

Order of Worship for May 8, 2011, Mother’s Day

Pre-service Song

Welcome and Announcements

A Tribute to Mothers: 2 Timothy 1:5 and Prayer (by pastor Bronson)

“Now Thanks We All Our God” sung by the congregation to the moms (# 788)

Call to Worship: Psalm 27:1-14 and Prayer

Songs of Worship:

“All Creatures of Our God and King”

Song # 63

“All Heaven Declares”

Overhead

“Holy, Holy, Holy Is the Lord of Hosts”

Song # 142

“Holy, Holy, Holy! Lord God Almighty”

Song # 3

Offering and Offertory “The Old Rugged Cross” by Tara Wixom in honor of her mother, Paula
(Congregation will follow the offertory by singing “The Old Rugged Cross”, (#327)

Special Music:

Message: “The Desires of our Hearts” (Matthew 6:5-13)

By Pastor Bronson

Closing Song: “I Sing the Mighty Power of God”

Song # 128

Parting Word of Grace

Vespers

A study in Hebrews 9

5:30 pm to 7:00 pm in the Library

“The Prayer Closet”

May 8, 2011

“Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving.”

(Colossians 4:2a)

This week let us be united in praying for:

1. **Russel and Sharla Weisner serving in Malaysia:** their prayer and financial support will remain strong; the Lord will grant them favor in the eyes of government officials; Spirit will soften the hearts and open the minds of many Muslims, Hindus and animists to the gospel
2. **President Obama:** will rise above partisan commitments and gain a true sense of our national purpose and need under Christ; will be enabled by the Spirit to see reality through a Biblical lens; will find peace with God through Christ
3. **Trustees:** they will gladly receive the Spirit’s guidance in determining projects to meet present needs and prepare for future growth; they will enjoy harmony of purpose and positive working relationships; they will know what they do is pleasing in God’s eyes and a blessing to the congregation
4. **Military Personnel of the Week: Pri. Cody Henneker** (grandson of Dick and Jane Miller):
Young Adult of the Week: Joshua and Lina Bronson at the University of London (son and daughter-in-law of John and Nini Bronson):

Let me encourage you to open your Bibles to Matthew 6:5-13. What we are going to be doing now for at least a little while as I introduced last week, is we are actually going to be looking at the Lord's Prayer. Jesus was asked at one point by His own disciples, “Teach us to pray.” This is probably one of the best known prayers in the world. It begins by saying “Our Father in heaven.” It goes on: “hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from all evil. Amen” The first petition: hallowed be thy name, Matthew 6:5-13, though I did not read all of those verses.

As I [have] mentioned before, I recite this prayer at least daily, often times many times during the day. I consider it to be essential, because this is what Jesus himself taught His disciples to pray. Consequently I consider this to be a part of my personal submission and devotion to God, and I would be an obedient child of His grace and one who seeks to fulfill His will. You will notice that it does not include the doxological (praise words) at the end which have long since been recognized as an addition. It is an appropriate addition, but it is recognized as not in fact the words of the Lord Himself.

Where I was last week is that we began to see how this prayer can lead us to the content, the substance of God's revealed truth to us which will counteract the lie in our own souls. That is essential. We have approached the Lord's Prayer in the context of Ephesians 6:10-20 which characterizes the spiritual life, the life we live as Christians, as a life of spiritual warfare, that we are not in a neutral world, we are in a hostile world, and this world-hostility towards us is not simply that of the flesh, of fallen men and women, but rather there is a personality which is in direct, consistent and unremitting hostility not only to God, ultimately, but also to all who would profess faith in God. We need to realize that. And that one has written his lie on our hearts. It is essential that you remember that at all times.

What is the lie? The lie is this: God is not to be trusted, and therefore we must rely on ourselves. All you need to do in order to come to some sense of how deeply that lie is imprinted is ask yourself, “How many times in the course of any week do those two statements come across my mind?” To believe the lie is to believe a terribly distorted view of God. The serpent planted the lie in the minds of Eve and Adam and it changed the relationship between them and God from life to death. To not trust God, to hold His word in suspicion, to doubt God's motives or intentions towards us is to dishonor God. For, honor is grounded in trust.

That was the dominant theme of last week's message. When Jesus taught His disciples to pray, “Our Father in heaven...” He was putting together two of the highest and most admirable and desirable concepts of His day. The two things that He brought side by side were the majesty and glory of God, so that what our Father does and what Jesus is doing is He is putting together this immensely high concept of God, and in His day the warmth, the intimacy, the unshakable loyalty, the moral courage and the nobility of spirit that were ideally to be true of a father. The father was the head of the family, he was the priest of the family, he was the channel of God's blessing for the family, and he was to exercise the authority in care and provision and protection over the family, ideally. They knew as well as we do that fathers fail at this, but the ideal was that this is what a dad should be. It is not the ideal today. That was a part of what it was I was trying to convey to us, so that when you and I go and we say “Our Father” what is the image of fatherhood that we are carrying in our hearts and our minds and how does it color our perception of God and the significant distinction from what it was in days of Jesus and what it is today?

