it’s easy to lose heart, especially if we are focusing on our own abilities, on our own personal resources, to try and achieve whatever it is in life that we think we need to achieve. There will be times when we will be overwhelmed and there will be the potential of losing heart. If you have ever been in a situation, even temporarily, where you have lost heart, it’s not a particularly pleasant place to be. It’s rather depressing; we don’t want to go there if we can avoid it. So He said,

2) *“There was in a certain city a judge who did not fear God nor regard man.* (NKJV)

So what kind of a judge is this? He doesn’t fear God, doesn’t regard men, sounds like the kind of judge who would take a bribe. He’s not going to be influenced by God, not

particularly concerned about men—you want me to judge in your favor? Well, then, line my palm! He's dealing with a widow. The widow doesn't have the means to buy influence.

3) *Now there was a widow in that city; and she came to him, saying, 'Get justice for me from my adversary.'*

Evidently she has a good case but he's ignoring her because he isn't going to get anything for it—nothing extra because she doesn't have it to give.

4) *And he would not for a while; but afterward he said within himself, 'Though I do not fear God nor regard man,
5) yet because this widow troubles me I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me.'*” (NKJV)

We're back to the same basic principle. In the first instance, a man's friend comes to him late at night; everybody is all bedded down, so in order to get rid of him, he gives him what he wants. In this case, finding the judge who relents and says, I need to get rid of this woman, so we'll help her out. Notice verse 6.

6) *Then the Lord [Jesus] said, "Hear what the unjust judge said. (NKJV)*

What did he say? I will avenge her because she is wearying me. I don't even know how she managed to get access to him but somehow she did. So he decides to take her case and deal with it just so he can get rid of her.

7) *And shall God not avenge His own elect who cry out day and night to Him, though He bears long with them? (NKJV)*

If the unjust judge could eventually be convinced to intervene, what do you think about God when we come to Him with whatever issue we might have? Evidently a serious issue, one that evokes what kind of response from Him? *Cry out day and night to Him.* Most situations don't push us to cry out day and night, but there are those issues that do. If you're in that kind of state of mind, and you're crying out day and night, it's probably a pretty serious matter. God is aware. Jesus Christ says here,

8) *I tell you that He will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?" (NKJV)*

Alright, that's interesting—what is this? Could there be a little difficulty with understanding the idea of God bearing long with us, and yet on the other hand, avenging us speedily? I have this situation that has driven me to cry out day and night. God is bearing long with me—how long?—a week, a month, a year, two years, four years? When you take a situation to God, the kind that has pushed you to the place where you are crying out some measure of anguish, and it's a trying situation, you would like God to avenge you speedily—like right now. That's what we want, isn't it?

We take our petition to God and we want Him to avenge us speedily—provide my desire, my petition, right now. I'm in pain, I'm in anguish, can't you see that? Yes, God can see it. He is well aware of what you're going through and what you're dealing with. I don't have an answer for you—a nice, tidy little explanation of how that works but I have had a little experience with it. I'll try to illustrate the point this way.

Back a number of years ago, in 1976, through a series of unfortunate events—to make a long story short—I was terminated from employment in the Worldwide Church of God. So I found myself unemployed. So, what to do now? In the late winter of 1978, my wife and I took possession of a small farm up in northeastern Washington state, about 90 miles north of Spokane. It had twelve acres of apple trees, which was going to make our living. (During this struggle, as I talk about “we” and “us”, I'm referring to my first marriage, which predates Linda and me—we have a separate history.) Both of us had grown up in orchard country. My first wife grew up raising apples in Washington; I was raising peaches, walnuts and almonds in the San Joaquin Valley of California. So it was a nice fit. It's not like we were going back to something we weren't familiar with; we were literally going back to the land, if you will.

We take possession of this place and we weren't there long enough for the snow to melt, when it comes to our attention that the water rights for the property, through which we could irrigate, are non-existent—it's not there, no water. There's a well, there's a pipeline that brings water there, but the State of Washington owns all the water—everything. What water you have in the State of Washington, you have by the grace of the Department of Natural Resources. So this is a particularly difficult predicament because we paid an irrigated price for what turns out legally to be a non-irrigated farm. Do you think I'm going to cry aloud, day and night, and let God know, we have to get this settled? This is serious business, we've invested every last nickel we have in this place, and we have to make it work. So we made it through that first season—that first harvest—but we had a serious issue.

