

Chapter 4

Ask of Me !

- *Praying For The Harvest* -

Prayer and Mission begin and find fulfilment in the heart of God Himself. A window in heaven opens in *Ps 2 :7-8* and we are privileged to hear a conversation in the heart of the Godhead between the heavenly Father and His Son.

*"He said to me, You are my Son;
today I have become your Father.
Ask of me,
and I will make the nations your inheritance
the ends of the earth your possession ..."*

This promise is not firstly made to us but to Jesus himself. In view of the Father's powerful mandate giving the "nations" to His Son, it comes as no surprise to see this promise wonderfully fulfilled in *Revelation 5 :9* :

*"You are worthy ... because you were slain,
and with your blood you purchased men for God
from every tribe and language and people and nation..."*

And *Revelation 7 :9* :

"After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no-one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb ..."

But what lies between the promise and the fulfilment?

The answer. ***"Ask of me !"*** **Prayer.**

Jesus made the ultimate intercession for the nations in giving his life on the cross (1), but He also delegated the promise of such prayer to his disciples in *John 14:14* :

*"You may ask me for anything in my name,
and I will do it."*

In giving us his "name" He has delegated the authority to "ask for the nations" to us his faithful followers. *Revelation 2 :26-27* encourages us to persevere in this prayer.

*"To him who overcomes and does my will to the end,
I will give authority over the nations -
'He will rule them with an iron sceptre;
he will dash them to pieces like pottery' -*

just as I have received authority from my Father..."

*Mat. 7 :7 is also so clear in calling us to unequivocally **ask**.
"Ask and you shall receive."*

God is longing for us to take up prayer as a key to missionary breakthrough. He wants us to look at the nations rather than our own needs and problems.

Matthew 8 :25-26 reveals how most of us are used to praying. Let's call it "**panic praying**". Often it's the only prayer that ever rises from the Church for without a crisis or problem to inspire us, we so often remain prayerless! Anyway the boat begins to fill up and the storm is raging overhead. All eyes are on the problem. A prayer rises out of man's basic instinct for survival :

"Lord, save us !"

This is as far as many of us get. **Save me! Help me! Bless me!** As their eyes are fixed more and more on the storm the prayer becomes prophetically negative !

"We are going to drown !"

It seems that their prayer is being inspired more by the spirit of death than by the Holy Spirit! I'll leave each one to judge what spirit inspires your own prayer meetings! Unfortunately so often missionary prayer meetings focus on the problem and risk the danger of praying out negative statements over the nations of the world.

Jesus hears the request, as he hears all our words. He hears more than the words, he hears the spirit and motivation behind them. With cutting discernment He succinctly summarizes the spirit behind their request :

"He replied : You of little faith, why are you so afraid ?"

Here we have it. **Unbelief** and **Fear**, the two foundations on which our "panic praying" is based. Focussing on the problem always leads us into such unbelief and fear. We need to turn away and let Jesus and His word fill our perspective until we find faith and boldness filling our hearts.

We all know what it's like when the water starts filling our boats, but before panicking, look to Jesus, "sleeping" as the waves rage, and find the peace and faith He is longing to inspire. Take time to look on His power and authority rather than your own weakness and problem. Let Him rebuke the waves and the wind, the earthly and the spiritual powers, and bring the calm. Don't panic pray the problem but look to the power and authority of Jesus! Then pray!

The home of Mary and Martha in *Luke 10 :40-41* gives us some more insight into how and how not to pray. This time we'll call it “**worry prayer**”.

Often folk relate well to Martha and of course we need to honour those with servant hearts and a practical bent. However in this particular incident Martha proved herself to be quite a formidable character. First of all she wasn't thinking straight. She launched into the “prayer”, or talking to Jesus, “*distracted by all the preparations that had to be made.*” How many prayers die before they even begin because of **distraction** ? It comes as no surprise that Jesus himself went to the quiet, desert places to pray (2) and advised his disciples to shut the door of the hidden chamber (3) in order to find a place far from distraction. **The place of inner calmness (even if the outside is bustling) is the place where prayer begins.** Anyway, Martha is getting more and more agitated and, as the deadlines begin to approach and she imagines the guests arriving she blurts out.

"Lord, don't you care ?"

Fancy that! Accusing Jesus of not caring!

