

Prayer 2 2016

If you are a guest with us this morning I want to welcome you to Harvest. We are currently engaged in a “Between the Books” study on Prayer. (Normally verse by verse)

Why a study on Prayer?

1. As elders we have been convicted that we need to give a higher priority to prayer both personally and corporately. We are convinced that the times in which we live require a strong and vital prayer life in the church.
 - Anti-Christian sentiment seems to be growing around the world.
 - Much of the visible church has departed from the Biblical model.
 - Violence in our nation has grown to epidemic proportions.
 - There is no greater time for a clear, Spirit driven proclamation of the Gospel.

In our “Between the Books” study on the topic of Prayer and I would like to draw your attention to the Gospels of Luke and Matthew where we will find the Lord’s Prayer.

- Last week Ron laid a very simple foundation addressing the Who, What, Where When, and Why of prayer. This morning I will attempt by the grace of God to address the HOW of prayer. HOW are we to pray?
- That was the question raised by the Disciples in the Gospel of Luke chapter 11.

Luke 11:1 **Now Jesus was praying in a certain place, and when he finished, one of his disciples said to him, “Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples.”**

- Obviously they observed Jesus’ prayer life, how often he went away to a solitary place to pray. They heard him address God as Father, which was foreign to them as Jews. Then they saw the power in which he ministered among the people.
 - There must be some connection between his prayer life and his power.
- Jesus went on to instruct them with the words of what we have come to know as “The Lord’s Prayer.”
- We believe that the Lord’s Prayer is not merely a prayer that we should memorize and repeat back to him rather it is a model prayer in which Jesus teaches his disciples the fundamental elements of effectual prayer.
- On a different occasion when the Lord was teaching a large group of people gathered on the Mt of Beatitudes he instructed them with regard to their attitude in prayer. Again this was a separate occasion but Jesus instructions remain the same.
- So the Lord’s Prayer is both a model showing us HOW we ought to pray and an example of the attitude we should have as we come to God in prayer.
- You should know me well enough to realize that it is going to take more than one week to work through this prayer. This morning my goal is to cover these three points:

As we open the Gospel of Matthew we will find that the Lord’s Prayer is:

- Not Ritualistic
- It Is Relational
- It Is Reverential

1. NOT Ritualistic

It is important that we understand that Prayer was a priority among the Jews of Jesus' day but over time their prayers had become formalized, ritualized, rote and lifeless. The most popular prayer among the Jews was this one: Called the "Shema"

Deuteronomy 6: 4 "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. 5 You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.

- The Scribes established the wording and forms of prayer so that they could be read or repeated from memory. Sadly, the frequency and formalism of these prayers enable the people to pray with limited attention to what was actually being said; they became routine, often verbalized as a semi-conscious religious exercise.

That reminds me of my childhood. I grew up in a Catholic neighborhood in Philadelphia. Many of my friends would leave confession on Wednesday afternoon with a requirement of saying 10 "Hail Mary's" and 5 "Our Fathers"

- I remember being very impressed with the speed in which they were able to recite those prayers. (they were indeed a semi-conscious religious exercise)
- I was just as impressed with the speed in which my friends returned to the sins that brought about the discipline of those prayers.
- Our Lord Jesus warns his disciples against meaningless, empty, ritualistic prayer.

Matthew 6: 5 "And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward.

6 But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you. 7 "And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words.

What does Jesus mean when He instructs his disciples not to heap up empty phrases like the Gentiles?

- He is telling them that they should not simply keep on babbling syllables and phrases like the pagans did in that day in hopes of manipulating God.
- He is saying, we should pray with understanding and confidence in the character and nature of God.
- The Pagan gods were thought of as being disinterested and uninvolved in the affairs of men. Therefore it was difficult to gain and hold their attention. After all they had cosmic things on their minds. (*Prophets of Baal on Mt Carmel*)
- Various incantations with repeated words and phrases, lengthy rituals of self abasement were used to capture the attention of these pagan gods.
- Jesus warns his disciples to stay far away from those practices.

