

Weekly Study of Sunday's Message.

April 14, 2024. "Simple Prayers of a Commoner: Why?"

I Intro.

Welcome to our companion devotional to Sunday's message. It's just a part of all we have to offer to you. We don't want you to miss out on anything. So, make sure you stay connected to keep informed. We hope you are fed and ministered to by NCC, and that you can be an essential part of us moving forward. We have many ways you can plug into life at NCC. You can find all those through our website, app, and social media sites. Our app is the best way to livestream our services, but you can also livestream on FaceBook and YouTube. You can revisit past services, sign up for events and even give. We're encouraged by your presence when you gather with us. New and familiar faces join us every Sunday. If you join us online, we appreciate your presence. We are 100% committed to our virtual attenders. We are your church family, and if there is anything you need, prayer, or anything else, please let us know. This is our weekly devotional that gives you some specific things to work through from Sunday's message. Whether you were able to participate in this service or not, this devotion is free-standing. You can use it to help you dig deeper into your own spiritual walk. We hope you find this tool helpful on your spiritual journey.

II Recap.

First, a huge thanks to Kristen Hill for starting this series off last week. "*Help*" is one of the simplest and most humbling of all prayers. And "*Help*" has to begin with the admission and confession; "*I can't*". This entire series is a look at simple prayers we can utter. Not having to have this fancy theology or understanding in place. And these prayers will connect us to God in a way that opens something up inside of us, and allows God to reveal larger truths to us that will help us in life. Today, we take the next step and pray one of the most heartfelt of all prayers. "*Why?*"

III Sunday.

I'm just going to have to admit there is a lot of material in this message. We cover a huge chunk of scripture. And in the message we walked through it pretty thoroughly. This will be a very condensed overview of what happened in the service. I would encourage you to watch the service. But let's just begin with some general type questions.

Have you ever prayed the big "*Why?*" prayer?

What was happening that caused you to pray "*Why?*"

What do you think the prayer "*Why?*" is born out of?

Have you ever figured out an adequate response to the prayer "*Why?*"

As we said, the scripture for Sunday is a lengthy one. It's **Romans 8:18-39**. We broke it down in the service, and had a conversation about specific sections and prayer. But for time's sake, just read the entire passage, and then we'll give a breakdown by sections of verses that we'll discuss.

What jumped out to you about this passage?

If you were to imagine, why was Paul writing this?

What does it tell you about suffering and our tendency to want answers?

We broke this passage down into five sections and then did a deep dive into what we believe Paul was trying to convey both about suffering. And trying to understand that suffering when we pray “Why?”.

1. “Why?” gives us permission to normalize what we’re experiencing. (Romans 8:18-23a.)

Praying “Why?” allows us, gives us permission, to say out loud things aren’t the way they’re supposed to be. We recognize the world is broken, unfinished. There is a completion we’re waiting for. This is where we have to fight the urge to be fixers, smoother overs. And just let people feel and name the pain and struggles that they’re experiencing that lead to their specific prayer of “Why?”. We know there is a better ‘there’ out there. Everything is holding its breath just waiting. Allow yourself and others to just feel what is prompting you to pray “Why?”

2. “Why?” is birthed out of this deep seated foundational sense that this world should work differently. (Romans 8:23b-25.) And that should make us ask; “*Where does THAT come from?*” How do you know something isn’t the way it should be if you’ve never seen or experienced that way it should be? I know that’s a weirdly deep and meta question. How do you know something exists that has never existed? There are things we just know that speaks into, informs our pain, that this isn’t the way things are supposed to be. There is this divine presence within us that is drawing us towards something better than this. Not just regular ‘ole hope...but “*eager hope...for the day*”. This is what we know deep down when we pray “Why?”

3. There are feelings and emotions that are so big and intense that “Why?” serves as a stand-in for things we can’t put into words. (Romans 8:26-27.) We are given a helper, someone to pull alongside of us, the Holy Spirit- ‘paraclete’ to help us voice our pains and struggles in the midst of them. God has given us the Spirit as a helper. And the role of the Holy Spirit is to help us in our struggle with our prayer of “Why?”. When all we can utter is “Why?”. We’re not even sure what it means, we have a spirit who knows us who is putting our wordless struggles into the perfect exact words.

4. Be prepared for the response to “Why?” to be different than we’re looking for. (Romans 8:28-30.) This is not individual but corporate. Everyone. Every pronoun is plural. So, the “Why?” here is not necessarily something specific for you in your life. But this “Why?” is this bigger work being done in all of creation. The key is “*according to HIS purpose*”. Not us working for our personal good. There is a larger plan being worked. And we are to join in this work. This plan is moving us into this larger work for peace and joy for everyone. “*Right standing and glory*” is everyone sharing in the work of bettering the world. Our prayer of “Why?” should move us from sitting in despair, into action.

5. “Why?” is to be framed in a larger story. (Romans 8:31-39). Sometimes we want ‘answers’. “*Explain ‘all of this’ to me in a way that will help it make sense.*” And often it just doesn’t make sense. “Why?” is often an unanswerable question. Not because it’s not legit. But because it’s born out of pain. Sometimes the pain is so deep that we don’t have words for it. “Why?” is often just the utterance of pain and heartbreak that isn’t necessarily looking for a suitable response. It’s a cry for someone to just say; “*You’re right! That is horrible. Let me be with you.*” I believe this passage is meant to be read as one larger thought. Paul is saying; our “Why?” is this story we’re finding ourselves in that feels hard, painful, and there’s a lot of suffering. But hold that up against this upper, larger story being written. It doesn’t take away the sting and pain of living day to day. Paul mentions a lot of horrible

things that would make anyone pray “*Why?*”. But there is something that we can hold onto in the middle of all that challenges us. We are to place our day to day story that’s chock full of “*Why?*” inside the larger story, and it will give those painful prayers of “*Why?*” perspective. Our prayer of “*Why?*” has more meaning when we can see inside a bigger story.

IV Challenge.

Okay, this was A LOT. We know. But the pain, hurt, struggles, and suffering we experience in everyday life can be a lot. Often overwhelming our beliefs. Even in God. It’s more than okay to admit that we doubt. Scripture is full of lament, mourning, expressions of futility. And to deny ourselves the spiritual practice of praying “*Why?*” is short circuiting spiritual growth. So, when you find yourself in the middle of a “*Why?*” prayer, allow yourself to feel all that comes with whatever it is you’re dealing with. And then know that you are being written into a larger God’s purpose story, an upper story. And then the Holy Spirit will give you what you need to find meaning, purpose, and potential for building resilience and growth in your prayer of “*Why?*”

What one step could you take that would begin to help you on that journey?