

**“Prayer...Fellowship with God!”**

**1 Samuel 30: 1-6**

Dr. Richard J. Alberta  
 Cornerstone Evangelical Presbyterian Church  
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**1 Samuel 30:1-6 (NIV) <sup>1</sup> David and his men reached Ziklag on the third day. Now the Amalekites had raided the Negev and Ziklag. They had attacked Ziklag and burned it, <sup>2</sup> and had taken captive the women and all who were in it, both young and old. They killed none of them, but carried them off as they went on their way. <sup>3</sup> When David and his men came to Ziklag, they found it destroyed by fire and their wives and sons and daughters taken captive. <sup>4</sup> So David and his men wept aloud until they had no strength left to weep. <sup>5</sup> David's two wives had been captured--Ahinoam of Jezreel and Abigail, the widow of Nabal of Carmel.**

**<sup>6</sup> David was greatly distressed because the men were talking of stoning him; each one was bitter in spirit because of his sons and daughters. But David found strength in the Lord his God.**

This morning we begin an eight part series on prayer. This passage may seem a very strange place to start our study....the story of David nearly being stoned to death by his own men. What could this have to do with the topic of prayer? Well...actually, I think it might be bursting with clues as to the importance and wonder of a life of prayer. Again...the text says: **“But David found strength in the Lord his God.”** I think there is an entire sermon on prayer in this passage. A believing man finding strength in the Lord his God. But first, let *us* pray.

My father was born in Sicily. Now, that's of little importance to you this morning except that I'd like to mention two things implied in his European and Italian background. One, I'm pretty sure that I had a couple of Sicilian uncles that I cannot speak about. And two, because he was old school, he would often call us on Sunday afternoons and say “Where are you? Why are you not here with me? I've got some great steaks here and a bottle of red wine...so...when are you coming over?” Now, Donna and I were newly married and she found those calls sweet but a little puzzling. Frankly, we had other things to do. Sometimes we would go to see him and sometimes...we would say “Why does he call that way?”

All these years later, I think I've figured something out. My father did not call because he needed me or wanted something from me or from us. In fact, we were more apt to visit when we wanted something from him. But why did he seem disappointed when we were not frequent visitors? Not

because he wanted us to do anything...but because he wanted our fellowship! Now that I am a father and a grandfather...whose grown kids are busy and sometimes far away...I long at times for their fellowship! And that reminds me of my Heavenly Father! He wants us to be with Him! He wants us to come over and sit at His table! Here is my most valuable insight on the whole matter of prayer...valuable to myself and perhaps it will be of value to you: do not think of prayer as anything more complicated than fellowship with God! God wants your company!

If we think about it, there is nothing God really needs from us. There is nothing we can supply to him that He does not already have or cannot obtain. We read in Psalm 50 where God says to Israel:

**Psalms 50:12 (NIV) <sup>12</sup> If I were hungry I would not tell you, for the world is mine, and all that is in it.**

What God wants is our company! Our fellowship! Indeed, He made us and He blesses us, believe it or not, for fellowship with Him! We've been discussing the creation in the last year and we even have a seminar scheduled to look at different ways of understanding it. There is disagreement and debate but one thing that is beyond debate is this: God made the Heavens and the Earth but He did not find adequate fellowship with planets or trees or giraffes or apes! *He made man in His image for fellowship with Him* and prayer from planet Earth to Him is the way that fellowship takes place while we live here!

Perhaps the most important thing to remember in considering the prayer life....in my view...the single most important thing is this **ONE GREAT TRUTH: GOD IS A HIGHLY RELATIONAL BEING WITH REAL GENUINE FEELINGS AND HE CAN BE BLESSED AND HE CAN BE HURT!** If we are going to have a meaningful prayer life, the first notion to discard is that God is a distant executive who already knows everything and who just wants to see if we acknowledge Him! God is not the Chairman of the Board never having lunch in the employee's dining room. God is not the President of the company only seen at a distance with people following him to the elevator. No, God is a caring and involved person who actually wants our company and He hurts when He does not receive it. He might even call! If we are listening closely...we might hear Him call and say "Where are you? Are you coming my way?"

In my years of ministry, I have seen many broken relationships between grown children and a parent or even both parents. Most often, I've seen

fathers in ruptured relationships with their sons or daughters. Mothers too but let me speak of fathers for a moment since I am one. And in those instances where I was involved as a Pastor...counseling and trying to help...I have observed that almost always the father is more pained by the breakage than his son or daughter. In family breakage, I've seen more pain in fathers than in their kids. And I've often seen a father much more engaged in trying to reconcile with a son or daughter than the other way around. That proves absolutely nothing ... except I suspect that it is very much like the hurt God feels in breakage with us. When men and women ignore God they do so in an uncaring way. But God feels the lack of affection and God longs for the fellowship that He is being denied. I'm convinced that when we are prayerless as His children in Christ, we lose a great deal....but in some sense it hurts Him more than hurts us. So we might ask..."Do we want to hurt God?"

