

Lord, Teach Us to Pray

October 11, 2009

Last week, I taught an introductory message to this series on prayer

- We discussed some practical reasons why we should pray
- We discussed briefly the role of prayer in the early Church
- We looked at two extremes to avoid in prayer
- We spend the bulk of our time looking at some practical considerations of prayer

The Bible says, “**The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much**” (James 5:16)

- That is a great motivation to pray, isn't it?
- But let's notice the specific nuances of that verse

First, it is “**effective prayer**” that accomplishes God's purpose

- Not just prayer itself
- It is entirely possible for you to go through the motions of prayer – yet to find your prayers being ineffective
- Our prayers are effective when we pray according to the will of God

Second, it is the effective prayer “**of a righteous man**” that accomplishes God's purpose

- Not everyone is “**righteous**” in the sight of God
- It is only through a relationship with Jesus Christ that one can be declared “**righteous**”

Third, if a born-again believer prays effectively, it “**can accomplish much**”

- That is encouraging!
- Prayer can cause change – it has results

Prayer is not a meaningless, monotonous exercise that Christians must endure

- If that is your focus, you have lost perspective of James 5:16
- You have your lost perspective of the essence of prayer
- Prayer is the *privilege* of those rightly related to God

This is an obvious overstatement, but this brief class will not be exhaustive

- I was reminded of this in preparing for this class
- I made a jet tour of the NT to see how many times prayer was mentioned – the results were simply staggering

Therefore, we have to limit the scope of this class

- We will not focus on the following aspects of prayer

Benedictions

- There are many of these short statements that are uttered in a spirit of prayer
- “**Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord**” (2 Pet 1:2)

Doxologies

- Like the benedictions, there are some doxologies that are spoken in an attitude of prayer
- There are rich texts that are worthy of careful meditation and study
- “**Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit**” (Rom 15:13)

Principles of prayer

- “pray without ceasing” (1 Thess 5:17)
- “With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints” (Eph 6:18)
- There are so many of these that we could study

If we think about it, every single exhortation of Scripture is an opportunity for us to pray

- Every commandment that is uttered could be a matter of prayer
 - o “This I command you, that you love one another” (John 15:17)
 - o *Lord, may I manifest this type of love toward others*

So you can see that the scope of prayers covered in the NT is simply mind-boggling

- There is no shortage of prayer material

The word “devote” is used ten times throughout the NT

- It is a word that has several connotations
 - o To be committed to
 - o To hold fast to
 - o To cling to
 - o To persevere in
 - o To adhere firmly to

In five of the ten uses in the NT – half of them – the object is prayer

- “These all with one mind were continually devoting themselves to prayer, along with *the* women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers.” (Acts 1:14)
- “And they were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.” (Acts 2:42)
- “But we will devote ourselves to prayer, and to the ministry of the word” (Acts 6:4)
- “rejoicing in hope, persevering in tribulation, devoted to prayer” (Rom 12:12)
- “Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with *an attitude of thanksgiving*” (Col 4:2)

I think we get the message, don't we?

- God wants us to be committed to prayer
 - o Persistent – not sporadic
 - o Dedicated – not casual
 - o Passionate – not apathetic

Are we “devoted” to prayer?

- Is prayer a definite commitment from you?
- Would others say that you highly value prayer?

There are many examples of men and women who could be studied in the context of prayer

- David Brainerd
- George Mueller
- J.C. Ryle

But the greatest example to study is Jesus Christ

- This morning, we are going to look at the account in Matthew 6
- Please turn to this passage for our time this morning

Our passage this morning falls within the larger framework of the Gospel of Matthew

- Matthew is a Gospel written for the Jews – to show them that Jesus Christ was, in fact, the Messiah

But we must be careful when we approach Scripture – especially the Gospels – to understand the original intent of the author

- The Gospels are not written to the Church
- The Church doesn't come into existence until Pentecost – Acts 1

This isn't to say that the Church can't benefit from the Gospels

- Paul states that matters and examples of the OT are “**examples**” for the NT believers (1 Cor 10:6)

Matthew 5-7 is the Sermon on the Mount – the greatest sermon that we have recorded in the Bible

- The Beatitudes
- The importance of right living by the disciples on the world around them
- The relationship between Christ and the Law
- Christ's view on
 - o Murder and anger
 - o Adultery and lust
 - o Vows and oaths
 - o Retaliation
 - o Relationships with one's neighbors and enemies

