

215 Take it to the Lord in prayer

“Take it to the Lord in prayer” as the old hymn puts it, to which Christian people will all nod in earnest agreement! But behind that agreement there is often rather more to it, for many of us can find the whole subject of prayer rather confusing, perhaps arousing in us feelings of failure or guilt. To be frank, are any of us content with our “prayer lives”? Can any of us, humbly but in the light of our experience, say “I know what I’m doing, I’ve got it sorted, I know how prayer works”?

There may be times when the doubts creep quietly in. Do our prayers really make God do something He would not otherwise have done? What about His overall plans coming to pass anyway, with or without my prayers? And who are we actually to pray TO? And whatever are we to pray FOR? We all know we should be praying, but quite what we should be praying, or how or where or when we should be praying – hmmm!

So much for the questions and doubts we all experience at times in our prayers: time now to roll our sleeves up for a good few reminders and encouragements! – for this time and in the next few Reflections, the Lord being willing.

First of all, whatever we may think sometimes, there need be no doubt that our prayers DO make a difference. The Lord is glad when we pray, welcoming us, hearing us, replying if we let Him, and weaving our often-feeble prayers into His gracious ways as He sees fit (eg., Romans 8.15 / Matthew 6.5-13); there is not a whiff here of some scowling headmaster angry at being interrupted! So that little voice we all come across – “You’re wasting your time here” – can be told to shut up, and the owner of that voice, “the father of

lies", can be firmly despatched in the victorious name of the risen Lord Jesus Christ (John 8.44). For no time spent in prayer is ever wasted, be it by us or by the Lord, and whether or not we feel "warmed" at the time or see "results" later on has very little to do with it (James 5.13-16).

We find prayer – that process of communication between the Creator and us, His sinners-redeemed - a constant theme throughout Scripture. Searching out the prayers of the patriarchs, the prophets, the kings, the Lord Himself and Paul and the young church, is very instructive. So if necessary we can change our "mindset" about prayer from "I suppose I should pray for a bit", to "Oh thank you Lord that I can now spend time with you in prayer!" – a small change of attitude perhaps, but one that can make quite a difference "just like that".

What is more, when we pray we are in very good company! Even if we are alone physically when praying (which is to be the "norm" in our individual prayer lives, Matthew 5.6), our prayers are being added not only to those of many fellow Christians, but best of all to those prayers which the Lord Jesus and the Holy Spirit are steadily lifting to God the Father on our behalf anyway (Romans 8.34 & 26-27). This is amazing. It means that when we pray, purely by God's grace we are caught up into both "the communion of saints" and into the very presence and workings of the living God Who has revealed Himself to be Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Next time we shall hope to consider how this revealed nature of Almighty God can and should affect our prayers.

Finally this time, we can make mention of the well-known "whole armour of God" of Ephesians 6, this being the required spiritual equipment for the Lord's people. The passage ends with – "Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all

perseverance and supplications for all saints ..." (verse 18, AV). These few words tell us so much about prayer! Prayer is to be in the context of the spiritual armour, as we remember that it is not a game or an occasional hobby. Prayer is "always"; it is earnest, serious, persevering; it is more concerned about the interests of the Lord and of others than about the interests of me.

What a gift. What a calling. What a privilege. What a responsibility. Indeed, "Lord, teach us to pray" (Luke 11.1).

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