I went to the man who sold the place to me, explained the situation to him, and said, I have enough money to either pay you, or live and operate next year, but I can't do both. Well, you can borrow the difference. Not really—to go to the bank and tell them that the water rights aren't secure, I won't qualify to borrow anything. He looked at me like he could not have cared less—no, pay up or else. So I told him straight, I'm not going to pay you because that's the choice I have. What did he do? He filed suit. We'll get you, we'll take this to court, so I'm going to go before the judge and seek justice. I had to protect my interests and file a countersuit. This thing dragged on for three years more—over three years. It's one of those matters in which God has borne long with us—I've been there, I know what it is for God to bear long with one. Finally, He will avenge you speedily—finally we come before the judge. Sorry—you lose, fella. Buyer beware and pay up. Talk about crying aloud now.

Suddenly we're three years in arrears and this is back in the day, for those of you who recall, in late 1981 or early '82, when the interest rates were going up as opposed to going down (they are practically zero and negative today). The bank was willing to loan

me the money and we managed to get the water situation settled. The loan was at the prime rate, eighteen and a half percent, plus one and a half percent. So we were stuck with a twenty percent loan and that was the final nail in the coffin. Time out—is this the way God speedily avenges my case? How do can I deal with a situation like that? I was devastated. We're stuck—every last dime we own is there. So I go to God, and ask, now what would You have me do? I don't know the answer to this. As one looks at scriptures like this—He bears long—we're into our fourth year in this business. But He says, I will avenge you speedily. When it came, it came. The judgment went against us, I had to borrow \$20,000 at twenty percent interest—the final nail in the coffin. What's the resolution here?

Next question then: Are you willing to accept God's judgment? This is the thing you have to recognize. You could go to the scripture and say, but You said this or that. Before you take God into account, that is, you bring Him to account—remember that God is not on trial—we're on trial, God is not. God is secure in His place and in His work and what He is doing. We are the ones who have to conform to God's guidance and direction. Notice what it says in verse 8.

8) I tell you that He will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?" (NKJV)

Ok, the judgment has gone against you; does God find faith in you or not? What is faith, brethren? Are you familiar with the scripture in 2 Corinthians 5:7—for we walk by faith, not by sight? What does it look like to walk by faith? Walking by faith means you're faced with a situation for which there is no obvious answer. You do not have the resources or the strength available to you to even pursue a solution to the situation, and are totally and completely dependent on God. What do you think about that? Will the Son of Man find faith on earth when He returns? That becomes the question. Are you going to live by faith or tell God, this is it—if this is the best You can do, I'm going elsewhere. A lot of people have done that, frankly. If you're not happy with God, you go someplace else. That's a dead-end street; I don't recommend that approach.

God is willing and capable of working with us—dealing with us—and He will, but we have to be willing to trust God, to put Him first. Otherwise, where are we? Are we willing to trust God's judgment? So again, do I have faith? I thought surely this would be my final exam—this must be my final exam—I get through this and then we're smooth sailing the rest of the way, right?

As it turned out, at the Feast of Tabernacles of 1981, Art Docken and his family were in the Philippines. Art did a lot of the foundational work in the Philippines and everybody knew and loved him. They ran him all up and down the Philippines, to all of the different Feast sites, and lo and behold, he has a heart attack. He comes back to Omaha, Nebraska, and he's recovering, and meanwhile I'm stuck, scrambling, trying to resolve this issue. In the end, the church sends us to Omaha to assist Art while he is recovering from a heart attack. The long and short of it was we had to put the place up for sale

because there was no way we were going to get out of this, there was no way we could. There really wasn't any other option.

So go back to the scriptures—He bears long with them; nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth? He will avenge you speedily—What was the solution? Obviously God wasn't too concerned about prospering the apple-growing venture in northeastern Washington, was He? So what am I going to do? Am I going to accept this or am I going to say to God, too bad, I'm not doing it. That was an option but I'll tell you what, after four years of what we had been through already, I'm in a position where I really don't want to buck up against God's will. We've been dealing with this long enough.