Chapter six opens up with a wide-encompassing principle, “**Beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them; otherwise you have no reward with your Father who is in heaven**” (6:1)

- What a statement!
- Jesus warns His followers – that includes us – to avoid marketing the faith in order to be noticed by others
- We are not to have the approval of men as the foremost motivation of our hearts
- If you are looking for the approval of men, “**you have no reward with your Father who is in heaven**”

Christ illustrates this principle as it pertains to

- Giving money (6:2-4)
- Praying (6:5-15)
- Fasting (6:16-18)

This morning, I want to focus on this section on prayer as taught by the Lord Jesus Christ Himself

- A very similar prayer is recorded in the Gospel of Luke, the 11th chapter, “**And it came about that while He was praying in a certain place, after He had finished, one of His disciples said to Him, ‘Lord, teach us to pray just as John also taught his disciples’**” (11:1)
- Something about the manner in which Jesus prayed attracted the disciples
- They wanted to pray as Jesus prayed

Here is what Jesus told them, “**Pray, then, in this way: ‘Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name. ¹⁰ Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. ¹¹ Give us this day our daily bread. ¹² And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. ¹³ And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.’**” (Mt 6:9-13)

Many people refer to this as the Lord's Prayer

- But it can't be the Lord's Prayer
 - o This prayer mentions debts/sins and forgiveness of those sins – Jesus never sinned
 - o This prayer mentions being led into temptation – Jesus could not be tempted by sin

- This prayer mentions deliverance from the evil one – “**The Son of God appeared for this purpose, that He might destroy the works of the devil**” (1 John 3:8)

If we want to study the Lord’s Prayer, we can find that in John 17 where His high priestly prayer is recorded

A more fitting description would be called the Model Prayer or the Disciples’ Prayer

- This is given as a model or example or pattern or outline of how to pray

Notice that Jesus does not give His disciples one prayer that would answer all questions and issues

- A few verses earlier, Jesus warned, “**And when you are praying, do not use meaningless repetition, as the Gentiles do, for they suppose that they will be heard for their many words**” (Mt 6:7)
- Some who pray nothing but this prayer are in danger of using “**meaningless repetition**”

This prayer is also recorded in Luke 11

- This is a different context than Matthew 6
- But we learn that Jesus must have taught this prayer on multiple occasions¹

Let’s take some time to go through this Model Prayer

- I want us to learn from the Master Himself about how to pray
- We will cover this prayer this morning and next week

This Model Prayer gives us six petitions of prayer that are broken down into two main categories

- Three petitions related to God’s glory
 - Relational prayer – “**Our Father who art in heaven**”
 - Reverent prayer – “**hallowed by Thy name**”
 - Receptive prayer – “**Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven**”
- Three petitions related to man’s need
 - Requesting prayer – “**Give us this day our daily bread**”
 - Repentant prayer – “**And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors**”
 - Rescue prayer – “**And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil**”

Notice a few things that Jesus does not address²

- He makes no mention of where prayer should take place – we can pray anywhere because God is everywhere
- He makes no mention of when prayer should take place – we can pray any time and at all times
- He makes no mention of the posture or attire of prayer – it is the attitude of prayer that is most important

The issue that Jesus addresses here is how to pray

- He gives them a model and example

I. Relational prayer (6:9a)

Our Father who art in heaven

It is interesting to see how Jesus teaches His disciples to pray

- The first words are “**Our Father**”

¹ D.A. Carson, *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary, Matthew*, 168.

² John MacArthur, Jr., *The MacArthur NT Commentary, Matthew 1-7*, 373.

What an intriguing principle that we learn about prayer from these two words

- *Not everyone can pray in the manner that Jesus did*

Only those who are in a right relationship with God can pray like this

- Only those who are children of God can refer to Him as “**Father**”

The idea of calling God “**Father**” was almost unheard of in the OT

- They viewed by many other names – Elohim, Shaddai, Rapha, etc.
- But not “**Father**”

Because of their disobedience and lack of intimacy with God, the Jews viewed God as distant

- Thus, they did not draw near to God with the proper attitude of prayer

There is a sense in which God is the Father of everyone on the Earth – but only in the sense of being their Creator

- “**Do we not all have one father? Has not one God created us?**” (Mal 2:10)

For those who are not in a relationship with Christ, they cannot say that God is their Father

