

Bishop Hannington Mutebi SERMON

Tuesday 14th June 2016

This morning I want us to know that something even as wonderful as prayer can have negative consequences if used wisely.

Many times we assume that when prayers are wrong God would automatically cancel them and He will not answer them.

This is a wrong assumption

On the other hand, well intentioned Christians believe that whatever they receive as an answer to prayer must be God's will for them.

Psalms 106:15 "So He gave them that they asked for but sent a wasting disease upon them"

I want us to look at two examples from Bible that can or may help us to change or revolutionize the way we feel about prayer.

THE MEAT WAS GREAT BUT THE PLAGUE WAS HORRIBLE".

Chapter 11 of the book of Numbers records the story of the children of Israel requesting for meat in the wilderness.

Numbers 11:33 says "But while the meat was still between their teeth, and before it could be consumed the anger of the Lord burned against the people and he struck them with a severe plague."

THE MEAT WAS GREAT BUT THE PLAGUE WAS HORRIBLE"

THE MEAT WAS GREAT BUT THE PLAGUE WAS HORRIBLE.

You may ask yourself;

1. What went wrong?
2. With the meat still between their teeth, why did God strike them with a severe plague?
3. Were they not only eating what God Himself had provided?

You cannot find answers to these questions in the book of Numbers but Psalm 106:13-15 provides some answers.

- Psalm 106:13-15 "But they soon forget what He had done and did not wait for his counsel. In the desert they gave into their craving: in the wasteland they put God to the test so he gave them what they asked for but sent a disease upon them"

The children of Israel:

- a) Did not wait for God's counsel.
- b) Were motivated by their own craving.
- c) Received the answer to their prayer but it was not good for them.

Psalm 106 makes it clear that sometimes God gives us what we want even though it is not good for us. It is far safer to pray in sincere submission that God would answer only if it is His will.

Let us stop assuming that God will automatically cancel wrong requests; we are not safe if we pray carelessly.

Note:

- In the wilderness, the Israelites did not pray for meat with a submissive attitude.
- Instead they were motivated by their own cravings.
- They willfully sought and obtained an answer to prayer that was not good for them.
- Israelites mistaken prayer and its tragic consequences warn us to be careful when we pray.
- There are many people (communities and individuals) who are living with the mistakes of their past.
- Sometimes these might be mistakes of their parents or grandparents.
- In some cases, they are living with the consequences of their own wrong praying.
- Some have, in answer to prayer, married a wrong spouse.
- Some have pursued wrong courses.
- Some have bought property they should not.
- Some attended churches they should not
- And in many cases we have not analyzed our situations carefully enough to realize we are living with consequences of our own wrong praying.

I want to tell you brothers and sister that we can avoid many mistakes by praying right.

In many instances our answers are supposedly justified by the knowledge that we received what we asked God for.

We always reason and say, it must have been God's will.

But I want to tell you; such careless reasoning is not consistent with scripture.

It is always important if we end our prayers by adding a safety clause- if it is your will or Let your will be done.

The second example is about KING HEZEKIAH

In the life of Hezekiah we see, "A king's prayer, both good and selfish being answered."

In his earlier years, Hezekiah was faithful to God and succeeded:

1. Spiritually
2. Administratively
3. Politically and
4. Militarily

In (2 Kings 19: 15-19) Sennacherib, King of Assyria, sent a threatening letter to Hezekiah insulting God. Hezekiah promptly took the letter to the temple and spread it out before God.

Hezekiah was concerned primarily for the honor of God among the nations.

His first prayer was not selfish, his concern was rightly and entirely for God's glory.

- 2 Kings 19:15-19 "O Lord God of Israel, enthrone between the cherubim you alone are God over all the kingdoms of earth. You have made heaven and earth, Give ear, O Lord and hear, open your eyes, O Lord and see: listen to the words.

- Sennacherib has sent to insult the word of God. It is true, O Lord that the Assyrian kings have said, “waste their nations and their lands. They have thrown their gods into the fire and destroyed them, for they love not gods but only wood and stone, fashioned by men’s hands.
- Now, O Lord our God, deliver us from his hands so that all kingdoms on earth may know that you alone, O Lord, are God (2 Kings 19:15-19)

This was a glorious, God- centered prayer illustrating effective cooperation with God in prayer. It brought great glory to God when the answer came to earth. God’s kingdom came and His will was done.

After such a glorious and great prayer with a wonderful answer from God and deliverance from Sennacherib

Hezekiah became ill. Prophet Isaiah informed him to put his things in order and prepare to die.(2 kings 20:1)

God was evidently finished using Hezekiah and He wanted him, to die.

