

Jesus' Pattern for Prayer

Matthew 6:9-15

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One day a woman was rushing home from a doctor's appointment. The doctor had been somewhat delayed at the hospital, and the lab work took a little longer than usual so by the time she left the clinic she was running quite a bit behind schedule. She still had to pick up her prescription, pick up the children from the baby-sitter, and get home and make supper, all in time to make it to the prayer meeting at her church that evening. As she began to circle the busy Wal-Mart parking lot, looking for a space, the windows of heaven were opened, as it says in Genesis, and a downpour began. While she wasn't usually the type to bother God with small problems, she began to pray as she turned down the row closest to the front door. "Lord, you know what kind of a day I've had, and there's still an awful lot to do. Could you please grant me a parking space right away, oh, and close to the building so I don't get soaked." The words weren't even completely out of her mouth when she saw the backup lights of a car come on at the end of the row. It was the best space in the whole parking lot, right next to the handicap spots and straight out from the front door. She made straight for it and as she pulled in, she said, "never mind God, something just opened up."

I would dare say none of us are that bad, but we often don't recognize God's goodness to us in the area of answered prayer.

We all can benefit from time at the feet of Jesus as he teaches us how to pray.

Last week we looked at the context for this prayer. We began with a quick look at Matthew 6:1 – "Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven."

Back in chapter 5 verse 20, Jesus told his disciples of the superior righteousness expected of them. He wrote, (for I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven." Now he warns them of the danger of religious hypocrisy. The focus has changed from righteousness in a purely positive sense to righteousness in a formal, external sense.

This text in Matthew 6:1-18 introduces the three chief acts of Jewish piety - giving to the needy, prayer, and fasting. In each asked the logical structure is the same:

1. a warning not to do the act to be praised by men
2. a guarantee that those who ignore this warning will get what they want but no more
3. instruction on how to perform the act of piety secretly, and
4. the assurance that the father who sees in secret will reward openly

So we have a contrast here between doing these things in front of others and doing these things in secret in front of God.

The structure of this text is clear:

- In verses 5-13 we see Jesus' Design for Prayer
 - In verse 5-8 we see what must be avoided
 - In verses 9-13 we see what must be followed
- In verses 14-15 we see the Dynamics of Forgiveness

Last week we covered what must be avoided and this week what must be followed and I want you to track with me because I think this will give you some fresh insight into prayer

Pray Then like This (v9)

Our father in heaven... We have a tendency to take this title for God for granted. It is so familiar to us, so common to our life, that we rarely give any thought to it. We fail to grasp what an amazing thing it is to refer to God in this way.

One of the most important doctrines of the New Testament is the doctrine of adoption. By nature, the Bible says, we are children of wrath (Eph. 2:3). God is not our Father naturally, in terms of an intimate, personal relationship. But we are adopted into the family of God in Christ. When Jesus gave this model prayer, he invited them to use that personal form of address, which indicates an intensely familial parent/child relationship.

This is not something to be taken lightly. Every time we open our mouths and say, "Heavenly Father," we should be reminded of our adoption, that we have been placed in this intimate relationship with God, a relationship that we did not have by nature.

Hallowed be your name... When Jesus taught the church how to pray, the first thing he chose to tell us to pray about is that the name of God might be regarded as sacred.

Very few people today would list the "hallowing" of the name of God as a top priority for the prayers of the people of God. In our culture we use nicknames so frequently, it almost seems foreign to place so much emphasis on the proper treatment of a name.

You don't have to attend the Chapel very long before you understand nothing reveals the state of a person's heart more clearly than the words that come out of his mouth. If God in the Ten Commandments saw the need to require reverence for his name in the time of the exodus, and if Jesus saw the need to call on his disciples to pray that God's name would be regarded as holy in the Jewish culture of two thousand years ago, how much more crucial is it that we pray that the name of God would be hallowed in our own time?

By placing this at the beginning of the Lord's Prayer, Jesus was giving it a place of priority. He was saying that a proper attitude toward God's name is the basis of everything, because how we live before God is determined by our attitude toward him and our view of who he is. No worship, no adoration, and no obedience can flow from a heart that has no regard for the name of God.

