

MTD and True Prayer

Moralistic Therapeutic Deism

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sermonaudio.com

Preached on: Tuesday, March 19, 2019

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Tonight we're continuing our series on what's been called moralistic therapeutic deism. It is a vague but powerful spiritual phenomenon that reflects the spirit of our age. It's a spiritual philosophy, not something that is formally taught by any particular religion, it's not something that someone would say, "Oh, I'm a moralistic therapeutic deist. You're a Baptist, how about that?" It doesn't work that way. It's more subtle than that. It's like termites in the wood that eat away at the spiritual health of an entire age, you know, an entire philosophy of evangelicalism just riddled with termites that are eating away at the substance and sooner or later the whole edifice collapses because it has been undermined from within by hidden things that you didn't even recognize at the start. Moralistic therapeutic deism is a philosophy that conditions men to think that their goal in life is simply to find happiness and God is a means to that greater end; God exists to help them along the way on their path of self-fulfillment, if he's needed, but if he's not, then you can get by just fine without him. In the end, he receives all good people into heaven, he makes no demands on people, and therefore God is just kind of a general thing out there rather than the high and exalted and lofty God whose glory filled the temple in Isaiah 6.

Moralistic therapeutic deism teaches that there is a god who exists and basically let me back up and just state this, there are five basic tenets as we've seen to moralistic therapeutic deism, MTD as we abbreviate it, and we've kind of reviewed the first three of those in our prior messages. We're going to look at point 4 here tonight, but just by way of review, the fundamental premise, the foundation of this spiritual philosophy is that there is a god who exists, who created and orders the world and watches over human life on earth, and as we've said so many times, that sounds good at first glance maybe to hear somebody affirm the existence of God might seem like a good thing, but when you realize that people stop there, that this is not helpful at all. This does not say anything about who the true God is. If you're going to talk about God, you have to define him biblically. You must speak of the sovereign Triune God who is revealed in the Lord Jesus Christ, not some vague higher power, a god, small "g," god who exists. When you mention the name of God, you need to quickly start to say who he is and define what he is like and what he has done, and the philosophy of our age does nothing of that, and why would they, when you think about it? Why would they want he's just kind of an optional accessory like having leather seats in your car instead of fabric seats, you upgrade to leather and it's not really that big of a deal. God's just an optional accessory to people, needed only when something goes wrong. He's not the center of their existence even

though people who think this way are very happy to call themselves Christians. What we have been saying all along is that the philosophy of MTD has nothing to do with biblical Christianity whatsoever.

Secondly, the next aspect as this has been defined by those who have written on this, the demands of God are pretty simple: God wants people to be good and nice and fair to each other as taught in the Bible and in most world religions. Now I admit that it's kind of a weird position to be in to speak against fairness and niceness and goodness. How can anyone be against this? It's like being against bunnies and jellybeans. You know, how can you be against something so benevolent and innocent and nice? How can you be against that and raise up any kind of thought against it? Well, I get that but the problem is it's just such a total distortion of the reality of what biblical truth is and it undermines the entire need of the Gospel. It assumes that people can be good, that they can be nice, that they can be fair, that they live without bias in their own favor, and none of that is true. The truth is that all men are sinners who refuse to seek God, who are opposed to his existence, who actively suppress his truth in unrighteousness. Men aren't good. They aren't nice. They aren't fair to one another. Why do we have such the repeated reality of war in life and amongst nations, and why do people so easily get married and then get divorced, and people can't even get along in the privacy of their own home? You see, moralistic therapeutic deism is making people think wrongly about the nature of the human condition and about the nature of fallen man. Scripture says that all men are sinners who need to be born again and unless you are born again by the Spirit of God in a way that causes you to repent of sin and put your faith in Christ, you're lost, you're judged and the wrath of God is upon you. Along with this, to say that all that God wants is for people to be good and nice and fair to each other completely misses the point that the greatest commandment according to Jesus is to love the Lord your God with all of your heart, soul, strength and mind. It's not that being nice to each other is a bad thing of itself, it's just that it's a complete reduction of what God actually requires from man.

