



SERMON OF THE WEEK

First Presbyterian Church of Honolulu at Ko'olau

November 19, 2017

"Jesus Prays for Us" (How to Pray Series)

Pastor Dan Chun

For the last seven months we have been going through a series on How to Pray. Today it ends. It is a fitting time to end as for the last week or so we have been having a series of conference events on prayer. Last weekend we had a three-day Life in the Spirit conference, followed by Worship in the Spirit, and then a gathering called Kingdom Come, which mixed singing praise music with prayer.

For seven days I was hanging out with the leaders of the conference – three British men – Pete Greig, Bill Cahusac, and Tom Smith. When you hang out with Brits, you discover a multitude of things.

First you wish you could talk like them. Their accents make it sound like everything is so articulate, intelligent, and poetic. You want to retort, "Eh no make li dat!" They could be reading out loud something from *Car and Driver* magazine or *Popular Mechanics* magazine, but their accent makes it seem like you're listening to a Shakespearean sonnet on To Drive or Not to Drive, that is the question ... whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer, the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune ...or to take arms against a sea of troubles." [Hamlet, Act III, Scene I]

You also discover from hanging around British people that what they say is not necessarily what they mean, or at least what we Americans understand. There's actually a website that shows the differences in phrases Brits and Americans use.

When the British say, "I hear what you say," Americans understand that to be, "They accept my point of view." But what they really mean is, "I disagree and do not want to discuss it further."

When the Brits say "with greatest respect," But Americans think it means, "They are listening to me." But what they really mean is, "I think you're an idiot."

When the Brits say, "That's interesting," we think, "They're impressed!" But what they mean is, "That is clearly nonsense."

When the British say, "I only have a few minor comments," we think it means, "Oh, he has found a few typos." But what they really mean is "Please re-write completely."

Communication can be very hard sometimes.

Over the last several months we have tried to teach you all about prayer and the different methods on how to communicate with God - whether through solitude, meditation, St. Ignatius's Daily Examen, healing prayer, prophetic prayer, or tongues. But there may be times when we doubt if God understands our prayers, or if they're even reaching Him. There may be times when we feel that God is so far away that we wonder if He even hears us.

Don't give up! Because there's one more kind of prayer that is one of the clearest forms of prayer to God. And that prayer is when Jesus prays for us. We end this

message series on prayer with not us praying to God, but Jesus praying to God FOR US! Is that not amazing?

Did you know that Jesus prays for us constantly? Jesus is always praying for us to God the Father and sending us His Holy Spirit. The Trinity is always working for us and leading us.

We see this in so many ways. Jesus' prayers for us show at least three things:

1) He loves us.

First, His prayers show us that He loves us. Are any of you going through a rough time? Are you wondering what is Jesus doing when He hears your cries for help or even before you cry for help? Hear this passage as Jesus is talking to the Apostle Peter, who, at this point, is called Simon.

Luke 22:31 "Simon, Simon, listen! Satan has demanded to sift all of you like wheat,

Luke 22:32 but I have prayed for you that your own faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned back, strengthen your brothers."

Did you hear that? In one translation it says that Jesus is PLEADING IN PRAYER to God the Father for us that we will not be sifted like wheat, that we would keep the faith even when being sifted.

I remember when I was a little boy how my mom used a metal sieve, which was a can with a crank on the side.

It had metal bars inside that would turn and push flour through the metal screen on the bottom to make the flour finer.

When Satan brings into our lives challenges or trauma or moral injustices or horrible situations, it's like he wants to sift us. He wants to push down on us with metal bars turning, so that we are cut and torn by the metal grids of the screen. But even when the Devil himself, who is real by the way, is trying to rip you up, Jesus prays for you. He's pleading with God the Father to help you in the midst of the pressure and the pain. Think of this – the Almighty God, the King of Kings, the Lord of the Universe is praying for you to not give up.

Now let me cut to the quick for many who are suffering extreme pain. Here is their question: "If I am suffering so much, why doesn't God end my pain? Why doesn't He turn off the spigot of suffering? If there is really a loving God, He would pray to eliminate and end my pain."

Here's the reality. There will ALWAYS be pain in this world. If you think that following Jesus means no pain, Jesus never said. We might have made up a religion in our minds of no pain on earth, but that is not what Jesus told us in the Bible. He said this at the Last Supper:

John 16: 33 "I have told you all this so that you may have peace in me. Here on earth you will have many trials and sorrows. But take heart, because I have overcome the world."

If you were a parent, an uncle, or aunty, you would want to realistically say to your child, "I wish I could promise you a life of no pain. But there will be pain, so you will have to be tough. You will have to keep the faith."

And that is what Jesus said to us. There will be pain. Keep the faith. In the midst of darkness, I am there in the shadows praying for you, crying with you. You may

not see me, but I am there praying for you.

I know we would want a world with zero suffering, but Jesus is saying, there will be trials and sorrows, but take heart for I have overcome the world.

