**Life on the Frontline 5**

Sometimes you hear Christians say, “I don’t *ask* God for anything. He already knows what I need and he’ll do whatever is best”.

On the face of it, it sounds like a statement of faith and trust; faith that God knows our needs and trust that he will do the right thing for us.

The trouble is, it’s a statement that says exactly the *opposite* of what Jesus said.

When Jesus’ disciples asked him to teach them to pray, what did he do?

He gave them a model prayer, a template… which we call “The Lord’s Prayer”

And in just 38 words in the Greek (in Luke’s Gospel) we find two expressions of desire and three requests.

Two expressions of desire: that God’s name would be hallowed and his kingdom come.

Three requests: for daily bread, for forgiveness of sins and to be not led into temptation.

Jesus taught his disciples very clearly to pray for themselves and for others.

Think for a moment about the last supper.

John records in his Gospel that Jesus prayed for himself, for the disciples and for all Christians who would follow (John 17)

He also records how Jesus told the disciples to remain rooted in him; without him they could do nothing (John 15.4).

And he told them to ask for anything they needed in his name (John 15.7).

So, why did Jesus tell his disciples to pray for themselves and for others?

Surely there are lots of reasons.

But looking at Jesus’ words in John 15.8 Jesus says that it is to God’s glory when the disciples are fruitful, “showing themselves to be [my] disciples”.

Parents so often know what their children need, but they love it when their children ask – it shows that their children believe in them; that the children believe that their parent loves them and wants to help them. Children asking parents for stuff is all about *relationship*.

And parents then giving their children what they need displays the parent’s love and shows their ability to provide.

So it is with God.

When we pray, we show that we believe in God; that he loves us and can help us.

When God answers our prayers, it is to his glory – both that he can provide and that we, his children, are productive in his service.

A few weeks ago, in our series of Life on the Frontline, we thought about God’s people in exile in Babylon. We were reminded of God’s message to them, sent through the prophet Jeremiah, to settle down there, to seek the good of the city in which they found themselves and to pray for it.

Last week we thought about what we might do in practice to seek the good of the places where we engage with the world.

This week we are thinking about what we can pray for these places and the people we meet there.

What, I wonder, is your prayer for the places where you engage with the world?

Maybe its just, “Lord, get me out of here!”

Jeremiah prayed that prayer often!

If you are praying that prayer maybe God will… or maybe not…

But all the time we are in the place where we engage with the world, how can we seek to bless it, and change it for the better, through our prayers?

Let me make two suggestions.

Firstly, we could pray the two expressions of desire and the three requests of the Lord’s prayer for our frontlines.

We could pray that God’s name would be hallowed – held in honour.

We could pray for God’s will to be done in that place, just like his will is done perfectly in heaven.

We could pray for God’s provision for the needs of that place, or for the people we meet there.

We could pray for forgiveness for the things that are wrong there – and actively chose to forgive anything bad that has been done to us there.

We could pray that the people there do not give into temptation and that any organisations we work with will behave in a legal and morally upright way.

That wouldn’t be a bad start, would it!

But when we are thinking what it would look for God’s name to be hallowed and his will be done on our frontlines, then maybe we could look at some of those passages in the bible which look forward to the time when God will rescue his people and make all things right.

In our going deeper session this coming Tuesday we’re going to look at Isaiah 29.17-24.

In it, Isaiah directs the gaze of God’s people to the day when God will establish his kingdom on earth as it is in heaven.

And the vision is glorious.

God will work out his purposes spiritually (Isaiah 29.18-19), morally and socially (20-21) fulfilling what he began with Abraham (22) and creating a truly renewed people (23-24).

Practically, we see the land renewed, the sick healed and people filled with joy. The ruthless and mockers will be done away with, evil irradicated and justice done.

Now aren’t we all looking forward to the day Jesus returns and all this is accomplished?

And wouldn’t we all like to see just a glimpse of this in the world around us now?

Maybe we could pray for God’s will to be done on earth as it is in heaven by praying for God to do these things now…

Not in the expectation that everything will be perfect this side of Jesus’ return. Jesus warned that there would be wars and rumours of war, famine and earthquakes, before his return (Matthew 24.6-7)

But in the expectation that in the person of Jesus God’s kingdom came to earth, and that it is even now spreading and growing like a mustard seed growing into a bush or yeast causing dough to rise.

Now, I hope this all makes perfect sense.

But if it does, why do we so often fail to pray accordingly?

Because doing this kind of praying is hard, isn’t it!

Well, it might be because we are lazy. We’d rather spend our time watching TV or checking our “likes” on Facebook.

It might be because we don’t really care.

But my hunch is that for many of us, its because we have been disappointed in the past.

We’ve prayed and ask God to step in and do something… something that seems entirely in line with his will… and nothing has happened.

And once this has happened a few times, even if we’d never admit it or say it out loud, we’ve begun to lose faith either in God or ourselves and we’ve given up.

Disappointment is one of the most crushing things in the Christian life, and it sucks the life out of us.

So, I wanted to end with five top tips for keeping our faith up and keeping going in prayer for our frontlines.

One: be prepared for the long haul. Jesus taught persistence in prayer in the parable of the persistent widow. The father had to watch and wait for the prodigal son to return.

Two: don’t make assumptions but do look to the bigger picture. A lot of Jesus’ teaching was in reaction to the tricks and testing the Pharisees threw at him. Jesus had to suffer before he was exalted to glory.

Three: surround yourself with people of faith who encourage you. St Paul in his letters to Corinth and Thessalonica says to “encourage one another”. So does the write of the letter to the Hebrews. Some people are very negative. Others spur us on. Make sure you are surrounded by those who keep your faith up and keep you pressing on. And make sure you do the same for others!

Four: keep a record of answered prayer. Its so easy to remember the disappointments but forget the answered prays. The psalms are full of recollections about God’s saving help in the past, and therefore expressions of hope for the future. If doing this was a good idea for the psalmist, it must be for us too!

Five: Keep focused on God’s character, not your problems. The way to walk in a straight line is to fix your eyes on the point you are heading for, not to keep looking at your feet. Keeping your eyes fixed on God, on who he is and what he has done for you will keep you heading in the right direction.

Let’s pray:

Father God, we praise you for your love, power and faithfulness.

Help us to trust in your good purposes for the people and places where we engage with the world.

Please help us to dream dreams and have visions for your name to be honoured and your will to be done.

And help us to pray… so that we may be fruitful and you be glorified.

In Jesus name,

Amen