

Hidden Treasure

On Sunday we launched a new sermon series called “Deepening Your Prayer Life.”

1. Warm-up Question: Sunday’s sermon began with a cartoon showing a little boy sitting on Jesus lap, talking to Jesus like Santa Claus, telling him all the things he wanted. If you found yourself sitting on Jesus lap like an uninhibited 8-year-old, what would you ask for?
2. As we launch this sermon series on prayer, our attitude might be, “Oh good, the preacher is going to tell me how to use prayer to get more of what I want!” Meanwhile, Jesus is probably saying, “How about instead I tell you how prayer can get you more of what you really need.” In life, we experience a rather profound push/pull between what we want and what we really need.

So Jeff began Sunday’s sermon by asking, “Are you a Level 1 or Level 2 person. Level 1 is the realm of circumstances. Level 2 is the realm of Spirit. Most of us are preoccupied with Level 1. We spend most of our time in prayer asking God to change our circumstances.

- a. Right now in your life, what’s a circumstance in your life that you’re asking God to change?
 - b. A Level 1 person is preoccupied with changing circumstances. A Level 2 person is preoccupied with strengthening his/her inner spirit. Which one do you tend to be? If you’re a mixture of both, what ratio of each are you right now? What should the ideal ratio be?
 - c. Jeff told the story of a woman whose son was arrested for drug dealing. She kept praying that God would keep him out of prison, get him sober, and help him to get a steady job. Nothing was changing. A friend encouraged the woman to think more deeply about what her son most needed – to find Jesus and peace in his life. So that’s what the woman began praying. At first, it didn’t seem to be working. Her son was angry with the world, was sent to prison, and went through agonizing addiction withdrawal. But in prison, he got involved in a Bible study, found Jesus, got sober, gained peace, served his time, then got out of prison and landed a job. As you heard this story, what thoughts or feelings did it evoke in you?
3. Take a look at the following Biblical promises:

“We are more than conquerors through Christ who loved us.” Romans 8:37.

“Whatever is born of God overcomes the world.” I John 5:4.

“The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds.” Philippians 4:7.

“May the God of hope fill you with all joy. . . .” Romans 15:14.

Suppose God offered you a choice and you could only pick one. Either: (a) all your circumstantial prayers will be answered; or (b) you can be filled with joy, peace that surpasses understanding, and the power to conquer and overcome the challenges of life, but without any change in circumstances. Which would you choose – and why?

4. Read what Jesus says in Matthew 13:44-46. Jeff defined the “kingdom of heaven” (and the equivalent phrase, “kingdom of God”) to mean . . . any space, large or small – past, present, or future – where God’s Spirit reigns.
 - a. By that definition, what does it look like for a person’s heart to be a kingdom of God? Given where you are in life right now, would you say that your heart a manifestation of the kingdom of God?
 - b. What is the primary point Jesus is trying to make in the two short parables we just read?

5. On Sunday, Jeff said Meditative Prayer is the doorway through which our hearts become a manifestation of the kingdom of God. He defined Meditative Prayer as . . . the process of soaking your mind in uplifting thought. Meditative Prayer is where we let God speak to us, instead of us speaking to God. Examples include singing or listening to worship songs, pondering a Bible verse or uplifting quote, listening to sermons or spiritual readings, daily devotionals, and contemplating religious art.
 - a. Read Psalm 63:5. What does that verse say to you?
 - b. Isaiah 26:3 says, “Thou wilt keep in perfect peace the one whose mind is stayed on thee.” What does that verse say to you?
 - c. Read Philippians 4:8-9. What does that verse say to you?
 - d. Over and over again, we ask God to give us peace, joy, and power. It’s one thing to keep asking for peace, but quite another to actually do our part to cultivate peace. What does it look like to cultivate peace, joy, power, etc., within us?
 - e. Jeff suggested that spending quality time in Meditative Prayer is the only way to turn our hearts into kingdom of God territory filled with peace, joy, and power. Do you buy that? Is Meditative Prayer the only way?
 - f. What is your favorite form of Meditative Prayer? How does it affect you?
 - g. As you hear others sharing their favorite forms of Meditative Prayer, do you hear any ideas you would like to experiment with?
 - h. Right now, what percentage of your prayer time is devoted to asking and what percentage is devoted to meditation (i.e., soaking your mind in uplifting thought)?
 - i. Do you feel you’re giving enough time and energy to Meditative Prayer? Why or why not? If not, what do you want to do differently?