It means in the end you can survive. Why? Because He is praying for you. Praying for you has always been His utmost desire. Some of you have had some difficult times in the hospital, the courtroom, at home, school, or at the office. Can you imagine right now in one of your deepest hurts that Jesus was there praying for you, maybe with tears in His eyes? He was in the background praying that you not give up, that you not surrender to evil, that you keep the faith, that you may have strength, that maybe intuitively you might feel His presence in the midst of your tears.

Remember Laura Boyer's story she once shared with us in church, and I have her permission to share it again. When Laura was a young child, she was molested. As an adult she had to work that through for many years.

In a desert in Arizona many years ago, she told God how angry she was for not being there for her when she was molested. She had a baseball bat in her hand, and she began to hit things in anger. Then with the bat, she wrote in the sand these words to God: "Where were you?"

Then it started to rain. Great. It muddled up her words, and that made her even angrier. She felt like God was trying to erase the question. She then felt even more abandoned.

As she looked back at that time in the desert years later, after experiencing God's healing, she realized that Jesus was there for her all throughout her childhood. He was crying FOR her; crying WITH her and praying FOR her, so now when she looked back at that time when she was literally having that desert – wilderness experience in writing the

words, "Where were you," she could now see that the rain symbolized God's tears.

The fact that she shared that story with us is because Jesus prayed for her. She eventually got stronger, got emotional healing. She shared her story with us publicly to strengthen our faith so that we might not give up on God. You see, she lived out what Jesus said could happen:

Luke 22:32 but I have prayed for you that your own faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned back, strengthen your brothers."

Laura turned from despair to God, and became so strong she could strengthen others. Hear now a prayer Jesus said after the Last Supper just days before He would be tortured and then killed. He said this in His prayer to God the Father about us:

John 17:15 I'm not asking you to take them out of the world, but to keep them safe from the evil one.

John 17:16 They do not belong to this world any more than I do.

John 17:17 Make them holy by your truth; teach them your word, which is truth.

Why do we have small groups, Bible studies, classes, and courses? So that we might teach one another the word of God, which is truth; the truth that Jesus is real, that He loves us, and that He prays for us. That is important truth for us to know. Get to know Him, and then don't give up on Him, for to do so will make the Devil so happy.

When we suffer, Jesus doesn't pray that we get taken out of the world. His prayer is that we will be kept safe from the Evil One – Satan. Ultimately we are safe, if we do not capitulate. Every day that we are alive, every day we keep hope in our hearts, we have defeated Satan who is a real personal evil on this earth.

Keeping the faith means the Evil One will never win. When we give up the faith, it means the Evil One wins. Don't let him win. No matter how great the pain is, hang in there. Don't give him the pleasure of you giving up. Jesus' prayer is that we hang in there and not surrender. Jesus is rooting for us.

How bad can it get for us humans here on earth. The Apostle Paul was massively tortured and jailed for his faith. He knew pain and suffering but he never gave up. He wrote this in a letter.

2Cor. 4:8 We are pressed on every side by troubles, but we are not crushed. We are perplexed, but not driven to despair.

2Cor. 4:9 We are hunted down, but never abandoned by God. We get knocked down, but we are not destroyed.

2Cor. 4:10 Through suffering, our bodies continue to share in the death of Jesus so that the life of Jesus may also be seen in our bodies.

Paul never gave up even though at times he was literally knocked down he was never knocked out in his faith. Maybe Paul was just speaking idealistically. Maybe he led a peaches-and-cream life so what does he know about real pain when he writes this stuff?

How bad was it for the Apostle Paul? Pretty bad? Yes, very bad. He wrote this further on in the same letter to a church.

2Cor. 11:24 Five times I have received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one.

2Cor. 11:25 Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I received a stoning. Three times I was shipwrecked; for a night and a day I was adrift at sea;

2Cor. 11:26 on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from bandits, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers and sisters;

2Cor. 11:27 in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, hungry and thirsty, often without food, cold and naked.

2Cor. 11:28 And, besides other things, I am under daily pressure because of my anxiety for all the churches.

2Cor. 11:29 Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to stumble, and I am not indignant?

2Cor. 11:30 If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness.

Paul had it really hard! But notice in the end he doesn't boast of his fortitude and faith and strength. No, he says I must boast of my weakness. Why would anyone boast of weaknesses? Because it is only in our weakness we realize we need Jesus. Until then we can be proud, bloated with pride, think we are sophisticated and smarter and stronger than we really are.

The fact is, people, our society is not smart enough, strong enough wise enough to save ourselves. Paul was saying I am weak; therefore I have no problem saying, I need help; I'm humble enough to know I can't do it on my own strength, I need the prayers of Jesus.

Hear this principle about Jesus: He will never ask you to do something that He did not do.

Jesus prayed. You should pray. He kept being faithful to God. So should we. Jesus was whipped, and beaten and stabbed and betrayed and crucified so when He says, "Don't give up," He is not doing that in theory. He went through immense emotional and physical pain. He was depressed, so depressed that He even said on the cross, "My God, my God why have you forsaken me?"

That's depression. Yes, even for Jesus. He was so anxious and panicked that He sweated blood, in the Garden of Gethsemane just before He was arrested

because He knew of the torture He would have to experience for our sake.

