

As Yet They Did Not Know the Scriptures
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We are in a season of needful prayer. Judah was as well. From the moment that Joseph's cup was found in Benjamin's sack, and his youngest brother was accused of theft (albeit it falsely), until the moment that he re-appeared in the presence of Joseph, Judah had to be moving and praying—winding up for the appeal he would deliver to Joseph on behalf of Benjamin. Everything is hanging in the balance.

So, you don't have to be a baseball fan to know that the pitcher winds up before he throws, right? So we are going to treat Judah's impassioned speech to Joseph as a fast ball, delivered in the strike zone with blinding speed! But first we are going to utilize this metaphor to address the preparation phase of our prayer life—the wind up before the pitch! And the preparation to prayer is known as meditation; in order to deliver a prayer, across the plate and in the strike zone, there are several things we need to meditate on. One topic is the power of prayer and very closely allied to that is the power of faith. Without further ado, let's consider the power of prayer (the privilege that God has afforded us to converse with Him) and follow-up on the place of faith in our prayer life. Before we leave the mound, however, I do want to mention that there is a third phase to throwing the perfect pitch and that is the *follow-through*: wind up, pitch and follow through capture the essence of pitching. After the pitch is thrown, everyone has to be ready to play ball, everyone.

1. Before prayer, we should meditate on God and the power of prayer. Meditation prepares the heart for prayer.

By prayer, fire was quenched; waters stood up, or were divided; the mouths of hungry lions were stopped; iron gates were opened and shackles fell off; windows of heaven were opened; the course of nature was overturned; climate was changed and droughts repealed; diseases were removed and health restored; the dead were raised and restored to family; sin was subdued; grace bestowed; kingdoms supported and despots removed; enemies were destroyed or scattered; the blind, deaf, mute and disfigured were restored; cripples walked and were made whole; and the hungry pilgrims were fed, devils were cast out! *How does anyone even begin to think like that?! **What praiseworthy speech! What glorifying thoughts!*** I have just basically quoted George Swinnock, a selection from his Works. He was writing on the necessity of prayer, *the duty of prayer* while reflecting upon Psalm 50:15, **meditation: . . . And call upon me in the day of troubles; and I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me.** And there it is: wind up, pitch and followthrough.

2. Before prayer, we should meditate on the power of faith. Meditating on faith builds faith.

When you hear Swinnock's words, I wonder which relevant portions of Scripture come to your mind? "The Song Miriam? (Exodus 15:1-18)" Or "The Song of Deborah (Judges 5:2-31)"? One of the psalms? I will lead out. What comes to my mind is Hebrews 11, the excellent, inspired and inspiring Hall of Faith chapter. If we substitute prayer for faith, or modify faith to read ***the prayer of faith***, the similarities between prayer (Swinnock) and faith (Hebrews) cannot be missed. In Hebrews we read about the triumph of faith though **the day of troubles**, in a chronology of the lives of faithful men and women: Abel, Enoch and Noah . . . Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Sarah, **all died in faith!** (v.13). By faith, Joseph foresaw the exodus, and Moses by faith **was hidden** his parents not fearing the king's edict! And Moses' faith led him to identify with the Hebrews, leaving Egypt and keeping Passover, enduring **as seeing the invisible**. (v.27) The people of God crossed the Red Sea safely, and **by faith the walls of Jericho fell down** (v.30) **By faith Rahab the prostitute did not perish with the disobedient** (v.31) **And what more shall I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets—who through faith conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, were made strong out of weakness, became might in war, put foreign armies to flight (31-34) . . . And all these, though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised, since God had provided something better for us, that apart from us they might not be perfected.** (vv.39-40)

What towering, enormously inspiring passages these are! Both are suitable for our pre-prayer meditation.

Likewise when Philippians 4:8 exhorts us to ponder some things in general—I have just named the specifics *of what we are **to think about—that is, meditate on:***
8 Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is [a]lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, think about these things.

