

REFLECTIONS ON PRAYER 5

Reflections on Tim Keller's 'Prayer' and God's word

KICKING OFF

On the 20th of September 2001, just 9 days after the surreal and deeply affecting events of September 11, my mother breathed her last. And as she did so I happened to reading Psalm 48, a Psalm that remains dear to my heart.

It's a strange Psalm, written by the Sons of Korah, who Douglas Green calls the edgier of the Psalm writers, pushing the boundaries. And Psalm 48 describes the city of God, the terror first sight of the city instilled on Jerusalem's enemies, that central to its defence was God who made her secure forever, a place where God's love, justice, and wise judgments ring out as well as the rejoicing and praise of her inhabitants. The Psalmist invites us to walk around the city, to ***"count her towers, consider well her ramparts, view her citadels, that you may tell of them to the next generation."***

And as I read this Psalm in that hospital room it was almost as if I was transported to God's city, the reality of the kingdom of God that Jesus had established for us and where my mother with a faith in Christ was about to arrive. And as I watched her last breath slowly dissipate I came to the last line, ***"For this God is our God for ever and ever; he will be our guide even to the end."***

And this month I have the opportunity of writing a brief paper on this Psalm to reflect on its meaning. And for this I need to take a step back from my own experience of Psalm 48.

Because even though I am sure God had a hand in me reading that Psalm at that very moment, what is the danger of reading Scripture through the eyes of our own personal experiences?

Why do I need to almost divorce myself from that hospital room as I ponder the meaning of Psalm 48 afresh?

And even though so far we have placed a fresh value on emotions and experience in our prayer life, not just practicalities and reality, any experience of God must be grounded in a true understanding of God's word or our tendency is to create ***a God of our experiences*** that we may even end up favouring over the true God of the Bible.

GOING DEEPER

Keller now describes prayer as a conversation, fellowship with the personal God who befriends us through speech. And the way we learn to answer and engage with God is by exploring how he first speaks with us.

Read Hebrews 1:1-3

How has God spoken to us throughout history?

In your group take turns in reading Genesis 1:1-5, Psalm 29 and Isaiah 55:10-11

What happens when God speaks?

Keller concludes that when with God, speaking and acting are the same thing. God's words are God's active presence in our world. Therefore, "if God's words are his personal, active presence, then to put your trust in God's words is to put your trust in God."

Read Hebrews 4:12-13 and 2 Timothy 3:14-16

What can we expect God will do in us as we read and hear God's word being spoken and preached?

In John 17 we see Jesus pray to the Father for his disciples, the Church. Read verses 6-8.

What do these verses teach us about the task the Father gave the son to do?

What do they teach us about what it means to be a Christian?

TAKING IT HOME

Keller quotes Edmund P. Clowney, "The Bible does not present an art of prayer, it presents the God of prayer." A God who communicates with us, reveals himself to us, fellowships with us, and speaks into our lives and every situation through the words of Scripture. Keller therefore concludes, "without immersion in God's words, our prayers may not be merely limited and shallow but also untethered from reality."

Q: What danger is there if our prayers are not connected to God's very words of Scripture?

Q: How can our prayers be better shaped by the words God has spoken to us?

Q: What can we expect to happen as we pray informed by God's very words?

PRAY

Pray together, not to the God of our emotions or experiences, but that our prayers might be a deep communing with God by responding to his very words to us which find their fulfilment in Christ.