The distraction and agitation have given her a completely erroneous view of the Lord. She begins to lose sight of His love and compassion. This often happens to us all in the face of fatigue, weariness and advancing deadlines. We may not be as direct as Martha but often the hurt is there in our prayer, accusing Jesus of not caring. True prayer can only be birthed as we arrive at the place of knowing God's commitment and compassion for a world of people. He may not care so much about our own selfish private agendas!

"My sister has left me to do the work."

She accuses her sister next!

“Worry prayers” are marked by their spirit of accusation no matter how religiously veiled they may be. Martha was focused on the work whereas her sister was focused on the word! Here is a key! **We must not let ourselves get focused on the work which will only lead us to worry, but rather be listening to the word of God which will only lead us to Jesus' feet!**

"By myself."

Self pity.

Looking only at the work has given her a false sense of martyrdom. Somewhere inside she is wounded with rejection and this shows itself in the desperate plea for help. Many missionaries, pastors and servants of the Lord may often find themselves praying as Martha, out of their feelings of frustration and loneliness. We long for more “workers” but often our asking is based on worry, need and a sense of getting an “uncaring” Jesus to act on our behalf.

"Tell her to help me!"

Now she's giving orders to Jesus!

At first glance it doesn't seem like sin and we all fall victim to the arguments that need and worry present before us. However, it really is quite serious, and Martha has slipped into a spirit of manipulation rather than the submissive resting of the Holy Spirit. She is on the road to "Jezebel" (4) which the Lord will not tolerate. We really do need to be careful about how we pray for workers and the "needs" of the mission field. If we drift away from the centrality of Jesus and His love and provision we end up self-righteous, accusing, worried and rejected manipulators! However, before giving up in despair, let's take a look at Jesus' loving response to Martha.

"Martha, Martha!"

He quietens her down. Speaking out her name restores the relation with Him and one can sense the love and patience of Jesus coming over in His double mention of her name. How often we need to be quieted by Jesus' loving words to us.

*"He will take great delight in you,
he will quiet you with his love,
he will rejoice over you with singing."*

Zephaniah 3 :15

As he did with the disciples in the boat he put His finger on the true inspiration of Martha's prayer.

"You are worried and upset - (turbazo in Greek meaning to make turbid like troubled waters. In tumult and uproar), about many things..."

Worry should never be a substitute for true prayer.

"Do not be anxious about anything, (especially 'many things') but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God..."

Philippians 4 :6

Let the Lord calm our "troubled" waters before we pray. Worry and upset should never dominate or even infiltrate our prayer times.

Jesus brings the solution.

"Only one thing is needed."

What's that we cry ?

Well, Mary was clever enough to have chosen it. We can choose it too. It is not forced upon us as a rigorous duty.

What is it then ?

Simply to listen at Jesus' feet. Prayer is all about listening.

"Mary ... sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said."

We need to come back to Jesus' own advice about praying for missionary advance which we find in *Matthew 9 :36-38*.

"When He saw the crowds, he had compassion on them..."

Jesus' eyes were not on himself. He saw the crowds, and their utter helplessness. He had compassion. This is His spirit, and the same spirit which He longs to inspire within us as we pray. **He longs to melt our hard hearts with his compassion.** Then He said :

"The harvest is plentiful..."

Jesus emphasises the opportunity not the problem.

Just take a look out there! All those nations to be won for Jesus! They are ready for harvest. What an opportunity!

Compassion and Vision: - seeing the opportunity and seeing the ready harvest - are the two pillars of "harvest praying".

"..but the workers are few."

Again, Jesus is saying this as an opportunity rather than with fatalistic resignation.

At the time there were only 12 disciples. As they prayed and went they quickly became 72 (5) and then 3,000 on the day of Pentecost. (6) Some sad missionaries continually whine out this phrase as if it was set in stone at the time of "only 12" as an excuse for failure to pray and recruit more workers. They totally ignore the fact that the whole idea is to multiply the workers! In an age when millions of "eleventh hour" workers are waiting to join the final thrust of world evangelisation surely we should be taking the prayer opportunity that Jesus offers us seriously.

"Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field."

The key prayer for our generation is to ask God to release the workers from Africa, Asia and the Americas. Those who genuinely ask will probably find themselves going as well!

Ask and Go!

Endnotes

- 1) Isaiah 53.12 "For he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors..."
- 2) Mark 1.35,45
- 3) Matthew 6.6
- 4) Revelation 2.20
- 5) Luke 10.1
- 6) Acts 2.41