

Costly Prayers

by Richard Owen Roberts

This sermon delves into the concept of costly prayer, distinguishing between prayers that involve personal engagement in the answer from those that do not. It emphasizes the importance of seeking wisdom from God through prayer, understanding that God's way of teaching us is often through challenging and costly experiences. The sermon also highlights the necessity of genuine involvement and action in response to prayer, especially in situations where God reveals a need for personal change or revival. It warns against being double-minded in prayer and stresses the significance of being willing to receive answers on God's terms, even if it requires personal sacrifice or transformation.

Scripture: James 1:5, James 1:6, James 1:9, James 1:22, James 1:27, James 4:3, James 4:8, James 4:10, James 4:17, James 5:16

Topics: "Costly Prayer", "Genuine Involvement in Faith"

Description

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Transcript

There's a wonderfully instructive passage on prayer found in the Epistle of James, chapter 1. Let me read a section of this. But if any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all men generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him. But let him ask in faith, without any doubting, for the ones who doubt are like the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind.

Now that passage deals with the type of prayer that we call costly prayer. Perhaps you haven't faced this fact, but there are cheap prayers and there are costly prayers. A cheap prayer is a prayer in which there's simply no way that you're going to be involved in the answer.

A costly prayer is a prayer where indeed something occurs through the power of God in your life that is part and parcel of the answer. Now the particular petition that is spoken of is a prayer for wisdom. If any man asks for wisdom, then God will indeed grant it to him.

But obviously if you pray for wisdom, God's not going to take a meat cleaver and split your skull and pour wisdom into you. God is going to teach you how to be wise. And God's way of teaching us is costly.

For instance, how much does a person who talks a lot learn while he's talking? If you're going to be wise, you're going to have to learn to listen. So listening, watching, weighing, carefully considering, giving God opportunity to make you wise through the use of the facilities he's already given you. A cheap prayer could be illustrated, say, like this.

On your way to a prayer meeting, you observe a group of three children hanging on to a very rickety fence. Their bellies are bulging, they're obviously as thin as rails, they look sickly. You say to yourself, those children are obviously in need.

You go to the prayer meeting and you ask for prayer for those children who are dying of malnutrition. Will that wash? Can you get away with that sort of thing? No, you see children hanging on to a fence who are dying of malnutrition. There's a duty placed upon you.

Action is required. If all you do is pray and expect God to do something miraculous through somebody else, you've missed the whole point of prayer. But a lot of our praying is like that.

We're expecting God to do something. We have no thought whatsoever of any involvement. But when you ask for wisdom, obviously there is an involvement.

So let's take this as a pattern for all costly prayer. Let me name another very costly prayer. Suppose that God makes you wise enough to realize our desperate need of Him.

Now, a lot of people do not know how desperately we need God. But God makes you wise enough to realize that. And then He burdens you to begin to pray for true revival.

Can you pray for true revival without cost? Well, you don't pray very long before God shows you something in your own heart that needs to be dealt with. Something in your own life that must change. Now part of what makes ongoing prayer meetings so difficult is that people come.

They say God really intends for them to be there. They know it's right. But once the convicting power of the Holy Spirit commences in their life, then they become not so sure.

They want to pray for revival. I've watched many a person start to pray for revival and then retreat and abandon what God called them to long before he had completed his intended work. So think about costly prayer.

Now in this passage we have two most excellent illustrations. We have the illustration of the fellow who is of no particular consequence in the mind of man. Verse 9 speaks of him, let the brother of humble circumstances glory in his high position.

So here's someone who considers himself nobody. He begins to pray for revival. God begins to thrust him forward and to use him.

But maybe he's so timid, maybe he's so backward in his thinking that he doesn't give God a chance to use him. He just feels himself totally disqualified. So the warning in the passage is if you ask, don't back down.

Don't be double-minded. The double-minded man is unstable in all his ways. So don't ask God for anything that you're not ready to receive on his terms.

The second illustration is that of a wealthy man. It's easy to picture precisely what James is led to write about. Here's a wealthy man, he gets a burden for revival.

He prays for two months steadily for revival. Then he hears from his accountant. And his accountant says to him, I've been keeping your books for 18 years.

This is the first quarter in 18 years that you've lost money. What are you doing? That is causing your finances to shrivel. Oh, don't think anything of it, says the wealthy man.

I have given some attention to another matter. Another quarter passes and the accountant calls back and says, you dropped 102 million this quarter. How many quarters will it take before the rich man begins to say, Lord, you misunderstood my prayer.

I wasn't praying for poverty. I was praying for revival. But the truth is many a rich man will not see revival until he abandons his love of wealth.

And many a poor and a simple man will not see revival until he is ready to receive it on God's terms. And that might very well mean that God intends to use him. So I ask you very tenderly, before you pray, do you think through your petition? And are you prepared to go on praying for that matter until God answers the prayer on his own terms?

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