But in the end He trusted God and said, "I entrust my life, my Spirit into your hands, God my Father." (Lk. 23:46) He knew where His ultimate hope was. Jesus never gave up in the midst of suffering. We should not give up.

And we don't have to give up to the Evil One. Why? Because Jesus is praying for us. And why is He praying for us?

2) He wants us to have unity.

Unity? Why unity? Because God knows we need to be unified even in pain. Life is hard, and we need each other and we need to help each other. In unity we can strengthen, encourage and comfort one another. When we are not unified, we don't want to do those things. We need to reach out to others and let them minister to us ... and offer our strength to minister to others. Often it is just one beggar telling another beggar where to find food – that Jesus is the bread of life.

Here is Jesus' prayer to God the Father for our unity:

John 17:11 Now I am departing from the world; they are staying in this world, but I am coming to you. Holy Father, you have given me your name; now protect them by the power of your name so that they will be united just as we are.

John 17:21 I pray that they will all be one, just as you and I are one—as you are in me, Father, and I am in you. And may they be in us so that the world will believe you sent me.

John 17:22 "I have given them the glory you gave me, so they may be one as we are one.

John 17:23 I am in them and you are in me. May they experience such perfect unity that the world will know that you sent me and that you love them as much as you love me.

God the Father loves Jesus a lot. That's His son. And Jesus is saying to the Father, "Love them as much as you love Me." That says a lot!

3) He wants us to have joy.

Listen again in to His prayer to God the Father:

John 17:13 "Now I am coming to you. I told them many things while I was with them in this world so they would be filled with my joy."

This is what I want to end with. Jesus prays that we might have joy. Not any kind of joy, but God's joy. The world's joy might just be a happiness that goes up and down depending on the circumstances. But God's joy sustains us. It happens not apart from pain but often in the midst of pain.

How can we be joyful even in tough times? It is a joy that God loves us so much and that in the end God will bring justice. Our faith must be based on the fact that someday our sorrow will turn into joy. It says in the Old Testament:

Psalms 30:5 Weeping may last through the night, but joy comes with the morning.

God offers us joy, but yes sometimes it takes a long time.

I told you two years ago or so how I was at Fuller Seminary campus as a trustee and one night Fuller students were supposed to invite the trustees over to their apartments for dinner. Pam and I were assigned to a doctoral student who was married and had three young children, and who was kind enough to cook us dinner.

When we got there she was embarrassed that the four students who were supposed to be eating dinner with us all bailed. They didn't show up. So she invited four other neighbors and friends to take their place.

At the end of the meal, I asked the students where they lived, and one of them, a single mom said, she lived at 250 N. Oakland Avenue. I said that's funny, that's where I used to live. What apartment? She said apartment 8. And my heart dropped. That was the exact apartment I used to live in.

She asked me if I wanted to go visit it, and I was hesitant. But Pam said, "Yeah, let's go." So we went into her apartment, which was just upstairs from where we were having dinner. Everything was so familiar. It seemed like it had the same Formica counters in the kitchen and bathroom as when I lived there for 5 years as a Fuller student and as a USC student.

Then suddenly I felt this wave of sadness. That apartment represented the saddest time in my life. It was where I lived when my first wife left me. The sadness and the loneliness and the abandonment came rushing back to me.

I remembered the exact spot where I received and opened the envelope of my divorce papers as my friends Dominic and Cindy stood there. I remembered how I was so devastated that the next day I flunked the exam of my New Testament class.

When the Psalm said weeping may last through the night, the "night" for me lasted many years. And all of that sadness flooded back to me on how that was such a dark, dark time. I remembered how my wife at that time said to me, "I don't love you, and I never did." Then two weeks later she left and moved to another state. Nine months later she married another person I didn't know existed. I was crushed. I felt like such a loser.

What made it worse when people said that maybe I should not be a pastor. But then just as the wave of sadness came to me suddenly, it was then instantly replaced by a wave of grace. I thought, "Wait a minute. Who would have guessed that some 40 years later I would

return to this apartment, and here I am standing with Pam, my wife of 36 years and the mother of our three children who love the Lord?

And I, the guy who shouldn't have been a pastor, did become a pastor. And I'm privileged to be the pastor of First Prez, which is an emotionally healthy church. What a blessing! And wait a minute, Pam and I started Hawaiian Islands Ministries and we have trained tens of thousands of church leaders, and I wasn't even supposed to be a church leader.

And wait a minute! This guy who flunked his final exam on his New Testament class is now a trustee of the largest cross-denominational seminary in the world. Me, the loser! And today, like the Apostle Paul, I boast of my weakness for it points even more to God's grace.

And I can say full on that I have God's joy. He has given me the greatest church in the world. I am so joyful here that I think I will treat everyone to a Thanksgiving dinner! I can truly say, Jesus prayed for me while I was in that apartment during my desert wilderness years. He wept with me. I can say, though weeping may last through the night, joy comes with the morning.

Don't give up! No matter how tough it's been, no matter how much you've failed God, no matter how low you have fallen, you have not ruined your chances with Jesus. Our Savior, who defied death, loves you. He's praying for you because you matter to Him.

May this truth give you even more reasons to praise and thank our Lord Jesus Christ this Thanksgiving. Amen? Amen.