

Chapter 3

God is Asleep !

- *He is a Lazy, Unjust, Uncaring, Distant Tyrant ! Don't Bother Asking !* -

A provocative title ! It is a summary of what many French friends I live with have said to me concerning prayer. It may also be the wounded cry of many other nationalities who have given up on prayer as a vibrant reality in their lives. Indeed it is mostly the honest declaration of those outside of the Church and yet I sometimes wonder how wounded and warped are even some of our own more religious views on prayer.

The challenging American thinker, A.Tozer, said that Christians never tell lies...they only sing them ! We might also say that Christians always say they believe in prayer...but are often deeply offended inwardly by God's seeming silences ! We feel guiltily disappointed in God ! Like old wardrobes our lives collect the worn out junk of memories of unanswered prayer and failure. Moth-balled prayers for healing, salvation of a loved one, provision, marriage, or a host of other issues clutter our spirits and eat away at the fabric of faith. This can result in a kind of token acknowledgement of prayer but without the passion or the practise.

In a nutshell, we are too wounded to pray aright.

Because we are Christians we dare not be as honest as our pagan friends in openly questioning God and we develop popular "**fig leaf theology**" to cover up our guilty nakedness. This theology expresses itself in such phrases as :

"God doesn't always answer prayer."
"He says, "Yes", "No", or "Maybe" to our prayers."
"You didn't have enough faith !"
"You didn't have enough love !"
"You weren't holy enough !"
"May the will of God be done."
"God works in mysterious ways."

Although there are snippets of half - truth in these phrases, they smell of mothballs and accusation revealing a God who doesn't live up to His promises, (see the wonderfully frank prayer promises in the following chapter. *John 14 :14, Matthew 7 :7 etc*), and who doesn't really love us ! We need to be healed from the abuse of such theology !

At the heart of the matter is a wrong perception and experience of who God really is. To pray successfully we need to be healed of this wrong perception and gain fresh revelation of God's ultimate goodness and willingness to answer prayer on our behalf.

Satan's strategy is to deform our perception of God, and slander Him to us thus destroying our faith and vitality.

From childhood authority figures, from teachers to parents to political and religious leaders, are sometimes abusive and mould deep within our beings a wrong conception of God.

Jesus himself recognised this truth in his own teaching on prayer, so let's learn from the master. It is important to note that, as a good teacher, Jesus exposed the wrong conceptions in the hearts of his listeners before replacing them with the radical truth of God's grace. Certain phrases are repeated over and over again in Christ's teaching as he juxtaposes our erroneous conceptions with the truth concerning his Father. It is important to grasp these "leitmotifs" as they lead us on the path to a genuine vision of God's greatness and love. Phrases like, "**How much more**", "**So I say to you**", and "**And will not God**", open the texts up to comparisons between human and heavenly perspectives.

I'll limit myself to three specific texts of Jesus concerning prayer but we could find many more as well as finding overlaps in the epistles. Jesus lays down a foundation for prayer in **Matthew 7 :7-11, Luke 11 :1-13 and Luke 18 :1-8.**

In *Matthew*, Jesus is giving his disciples the key to prayer. Thinking back perhaps to his own commissioning in *Psalms* 2 : 7,

*"..You are my Son;
Today I have become your Father.."*

where the element of "sonship" was so important, he in turn underlines the importance of knowing our place as sons and daughters of the heavenly Father.

*"This, then, is how you should pray:
Our Father in heaven..."* *Matthew 6 :9*

He hammers the message home even more strongly in chapter 7, and I imagine him being quite humorous in his style, using everyday family images which would touch a chord in each heart. His longing is to heal his hearers of a wrong concept of Fatherhood.

"Ask and it will be given to you."

is the wonderfully frank truth of scripture. However in a world of hard knocks the hearers' minds are already putting up barriers and get out clauses in a wounded, knee jerk response to such a generous theology. Jesus, however, is already one step ahead of them.

"Which of you , if his son asks for bread , will give him a stone ?"

Little Johnny, hungrily expectant at the dinner table, is suddenly summoned to the garden by his Dad. Grabbing his son by the hair he pulls him forward and rams a dirt covered stone down his throat !

"Here son, chew on that ! It'll do you good !"

Next Friday he's there again at the table looking forward to a promise of fish and chips when suddenly he is summoned once again to the garden. (Remember Jesus was speaking to a middle eastern audience who had much more exotic things in their gardens than slugs and lettuce !). There stands his Father with a nasty snake which he quickly puts to his son's tender mouth. Poisonous fangs await to do their damage. Other options on the menu include scorpions with a vicious sting in the tail ! (*See Luke 11:12*)

"Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake ?"