Look at Micah 6, for example, Micah in the Old Testament in the middle of the 12 Minor Prophets. What does God require? Micah 6:8, "He has told you, O man, what is good; And what does the LORD require of you But to do justice, to love kindness." Okay, but here's the kicker that moralistic therapeutic deism has to excise out of the Bible, what God requires is that you would "walk humbly with your God?" And to the extent that that is excluded, to the extent that a message or a preacher is silent on that issue is showing that they are being silent on the most fundamental issue of them all. God wants more than horizontal human kindness in relationships, he demands vertical allegiance. The Lord Jesus Christ came to earth and he preached and he said, "Follow Me." He made a demand of personal allegiance and discipleship among those who heard his teaching. MTD knows nothing of that.

Thirdly, what we looked at last time: the central goal of life is to be happy and to feel good about yourself. Beloved, that's not the central goal of life. That's not the purpose of existence. That is not the reason that God created man but this third point is saying that God wants us to feel good and to have self-esteem. He wants to make your life better physically, materially, emotionally, and that God is just dying to make you feel good and

that's why he exists. He exists as your cosmic Butler. No, no. How many times can I say "no" to emphasize that that's a totally distorted view of life and reality and the purpose of your existence in the presence of a holy God? As we said last time, the first question of the Westminster Shorter Catechism is, "What is the chief end of man?" The answer is, "Man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever." It is not to find personal fulfillment as the central goal of your life. Your goal, your aim, your motivation is to glorify God with your life. That is why we exist. That is why man has been put on earth is to be a reflection of the one in whose image he was created, and when Christ redeems us, we are to be conformed to his image and to grow in his likeness and to reflect him in the nature of our character and attitudes and life choices.

That's all by way of review. Well, let's come to the fourth thing here which is our new material for this evening and the more that you peel back the layers of the onion, the more that the pungent stench of moralistic therapeutic deism assaults your nostrils and it brings tears to your eyes, and it's like peeling a bad onion and you just go deeper and the stench just gets worse and worse as you hold it up to the light of Scripture. And beloved, I would say this and just by way of anticipation of what we're going to talk about now is that you don't have to be a full-blown person like this with this philosophy in order to have been influenced by its thinking and to have it affect the way that you think about the Christian life and think about the nature of sanctification, or to think about as we're going to look at a here this evening, to think about the nature of true prayer, and here on the fourth point of this philosophy, this vague philosophy, we're going to see this really brought out and I would venture to say that every one of us in this room has been profoundly affected by this kind of thinking that we are going to assess here this evening.

Point 4, the fourth part of their so-called creed is this: God does not need to be particularly involved in your life except when he is needed to resolve a problem. God does not need to be particularly involved in your life except when he is needed to resolve a problem. Now we just see this all around us. People have no regard for God, they're going through life and they're perfectly happy, but then a tragedy hits or a financial reversal comes and all of a sudden they're wanting to cry out to God; because the problem is beyond their capacity to solve, they're looking for something higher in order to fix their situation. And, look, Christ is more than willing to receive sinners who come to him in faith crying out to him for salvation, wanting deliverance from sin, but what we need to distinguish is a purely selfish and self-centered mindset that simply wants God to fix stuff for us so that we can get back on the road of what we wanted to do, and to realize that there is a distinction between that and coming to Christ and saying, "I want to serve You. I need You to save me. I want to belong to You. I give my life over to You completely and unconditionally. And the principle that guides my life now is thy will be done, not mine." Those are completely different aspects, completely different mindsets about our orientation toward who God is and who Christ is and it does us good to think through these things, beloved.

As we have seen over the past couple of Sundays out of Philippians, is that there are aspects, there are ways of thinking about being a Christian that involve us as thinking about ourselves as the slaves of Christ. He is the Master and we are the slave who owes

him total obedience. That has no place in moralistic therapeutic deism. It has no place in most of what passes for Christian preaching these days. We are saints by which it means that we are set apart to serve his purposes; that we exist to fulfill the expectations and the purposes and the design of God that he has established for our life, and to take whatever talents and resources and time that he has given to us and to use those and to spend those in his service, to advance his kingdom, to advance his name, to advance his glory. That's why we exist. That's why we have the things that we have. That's why we have the relationships we have, to be an instrument that is serving the purposes and the glory of God in whatever areas of life he's given to us.