So we ended up in Omaha, back in the full-time ministry again. We managed to sell the place and got just enough out of it to cover our obligations. We left Washington for Nebraska with little more than a good name, which is a lot, by the way. I could illustrate that point but I don't have time today. So do you have faith in God or not? Are you willing to accept God's judgment? Are you willing to let God sort things out for you?

How do we handle these trials? By learning to trust God. So we managed to get through it. The Dockens were there for another three or four months and then they were transferred to northern California, and lo and behold, I am now the pastor of the Omaha and Lincoln congregations. Five years down the line they give me Sioux City, Iowa, and the Mickelsons along with it, just for the fun of it. That's how we got acquainted, and who knew the downstream benefits or what the results of that relationship were going to be? Here we are together in Spokane, decades later. God sees the end from the beginning; you and I do not. It boils down to, are we going to trust God to see us through or not? He wants us to develop faith and trust in Him, and He will put us through the paces to do that.

I could have called Him to account, asked Him, what's going on here? He might have said, wait a second, what did I promise you? What did you read in Luke, chapter 11? Give us this day our daily bread. Did I give you your daily bread or not, He could have asked. And if I were to reply, whining, but I wanted more than that? Well, that's not relevant, especially in the kind of world in which we live, the industrialized part of the globe. We want more than our daily bread; that's just bred into us. God calls us out of that: I want you to be satisfied with what I give you because what I give you, eventually, is eternal life, which the world around you simply cannot offer.

We got settled into a new routine, thinking, surely there won't be anything more difficult than that to come along. It didn't for a while but there came a day—of course there was the whole issue of being downsized when the Worldwide Church of God went off the rails altogether and into the ditch—but there came a trial that paled into insignificance, essentially, to losing the farm, and that was going through a divorce. Without a doubt, as I look back on my fifty-plus years, that is without a doubt the most—how do I describe it?—the worst trial I've ever been through. The loss of my daughter to a brain tumor, after an eleven-year struggle, doesn't even come close. Time out—You're not

going to put me through this, are You? What about the trial with the farm? That wasn't the final exam, that was the mid-term exam, and there will be more small tests along the way. God wants to know, what are you doing—are you with Me or not? In all circumstances?

You'd think God certainly wouldn't put me through this, but He did. I went through the divorce, survived that; survived the death of my daughter. You think we didn't pray about that? He bore long with us, eleven years. Finally, when the resolution came, she died. Linda and I were keeping vigil with her husband, Dave, at the hospital here in Spokane, for three days or more. There just came a day, and it was over; we were just waiting for her to breathe her last. What am I going to do?

Am I going to call God into account because He didn't resolve the trial the way I wanted it resolved? It isn't about what I want. It isn't about what you want. It's about us getting into harmony with the will of God. Thy will be done. Not my will, not your will; we're to meet God's expectations. God isn't required to meet our expectations. That's just the way it is, and sometimes it can be difficult. There's comfort in knowing that God is in charge; He's guiding us, directing us, leading us in the way. Once again, we are to live by faith, not by sight. What does that mean? That means God is going to lead you into situations where you cannot see the solution, and it will probably be so traumatic that you will be crying out one way or another, day and night, seeking God's intervention—bring the remedy, bring the solution. We learn to trust God. That's the final end.

Surely that won't be any worse than what's coming down the line. Let me run up against the issue of the truth versus corporate religion. I didn't see that one coming, when suddenly there's more interest in preserving the status quo than there is in following the guidance of God as He reveals additional information about Himself, of all things. The record of God and Christ—how much more basic can you be? So we had to face that particular situation and the aftermath of that. Had I passed my final exam? Well, probably not. If I'd passed my final exam I would probably be in the grave awaiting the Second Coming, right?

I don't find it particularly helpful to sit around and speculate about what my next trial is going to be—no thanks. It's interesting, I don't have a nice, tidy little answer for you relative to the proposition of God bearing long with us on the one hand, yet avenging us speedily on the other. I can look only at my experience and say, okay, we have to learn to trust God's judgment—final word, that's it. What it does do for us, over the course of decades—when we've been through these kinds of trials and tests and God has seen us through, and we're beaten and bruised a little bit, maybe a lot, but nevertheless, as time goes on—we come to the place where we can have compassion for our fellow Christian, for our neighbor, for some poor soul anywhere in the world.