When Jesus says, “Our Father who is in heaven,” the point He is making is that this is not to be confused with anything on earth. It is not, therefore, to be confused with the gods that men make in their own image. Our God is a heavenly Father.

Honor is grounded in trust. All of us know it is exceedingly difficult for sinners to trust one another. Indeed, from one perspective we should all of us understand and appreciate that building trust, building the capacity to trust is at the heart of the work of grace. Sinners are neither trusting nor trustworthy. To heal the hearts and minds of sinners you have to persuade them of three things. First, you have to persuade them that you love them. Secondly, you have to persuade them that you forgive them. Thirdly, you have to persuade them that they can trust you. In other words, to heal the hearts and minds of sinners, you have to persuade them that you love them even though you are not like them at all. That is the work of grace.

The first petition of the Lord’s Prayer is “Hallowed be Your name.” According to Webster’s Dictionary, the 1966 revision, “hallow”, which is the root form for “hallowed” is a transitive verb, meaning that the action or the dynamic has an object upon which it acts and is defined as “to make holy or sacred, to make sacred or holy, to sanctify or consecrate.” The second meaning is “to regard as holy, to regard as sacred, to venerate.” That is what it means when we say, “hallowed” or “holy be”, that is what we are saying. To hallow God’s name is to set it apart from all others for exclusive devotion, veneration or adoration. That raises a question: if I am going to set apart the name of God for an exclusive devotion and veneration and adoration, what is the name? More precisely, what am I venerating? What does God’s name mean or signify or stand for? What I am going to do in the next few minutes is to give you three names of God. Not all of the names, just three names of God that are I think essential for us to comprehend if we are going to respond in reasoned prayer.

You might recall that Moses actually asked that very question when he was faced with God’s call that he return to Egypt from which he had run away forty years earlier. He had run away because he was rightly accused of murder, and he was hiding. What did God want Moses to do? He wanted Moses to go back and talk to the king, Pharaoh. And what was he supposed to talk about? He was supposed to go back and talk about Pharaoh letting approximately six million of his slaves just walk away. Really? The likelihood of Pharaoh’s compliance was zero, as far as Moses was concerned. But his first concern was not with Pharaoh. His first concern was with the Jewish slaves. After all, it was the Jewish slaves who wanted to turn him in for murder. They were not too keen on having an adopted princeling of Pharaoh’s household, even if he was a born Jew, being their liberator. Smart slaves know this, life is better if your master is happy with you and it is bad if he thinks you’re trying to get away.

So, when God conducted His burning bush interview with Moses, Moses asked the question of Exodus 3:13, “If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, the God of your fathers has sent me to you, and they ask me, what is his name, what shall I say to them? God answers and says, what I want you to tell them is that “Yahweh” has sent you. Yahweh in Hebrew is a rather peculiar form of the verb “to be”, and it is generally translated as “I am who I am.” What does that sound like? “I do not need to answer to anyone, for no one can tell me either who I am or who I should be or what I should do.” I venerate, adore, worship, I bow before the God who said, “I AM WHO I AM”.

This is essentially what Paul says in Romans 9. I encourage you to turn to chapter 9:20-21 of Romans. It is also very close to what God says to Job when He finally grants Job the interview that Job has been asking for since all his troubles began. We will look at Job in a moment. First let’s look at Paul. Paul’s words in Romans 9:20-21 are these: now listen to these words and ask yourself how they fit into your picture of

God, and how they fit inside your heart as a statement from the God whom you love and serve. “. . . *who are you, O man, to answer back to God? Will one who is molded say to its molder, ‘Why have you made me like this?’ Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for honored use and another for dishonorable use?’*” Let me translate this. God owes us nothing. God can dispose of us as He wishes. I suspect that is deeply offensive. It is to me. When I encounter this about my God, when I am reminded of this, there is within me that which says, “NO!!! Not just; not fair!” But beloved, this is part of what it means to recognize that He is God. Do you agree with those who feel that we have an obligation not to treat animals with cruelty? I do. But to whom do I owe that obligation, the animals? No. I owe that obligation to God, and that is it.