You're a saint. You're set apart for that and, you know, I didn't plan the nature of the pulpit this way for these things to fit so perfectly together. I'm not near smart enough to plan like that. This is just providentially what the Lord has for us in the life of our church and so with this aspect, with these thoughts of being slaves of Christ, being saints in Christ Jesus, this mindset that God does not need to be particularly involved in your life except when he is needed to resolve a problem, well, based on what we've seen on Sundays, you could see immediately that that can't possibly be true. This is diametrically opposed to what is right and what is accurate about being a Christian and the truth is that this spirit that keeps God at a distance, this philosophy, this way of thinking and feeling about spiritual matters that keeps God at a distance like that, is a disguise for something else, it's a disguise for the sinful autonomy of man and is an expression of his ingratitude for all of the blessings that God has given even to unsaved men.

As I said in the past, MTD sees God something like a roadside assistance mechanic, somebody who comes along when the car breaks down or something has gone wrong. You don't have a personal relationship with the guy from AAA, he just shows up when you call him, he fixes what's wrong, and he gets you back on the road and then he doesn't hear from you again and you don't hear from him again. He's not telling you how to live, he's just there to fix things for you. As a practical matter, you don't need to know him, you don't want to know him, you don't need him, you prefer that he's not around because if he's around there's a problem, but if something breaks down, he'll get you going again. That's the way our world thinks about God; it's a way that much of the so-called church thinks about God. Others using slightly different metaphors, have compared him to a cosmic genie. You rub the lamp, he pops out and says, "What do you want? I'll give you the three wishes." And you tell him what you want and he gives you what you ask. Others have compared him to a divine butler who's ready to respond to you with a napkin draped over his arm, "How can I serve you today? I'm so delighted to be able to help you and you tell me what you want and I'll go get it for you." The whole common mess involved in all of this that we just need to lay out is this, your needs dictate what God does. If you need something and you ask, God will fix it for you but otherwise he stays out of the equation. He's not an integral part of your life. He's not necessary. He answers your call, he shows up, he fixes it quickly, then backs away, moves back out of sight until you call again and he doesn't demand anything from you in return. The spirit of prayer, beloved, that that mindset generates and I'm quoting James Montgomery Boice here for something I was actually preparing for Philippians for a month from now, the spirit of prayer is this: do this, do that, do it quickly and that's that. Just do what I want, do it quickly before I get

frustrated, and that's all I've got to say, and prayer simply becomes a matter of giving God a list of requests, a list of demands that you want, and then, you know, in Jesus' name, amen, and then you move on and suppose that you have engaged in true prayer.

Well, this so-called god, small "g," of MTD, if I keep going I'll get a good string of rhymes going here, what this mindset does, this way of thinking about prayer and God, what it does is it conditions people to utter ingratitude. If men think that God is distant and uninvolved in life and he is remote and not doing anything until you ask him to, then who gets the credit when things go right? All of a sudden man has become the master of his own destiny and when things are going well, then he can take the credit for it rather than reflect praise and thanksgiving and gratitude back to God. "God had nothing to do with it because I did it on my own." So it conditions people to be ungrateful and proud and selfish in a vertical way to only look to God when they want something.

Well, as I alluded to in the past, none of us would want a friend like that who doesn't care about us, that's not interested in us, and the only time they show up is when they want some cash or they need you to help them move or something like that, otherwise they want nothing to do with you. All of us recognize that that's just a self-centered person and there's no real friendship there at all. Well, multiply that by infinity and realize the offense that this mindset must be to a holy God who is actually providentially involved in every detail of life, and you start to realize that this is not an innocent philosophy that is just somewhat misguided, this is fundamentally expressing the sinful heart of man. Moralistic therapeutic deism is a completely false view of reality. It has nothing to do with the way that things really are.

I want to take you through some scriptures now to help you think through these things. Remember, the idea is that God does not need to be particularly involved in your life except when you've got a problem and the truth of the matter is so much different, so much different. Beloved, you are not independent of God whether you're a Christian or not. You are not independent of him as you go through life. You derive your very existence from him. He gave you life. He sustains your life. He knows the number of hairs on your head. He gives you breath. The last thing that anyone should think is that they exist independently of the God of the Bible.

Look at the book of Acts 17. In Acts 17:24 Paul is preaching in Athens and he tells these pagans this. Pagans. This is what we need to say to people who are infected with the philosophy of moralistic therapeutic deism. They're just pagans. I'm sorry, I don't mean that as an insult, I mean it to be descriptive. They have no reality of God in their lives at all. They are separated from him in spiritual darkness, under his wrath and in danger of eternal judgment no matter how much they may be involved in so-called Christian activities, if this is their mindset.