It would be good for us to remember Jesus' warning even today: We need to be discerning.

- The prayer of Jabez was supposed to bring prosperity when repeated daily 30 days. I have been in gatherings where so-called spirit led songs and prayers containing words that were repeated or utterances that were given without interpretation leading people into some ecstatic experience in the name of Jesus.

- Is that the Holy Spirit or is it simply an ecstatic experience of the flesh? God knows. And the fruit or lack thereof will reveal the truth about the practice.
- I believe that we should be careful not to fall into what Jesus describes as pagan practices of repeating phrases or words as if they were some kind of mantra that is used to manipulate God or capture his attention.

Friends, *those of you who are in Christ*; I want to encourage you: We already have God's attention, His eye is on the sparrow and I know he watches me.

So, approaching God in prayer does not require religious or ritualistic exercises in order to gain his attention; instead our approach to God in prayer is relational and reverential.

2. Relational - Jesus taught his disciples to address God as "Our Father."

Jesus addressed God as Father in every recorded prayer with the exception of one cry from the cross where he said, "My God, My God."

I think it is significant that Jesus' model prayer begins NOT with "I or MY" but with the word "OUR."

- This tiny word forms an immediate bond between all of us as believers; it is a bridge connecting you and me in Christ. When it is joined with the word Father it speaks of our union with one another as those who have been "Born of God."
- So with this simple opening we recognize our common familial relationship with one another through Christ.

Our individualistic society has infiltrated the church to the point where our one Lord, one faith and one baptism are frequently spoken of as "MY personal relationship with Jesus."

- But this individualistic language is foreign to the New Testament. The Scriptures speak of the church as a Body, a household a holy temple made up of living stones. All of these metaphors describe a single unit which is made of many parts.
- Throughout the Lord's model prayer, in every petition Jesus employs plural pronouns.
 - God is "Our father."
 - We ask Him to Give US this day OUR daily bread.
 - Forgive US OUR debts as WE also have forgiven our debtors.
 - Lead US not into temptation, but deliver US from evil.

It is far too easy in our prayer life to be consumed with our own problems, overwhelmed with the pressures that we face. We have all been taught to look out for number one, to fend for ourselves but Paul wrote to the Corinthians:

1 Cor 12: 24b, **But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, 25 that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. 26 If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together.**

- WHY would Jesus have to teach us to rejoice with those who rejoice and mourn with those who mourn?
 - Because in our sin we envy those who rejoice (*Why them and not me?*) and we neglect those who mourn. (*They probably deserved that!*)
 - Friends, it should be different in the Body of Christ!!!

God has made us one body, adopted us into one family and sealed us with one Spirit and it is by the Spirit that we cry out Abba, Father.

Galatians 4: 4 **But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, 5 to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. 6 And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!” 7 So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God.**

So together As brothers and sisters in Christ, by the Holy Spirit, we address God as Father and the wonderful thing about OUR Father is that HE is “In Heaven.”

- You may hear a group of Kindergarten boys debating which of their Fathers is the strongest, which has the best job or the most prominent position.
 - My dad is a fireman - he is a hero, he saves lives.
 - My dad is a builder who builds skyscrapers.
 - My dad is the governor of Pa. He is the most powerful man in the state.
- BUT there is no higher power, no more glorious position that the one held by **Our Father who is in Heaven.**
- When we pray “Our Father in heaven” we are not stating WHERE God is but rather WHO God is. We are Not describing His location, But His exalted position.

Psalms 103:19 **The LORD has established his throne in the heavens, and his kingdom rules over all.**

Psalms 115:3 **Our God is in the heavens; he does all that he pleases.**

- God is exalted high above his creation. He is enthroned in a position of power and authority over all that exists.
- It is important when we come together in prayer that we understand who it is that we are addressing. He is majestic in holiness, unmatched in glory and power, magnificent in splendor, the creator and sustainer of all that exists, ruling in sovereign authority over everything that is in the heavens, on the earth and under the earth.