Jesus Christ died to take away the sin of *all* people, not just this little group we call the church of God. We learn over time to begin to take on the attitude of the one whose blood was shed for us. Let's turn to Hebrews, chapters 4 and 5, and let's note that. If you take a look at yourself in the mirror and picture what God has in store for us—the

end product—I characterize it this way: We're over here in the flesh and God is over here in the Spirit (He's eternal and it's His plan that's being worked out), how is God going to get human beings, in the flesh, temporary, air-breathing people, how is He going to get us over here, as full-fledged children of God, born into the very family? Siblings as it were with Jesus Christ—how is He going to accomplish that? It's a vast gulf in one sense, not possible by our own effort.

Hebrews 4:14 *Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. (NKJV)*

Hold fast our confession. That's interesting because indeed we have a confession, we have committed ourselves to God.

15) *For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. (NKJV)*

So Jesus knows what it is to face the challenges of the flesh, of being a human being—He's been there, He's done it. He ran the whole course and faced the same kind of temptations that we face, and so, as a result, He can sympathize with us. He's an advocate for us to the Father; He doesn't stand between us and the Father but is an advocate to the Father.

16) *Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need. (NKJV)*

Brethren, there will be a time of need. You're not going to escape it. You're going to face circumstances and situations where you are in need and it's going to require the intervention of the great High Priest to get you out of it. That's my experience. That's the scriptural record here. Then he goes on to describe the whole business of the high priest, speaking now of the human high priest.

Hebrews 5:1 *For every high priest taken from among men is appointed for men in things pertaining to God, that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins. 2) He can have compassion on those who are ignorant and going astray, since he himself is also subject to weakness. (NKJV)*

Once again, he's talking about the physical priest but he's going to make the crossover to Christ and how He's able to do the same. Ignorance, by the way, is not a terminal illness, right? There is a remedy to ignorance. If you're willing to accept it, if you're willing to take the medicine.

3) *Because of this he is required as for the people, so also for himself, to offer sacrifices for sins.*

4) *And no man takes this honor to himself, but he who is called by God, just as Aaron was. (NKJV)*

So this priesthood business is a direct calling of God.

5) *So also Christ [now he makes the transition to bring Christ into the picture] did not glorify Himself to become High Priest, but it was He [that is, God] who said to Him: "You are My Son, today I have begotten You." (NKJV)*

God the Father is the one who glorified Christ to become the High Priest, the one who said, You are My Son, today I have begotten You, quoting Psalm 110.

6) *As He also says in another place: "You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek";*

7) *who, in the days of His flesh [His body], when He had offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears to Him who was able to save Him from death, and was heard because of His godly fear,*

8) *though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered. (NKJV)*

A couple of things to note here. Jesus, as a human being—it was known from the beginning that there would be a Lamb, slain from the foundation of the world—He knew this; this was not a surprise. Now He's a human being, now He's in the flesh, as we are. So He is experiencing life as you and I experience life, and the day comes—in spite of His foreknowledge of the circumstances—that He comes to the hour and He is stressed beyond belief. "Father if it's possible, take this cup from Me." When He is nailed to the stake and about to breathe His last, He responds in quite a human way, as we heard in the sermon last week: My God, My God, why have you forsaken Me? Does God forsake His children in their hour of greatest need? No, He doesn't. But brethren, there are times when we have to drink the bitter cup. There are times when God requires that we press forward even though we don't see the solution, and so, in the case of Jesus, verse 7,

7) *who, in the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears to Him who was able to save Him from death ... (NKJV)*

But He didn't save Him from death. He was crucified, tortured, bled to death. The point is, saving from death doesn't necessarily mean not dying as we understand death—you stop breathing, your heart stops pumping blood and you die. Given to all men once to die, that's going to happen, that's what happens to fleshly human beings. Jesus died, He was resurrected, and if we don't live long enough, many of us are going to die and await the resurrection as well. But, again, He was able to save Him from death.

7 continued) *... and was heard because of His godly fear,*

8) *though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered. (NKJV)*

Was Jesus disobedient and had to be taught to be obedient? No, but He had to live the full experience. He never disobeyed but He had to live the whole experience from birth, to death, to resurrection, and then it can be said, He's been perfected.