What does Paul say to these pagans? He says in Acts 17:24, "The God who made the world and all things in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands; nor is He served by human hands, as though He needed anything, since," here it is, "He Himself gives to all people life and breath and all things." He gives

to all people life and breath and all things. He's not remote and distant. You do not exist independently of him. Your existence is derivative of him and dependent upon him and if God withdraws his hand, you would cease to exist. That's reality and it is diametrically opposed to the idea that God is not necessary for your life.

Verse 26, "He made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined their appointed times and the boundaries of their habitation, that they would seek God, if perhaps they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; for in Him we live and move and exist, as even some of your own poets have said, 'For we also are His children.'" What we need to be mindful of contrary to an idea that God is just an optional accessory to life to be taken or left alone as you will, what we need to realize is that God is the center of our existence and without him we would not be, and all of a sudden we recognize God at a fundamental level and even just thinking theistically and not necessarily in a uniquely Christian way just yet, we recognize that the truth is the exact opposite of what you see on the screen in front of you. The idea God does not need to be particularly involved in your life is the exact opposite of what the reality is. God is particularly involved in your life. He has given you life and breath and everything that you have and it is your responsibility to acknowledge that and to thank him for it, and the failure to do that is not an innocent maladjusted philosophy, it is the height of ingratitude, rebellion and sin not to acknowledge that. Everyone everywhere should be acknowledging God, not adopting this kind of mindset as though he were some unnecessary ruler out there far away. Scripture says that God sends the sun and the rain upon the wicked and the righteous alike, Matthew 5. God makes the plants to grow, Psalm 104:14. Indeed, he directs all things to fulfill the counsel of his will, Ephesians 1:11. The God of the Bible stands against this philosophy and condemns it and the mindset of men who think this way are guilty of false religion at its worst. They are saying that God is someone other than who he is. They are saying that God does things other than what he actually does and they are saying that their life is not in need of this God although actually they do.

So this idea that you only need to call upon God when you've got a problem, you know, now we're going into the second aspect of this fourth point, you only need to call upon God when you need him to resolve a problem which introduces us and brings us into the realm of prayer and this is where for the rest of the time, this is where I think this may sting a bit for all of us. This is going to get into not just our kitchen but into the laundry room and the living room and the balcony and the basement and every other aspect of our life. Beloved, as I said in the first message on this, what is it that refutes moralistic therapeutic deism? If you recall nothing else, if you can't remember anything else going forward of these five points or anything else that I've said in this series, just remember this one thing and it will tee you up to go in the right direction when you encounter this in the future, if you recall nothing else, remember this: Jesus Christ is always opposed to every aspect of moralistic therapeutic deism and he is the answer to the false sugary philosophy that infects our world and it infects the evangelical church. Every aspect of these five principles of moralistic therapeutic deism run counter to the person, the work and the teaching of Christ. There is no getting around this. You cannot have this vague philosophy, this vague spiritual philosophy as your operating view of the world and have

Christ along with it because Christ has none of it, and everything about who he is and what he said contradicts it at every key point.

So how does this play out for us here this evening? God, you only need to call on him when you need him to resolve a problem, you know, and if life's going good, well, why would you pray, is the idea? Why would you pray, why would you spend your time seemingly speaking into the air if things were generally good in your life and you weren't pressed by problems? Why would you do that? You know, according to moralistic therapeutic deism, as long as you're happy there's no need to pray. You don't need God if you're happy. Well, what you and I as thinking Christians need to do is to come back and let this be a platform for us to go back and to remember basic things and to use this bad philosophy as that which would sharpen our thinking, sharpen our practice, and sharpen our hearts to be more engaged with the glory of God than they are as we came in here tonight. That would be a worthwhile endeavor, wouldn't it?