By now you can almost imagine Jesus' audience, amused and yet slightly enraged at such an ungenerous Father, wanting to butt in and say something more positive about Fatherhood. Jesus, having gotten them thinking in the right direction beats them to it:

*"If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, **how much more** will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!"*

Has our view of God been so warped that we think he will give us something hard like a stone ? Many, like the servant in the parable of the talents, think of God as being a "hard man". Many of my Catholic friends here in France have a view of two ways to God. The hard way through God the stern Father, and the easy way via Mary.

Even in more evangelical circles there is often the hidden fear that God's will for me will be something hard and horrible ! Deep down are we afraid of obeying God? Are we fearful of getting too involved in prayer, in case He might actually speak to us ? Do we think he has prepared something for us with a nasty sting in the tail ? The devil lies to us and perverts the truth of God's love by filling us with **fear**.

Jesus goes to the heart of this fear and unbelief by gently bringing it to the surface in His example of the evil Father. He exposes such a concept for the demonic lie it is and unequivocally asserts the truth of God's Fatherly care. His words carry the balm of healing and restore the image of God the Father in the hearts of His hearers. Perfect love casts out fear ! Meditate on Christ's words and enable Him to free you from your own deep seated fears in order to be able to receive the faith to pray aright to a loving heavenly Father who longs to give good gifts to his children.

Let's move on to *Luke 11*. Again Jesus is teaching on prayer and comes up with another striking little story. Like our first story this one is designed to expose the hidden views we have concerning God's character especially in relation to prayer. Essentially we have a man in need coming to "his friend", to ask for three loaves of bread. He is the

archetype of all who come to God with their needs. However, in spite of his being a friend he gets a rather shocking reception !

"Don't bother me."

Deep down, do we sometimes harbour the image of God being like some high-powered business executive, rushing around running the world with no real time for my prayers and concerns and my three little loaves of life!

"The door is already locked,"

Do you sometimes think that a "no entry" sign has been put up specifically over heaven for you ? Have sin, rejection and unbelief put barricades before heaven's generosity? Has someone told you that you've no right to pray, as that is only the job of priests, holy men and the super spiritual ?

"..and my children are with me in bed."

Well, here we have it. God is asleep in bed while the world hungers for bread !

How many have not sometimes found themselves pondering such thoughts. Communists and humanists load their guns with such ammunition. The famous communist playwright, Bertolt Brecht, wrote:

"Food is the first thing, morals follow on!"

God seems strangely absent from the world scene. Often we may have cried out to God and felt, perhaps, His absence. An absence that may well have wounded us deeply and left the way open for Satan's bitter lies.

"I can't get up and give you anything."

Is God really as pathetic as this !

Better find some rich businessman to get things done or some mafia warlord as God is powerless ! The above is the exact opposite of who God is and a direct antithesis to the whole ethic and promise of prayer ! If you've ever believed this lie about Him you almost deserve to be breadless ! Such a blasphemous view of God and prayer is a pretty serious sin that needs repenting of. Jesus gently rebuked the father of the demonised boy in *Mark 9: 23*, when he weakly said,

" If you can ? "

We need to remember that he was speaking to the all powerful Son of God ! *" If you can ? "* is just not good enough ! Jesus reminded him of the level of faith filled asking he was looking for.

" " If you can ? " said Jesus. " Everything is possible for him who believes "

Let us repent deeply of all the wrong views of God that are exposed in Jesus' simple story. Like our concerned father, struggling with past failure and demonic lies, let us cry out :

" I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief! "

Let us persevere, and be bold enough to walk through apparent contradictions by faith. Learn to laugh at Satan's lies and attacks and hold firm on God's generous giving nature. This is the "**persistence**" mentioned in the text. **A persistence for a right perspective of God, not a superstitious persistence in dead works of unbelief.**

The "boldness" and perseverance here is not to change God's mind or somehow win Him over through good works or penance. It is simply our own inner perseverance and boldness needed to overcome the lies of the enemy which continually blaspheme God's character to us. We must daily and boldly overcome such persistent demonic propaganda !

Jesus, having exposed the lie, takes us firmly back into the truth of prayer and promise.

"I tell you.."

"So I say to you.."