This idea...that the basis for prayer has much to do with God's heart and feelings is shown in a short passage in the Old Testament. It is actually a tug at the heart of man in ancient Israel and Judah. Somewhere in the sixth century BC, God sent the Prophet Jeremiah to speak to His faithless people. They had turned away from following Him and were worshipping idols and living profligate lives. And they were miserable and wretched and God said:

**Jeremiah 3:19-20 (NIV) <sup>19</sup> "I myself said, "How gladly would I treat you like sons and give you a desirable land, the most beautiful inheritance of any nation.' I thought you would call me 'Father' and not turn away from following me. <sup>20</sup> But like a woman unfaithful to her husband, so you have been unfaithful to me, O house of Israel," declares the Lord.**

Did we hear that? **"I thought you would call me...Father?"** Can we not hear the hurt in the voice of God? Does it not remind us of Jesus looking out over Jerusalem and saying:

**Matthew 23:37 (NIV) <sup>37</sup> "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing."**

The amazing truth is that God is a person with feelings and that He wants our fellowship! Apparently more than we want His! And God goes out of

his way to arrange that fellowship! I love that passage in Second Samuel that says:

**2 Samuel 14:14 (NIV) <sup>14</sup> “Like water spilled on the ground, which cannot be recovered, so we must die. But God does not take away life; instead, he devises ways so that a banished person may not remain estranged from him.”**

God is a person...a being...and God has feelings and God “devises” ways to bring us back to Himself. And God comes looking for us as proven by His sending the Lord Jesus Christ to call us! God comes *looking*...for us!

The Word of God says God actually cares for us! Consider Peter saying:

**1 Peter 5:6-7 (NIV) <sup>6</sup> Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. <sup>7</sup> Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.**

Do you see God as someone who cares for you and actually wants fellowship with you to discuss your concerns? Do you see God as eager to come find you like the father in the great parable? Jesus said:

**Luke 15:20 (NIV) <sup>20</sup> So he got up and went to his father. "But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.**

They Crucified Jesus for his claim to be the Son of God. That is true but be certain that all along the way Jesus was shocking and irritating those who heard him! Jesus was insisting that much off what they thought about God and even the meaning of the Scriptures was wrong. And one thing the ancients Jews thought for sure was that God was so Almighty and so blessedly Holy that He...God...would never, ever come running down the path to welcome a sinner if that sinner repented! And here is Jesus saying that God desires the fellowship of His children so intensely that he ran to his son and threw His arms around him and kissed him!

Do we understand that when we bow to God in prayer, He leans in throws His arms around us and says “Oh wonderful! By all means have fellowship with me!” God runs to the one who seeks after him in prayer! A woman sat in my office some time ago telling me of her distant father who raised her. Then she started to cry gently and I said “What do you picture your Dad saying to himself when you approached him as a kid?” And she thought a moment and said this: “I suspect he would see me and say to himself ‘Oh what now? What do you want?’”

But that is not the God of Scripture! The God of Scripture wants our fellowship and that is what happens when we pray! And God comes looking for us as proven by His sending the Lord Jesus Christ to call us! God comes *looking...*for us!

I like that story about President Harry Truman many years ago. It was his birthday and the cooks in the White House kitchen baked him a nice cake and sent it up to his office. After he enjoyed it with his wife and some friends, Truman went downstairs with the platter still half full with cake. He went all the way to the White House basement to the kitchen and appeared in the doorway. The surprised staff just stared not sure what to say. Then the Head Cook greeted him politely and he said "I just wanted to thank you for this wonderful cake...and see if any of you would like a piece." And she said "Why Mr. President...I've worked in this kitchen for forty years and you are the first President to come down here since Coolidge...and he only came to see how many lights we had on!"

God is like that. God is a person...a being with feelings and He condescends to meet with us and invite us into fellowship. God comes down to the basement to fellowship with us! God does not just descend into our lives to see if we are wasting electricity! No, God descends into our lives for fellowship! To invite us to His table! If we would stop thinking of prayer as just making requests and giving thanks for blessings...and think of it first and foremost ***AS FELLOWSHIP WITH THE VERY SENSITIVE MAKER OF HEAVEN AND EARTH...***we would jump at the chance! We'll be saying much more about this in the days ahead.

Now...as to David and his unhappy warriors. Here's what happened... at this point in history, David has been fighting guerilla wars against the enemies of Israel. But David's men are no doubt pretty weary of this whole business chasing everywhere. At one point, David made a tactical blunder and the families of his men were all captured.

I think we can picture David's small army as totally exhausted and without confidence in his leadership. Weary of him, they begin to talk of stoning David! This is a full-fledged mutiny and David realizes that he is all alone. Completely! Saul wants to kill him! His own men want to kill him! His wives and families are gone and he is all one hundred per cent alone! What shall he do? What would you do?

Of course David prayed by the writer makes the point of saying "**But David found strength in the Lord his God.**" Here we have a man all alone and frightened for his life. But here we have a man who had a long-standing relationship with God in prayer. And he, David realizes in a moment that

actually he is not all alone. His actions remind us of that lovely line from the song: “Where will I, where will I...go when I’m afraid? My Heavenly Father is watching over me!” David does not so much need a prayer for deliverance as he needs fellowship with God! Strength is found in FELLOWSHIP with God! That is why the Lord Jesus Christ was so hurt by his disciples when they were in the Garden of Gethsemane. We can hear him saying **“Couldn’t you just pray with me and be with me for an hour?”**

As we approach the Lord’s Supper this morning, I have an unusual thought. I believe that the Communion Table is simply an invitation to fellowship with God. It is a prayer acted out. It is fellowship with God thru His Holy Spirit. It is literally Communion with God. When we take the bread and we receive the juice as the symbols of our Lord’s body and blood, we are in fellowship with him. We are praying “Yes, Lord Jesus I am redeemed and I have fed upon you as my blessed Savior!” Think of it...just about the last thing Jesus said to his own in fellowship was in effect ... “the next time I drink this will be with you at the great feast!” When we pray and when we come to the Lord’s Table ...we are saying “I want fellowship with you Oh Lord!” And we do that because He came down to the basement with a platter of blessings...to offer us Himself.

Let us pray.