

The Less Traveled Road of Prayer

The 17th chapter of the book of Exodus begins with the most wonderful story of water that came forth from the smitten rock and it ends with the decisive victory of Israel over Amalek. Without mentioning the subject of prayer or intercession by name, it is singularly one of the most impressive illustrations of the power of prayer to be found anywhere within the pages of Holy Writ.

In Alfred Lord Tennyson's, *Idylls of the King*, which is basically a retelling of Sir Thomas Malory's, *Le Morte d'Arthur*, one of the most touching scenes is "The Passing of Arthur." In a final horrendous battle Arthur kills the wicked Mordred, but in doing so receives a mortal wound. Every knight of the Round Table had been killed save Sir Bedivere, who carries the dying king to a church in Avalon. In the closing moments, King Arthur requests from his remaining valiant knight to pray for him. Tennyson phrases it most eloquently and famously:

"More things are wrought by prayer
Than this world dreams of. Wherefore, let thy voice
Rise like a fountain for me night and day.
For what are men better than sheep or goats
That nourish a blind life within the brain,
If, knowing God, they lift not hands of prayer
Both for themselves and those who call them friend?"

The king was correct; "More things are wrought by prayer than his world dreams of." Let's examine this passage and see what the Lord will teach us:

I. GOD IS THE FOUNTAINHEAD.

Exodus 17:1-4

It is important to note that the words Massah and Meibah in Exodus 17:7 mean respectively, "testing" and "quarreling and/or complaining." The people were demanding water from Moses. Moses quickly informs Israel that their issue is with God, not him, therefore, why would you tempt Him. Deuteronomy 6:16: "Ye shall not tempt the LORD your God, as ye tempted *him* in Massah." Matthew 4:7: "Jesus said unto him, It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God."

In America, we must remind ourselves that although we live in an environment where the average citizen lives far above the norms and standards of the remainder of the rest of the world, that we did not arrive at this place because we earned it, but we are recipients of God's mercy and gifting.

In Ayn Rand's book, "*The Fountainhead*," the case is made for individualism versus collectivism. This Russian author is protesting the communist, socialistic viewpoint, which I would also protest. The problem in her philosophy is that she takes individualism a step too far. One writer commenting about Rand's book brings to the forefront the inner belief system of the protagonist in her book, Howard Roark, "At his second trial, Roark argues that individuals, not societies, propel history. He says that individual creators are *the*

fountainhead of civilization. Roark's speech is passionate and lyrical, and the audience receives it with awed silence." This is wrong. Man is not the fountainhead - God is the Fountainhead. Jeremiah 10:23: "O LORD, I know that the way of man *is* not in himself: *it is* not in man that walketh to direct his steps." Proverbs 16:25: "There is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof *are* the ways of death." Lamentations 3:22: "It is of the LORD'S mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not." James 1:17: "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning."

II. REDEMPTION IS THE FULCRUM POINT OF PRAYER.

Exodus 17:5-7

Archimedes said, "Give me a lever long enough and a fulcrum on which to place it, and I shall move the world." This is an interesting statement, but again it exalts man as the source of his being and creator of his own personal bliss. This reminds me of a poem that has and still receives seemingly endless praise, written by William Ernest Henley, entitled, *Invictus*. The closing four lines read:

"It matters not how strait the gate,
How charged with punishments the scroll,
I am the master of my fate:
I am the captain of my soul."

If any man or woman, youth, middle age, or senior citizen attempts to be the captain of their own soul, they will crash and burn. There is a story of a captain of a mighty destroyer who believed he had a mastery over the sea, only to find out he was on a collision course with disaster rather than destiny.

When Moses is commanded to strike the rock, it is a very touching picture of Christ, the Rock of our Salvation, who was smitten for us, as was prophesied in Isaiah 53:4: "Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted."

The children of Israel did not deserve the water, but God, by grace, gave it to them in love, in spite of their wrong-doing and extremely bad attitudes. God saves us and is willing to answer our prayers, not because we've earned it, but because He loves us. Titus 2:13, 14: "Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ; Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works."

III. THE POWER OF PARTNERSHIP IN PRAYER.

Exodus 17: 8-16

A. The provocation of a cruel foe

Exodus 17:8; Deuteronomy 25:17, 18

B. The plan of battle

Exodus 17:9, 10

C. The problem in the prayer

Exodus 17: 11

D. The partnership enjoined

Exodus 17:12, 13; Ecclesiastes 4:9-14

*It was the prayer on the mountain that assured the victory in the valley!

E. The phenomenon to remember/the people to forget

Exodus 17:14-16

After the victory, Moses builds an altar and names it after the God he serves, "Jehovah-Nissi," meaning "The LORD our Banner!"

God wants Israel (and us as well) to remember the atrocity, but do not make much of the perpetrators. The Bible never gives us the name of the Pharaoh who ordered the mass murder of the Israelite babies. Dennis Prager, Jewish teacher of the Torah said, "To this day, when Jews speak of a particularly evil figure - in the modern period, generally Hitler - they will often follow the mention of the person's name with the words, "May his name and memory be blotted out" (*ye-mach she-mo ve-zichrono*)."

Conclusion:

Make no mistake; the Rock was a type of Christ, wounded for us. Paul brings that truth to our attention in I Corinthians 10:4: "And did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ." Moses is told the second time to go to the Rock for water. Furthermore, he is instructed to speak to the Rock, not strike it again. He disobeyed and in anger struck the Rock the second time. This cost him residency in the Promised Land. The overlying message is that Christ need only die once for our sins. Hebrews 10:10: "By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all."

-Pastor Pope-