And when I tell you that Christ is always opposed to moralistic therapeutic deism, let me show you this here in inviting you to turn to the Gospel of Matthew 6 at a passage that we've looked at often. Many people are interested in prayer, I would remind you that we've taught much on prayer from Matthew 6. I would encourage you to seek out those messages. But in Matthew 6:9, Jesus teaches us what true prayer looks like, how it is that his disciples are to pray, and over against the selfish mindset that just prays and asks God for stuff, and asks him to fix things in life without regard to anything else, over and against that comes the teaching of Christ and says, "Here's how My disciples pray. Here's how I command you to pray as one of My disciples. Here's how a slave of Mine prays. Here's how a saint in Christ Jesus prays, one who is set apart for His purposes." What does Christ say about prayer? Matthew 6:9, he says, "You pray in this way," and then he lays out the content of what is to be said; he lays out the motivations for why we pray; he lays out the attitudes and the dispositions that inform the way that we pray, and what you find as you go through this in a most general overview way here is that it is just miles removed from this exclusively self-centered, help me in my problem kind of praying that is no doubt the predominant way that most people think about prayer. Christ teaches us something completely different, completely God-centered, completely humble, completely dependent, and something that is a consistent day by day matter of life, not just an occasional thing when life gets too bumpy for you to have the smooth ride that you desire. Look at what he says in Matthew 6:9, "Pray, then, in this way: 'Our Father who is in heaven, Hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done, On earth as it is in heaven.'" Those opening three petitions completely God-centered. As you would expect for someone who is set apart to serve the interests of Christ and to serve the interests of God and that's our purpose in life as we saw from Philippians 1:1 on Sunday, if you are set apart for the purposes of God, then that is going to carry over into the way that you pray, and one of the defining aspects of true Christian prayer is a preoccupation with the glory of God and the will of God, and starting there as the reason that you pray.

Christ teaches us to enter into prayer with praise on our lips. "Father, hallowed be Your name. Forget about me, God, let's talk about You." It reminds me of the show that I saw, a guy was talking to a couple of girls and they were telling him that he was conceited. He

always wanted to talk about what he wanted to talk about and he said, "Okay, well, let's talk about you then, what do you think about me?" They rolled their eyes and walked away from him. We, by contrast, when we come into the presence of God, Christ teaches us, come in with a preoccupation of him on your mind. Set aside, let's forget about ourselves, as the chorus goes, concentrate on him and worship him. "My Father, my loving Father, You who are in heaven, O God, I praise Your name. Let Your name be exalted before men. Let it be exalted in my heart. God, I love You and I worship You. I worship Your name, the fullness of Your character and all that You are. Father, let that be high and exalted and lofty in the eyes of men and in my own heart. Your kingdom come. Father, I pray that Christ would come back. I want Christ to return and in the meantime, let Your kingdom spread through the proclamation of the Gospel and bring forth conversions under the sound of the preaching of Your word. Let Your kingdom come, O God. Glory to Your name. Let Your kingdom come. Let this world go by. Just let Your kingdom advance, Father, that's what I want from You."

Look at verse 10, "Father, Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. God, I pray not for my will to be accomplished but, Father, what You want. I pray that would be what You do. I am subordinated to You. I am submissive to You. I love You more than I love life itself and, therefore, Father, what would please You is what I want no matter what the human consequences might be to anyone else. Just as long as Your will is done, I know You'll be pleased if Your will is done and because I'm set apart for Your purposes, O God, I pray for Your will to be done. Because I'm not of this world, I'm in it but I'm not of it, I pray that Your kingdom would come and let this world go away for all I care. God, Your name is great and high and lofty. Your glory fills the temple. Isaiah saw Your glory and he said, 'Woe is me, I'm undone.' Because of the greatness of Your glory, God, hallowed be Your name."

So you just see my point being, you see this God-centered emphasis in the way that Christ taught us to pray. This is where I say it stings. Where is that focus in the way that you or I pray? Is this a consistent theme in your praying? Do you find time to just set aside everything of life to just give praise and worship to God when you pray? We're assuming, aren't we, that we pray even. "Ouch! Why are you stepping on my toes like this?" Because God's glory matters. That's why.

Now as you go on in verse 11 of Matthew 6, you see that God is not indifferent to our need, "Give us this day our daily bread." So God welcomes our prayers of dependence but it's hardly the exclusive focus. Prayer is so much more than that and notice the daily dependence that it expresses, "Give us this day our daily bread." This is meant to be a day by day pattern of life, an attitude of mind and disposition of prayer of daily ongoing dependence before him that is utterly contrary to an idea that God doesn't need to be particularly involved unless you've really got a problem and then you can call upon him and he'll jump up and serve you and solve it for you. Well, no. No, that is not it.