Like Swinnock's prayer list, or Hebrews 11—both or either will contribute to your wind-up . . . and add to your assurance that your prayers will be heard.

As I asked before: *How does anyone even begin to think like that?!*

I want to answer that question on the basis of developments which occurred on the first Sunday after the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. Two things about the apparent lack of knowledge regarding the Scriptures *among the disciples* in the Upper Room where the eleven were hiding out (John 20:9: **for as yet they did not understand the Scripture, that he must rise from the dead**), and the appearance of the Lord to other disciples on the Emmaus Road (Luke 24:25-27: **O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his**

glory? And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.) The two returned to Jerusalem with their report, and the eleven had already seen the risen Lord—and received the Holy Spirit. Then the Lord appears again, saying, “**all that is written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.**” Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures. (Luke 24:44-45)

The answer is by a proper understanding of Scripture which comes by the gift of the Holy Spirit. This is what **opened their minds**. Jesus instructed them in the right reading of the Scriptures (**all that was written about me**) and gifted them with the Holy Spirit. Then you can sing of the power of prayer, and exult in the power of faith.

We come at last to Judah’s appeal to Joseph.

Joseph’s actions, in dealing with his miscreant, wicked brothers parallels, or conforms to God’s dealing with unrepentant sinners—the sin condition must be acknowledged and dealt with. **What deed is this that you have done?** Joseph asks. That question harkens back to God’s interrogation of Adam and Eve, and to Eve the Lord said, **What is this that you have done?** (Gen. 3:13). And it echoes Gen. 4:10 where God confronts the guilty Cain, **What have you done?** God already knows about the murder, **your brother’s blood is crying to me from the ground**—Cain had done exactly what Joseph’s brothers conspired to do! God already knew—and Joseph’s hints that he has a share of omniscience, too: **Do you not know that a man like me** (a priest like me?) **can practice divination?** This is not exactly an admission that he did such things. But Judah is no stranger to pagan arts and superstitions—his son, Er, married the daughter of a Canaanite priest—at Judah’s direction (38:6). His friend, Hirah, helped Judah to his advantageous marriage to Shua, whose name means opulence, and this sense of Judah being well-placed in Canaanite society (as Joseph was later in Egyptian society, even to being married to the daughter of the priest of On!) is supported by Judah marrying his son to a daughter of the priest class! We may suppose that Joseph knew of this, but most certainly God knew *what he had done*. Judah’s participation in the Ashtoreth cult, which employed temple prostitutes in pagan worship, is attested to by the cord he wore when seduced by his daughter-in-law, Tamar, who leveraged his lust to obtain her right and due from him. God knew about all that as well. He appointed that the seed of promise would pass through Tamar and Judah. Judah’s sons, Er (**wicked in the sight of the Lord**) and Onan (**what he did was wicked in the sight of the Lord, and he put him to death also**) proved too wicked! We covered the wickedness of Judah towards Tamar in an earlier message. So, this entire journey to the wild side, paganism and sexual intemperance, was utterly transparent and known to God—and all the resultant defilement had to be dealt with. As it always does.

And we are privy to the wickedness that preceded abandonment of God and family: the attempted murder of Joseph and his enslavement by his brothers. The lies, deceit and dishonoring of his father. While Judah's dishonoring of Jacob was not as explicitly sexual as Reuben's incestuous adultery, it was a matter of record with God. And even prior to that we have the mayhem and slaughter of the Shechemites, which followed upon indecent, and vile behaviors as reported to Jacob by Joseph. *All of that and more I am sure is summed up in: **What shall we say to my lord? What shall we speak? Or how can we clear ourselves? God has found out the guilt of your servants;*** (v. 16) This is both confession and repentance—there is no excusing, no blaming, just straight out acknowledgment of iniquity—all of it, I think. They are sinners.

