

That's What You Get!

Matthew 26.36-53

While on a pleasure trip, a man and his wife were driving along an isolated rural road, when suddenly the car sputtered and coughed and rolled to a stop. It was not difficult to tell that the automobile had run out of fuel. They both sat there for several seconds, staring through the windshield at the road ahead of them. Finally, the wife turned to her husband and said, "That's what you get for not stopping at the gas station when I told you to!"

Many of you are aware that I have been working to have a Prayer Garden in the back yard of the parsonage. In other places I've lived I've tried to have a very special place where I could go to spend time alone with God. What is a Prayer Garden? It's simply a garden where I go to pray. When it's raining, I have a comfortable chair on the back porch of the parsonage. Do you have a spot like that? Here's what you can do—simply designate a particular place around your home where you can spend time alone with God and call it your "Prayer Chair," or your "Prayer Porch," or your "Prayer Swing," or your "Prayer Patio."

You may be aware that John and Charles Wesley were the founders of the Methodist Church. Charles wrote the hymns, "Love Divine, All Loves Excelling," "Hark! The Herald Angels Sing," and "Blessed Be the Name." You may not know that they were two of 19 children! When their mother, Susanna, wanted to spend time with God, she would sit down in her kitchen and pull her apron up over her head. When the children—all 19 of them!—saw their mother sitting in the kitchen with her apron over her head, they knew not to disturb her! That was her "Prayer Place." When John Wesley was an adult, he said that he had learned more about Christianity from his mother than from all the theologians of England.

You will pray to God anywhere and at anytime, but let that special place be the particular spot where you know you will fellowship with your Heavenly Father. Perhaps fix it up with a plant or two, good lighting, and so forth, and let others in your household know that when you are in that chair, or sitting under that tree, or whatever, that you are praying or reading your Bible. And don't be ashamed to talk about it. When someone calls, have your husband or child or wife tell the caller, "He's in his Prayer Chair right now—he'll call you back."

One reason I have spent so much time and effort in putting my Prayer Garden together is because I sincerely believe that the more time I spend there, the better pastor and preacher—and person!—I will be. I can always tell when I have not

spent much time in my special prayer place. Life gets more complicated, more harried, more frustrating when I neglect my prayer time. And you know this to be true in your own life, don't you? Finding a time and a place for prayer is crucial to our walk with God and the development of our relationship with Him.

In the story from God's Word before us today, it is not difficult to tell that Peter had not prayed. When it was all over, it was almost as if someone were saying to Peter, "That's what you get, Peter, for not praying!" The same is true with you and me. When we fail to pray, there are certain inevitable consequences in our lives.

1 One result of our failure to pray is that we are unaware of the presence of God.

When the soldiers came to arrest Jesus, it was Peter who pulled out his sword and began hacking away at the crowd, slashing off one of the ears of the servant of the High Priest. They were not going to hurt *his* Lord, not if he could help it!

His defense of Jesus was admirable. But Peter missed something here, something very important. While Jesus was praying, Peter was sleeping and he totally missed the presence of God. Had he prayed with Jesus, he would have caught a glimpse of God's presence, even in this difficult situation, when things really looked bad. And had he known God's presence with them in the Garden, he would have known also that there was no need for violence, no need for human intervention, no need for panic. He had not prayed, and now he was totally unaware that God was right there, ever-present, totally sovereign, in control, doing a great thing through this particular situation.

Am I like that? Are you like that? How many times is there danger in our lives or a crisis of some sort, or an important decision to be made, and we are totally unaware of God's presence in our lives because we have not taken the time to pray?

We jump to conclusions; we take matters into our own hands, when we ought to leave it with God. But oftentimes we don't leave it in God's hands because we are simply not even aware that God is anywhere near us, or that He has any interest whatsoever in our lives.