You hear men and women of God quoting this text telling sick people “If you will pray as Hezekiah prayed, you too will receive your healing.”

It is true if you pray as Hezekiah prayed you too, might receive your healing.

However, I can as well argue and say that it may be neither God’s will nor good for you.

With the results of Hezekiah’s prayer, it is easy and possible to see that Hezekiah’s prayer was similar to the prayers of Israel in the wilderness.

It was not the prayer he should have prayed and the results were not good for Hezekiah or Israel.

The records of Hezekiah’s behavior reveal that his attitude during the last 15 years of his life were totally different from his attitude during his godly, former years.

What he said in his prayer of thanksgiving when he was healed (Isaiah 38:9-20) seems to indicate he was humble and grateful to God.

Yet, how he behaved in subsequent years’ indicate that he was prideful (Isaiah 39 and 2 Kings 20)

How he behaved is more of an indication of his attitude than what he said- actions speak louder than words.

Furthermore, in 2 Chronicles 32:31 it is recorded that “.... God left him to test him and to know everything that was in his heart.”

His pride and self-sufficiency led him to pray according to his own desires rather than seek or submit to God’s plan

- 2 Kings 20: 1-69
- “In these days, Hezekiah became ill and was at the point of death. The prophet Isaiah, son of Amez, went to him and said “Put your house in order because you are going to die; you will not recover”
- Hezekiah turned face to the wall and prayed to the Lord; “Remember O Lord how I have walked before you faithfully and with whole hearted devotion and have done what is good in your eyes.” And Hezekiah wept bitterly.
- Before Isaiah had left the middle coast, the word of the Lord came to him ; “ go back and tell Hezekiah the leader of my people, “This is what the Lord, the God of your father David says; I have heard your prayers and seen your tears , I will heal you . On the third from now, you will go up to the temple of the Lord. I will add fifteen years to your life.” (2 kings 20:1-69)

In this prayer we see that Hezekiah prayed the opposite of God's will that Isaiah revealed to him. In this prayer, there is no mention of God's glory or reputation among the nations. This contrasts with the earlier prayer in which Hezekiah, fearing the Assyrian army, was very eager for God to glorify Himself "....so that all kingdoms on earth may know that you alone, O Lord are God (2 Kings 19:19)

There is warning for us to take note of:

- In this prayer Hezekiah is referring to his own former good works as though good works were the basis for God answering our prayer.
- Hezekiah is as though bragging
- His prayer was both misguided and incorrectly motivated.

Whenever we refer to our good works as though they earn the answer to our prayer, it should be a warning to us.

Maybe subconsciously we think our petition should be answered because we are good.

In such cases, our focus is wrong; God answers because He is good.

We can as well see in this prayer of Hezekiah a mistake in the bitterness with which he wept and prayed. Most of us here are parents and we very well know that not all crying of our children is in submission.

- Sometimes crying can express defiance or anger.
- Weeping bitterly, with his face against the wall, "is a different practice than the godly prayer warrior who, just a little earlier had spread the Assyrian's letter out before the Lord in the temple.
- Weeping with bitter resentment towards circumstances or an authority figure is different from a submissive cry of petition, sorrow or loss.
- Hezekiah's weeping is no sure sign of any sincerity
- He wept bitterly not in humble or submissive petition but in annoyance and insubordination.
- Nevertheless God granted Hezekiah's prayer and gave him 15 more years of life.

NOTE:

Sometime later, visitors arrived from Babylon to congratulate Hezekiah on his recovery.

- 2 Kings 20:12-13 "At that time, Merodach, Baladan, son of Baladan, king of Babylon sent Hezekiah letters and a gift because he had heard of Hezekiah's illness. Hezekiah received the messengers and showed them all that was in his storehouses; the silver, the gold, the spices and the fine oil- the armory and everything found among his treasures. There was nothing in his palace or in his kingdom that Hezekiah didn't show them." (2 Kings 20:12-13)

We talk about that which is important to us.

What Hezekiah talked about and showed to his Babylonian visitors indicated to us today the object of his trust and attention.

He took them to the armory, showing them swords, spears, bows, arrows and other implements of war.

He took them to the treasury and showed them the spices, silver and gold.

At this later stage in his life, it seems he trusted military and economic strength, not God.