Your kingdom come (v10)... The New Testament opens with the announcement that the kingdom of God is coming, that something new is about to take place in the unfolding history of redemption. But the feelings of hatred against the reign of God run so deep in the human heart that Jesus was brought before the Roman authorities on the grounds that he was making himself King.

Jesus didn't make himself King, the Father made him King. But just as God had been rejected as King by the ancient Israelites, Jesus was rejected as King in the time of his incarnation.

When Jesus told His followers to pray, "Your kingdom come," he was making them participants in his own mission to spread the reign of God on this planet so that it might reflect the way God's reign is established in heaven to this day. It is a kingdom that will be ruled by God's appointed Messiah, who will be not just the Redeemer of his people, but their King.

Your will be done... Does it seem a bit strange here that Jesus would pray, "Your will be done"?

- Isn't God's will always done?
- Isn't God sovereign anyway?
- Isn't that a rather useless thing to say?
- Isn't it apparent that God's will be done?

I am confident there's an answer to this, but I don't know what it is. I believe this is one of the great mysteries of Scripture. The mind of God is infinitely beyond my own mind, and this is an impossible dilemma, for me. But not for God. I have no ability to resolve such a paradox, which is no paradox at all in the mind of God.

Let's take a well thought out look at this though. Let's examine God's will very briefly this evening. There are three ways we must understand the will of God.

1. There is the sovereign, effectual will of God. When the Bible speaks of the will of God in this sense, it is describing the will that causes whatever he decrees to come to pass. When God willed the universe to be created and said, "Let there be light," that expression of his sovereign will was instantly fulfilled.
2. Second, the Bible speaks of the will of God with respect to what we call his perceptive will or "will of command". The preceptive will has to do with his law and commandments, the precepts he issues to regulate the behavior of his people. It is the will of God that you have no other gods before him, that you honor your father and your mother, that husbands love their wives and wives respect their husbands, and so forth. The preceptive will of God **can be** violated and **is** violated every day. Being sinners, we disobey the will of God.
3. Third, the Bible speaks of the will of God in terms of his basic disposition or inclination. In this sense, God's will has to do with what is pleasing or displeasing to him. 2 Peter 3:9 is an example of this, "The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, **not wishing** for any to perish but for all to come to repentance."

On earth as it is in heaven... This qualifies what will of God we are to pray be done. These words suggest that there is a discrepancy between the accomplishments of whatever will of God Jesus has in view here on earth and its accomplishment in heaven. We know that the sovereign will of God is always accomplished, not just in heaven but also on earth.

John Piper believes that Jesus must have the preceptive will of God in view, because the preceptive will of God is always obeyed by angels and by glorified believers in heaven. There is no sin in heaven. There is no conflict between the will of the creatures who are gathered around the presence of God and his holy will.

Jesus is affirming that the will of God is done in heaven. However, he is also affirming that it is not done here.

- People here on earth do not strive to glorify God.
- They do not seek the kingdom of God.
- They do not hallow the name of God.

So Jesus says we ought to pray, "Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

Give us today our daily bread (v11)... Christians often use a simple acrostic as a guide to prayer: A-C-T-S. Each of the letters in this acrostic stands for one of the key elements of prayer: **A**doration, **C**onfession, **T**hanksgiving, **S**upplication, Not only does this acrostic remind us of the elements of prayer, it shows us the priority we ought to give to each.

R.C Sproul writes, "Unfortunately, we often spell our prayer life something like S-C-A-T, because we start with supplication and spend very little time, if any, on adoration, confession, and thanksgiving."

While the term "thanksgiving" is not explicitly used in our text, understanding our need for tomorrow's food should immediately bring to mind the reality of who provides it. We serve a God who gives. God gives his gifts in order to provide for the needs of his people, for he is a God of providence.

We come to God in a spirit of humble dependence, asking him to provide what we need and to sustain us from day to day (and not merely with only material things). We do not ask for great riches, but we are encouraged to make our needs known to him, trusting that he will provide.

And forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors (v12)... Debts is a good word choice here, because when the New Testament addresses sin, one of the main ways in which sin is described is as a debt. When we sin, we put ourselves into debt to God; we incur an obligation; we come to owe him something. Thus, when we ask for his forgiveness, we are asking that he forgive our debt. Jesus attaches a condition to this prayer. He doesn't simply tell us to pray, "Forgive us our debts." Rather, we are to ask God to forgive us "as we forgive our debtors." If this condition is to be taken literally, we are in trouble. We cannot be as forgiving as

God; none of us can. But thank God that this is an aspiration rather than a condition, that Jesus is teaching us to aspire to mirror and reflect the kindness of God, to stand ready to forgive anyone who has sinned against us or offended us when they repent.

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one (v13)... Jesus now turns his attention from the past to the future. Where Jesus has just spoken of the forgiveness of our past sin, he now shows we are to ask the Father to spare us from the temptations and the spiritual attacks that can lead us into new sin.

Don't misunderstand what Jesus is saying here. James teaches in his epistle, "Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am tempted by God'; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he himself tempt anyone" (1:13).

James goes on to explain that enticement and temptation to sin arise from within, from our own evil inclinations and desires. External temptations can come to us from fellow sinners or from Satan himself, who is known in the Bible as the tempter. But God himself does not engage in temptation to sin.

So what does Jesus mean?

Jesus is saying that we should pray that the Father will never cause us to undergo a severe test of our faith or of our obedience. We can see how the second half of this verse helps explain the first. God often uses Satan to bring testing on his children. Thus, when Jesus teaches us to pray, "Do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one," he not only is teaching us to pray for deliverance from testing, but teaching us to seek divine protection from the works of Satan.

The Dynamics of Forgiveness (v14-15)

For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins...

Is Jesus talking about salvation here? Certainly not, for **we have no part** in whether or not God forgives a rebellious sinner.

Concerning this text, John MacArthur writes, "Believers cannot know the parental forgiveness, which keeps fellowship with the Lord rich, and blessings from the Lord profuse, apart from forgiving others in heart and word."

Thus Jesus' conditions applying to our transformation not our justification. If that is true, the text indicates not only a loss of fellowship with God, but also his judgment in some way.

D.A. Carson adds, "There is no forgiveness for the one who does not forgive. How could it be otherwise? His unforgiving spirit bears strong witness to the fact that he has never repented"

It appears then that God refuses to forgive him in an attempt to get the child to come face to face with his sin of an unforgiving heart.

CONCLUSION

On the tenth anniversary of the 911 attacks on NYC, Jayne and I were on a ship heading down the Hudson River, through New York harbor toward the open sea.

On the starboard side of the ship stood the Statue of Liberty.

And at its base reads a sonnet by Emma Lazarus containing these familiar words:

"Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!"

The total weight of the statue is 225 tons including:

- 27 tons of steel and concrete base
- 127 tons of steel infrastructure designed by Gustave Eiffel.

Without the infrastructure the statue wouldn't stand for more than 3 minutes.

The infrastructure is crucial to the Statue of Liberty, but take away the copper exterior and the infrastructure is just that. It is the face and arms and robe and golden torch that makes the statue unique and special. This is a picture of our prayers.

Over the past two weeks we have heard Jesus give us the infrastructure of how we should pray.

1. First, on what not to build our prayers – hypocrisy and vain repetition
2. Second how to positively build our prayers

But Jesus didn't stop with the structure. He made it clear that our hearts are involved, that prayer is not only repeating structure.

Jesus has given us the structure and pattern for prayer, but it is us pouring out our hearts to God on top of that structure that makes our prayers sincere, humble, special, and effective.

Sweet hour of prayer! sweet hour of prayer!

that calls me from a world of care,
and bids me at my Father's throne
make all my wants and wishes known.

In seasons of distress and grief,
my soul has often found relief,
and oft escaped the tempter's snare
by thy return, sweet hour of prayer!

Sweet hour of prayer! sweet hour of prayer!

thy wings shall my petition bear
to him whose truth and faithfulness
engage the waiting soul to bless.

And since he bids me seek his face,
believe his word, and trust his grace,
I'll cast on him my every care,
and wait for thee, sweet hour of prayer!