How humbling it is that the glorious, omnipotent King of the universe would allow you and me to call him Father.

So what have we learned: Our prayers should not be an empty ritualistic repetition of words designed to awaken some obscure, uninterested deity rather they are the words of a flock of children, a joyful band of siblings who are dearly loved by their father who just happens to be the Sovereign King of the universe.

We move to our FINAL POINT - We approach God in prayer with Reverence.

- In light of who the Father is and the glorious heavenly position that he holds the first petition that Jesus teaches his disciples to bring before God is a petition for the Name of God to be hallowed.
 - We don't use the word “Hallowed” in normal speech today - It means to be sanctified, set apart as holy.

Because this is a petition, an appeal and NOT a STATEMENT we are NOT simply saying:
“God your name is holy.”

No, we are actually imploring God to do something, TO ACT.

This petition is a cry from OUR heart TO God saying, ‘God Cause your name to be hallowed, bring to this fallen generation a sincere reverence and honor to Your glorious name and all that your name stands for!

In other words what we are praying is that God would make his name known to mankind, move men to reverence his name and teach men to order their lives for the honor and praise of his name.

- Actually, the Lord Jesus prayed in this same way when he was facing the cross.

John 12:27 “Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour’? But for this purpose I have come to this hour. 28 Father, glorify your name.” Then a voice came from heaven: “I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.”

- Jesus gave himself up to death, in order that the Name of God would be glorified.
- Through His death we see the mercy, the grace and loving-kindness of God clearly displayed.
 - The cross is the ultimate demonstration of the heights and depth and breath of God’s abundant love.
 - But there is more:
- We see the perfect justice of God demonstrated in the cross as Jesus BORE the wrath of God on behalf of his beloved people.
- When the Bible speaks of “The Name of God” it has in mind ALL of the glorious attributes and perfections of His divine person.

In Shakespeare’s play, “Romeo and Juliet” Romeo asked the question: “*What is in a name?*”
“*That which we call a rose by any other name would smell as sweet?*”

- Romeo was saying that the essence of the rose, the softness of the petals and the sweetness of its aroma would be represented by any name that was give to it.
- But when I say “Rose” what immediately comes to mind are all of the delightful attributes of the flower.
- So it should be with The Name of God, YHWH, Jehovah, (Self Existent one) His name is representative of all His glorious attributes.

When we pray, before we voice our own needs, before we break out the shopping list of personal desires, Jesus teaches us to pray that the name of God would be set apart as holy.

- How many times in a week do you hear the Name of God blasphemed?
- How often do you hear the name of the Lord used in jest?

BUT Now that God has given you a new heart and put His Spirit within you, there is a new sensitivity to the Name of God. It grieves your spirit to hear his name Blasphemed.

So This petition, that the Name of the Lord be hallowed, is uniquely an evangelical petition. It is the cry of our heart that men and women from every nation, tribe and kindred would know the glorious character of our loving heavenly Father.

O Great God, Holy Father Sovereign and gracious Lord we come together as brothers and sisters, redeemed and adopted by the glorious work of our Savior Jesus Christ, and we ask that you're your name, your abundant love, compassionate and mercy would be revealed through the proclamation of the Gospel.

This morning O Gracious God we pray for our family members and friends who have not yet experienced your redeeming grace and we ask that you would sovereignly, wonderfully, graciously open their blind eyes that they may see Jesus High and lifted up, that you might give to them a new heart and put a new spirit within them. Wash them from all of their filthiness and clothe them in the righteousness of Christ.

O Lord, open the eyes of their hearts that they may see the sinfulness of their own souls and grant them the gift of repentance that your name might be hallowed.

We ask this in accordance with how you have taught us to pray and we ask it in the matchless name of Jesus Christ.