NOTE:

- 2Kings 20:14-15 “Then Isaiah the prophet went to King Hezekiah and asked, “What did those men say, and where did they come from? From a distant land, Hezekiah replied. “They came from Babylon.” the prophet asked “what did they see in your palace?” they saw everything in my palace, Hezekiah said. There is nothing among my treasures that I did not show them.

The state visit of the messengers from Babylon would have been a good opportunity for Hezekiah to take his foreign guests to the temple in Jerusalem and say, “This is where I brought the threatening letter of Sennacherib and laid it out before our mighty God.”

This is the temple where the creator-God, Jehovah, Elshaddai, Yahweh, our great God – dwells and receives the praises and prayers of His people. Come with me and see the temple of the great God of all the earth. He could have pointed out that the God that was worshipped in that temple was the very same God who delivered Israel and healed him but he did not.

At the earlier and humble stage in Hezekiah’s life, when the Assyrians laid siege to Jerusalem. Hezekiah did not go to the armory or treasury; instead he went to the temple.

At this later stage in his life, he instead took his guests to the armory and treasury, not to the temple. There appears to be no mention made of Israel’s protector, just boastings of armaments and treasures.

At this later stage when the congratulations and accolades were coming his way, he did not go to the temple to give God the praise.

Instead, he went to the armory and treasury to brag.

The most important lesson for us here is to find God’s will and praying accordingly.

NOTE:

Another lesson is how many times do we run to God in prayer when we have a problem?

Then, after He has helped us, do we brag about something else other than our true Deliverer?

NOTE: 2 Kings 20:16-18

Then Isaiah said to Hezekiah, “Hear the word of the Lord: the time will surely come when everything in your palace and all that your fathers have stored up until this day, will be carried off to Babylon. Nothing will be left, says the Lord. And some of your descendants, your own flesh and blood, that will be born to you will be taken away and they will become eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon. Then said Hezekiah to Isaiah, “The word of the Lord that you have spoken is good.” For he thought, “Will there not be peace and security in my life time.”

Isaiah did not wait long to confront the King.

When Hezekiah admitted to Isaiah that he showed the treasures and armaments to the Babylonians Isaiah delivered a very sad message those treasures and some of Hezekiah’s own offspring and Israel citizens would be carried off to Babylon as slaves.

This terrible message should have helped Hezekiah to know/realize that he has just made a great spiritual and political mistake.

Interestingly, Hezekiah revealed his selfishness pride and arrogance, caring not for the future suffering of Israel, but only for his own safety.

He said that Isaiah's message was good because the suffering would take place after his life had passed in peace and security.

2Kings 20:18

The word of the Lord you have spoken is good, Hezekiah replied. For he thought, "Will there not be peace and security in my life time?"

NOTE;

However the problems Israel experienced because if Hezekiah's prayer and the 15 year life extension did not end with Hezekiah's passing.

2 Kings 20:21 and 21:1-2

"Hezekiah rested with his fathers and Manasseh his son, succeeded him as King. Manasseh was twelve years old when he became King and he reigned in Jerusalem for fifty five years.

His mother's name was Hephzibah. He did evil in the eyes of the Lord following the detestable practices of the nations the Lord had driven out before the Israelites.

- ✓ How many years after Hezekiah's healing did he die and Manasseh begin to reign? - 15
- ✓ How old was Manasseh when he began to reign? - 12
- ✓ Then how many years passed between the healing of Hezekiah and the birth of Manasseh? – 3
- ✓ Had Hezekiah died when God said he was to die, Manasseh would not have been born.

I want to believe that, there would have been another of David's descendants who could have preserved David's line.

2 Kings 21:16 says, "Manasseh also shed so much innocent blood that he filled Jerusalem from end to end.

It is possible Isaiah, the faithful prophet who tried to influence Manasseh's father towards righteousness, was among those killed by Manasseh.

One tradition says that Isaiah was sawed into two and another says that Manasseh had Isaiah killed. Some believe when Hebrews 17:37 states "... they were sawed in two ..." implies that Manasseh killed Isaiah.

It is sad to note that Manasseh led Israel with ungodly influence for 55 years only to be followed by two more years of ungodly leadership by Manasseh's son Amon

"Amon was 22 years old when Jerusalem two years... He did evil in the eyes of the Lord as his father Manasseh had done. (2 Kings 21:19 and 21).

If Hezekiah accepted God's word and died according to His plan, no innocent blood would have been shed.

Hezekiah is a sad illustration of the danger of prayer when it is not submitted to the good use for which the privilege of prayer is to human beings.

It was not until the reign of Josiah Hezekiah's great grandson that Israel finally had a godly king once again.