

My Thoughts for Sunday, 16 August 2015

“How Do I Love Thee? Let Me Count the Ways”

Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s Sonnet 43 began with these very words; “How do I love thee? Let me count the ways. This, probably the greatest of all love poems, might have been written to a spouse or an extremely dear friend. However, if you are going to attempt to approach your Lord in this fashion; hang it up, put it back where you got it and sit back down and do some serious review of your relationship with your Lord. Yes, your Lord does want your love and your devotion but He does not need you to remind Him of the many and various ways you feel that you show it. He sees all you do and knows the heart you do it from.

Or perhaps you are of the type that likes to pray in this fashion; “*Dear Lord, you know how much I help the homeless and the needy. You know how much I study your Word and read the Bible. I try to do the best I can do for all my friends and neighbors. Please come to me now and hear my prayer. I need your help and can find no other way to get what I really need in my life.*” Again, if you are going to attempt to approach your Lord in this fashion; hang it up, put it back where you got it and sit back down and do some serious review of your relationship with your Lord.

We need to realize two very important truths in approaching God with our praise and our needs. First, we can never impress our Lord with how many ways we might love Him. It is not about our love for Him that we impress Him but by what He has done for us that should impress us. See what Paul wrote to the Romans... “*but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*” Romans 5:8 In light of just this one short statement of His love for us wouldn’t it seem more appropriate on our part to display tremendous awe for Him? One might express their thoughts of love in the light of what He did for us with words like; “Lord, I am in total awe and deep gratitude for the wondrous act you performed in giving up your very life that I might be acceptable to the Father and sin free. I will go through the remainder of my days viewing and counting the endless ways you have shown your love for me, an undeserving sinner. I know you gave up your position in glory with the Father in heaven to come and live as a man to experience all my trials and temptations in order to be the sacrifice needed to redeem me from death and an eternity in hell. Thank you, Jesus.” This, my friends is but a short statement of the love I have and we should all have for Jesus as we go through our earthly lives attempting to fulfill the commission He left us with, “*Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned...*” Mark 16:15-16. It is imperative, as we look around us at this sin filled world, that we reach as many unbelievers as possible and show them the wonders of the love that we have been shown from our Lord and Savior. His promise is for them also, not just for us who have already been led by the Holy Spirit to believe.

Secondly, we are not going to impress our Lord by telling Him of all the good things we have done and try to coerce Him into doing our wishes. Look at what the prophet Isaiah wrote about us and our good deeds in Isaiah 64:6 “*For all of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment; and all of us wither like a leaf, and our*

iniquities, like the wind, take us away.” So you help feed the hungry, you give shelter to the homeless, you do good deeds for your neighbors, etc. etc. So what? You are merely fulfilling the commands of God in your life that He has already paid you for. These deeds do not get you special favors. These deeds are done because God through the sacrifice of his Son has already given you favor. His favor was giving you forgiveness for your sins that would have eventually weighed you down thru the gates of hell had He not paid the price for them and taken them off from your back onto His own. In light of this verse from Isaiah shouldn't our prayers reflect our love and devotion to God rather than trying to edify our own, so called, good deeds? Shouldn't we at least go back to the prayer that Jesus taught His disciples? Matthew 6:9-10. Regardless of the words we might use, we should always, as Jesus sample prayer did, glorify God first and request that in all things His will is desired first and foremost. We give thanks for the many blessings He has given us and then request those special things we might truly be in need of. Realize of course that as we are praying to God, He already knows what is on our hearts. Flowery speech is wasted and not necessary. We must remember that all prayers to the Father are presented through Jesus as He says, *“no one comes to the Father except through me.”*

Here are a couple of other scenarios that might make your prayer and praise life more comfortable. Recall when Lazarus was sick and dying. Mary and Martha sent a message to Jesus stating **“the one you love is sick.”** John 11:3 This was, in effect a prayer to Jesus that they desired His help. Then we also look at the way John referred to himself in the gospel of John. In that book John referred to himself five times as **“the disciple whom Jesus loved.”** Was he being arrogant or was he a favorite of Jesus? No! All these believers in Jesus and His sacrifice were aware of and sure of Jesus great love for all mankind. They had confidence enough in this great undeserved love that they had no second thoughts about referring to themselves in this fashion. We too would do well to recognize and appreciate this love of God for us. It would not be inappropriate for us to address Jesus in like manner when we have a special need. **“Dear Jesus, the one you love is sick and in need of your help,”** or **“Jesus, the one you love is in dire straits to meet my mortgage payment. If it is your will please send me some help.”** or maybe, **“Jesus, your friend appreciates all you have done for me and I just want to say again, Thank you.”** Trust that we are all His favorites, the ones He loves.

The question was posed one time: “What is the focus of the Bible? Man loving God or God loving man?” The majority of the answers were “man loving God.” However that is the wrong answer. Even if we don't say it this is the way we generally act and pray. It is always, with us, our attempt to show God our love. But, if you really get to understand the message of the Bible you would see that the total endeavor by God is to show us His love and what He has done for us and what little He requires of us for a fulfilled and profitable life in His Kingdom. All sixty-six books of the Bible, all forty-plus authors writing over the course of sixteen hundred years, point to the same thing: God's love for humanity. Face the facts. What can we ever do for our Creator? Nothing! What can we ever do for ourselves to make our lives better? Nothing! What can we do for anyone else that would prolong their life or make it more comfortable? And again, nothing! But God has done it all for us if we just believe. That's it friends, Believe!.