But God is closer to us than we could ever realize. He is more interested in our lives and the things which affect our lives than we ourselves are. He is present

when we are happy and when we are sad. He is with us whether we are wealthy or destitute, sick or well. He walks with us when things appear to go right in our lives and when it appears to us that life is literally crumbling apart beneath our very feet. He wants us to know that He is present. He wants us to benefit from His presence. It is in the holy time we spend in prayer that His presence becomes real and vital to our lives.

Can you imagine the difference there would be in the decisions we make in our personal lives if we were only more aware and conscious of the presence of God? I don't mean being aware of God's presence in the way that we might say, "Yes, I know He is here; He's everywhere." I mean in the sense that that awareness changes us, and motivates us, and challenges us, and humbles us, and guides us. Imagine the difference in our church if every member was aware of God's presence in our services! Imagine the difference in your life if you were aware of God's presence in your daily affairs—your work, your school, your home!

And can you see that perhaps one of the reasons we do not sense God's presence in our lives is because we do not take the time to spend with God in prayer? A complete ignorance of God's presence—that's what we get when we neglect our prayer lives.

2 A second result of the failure to pray is that we are unaware of the purpose of God.

When Jesus rebuked Peter for his hasty action, He said to him, "But how then would the Scriptures be fulfilled that say it must happen this way?" Peter many times showed that he misunderstood the mission of Jesus. He did not understand why Jesus had come.

Just before Jesus took Peter, James and John with Him to the Garden, Peter loudly declared that he would never leave his Master, not even if everyone else did—that he would even die for Jesus! He didn't understand just how close he was to the truth—or how much his devotion to the Christ would cost him.

On another occasion, Jesus had stated that the elders and the chief priests would cause him to suffer, and would kill him—but after three days He would rise again. But Peter—always the one to step in, always with good intentions, but somehow always seeming to interfere—said "God forbid! This should never happen to You, Lord!" This was the time that Jesus responded, "Get behind Me, Satan!"

Poor Peter! He was so slow to catch on. He was so slow to realize that Jesus was the very one written about in Isaiah 53: *“But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed...He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he was brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth.”*

If Peter had stayed awake, and if he had watched and prayed with Jesus during the time Jesus agonized in the Garden over God’s purpose, Peter may have caught a vision of the suffering that had to come in order that we might be saved. Peter might have begun to understand all the things that Jesus had tried to teach him and the others about the purpose God had for sending His Son. That purpose was not to take over the world by force and military might and power but to provide hope for the hopeless, freedom for those imprisoned by sin, forgiveness for the guilty, healing for the spiritually sick. Peter might have begun to understand that had he just prayed. He might have been aware of God’s purpose.

How many times has God tried to work a great work in your life, but you’ve been too self-centered, too set in your ways or too busy to notice? How many times has God’s purpose for your life been thwarted because you have not prayed? How many times have you despaired over a situation because you could not catch a glimpse of God’s purpose for your life?

Perhaps many times we are like Peter. We mean well. We have good intentions. But we rarely spend time alone with Christ in prayer, rarely seek to discover God’s will and purpose for us in our lives. And when God does begin to work in our lives, when His purpose is becoming known to us as our lives unfold, we are totally unaware of His purposes. We fret and complain about ill-fortune, bad luck, and we wonder why God is picking on us. We are totally unaware that God has a purpose, and that God is working that purpose out!

Now when you pray concerning God’s will and purpose for your life you will have one of two things happen to you: (1) God’s purpose will be revealed to you; or (2) you will trust yourself to God, that His way is best, whether or not you know His purpose.

Can you imagine the difference in your life if you took the time to pray, to find out what God’s purpose for your life is? Can you imagine the peace that would flood your heart when you have completely trusted Him with your life?

3 A third result of our failure to pray is that we are unaware of the power of God.

Another thing that Jesus said to Peter had Peter had whacked off the servant's ear, was, "Peter don't you think that even now, with all these soldiers and other enemies around Me, that I could not pray to My Father, and He would send more than twelve legions of angels?" Jesus had prayed and He received a new and fresh glimpse of the power that His Heavenly Father has, and how available that power was to Him.