*"..he will get up and give him **as much as he needs.**"*

"Ask and it will be given to you;"

In this world where God's image is constantly being blasphemed by the enemy's works of death and destruction, aided and abetted by the Church's passivity and "fig leaf" doctrine, we need a **bold generation** who will hold firm in prayer, striving daily to maintain their high view of God and getting answer from heaven to meet the needs of mankind. The prayer of faith will always meet God's provision. God is longing to find faith that receives **as much as we need** and hearts that dare to ask. So.....how much do you need ?

Our third text begins in the same teaching style with Jesus exposing the erroneous, sinful view of God. *Luke 18: 1-8* is a story designed to encourage prayer.

*" Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that **they should always pray and not give up.** "*

What makes the majority of people give up on prayer ?

The idea that God is uncaring, unjust and harsh !

Many people have an unhealthy fear of God seeing Him as an unfair judge. This paralyses their prayer and makes them give up easily. Jesus exposes this wrong view in his opening lines describing this awful man.

" In a certain town " - he might even have said " In a certain mind set ! "

" ..there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared about men. "

Again this definition exposes the hidden lies that have wounded our perception of God. It couldn't be further from the truth of a generous loving God who so cared for the world that He sent His one and only Son to suffer and die on a cross.

The ultimate caring !

A widow's prayer request is also mentioned.

" Grant me justice against my adversary. "

Her plea is the universal cry for justice which has risen from broken, bereaved hearts since the earliest ages. Literally she is saying *" Give me justice against anti-justice. "* As well as being the voice of humanity she is also the voice of a Church, perhaps not yet fully understanding her inheritance as a Bride, yet interceding for justice against the great adversary Satan.

Sometimes, in reading this story, it seems that the judge is more of a problem than the widow's adversary ! Sadly, many people in the world seem to spend more time blaming God for injustice and adversity than blaming their true adversary Satan ! True evil hides behind perverted perceptions of good.

Our " judge God " here is just as refusing as " our asleep God " in the last story.

" For some time he refused "

Refusing justice ! Unthinkable ! Even old Abraham knew better than that when he " persisted " in prayer to raise himself up to the level of God's justice when he interceded for Sodom and Gomorrah.

" Will not the Judge of all the earth do right ? " Genesis 18 :25

Again, the whole passion of Christ is a potent statement to God's utter lack of procrastination in bringing justice to the world.

So are we to vainly pray for justice like some poor widow woman. Is prayer just about giving God a headache until he gives in ! Are we meant to simply wear God out with our superstitious mumblings and good works ! I remember hearing a famous preacher once say that many religious people he met seemed to be *" nicer than God ! "* Is

our attendance at Church, added to our cultural morality, myriad masses and prayer chains designed to wear down God's resistance until he finally gives in and answers !

" Even though I don't fear God or care about men, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she won't eventually wear me out with her coming ! "

Surely we can do better than this ! Jesus' whole aim here is to expose our wrong legalistic perceptions and spur us on to faith. If an evil father can give food to his kids, and if an uncaring judge can finally give in, **how much more**, does God want to answer !

*" Listen to what the unjust judge says. **And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones who cry out to him day and night ? Will he keep putting them off ? "***

It is at this point that you have to think back to the pantomimes you saw at school... *" Oh yes it is!...Oh no it isn't "*. You get the idea ? The crowds around Jesus would be bursting to answer. *" No ! No !...Our loving God will not keep putting us off ! Even if the Romans are here, bringing injustice with every step, we know that Yahweh is not an unjust judge. "* And Jesus, having got them to a point of faith continues:

*" I tell you, **he will see that they get justice** -big cheer from the crowd !, **and quickly.** " - even bigger cheer from the crowd !*

And then he delivers us our ultimate, deeply challenging punch line:

*" However, when the Son of Man comes, **will he find faith on the earth ? "***

Will he find hearts freed from fear and unbelief, hearts which trust a loving Father who gives good gifts to those that ask. Will he find the faith that pushes through the apparent failures, lacks and contradictions of life, a faith that takes hold of Yahweh Jireh, God the Provider. Will he indeed find his chosen ones crying out in intercession, day and night, in full faith that their prayers for justice in the nations are being met and that deliverance is as quick and as sure as the rising dawn.

In reading these words and parables, the Holy spirit may have exposed deep wounds and lies that have distorted God's generous beauty to your eyes. Allow these same words to gently encourage and heal and bring a fresh power and perspective on prayer and its certain answer !

Look to the cross, look to the heart of Christ and find total care, total Fatherhood, total commitment, total grace, total intimacy, total action and total love !

Oh yes he is.....!