Joseph's response focuses on the immediate transgression—but that doesn't mean a dismissal of all of Judah's sordid past. It does mean that given where he has been is not, in Joseph's eyes nearly so important as where he is now. Has he died to himself, to his selfish and self-indulgent, crooked and deceitful ways? Will he stand up for his brother, Benjamin, or sell him down the river so to speak?

Judah is about to embark on one of the most beautiful and impassioned speeches in the entire Scripture—excepting of course, the discourses of our Lord Jesus Himself. He is about to deliver his pitch, his appeal for the freedom of Benjamin. In entire humility and total submission to the authority of Joseph as judge and king, Judah offers what some have called a model prayer—a pray like unto the Lord's prayer, preserved to be emulated by us! Judah pleads for a hearing, having honored the governor (**you are like Pharaoh himself**), he says, **Let not your anger burn against me**—he is begging for mercy from the one who can give it. Judah shares that they had been honest in relating to him the existence of his father, and his brother . . . and had spoken of his father's love for Benjamin at the start. Then he relates, you said, **Bring him down to me that I may set eyes upon him.** (v. 21) This last clause carries the sense of “that I may bless, or show favor to him.” That kind intention aside, Judah continues, **The boy cannot leave his father, for if he should leave his father, his father would die.** (v. 22) *This sensitivity to, and care for Jacob, their father* is something new, as in different! The hardness, and callousness evidence in so much of Judah's previous dealings with others is gone. (I cannot but think that the incident with Tamar, including the birth of his two grandsons, might have had something to do with this softening.) **Then you said, ‘Unless your youngest brother comes down with you, you shall not see my face again.’**” (v.23) Note Judah does not contest Joseph's right to make such a demand! He is just playing the ball where crosses the plate.

Judah then shares how they related all of this to Jacob. **Then your servant my father said to us, “You know that my wife bore me two sons. One left me, and I said, ‘Surely, he is torn to pieces’ and I have never seen him since.”** (v.28) Now this is as shockingly graphic a picture of what was done to our Lord Jesus in the crucifixion process as occurs anywhere in Scripture! **If you should take this**

one also from me (Is he hinting that he suspects their prior mischief? Perhaps.) **you will bring my gray hairs down to Sheol.** (v. 29) This then is the compelling motivation for Judah to make this appeal for Benjamin. **Now therefore, as soon as I come to your servant my father, and the boy is not with us, then, as his life is bound up in the boy's life** (whether this is healthy or not, right or wrong) **as soon as he sees that the boy is not with us, he will die.** (vv 30- 31) Judah, having made himself surety for the boy's safe return, acknowledges that his life is forfeit then says, **please let your servant** (Judah himself!) **remain instead of the boy as a servant to my lord . . . how can I go back if the boy is not with me? I fear to see the evil that would find my father.** (vv. 33-34) A fervent logic informs the whole appeal—and it is based on a knowledge of self as well as of God, or of Judah and Joseph! He takes Joseph at his word, and leaves the results up to the one in charge!

Now what is that?! Is it not courageous, self-sacrificing love for Benjamin and mercy for his aging father?! Is it not utter truthfulness and sincere pleading for help? This is my request; do with me as you will.

If this sentiment had been accessible to Judah years before, the enslavement of Joseph, let alone his elimination/attempted murder, would never have happened! Not sinning has as many consequences as sinning, if not more! Complete submission, entire ownership of sin, and an appeal to compassion—that, friends, is the right stuff when it comes to passionate and effectual prayer. Submission, transparent ownership of who we are and where we are, and an affectionate appeal to our loving Father (with all our hearts).

I have laid out for you, from Scripture, the basis for prayer as found in Genesis 44. That is not the only place it is found, mind you. If you have understood me, you know, how to approach God in prayer. Meditate on the power of prayer, consider the power of faith (its effectiveness) and then, plan your appeal anchoring your request in your knowledge of God, your firm grasp of his promises . . . wind-up, the pitch . . . and the follow-through? Thanksgiving and praise . . . glorify the One who will withhold no good thing from you.

Amen