Now listen to God’s words to Job. (Job 40:7-14). The background in case you are a little hazy on the story is that Job was a very righteous man. He had ten children. He prayed for all ten of his children every single day. He offered up sacrifices in the hope that all was well with them before God. He was, in fact, such an outstandingly righteous man that God boasted about Job to Satan. Satan said, “The only reason Job is faithful is because You have built a hedge of protection around him and he suffers no harm or trouble.” God said, “Not true.” Satan said, “Is so!” God says, “OK, no hedge!” First He takes [away] the protection all around what Job owned and was precious to him, then the second time around he takes away the protection of Job’s own body. Job was reduced to horrific suffering and loss. How do we respond to that? Just today we prayed for a hedge to put around those whom we love, of course!

This is what God says to Job when he finally gets the interview that he has desired: *“Dress for action like a man; I will question you, and you make it known to me. Will you even put me in the wrong? Will you condemn me that you may be in the right? Have you an arm like God, and can you thunder with a voice like his? Adorn yourself with majesty and dignity; clothe yourself with glory and splendor, pour out the overflowing of your anger, and look on everyone who is proud and bring him low and tread down the wicked where they stand. Hide them all in the dust together; bind their faces in the world below. Then will I also acknowledge to you that your own right hand can save you.”* Now I am going to give you a little lesson in reasoning, for this is horrible stuff to deal with. A man named Renee Descartes once made this observation: “If the all-powerful God is evil, then we have no hope; therefore we must hope and believe that the all-powerful God is good.” This relates immediately, doesn’t it, to the lie. The lie says God is not to be trusted, and therefore we must rely upon ourselves. That is exactly where the confrontation with Job ended, wasn’t it? I can’t trust God; I’ll save myself. But what are the odds? Zero! In reality if God is not to be trusted, then all is lost, there is no hope, for there is nothing upon which we can build.

There are some things which we know. We know this: we know that unrestrained evil is self-destructive. Unrestrained is self-destructive; it devours itself; it destroys whatever is around itself. But look around. Is it not interesting that in the world around us there is far more good than there is evil? Have you gazed upon the heavens, or visited the depths of the sea? Have you looked upon the rising and the setting of the sun, delighted in the beauty of spring, looked upon the beauty of a new born child, rejoiced in the blessings that come to the saved and the unsaved alike? There is an immense amount of goodness in this world! Consequently, because only God is able to restrain God, He must be good. When you and I approach God in prayer, we need to remember we approach a God Who is incomprehensibly great in power and is limited or restrained only by that which He is in Himself. God is the uncreated Creator of all things. The sum of all things is less than God Himself, for the effect cannot be greater than the cause.

When we approach God, we approach the One from Whom all things come, for Whom all things exist, and over Whom you and I exercise no control at all. That is the God Who dwells in heaven. Now beloved,

sober thinking – which is what we desperately need – gives a warning: approaching such a God is frightening. A man named J. B. Philips a long time ago, in the 1950's I believe it was, wrote a book saying your god is too small. We are most uncomfortable with this kind of God. We prefer a god that can fit neatly and conveniently inside the span of our comprehension and our desires, with whom we feel safe and comfortable and do not feel unduly threatened by. We like a small god. That, however, is not the God who is.

It was something of this kind of fear which the Israelites experienced at Mt. Sinai when God spoke from the mountain giving the Ten Commandments. You can go and find it at Exodus 20:18-20. This is what happened: there they are, standing in front of the mountain. They have been taken out of Egypt and passed through the desert. Moses went on top and came back down. All the people gathered close. Suddenly God began to speak: *Now when all the people saw the thunder and the flashes of lightning and the sound of the trumpet and the mountain smoking, the people were afraid and trembled, and they stood far off and said to Moses, 'You speak to us, and we will listen; but do not let God speak to us, lest we die.'* When we take up the words of Jesus and say “. . .hallowed be Your name. . .” we are committing ourselves to dealing with God as He is: “I AM WHO I AM.” We are committing our selves to the fear of God.

Fear is the rational response of a finite creature in the face of the infinite power and incomprehensible wisdom which is inescapably present. Fear alone, however, fear alone will drive us to despair. Consequently does not leave us in so barren and terrible a place. Shortly after the episode at Mt. Sinai, God revealed much more of His name to Moses. Faced with the quick descent of the people into idolatry and the need to exercise extraordinary discipline Moses was moved to ask God if he might see God's glory and God complied. You will find it in Exodus 34:5-8, this second name of God. This what God said: *“The Lord descended in the cloud and stood with [Moses] there, and proclaimed, ‘the Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin – did you hear that? This God of absolute power, this God who need answer to no one, this God Who exercises control over all things and nothing can control Him: what has He said? “I am a God full of love; I am a God full of compassion; I am a God full of faithfulness; I am a God Who forgives sin; I am a God Who is steadfast. You and I ought to be saying, “Thank God!!!” But He also says, “. . .but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation.’ And Moses quickly bowed his head toward the earth and worshiped.”*