In verse 39, where it reads that Jesus went a little farther and fell on His face, and prayed, the word for "prayed" there is the usual word used for talking to God. But in verse 53, when Jesus said, "Did you not think that I could pray to My Father?" He used a different word altogether. He used a word that means "to summon with authority, to call upon as an ally." He knew the power of God!

But there's something else in verse 53 that we should not overlook. When Jesus said that God would give Him twelve legions of angels, He used an unusual word. He used a military term which means "to place by the side, to post at one's flank." With a single word, the ranks of the angels would form at His side, ready for battle.

But Peter had been asleep, had not prayed, and was totally unaware of God's power for that difficult moment. So he had to resort to pathetic human means to protect them. One sword against a great multitude! He was going to defend Christ, as if Christ had no power of His own! Yes, Peter had been there when Christ showed His power in raising Lazarus back to life. Peter was there when a woman who had been sick for twelve years was healed.

Peter saw the power of God when the wine ran out at the wedding in Cana, and he saw the power of Christ to solve the problem, when human resources could not. Peter had seen the power of God again and again, and yet now, because he had not spent a most important hour in prayer with Christ, Peter was totally unaware of the same power he had seen before his eyes again and again.

Oh, the power of God that is available to us, that is ours for the asking, but so often goes unnoticed and unused because we do not even realize it is there! How often we rely on our own power and our strength, even when common sense tells us that our strength is not enough! How often we fail to benefit from God's power because we have not stopped long enough to spend time with God in prayer.

How many times have you gotten yourself into trouble—or trouble came all by itself—and you tried in vain to solve it? Soon, you decide that your efforts are as useless as Peter trying to hack his way with one sword through a multitude of swords. And when you do finally hear Jesus speaking to your soul, you hear Him say, “Hey, there—don’t you think that even now, even with things as messed up as they are in your life, that you can pray to your Father, and He will give you the same kind of power that raised Me from the dead?”

Yes, we can talk about the power of God; we can read about it in God’s Word; we can sing about it—but do we experience it? Do we know God’s power personally? If we do not, we probably do not talk to God, do not pray, do not know what it is to spend time alone with God. Because a *prayerless* Christian is also a *powerless* Christian!

And if you do not pray, if you do not spend time alone with God, then you have no power in your problems, no power in praying for others, no power in victory over sin, no power in making decisions.

Can you imagine the impact on our church, on our community, when previously powerless Christians are filled with power from on high? Can you imagine the difference in your life when you know and draw from God’s power—daily? It will come to you when you seek God’s face—and pray!

Here’s what we get when we fail to pray: a lack of awareness of the presence of God; a misunderstanding of the purposes of God; and an ignorance of the power of God.

Thousands upon thousands upon thousands of people never utter a word of prayer. They eat. They drink. They sleep. They wake up and go to work or school. They do housework. They return to their homes. They breathe God’s air. They see God’s sun. They walk on God’s earth. They enjoy the mercies of God. But they have dying bodies. They had judgment before them. But they never speak to God. They live like creatures without souls.

They have not one word to say to Him in whose Hand are their life and breath, and all things, and from whose Mouth they must one day receive their everlasting sentence of judgment.

Is this the way *you* do?

*I got up early one morning
And rushed right into the day;
I had so much to accomplish
That I didn't take time to pray.*

*Problems came tumbling about me,
And heavier grew each task;
"Why doesn't God help me?" I
wondered.
He answered, "You didn't ask."*

*I wanted to see joy and beauty,
But the day toiled on, gray and bleak.*

*I wondered why God didn't show me.
He said, "But you didn't seek."*

*I tried to come into God's presence;
I used all my keys at the lock.
God gently and lovingly chided,
"My child, you didn't knock."*

*I woke up early this morning
And paused before entering the day.
I had so much to accomplish
That I had to take time to pray.
—Ralph Cushman*