9) *And having been perfected [He came to the completion of the task], He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him ... (NKJV)*

Obedience is necessary. Jesus was obedient even to the death on the cross. What does that say for you and me? What does God expect of us?

10) *called by God as High Priest "according to the order of Melchizedek," (NKJV)*

Once again, you have a situation where we see what Jesus went through and we see that He had to learn obedience, He had to be perfected. In His case it wasn't because He was disobedient—that's our case, we're disobedient and continue to sin from time to time. God doesn't reject us because we make a mistake, because we sin—where would we be? Jesus had to be perfected and that doesn't mean He was imperfect. It simply meant for Him, He had to complete the whole race. For us now—become you perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect. Really, how is that going to happen? By yielding ourselves to God and to God's will, following the example of Jesus Christ. Here we see that we have to be perfected. Once again, I don't have a nice, neat explanation for the difference between bearing long on the one hand and intervening speedily on the other. I do know this, that as time has gone on, over the decades, as we persevere with God, He gives us the ability, the compassion, to help others along the way. Isn't that what it's about? Of course. Then we have the responsibility to take the kindness that's been given to us and extend it to others. It's an interesting proposition.

I want to go back to Luke's account in chapter 14, and stop and consider, what did you commit to when you went into the waters at baptism? Do you remember? What was going through your head? What was the basic, standard approach of the church of God? You came to baptism and were counseled, you were ready to be baptized, but did you understand what this meant, did you recognize the magnitude of what you were saying when you entered into this covenant with God—this new covenant? Did you really understand? I look back on my experience, 1966, and, to the extent that I could, I understood, but I realized, as the decades went by, I had a lot to learn. There was a whole lot I didn't understand yet. In Luke 14:25, Jesus is preaching, there's a lot of red letters in this part of Luke, and He's preaching to the multitudes—He attracts crowds.

Luke 14:25 *Now great multitudes went with Him. And He turned and said to them,*

26) *"If anyone comes to Me [if you want to come to Me, here's what you're going to have to do] and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple. (NKJV)*

What kind of business is that? Are you kidding me? What about my responsibilities to my mother and father, to my wife and my children, my brothers and sisters, etc. etc.—

what about that? In most of the commentaries you'll read, they say the term "hate" means "love less by comparison". I often thought, if it means that why didn't they translate it that way? Nevertheless, what is He saying here?

27) And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple. (NKJV)

What does it mean to bear a cross? Read all three of the synoptic gospels, describe what it means to bear the cross, at least as Jesus experienced it. You want to enter into that kind of relationship—bear the cross? You're going to come after Me, you're going to have to pick up your cross, otherwise you can't be My disciple. So what's going on here? In spite of all the connections, all the obligations that we may have when God begins to interfere in our life, at some point in time we have to come to recognize that all that must be secondary, including my own life.

I can remember, I was single at the time, I was an Ambassador College student, I have no worries—bills are paid, I get three square meals at the dining hall (good food, too), didn't have to worry about doing my laundry, all I had to do was make my bed and get to class on time—it was terrific. How could I possibly understand what it meant, in full at least? To put God, to put Jesus Christ, ahead of my mother and father, my wife and children—I didn't have any wife or children. I had a brother, at college with me, sisters—how could I possibly understand it? I came to understand it when the day came when I had to choose between an eroded, dissolving marriage, and pursuing God; then it came home to roost, big time. Now I know what He meant. Verse 28.

28) For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not sit down first and count the cost, whether he has enough to finish it—

29) lest, after he has laid the foundation, and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him,

30) saying, 'This man began to build and was not able to finish.' (NKJV)

So what are we saying? We enter into a contract with God to finish the project. It's helpful if we count the cost, then when the painful decisions have to be made, we make them. So we do or we don't. There were a lot of people who wouldn't, when it came down to disrupting their family situation one way or another. There are those who did, who left troubled situations. I had friends at Ambassador College who tossed their suitcase out the bedroom window and followed it, and didn't look back because the situation was so hostile at their home, as they ventured out to pursue God's way. Where are all of them now? God knows. You get the picture here. I'm sorry, God is not going to exempt you or me from having to face the full project. There are no exemptions, no exceptions. When God comes, will He find faith on earth?