In verse 12, you go on and you see the humility of the confession of sin, "Father, forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors." A desire for holiness. "Do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil. Yours is the kingdom and the power and the

glory forever. Amen. Amen and amen." For all that I've said here, I'm making a really modest point out of this passage, is simply for you to recognize this simple point: your needs are not the only thing about which you are to pray, your need is not the only occasion of prayer and it's not something haphazard and indifferent and only in the crises of life. True Christians under the authority of the Lordship of Jesus Christ pray in a manner that remembers the glory of God, that ascribes honor to his holy name, that seeks his interests over their own, seeks his will over their own, and in that greater context humbly, daily expresses dependence and says, "God, I ask You, I'm a humble slave, I'm Your humble servant, O Master, I ask You to care for me as I go through this life as Your slave, as a saint, as the one seeking Your glory. I do have these earthly needs, Father, but they are only a portion, it's only one aspect of a far greater whole of the manner in which I address You as my loving heavenly Father."

So it's not that we only pray when we need something, beloved, Christ tells us that his disciples pray to the glory of God. His disciples submit to his will consciously in prayer, "Not my will but thine be done." Christ's disciples pray daily. Christ's disciples confess sin. Christ's disciples are preoccupied with holiness. What else does it mean, "Don't lead us into temptation. God, keep me out of places where I would fall into sin." So beloved, when we think about praying, we need to see the instruction that our Lord gave us to embrace it even though if it pinches and convicts us that that has not been our pattern to date, and to the extent that we have been self-centered and earthbound and materialistic in our praying, then God has presented you an opportunity here this evening to repent of a faulty practice and maybe even a faulty view of prayer, and to realize that as a saint you are set apart for his purposes, you are set apart for his glory. One aspect of being sanctified like that is that it informs the way that you pray. "God, I am concerned with Your glory here. That is what I want. That's the predominant reason that I'm praying. Oh, there are these other things too, God, but above all, Father, I just want to see You glorified. I want to praise Your name. I want to seek Your kingdom. I pray for Your will to be done."

That's how Jesus taught us to pray and it is a bazooka against the self-centered way that we've been conditioned to think about praying, as though prayer were just a utilitarian way for us to get God to do what we want him to do. The truth of the matter is that when we're thinking rightly about prayer, our motivation in prayer is not to have God do what we want him to do, our motivation in prayer is for God to do what he wants to do. "Your will be done," what else does that mean? "Your will be done. Your kingdom come. God, I'm here serving Your interests in prayer and I delight to do that. I delight to do Your will. I delight to pray according to Your will." Rather than ignoring this God and simply calling upon him when we need or want something.

Look over at 1 Thessalonians 5:16 and 18. In a few weeks, we'll come back to this theme from another text in Philippians 1 and we'll see all these things all over again. Paul says in 1 Thessalonians 5:16 through 18, he says, "Rejoice always; pray without ceasing; in everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus." Prayer offered with joy. Prayer offered faithfully over time. Prayer offered with a spirit of gratitude. "Father, I'm here more than just to ask You for stuff. God, forget my stuff that I want, God. Forget

it for now, you know, because what I really want to do right now, I just want to give You thanks for what You've already done. I want to thank You for the work of my Lord Jesus Christ on the cross that paid from my sin and reconciled me to You. I want to thank You for the indwelling Holy Spirit. Thank You, Father, that I now have eternal life, indestructible life. I am immortal. I'm going to live forever in Your presence, and when I'm with You, I'm going to enjoy the pleasures and the bliss of heaven forever around the throne of Christ. Thank You, Father, for doing that for a wretch like me. God, I'm so very grateful to You for all that You've done. Thank You for giving me Your word, the place where I can find the inerrant revelation of Your mind that infallibly guides me in life. I think You for that, Father. Thank You for giving me a church that I can attend where I fellowship with like-minded believers. Thank You for your provision in life. Sure, thank You for the loved ones around me. Thank You for the many ways that You've answered prayers in the past. I know that I've forgotten to thank You more times than I can count but right now, Father, I just remember and I thank You for all of Your goodness to me. Thank You that I have loved ones that know Christ. Thank You that I have hope that the work of your Spirit isn't done in those that don't. O God, my life is surrounded with Your goodness. Here I was dead, separated from You, a lover of sin, a lover of self, and Your Spirit came upon me, brought the Gospel to me and caused me to be born again. O God, thank You, thank You, thank You, thank You. God, I can't say it enough, thank You in everything."