This is the second of God's names. It is God's second answer to Moses' question regarding His name. It is a description of His moral character and moral will. God is infinitely more than an eternal being with limitless power. God's second name opens our minds and hearts to more than wonder and awe. How many have looked at some of the marvelous NASA photos or the photos from the Hubble space station? Aren't they magnificent? Don't you stand there – I do, I stand there and my mouth drops open and I think, “This universe has such beauty, majesty and immensity that my mind cannot absorb it. It is almost like the American debt. Unbelievable! But just how long would we survive if that we were in that environment? Not a second. It is utterly alien to us. It is a good thing we are on the earth encased in protective ozone! God is a shield for us. God wraps His eternally powerful arm around us and He contains us within the circle of life. You and I should just be overwhelmed. God's second name opens our hearts and minds to hope and meaning, so that we can stand in His presence.

In Romans 1:19-20, Paul tells us what the creation itself tells us about God. *“For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his*

eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made.” When Paul used the term “divine nature” it is the only occurrence in all of scripture for those terms, though it was relatively common in ancient Greece. The meaning is, “divine as opposed to human.” In other words, there is no cause or room for confusing that which was divine with that which was human. That, of course, is exactly what the Greeks and virtually all other pagan cultures did. They confused what was divine with what was human. This is the essence of idolatry. What are idols? Idols are gods of human making and they have human attributes. Why do men make idols? Men make idols in order to escape from the true God. You and I cannot approach the true God the way worldlings approach their idols.

Pagans make deals with their gods. You do not make deals with the true God. “God, I am going to give a hundred dollars every week in the offering. Just make it so that my child doesn’t go on the mission field!” “I am going to dedicate a hundred hours of volunteer time a week if you will cure my wife from cancer.” Beloved, do not make deals with God. You and I cannot approach the living God, the true God, the way pagans approach their idols.

At the same time, we are made in God’s image and likeness. God is not, therefore, altogether alien to us. When we approach God He is heavenly, we are not. But, He is our Father. Thus we are powerfully drawn to Him. It is true, our hearts long for communion with God. This is an extremely powerful emotion. There are two consequences. Under the impulse of this longing for communion, either we will submit to being remade in the image of the God whom we seek, or we will remake God into the image of our desires: one or the other. This is the heart of the first petition. Jesus says we must resolve within our hearts that God is holy. That is, that we cannot tamper with Him. We have no right to alter who He is in our minds or in our hearts. We cannot tamper with His name. We must worship Him as He is, that is, as He has revealed Himself to be, according to His truth. O, beloved, how we love God’s mercies and forgiveness, but how we fear His perfect justice. How we love His mercy and forgiveness, but how we fear His unrelenting rejection of sin. But in this petition we are asking God to give to us the strength and to provide us with the guidance to not do wrongly by His name. And we are admitting that without His help we will fail.

It is my hearts desire that we will pray; that we will be a people of prayer. I know from history there will be no revival, no outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon this sick and broken land, there will be no outpouring upon the sick and ailing body of Christ that has become so powerless that it cannot stand against the culture; there will be no hope for the body of Christ within the context of American life until God’s people pray. But they must pray to God, not to the image that we recreate that draws us away from God and His presence. He is not a sentimental being: He is God and He wants us first of all to bow before Him, give our lives to Him and learn to walk in obedience before Him every day, so He might bless us and heal our broken land.

Let us pray: Gracious Father in heaven, You have granted to us all the means of grace; You have opened the doors that we might enter into your presence. Now, Father, convict us that we might do it. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

Questions for Understanding and Application:

1. What most often or commonly motivates you to pray? What most often motivates you to speak with your spouse, children, neighbors, friends, classmates or work-mates?

2. When you pray do you tend to think more about what you want to say or more about the One to whom you are speaking? What effect might it have if you thought more about God when you prayed?

3. Do you think meditation on the three names of God given in the messages will be helpful in how you approach God and in your prayer life in general? How might they help? Could they hinder?

4. How do the second and third names complement each other and how do they differ?

5. What is your first thought when someone mentions the kingdom of heaven or of God?

6. Which of the Matthew 13 parables of the kingdom do you find most helpful for living?

7. What do you understand to be the relationship between the churches in the world and the kingdom of heaven in this age?

8. In Matthew 13:10-15, Jesus indicates a person needs something special from God to understand the secrets of the kingdom of heaven. Do you agree these are the gifts of faith and love which God gives us: see Ephesians 2:8-9 and I John 4:10.