Chapter 6 of Matthew; a couple of points I think are important at this time, because, once again, what we're seeing is, and I think the point is, this goes beyond just the subject of prayer, doesn't it? What we see in scripture, if we take a close look, is prayer is worship, prayer is spiritual discipline and it's something that we do. Yet what we

come to understand is, if we are going to be perfected, if we're going to follow Christ's example, worshipping God goes well beyond the prayer closet. It includes our day to day living. We worship God in how we live our day to day lives, pure and simple. That is a part of the process, we come to understand that. We gather for church services and this is worshipping God, because it's a commanded convocation, and we come with those of like mind to share in the process and the experience, to fellowship together, and to comfort and encourage one another. In Matthew 6, this is a similar instruction as we read in Luke 11, but notice verse 6; we won't read the Lord's prayer again but I want you to notice a couple other points.

Matthew 6:5 *"And when you pray, you shall not be like the hypocrites. (NKJV)*

Brethren, hypocrites pray, so bear that in mind. Sometimes they're the ones who make the biggest deal out of it.

5 continued) ... For they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men. (NKJV)

I don't remember seeing anybody doing it quite that way, so as to bring attention to themselves. Nevertheless, if that is your approach, your desire—to bring attention to yourself—you'll probably get it and that's your reward, the end of it. Is that what you want? That would be pretty short-sighted.

5 continued) ... Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward.

6) But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly. (NKJV)

Why does He bring this up? Evidently there is some significance to going into a secret place or a common place—He calls it a closet, but wherever it is—closing the door, then it's You and me, LORD, just the two of us, and we'll deal with our issues. I've thought that through; what is the significance of that? I believe it has to do with a matter of priorities, in that we have to demonstrate to God through our actions, through our day to day life, that we're willing to put Him first.

I remember at Ambassador College when I really learned to pray—they were working us over constantly about getting our prayer in and making sure we did it—so I'm learning how to do that and you have to show up. So I make a date because if I didn't get it done, then the phone rings, someone knocks on the door, the mail comes—something happens—and suddenly you're through the day, and things are all mixed up, and you don't get it done. Well, you pray on the way to work—okay, I don't fault that, that's alright. You pray in the garden or whatever you're doing—changing the baby's diaper—there's nothing wrong with that either, but let's not let life get so busy that we don't have time to closet ourselves—you and me, LORD—with no interruptions whatsoever.

If I'm praying on the way to work, that might be appropriate, to pray for protection from traffic hazards and all of that sort of thing but you will have other things on your mind besides your communication with God. Not that those things are wrong, it's fine—pray all the time. What does Paul mean when he says pray without ceasing? I think it goes beyond just mumbling to yourself all day—thank you, LORD, for this, protect me from that—that sort of thing. I don't think that's the entirety of what he means. Pray without ceasing, twenty-four, seven; your life needs to be a living prayer, if you will. Our lives, our day to day experience in life, must be a worshipful experience.

7) And when you pray, do not use vain repetitions as the heathen do. For they think that they will be heard for their many words.

8) "Therefore do not be like them. For your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him. (NKJV)

Why ask then? God wants to know what's on your mind, He wants to know what's most important to you. What is your top priority? It gets complicated. You run into individuals who have complicated situations. You're a single parent with young children, you're trying to get time alone—yeah right, when will that happen? But you see, this is the whole issue. Husbands and wives, marriages, families, work, school, obligations at home, then one of the children gets sick—great, now what? It's a constant struggle to demonstrate that you are willing to put God first. It's a critical issue.

What's the main point here? The main point is, God is going to know, will there be faith when Christ returns? Ask yourself that question. Are you living by faith? Is your life a living testimony, an exact image of Christ and how He lived His life? God will test us, there will be difficulties; it's by much tribulation that we enter the Kingdom of God. The path to eternal life is straight and narrow, it's difficult, and difficult things are going to come. God will deliver us from all of them.

Prayer is a part of worship. Pray without ceasing goes beyond just prayer. It's how we set our priorities, it's how we conduct our daily lives. God is Spirit and God is looking for people who will worship Him in spirit and in truth. It's a day to day responsibility that we have, and one thing that God expects us to do, so we need to set our hands to do that. Let our lives be a living example, a worshipful example, of how we should relate to our God and our Creator.