- Jesus told the Pharisees, “**You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father**” (John 8:44)

So you are either children of God or children of Satan

- But only those who belong to God can pray this Model Prayer since they are the only ones who have a relationship with God
- “**I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but through Me**” (John 14:6)
- “**But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name**” (John 1:12)

It is interesting to note Jesus’ use of “**Father**”

- In verse 9, He says, “**Our Father**” since He is speaking of an attitude of prayer that would describe Him as well as His disciples
- In verse 14, He says, “**Your Father**” since He is speaking of sin – Jesus has no need for forgiveness since He has never sinned

Jesus uses the title “**Father**” in all of His prayers except when He is on the cross where He says, “**My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?**” (Mt 27:46)

- He was experiencing *separation* from His Father for the sake of this who would believe

Notice that Jesus instructs His followers to pray “**Our Father**”

- We belong to a family of believers – the household of faith
- We are not independent from one another – we are interdependent on one another

We also notice that our Father is “**in heaven**”

- There is a real sense of intimacy that we have with God
- However, intimacy should not create an attitude of irreverence and disrespect
- Familiarity with God should be coupled with reverence for God

II. Reverent prayer (6:9b)

hallowed by Thy name

Those who know God intimately as “Father” are then instructed to revere His name as “hallowed”

- “hallowed” is the same base word as “holy” or “holiness”
- It implies being set apart or different

Even though believers are rightly related to God through Jesus Christ, we must guard against a casual approach in prayer

- We need to acknowledge God as being *unlike* us
- He is perfectly holy – sinless

The holiness of God is not merely a characteristic of God

- It is the very essence of who God is

When we pray, “hallowed by Thy name,” we are not praying that God will *become* holy

- Rather, we pray and acknowledge God as being holy
- We are agreeing with the truth of God’s revelation of Himself
- We are acknowledging who God really is

Isn’t it interesting that Jesus taught, “hallowed by Thy name” (emphasis mine)?

- What does the name of God have to do with prayer?
 - o The name of God represents all that He is
 - o His character, plan, and will³

III. Receptive prayer (6:10)

¹⁰Thy kingdom come.

When we come to God in prayer, we come realizing that God is sovereign

- As such, He is in complete and total control
- Nothing is out of His control

Some have stopped with this thought and said that prayer is unnecessary in light of God’s sovereignty

- If God’s will be done, why pray?
- How would you respond to this?

As we mentioned in the introductory lesson, we pray for a number of reasons

- We are commanded to pray
- Jesus Christ was eternal God – knowing all things – yet He prayed
- We are assured that “the effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much” (James 5:16)

When Christ encouraged His disciples to pray for the kingdom of God to come, He wanted them to anticipate God’s rule over them

- He wanted them to acknowledge God’s sovereignty would be lived out in their lives
- He wanted them to adopt an attitude of submission to the King of kings

³ John MacArthur, Jr., *The MacArthur NT Commentary, Matthew 1-7*, 377.

Of course, this prayer looks forward to the time when Christ will return and establish His 1000 earthly reign during the Millennium

- This earthly reign will usher in the eternal reign

Thy will be done, On earth as it is in heaven.

If God is sovereign, then why do we need to pray for His will to be done?

- If He is all-powerful, can His will not be done?

“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.” (2 Pet 3:9, emphasis mine)

- That word “wishing” could also be translated “willing”

God does not “wish” for any to perish

- But do people perish?
- *Of course they do?*

So when we pray for God’s will to be done, we are not insinuating that God needs our help

- God was doing very well before the creation of the world, wasn’t He?
- God doesn’t need the help or assistance of mankind

“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; ²⁵ neither is He served by human hands, as though He needed anything, since He Himself gives to all life and breath and all things” (Acts 17:24-25)

Jesus wants us to pray that the will of God will be performed in our lives

- This takes place when we are obedient to Him

The will of God is being carried out perfectly in heaven

- So this prayer asks that the will of God be carried out on earth as it is in heaven

We need to come to God in prayer with a open, humble heart

- Ready to obey and submit to Him

Even the Lord Jesus Himself prayed, “My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; yet not as I will, but as Thou wilt” (Mt 26:39)

- This He prayed three times
- He is our Model even in times like this

One of our goals in prayer is to allow God’s desire to become our desire

- “Delight yourself in the LORD; And He will give you the desires of your heart.” (Ps 37:4)