You see, this is where Scripture points us in our attitudes toward prayer and you see that the predominant philosophy in the church is not geared toward that at all and with sorrow in our hearts to one degree or another, we all confess that we fall short of that ourselves. We recognize that the spirit of moralistic therapeutic deism has influenced us more than we might have thought. So beloved, I ask you whether your pattern, we need to examine ourselves here, is it your pattern that you only pray when you're in trouble and that otherwise you can go through life in a prayerless way and not really think about it too much? Do you only ask for things from God without a spirit of praise, without a spirit of gratitude recognizing the great high exalted King to whom you're praying?

Let's step back. I've skipped over some things in my notes and that's okay for this evening. Sometimes it helps just to keep things simple and clear. With all of these things said, let's step back and ask ourselves a different question that can kind of reassure us in the presence of God. When we think about these things in light of what we've said here tonight, in light of what Jesus said in Matthew 6, it's amazing, isn't it, that God answers any of our prayers at all? Isn't it amazing that he answers our prayers at all when we offer him these cold, halfhearted, occasional, leftovers of life and we come into the banquet room of the King bearing scraps of prayer? Isn't it amazing that he has accepted us notwithstanding that? Isn't it amazing that he invites us still into his presence? Isn't it amazing that he has answered prayer and cared for us all along when our response toward him has been so meager in comparison to his infinite worth? Isn't that amazing? It amazes me. It amazes me that I get to do what I get to do in light of these things.

Well, a couple of things to strengthen and help you as we close. First of all, you see, I believe from this, how much our feeble prayers must be offered in the name of Jesus

Christ and through Jesus Christ to find any acceptable nature of them in the presence of God. It should be obvious to you that we cannot rely on the intrinsic worth of our own praying for God to answer them because our prayers are not worthy of him. But that does not close the door of heaven to you, beloved. Christ died to give you access to God in his name, in his merit, according to his character, and somehow in a way that I won't profess to understand, somehow the Holy Spirit takes our feeble prayers and in the name of Christ converts them into something that is acceptable to God and God receives and answers them for the sake of his Son, not because we have prayed in any manner that is particularly worthy. That doesn't excuse us and that's not an excuse for us to continue in our spiritual mediocrity, rather it's that which comforts us and helps us to see that God is gracious to us even in our inadequate prayers and worship to him; that the blood of Christ and the righteousness of Christ is sufficient even to cover this and it gives us a measure of how great and expansive his grace was upon us when he saved us back when. It reminds us that even as our prayers are tinged with sin and selfishness like this, how wonderful it is to be under the reign of a Savior who died to wash away even that sin, who died to take away even that falling short of our lives, and to receive us and to accept us and to reconcile us to God based on the righteousness of Christ, based on his shed blood, and when we see it from that perspective, we're renewed, we're refreshed in Christ again, we're encouraged again to pray afresh to him but now it comes from a spirit not of self-sufficiency and, beloved, I got to the word that I needed to say all night long, I just got to the word that I needed to say all night long, that we pray now in light of these things not from a spirit of personal entitlement as though we deserve everything that we ask for in our selfish approach to God, rather we pray in a spirit of dependence, we pray in a spirit of gratitude that God would receive such a sinner as us, we pray in a spirit of humility, "God, I realize that in myself I'm not worthy of being able to pray to You but I cling to Christ, I come to You in the name of Christ. I plead His merit. I plead His shed blood as my access before You, nothing of myself. I'm a saint in Christ Jesus asking these things." And we start to realize, as I said before, that if we are saints in Christ Jesus, set apart for his purposes, then even the way that we pray is set apart for the glory of God and not our own earthly stuff; that our earthly stuff is not the center, it's allowed but it's comparatively incidental to the greater pursuit of the glory and the knowledge of God as we are before him in his presence.

So beloved, I commend these things to you from God's word. I encourage you to the extent that you find your own heart exposed by these things, to consciously reject the spirit of our age that would just use God for its own earthly purposes and pray to him, to the glory of Christ through the name of Christ and find in that your true purpose in the presence of God.

Let's pray together.

Our Father which art in heaven, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done, as in heaven so also upon earth. Give us this day our daily bread. Father, forgive us our debts, our many sins, even as we have forgiven our debtors and those who have sinned against us. And Father, we pray that You would increase our personal holiness, that You would lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil and, Father,

we pray these things not for our own sake but because Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.

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