

INTRODUCTION

This morning, I want us to begin a series on prayer, and in particular, on the prayer Jesus gave us. For as Christians we're always called to pray. However, during this strange and uncertain time, the call to pray is all the more pressing. It really is our main call, the one call we can all engage in, and it's for this reason that I want us to spend time pondering the Lord's Prayer, so that more and more we can address the whole of ourselves and all of our circumstances to our Father who is in Heaven.

Now today will serve as the introduction to this prayer, and to get us started, we'll be reading from **The Gospel of Matthew chapter 6 and verses 5-13. Matthew 6**, beginning in **verse 5**. Let us now hear God's Word. **(READ)**

THE BRIDGE

There's an ancient Christian saying, one that's been around since the 5th century that goes like this: *The Rule of Prayer is the Rule of Faith*. Simply put, this means, the way one prays reveals what one believes. Or put another way, what one believes shapes how one prays. For what we believe (about God, about ourselves, and about the world) is shown in the way we pray. For example, (and this is taken from our text), if you believe that God, in order to act, has to first of all be moved, moved by us, then your prayer life, more than likely, will be filled with many words - religious, bribing, even desperate words. Words offered in the hope that maybe, just maybe, God will answer your prayers, but he'll only do so if you offer enough words and the right words. Or (and this is another example from our text), if you believe that God is impressed by your religiosity, then don't be surprised if your prayers will be showy, offered to God in the hope of impressing him as well as others, of proving to others just how religious you truly are. Because once again, how we pray reveals what we believe.

And because this is so, what we need is for God himself to show us who he is; and with this, we need God to teach us how to pray. For left to ourselves, we can't know God. And not knowing God, we can't address him in way that's consistent with his character. For our greatest need is for God to make himself known. And my friends, this is ultimately what he has done in Jesus. For in Jesus, God has come near to us personally, come as a full-fledged human being, and he's done so in order to manifest himself to us - to show us who he is, what he's done, and what he's most passionate about. And he's done this so that we might know him, and in knowing him we might address him personally and faithfully. The good news is that God has made the first move toward us so that we might respond to him with lives characterized by praise and prayer - honest, humble, deep, and dependent prayer.

This reality is captured perfectly in what we've been given in the Lord's Prayer, when Jesus, who is God in the flesh, teaches us how to pray...teaches us how to address God on the basis of what we now know of God in the face of Jesus Christ. For only in Jesus can we truly know God, and only in Jesus can we truly pray to God... pray in way that truly honors him and that is consistent with who he has revealed himself to be in Jesus.

WHY WE SHOULD PRAY THIS PRAYER

Now with this in mind as a sort of foundation for our studies, what I want to do **first**, is give us some specific reasons for...**Why We Should Pray This Prayer**.

The **first reason** is this: We're to pray this prayer because...**it's Jesus' gift to us**. He says in **verse 9...Pray then like this**. And here, Jesus gives us the words to pray because he knows our deep struggle to pray - our struggle with what to pray, with why to pray, and to whom we're to pray. Jesus knows that true prayer doesn't come naturally to us, and because it doesn't, we either don't engage in it at all, or we twist it so

as to fit it to our own desires. We are poor “prayers” who on our own lack the language of true prayer. And because this is so we need to be schooled in prayer. In giving us The Lord’s Prayer, this is the very thing Jesus does. He’s bringing us into his school of prayer, and in so doing he gives us a prayer language. He gives us his own prayer language. For in this prayer we are given the prayer of the only begotten Son of God who has known the Father from all of eternity and who came into the world to make the Father known to us. This is the prayer Jesus gifted to us, and it’s no cheap gift. No! It’s a costly gift, for this prayer is ultimately given to us at the cost of Jesus’ own life. For he died and rose again that we might...**Pray like this.**

Second, we’re to pray this prayer because...*as we do, we’re actually given a clearer picture of who Jesus is and what he came to do.* You see, this prayer actually serves as a lens through which we come to know Jesus and to discover what he is most passionate about. As one writer has put it...**When Jesus gave his disciples this prayer, he was giving them part of his own breath and life. For this prayer is actually a distillation of his own vocation and his own understanding of his Father’s purposes and plan.** And what was that plan? What did Jesus come to do? Well, the prayer tells us that Jesus came to set up God’s good and healing reign on earth as it is in Heaven. He came to set up a new way of being in the world, one that’s characterized by dependence, by forgiveness, and by deliverance. And he did so that we might learn to live for the honor of God’s name by the doing of God’s will. For in the Lord’s Prayer we find a summary of the gospel - that in and through Jesus, God has done for us, and will do for us what we could never do for ourselves. And he has done so that we might become a people of praise in every area of our lives. So we’re to pray this prayer that we might come to know and love Jesus more, so that we might stand in awe of him who did everything necessary for our life and our salvation, and who ultimately did it for the glory of his Father and for the good of us, his people. For in knowing Jesus we come to know God himself, and central to that knowledge is this prayer.

Third, we’re to pray this prayer because...*it has the power to shape our Christian Life;* and that shaping begins with the reality that Jesus tells us to address God as...**our Father.** In being given the words...**Our Father,** Jesus has given us the undeserved gift of affirming that God isn’t some distant and uncaring God. No, he is our loving Father, and because he’s our Father we can address him as such. In referring to this amazing reality the **Orthodox theologian Alexander Schmemmann** has written...**How many ideas have evolved in humanity’s imagination about God! He’s been referred to as the Absolute, the First Cause, Lord, Omnipotent, Creator, Benefactor, and so on and so forth. Each of these ideas and designations relates to some element of truth, to a profound experience and a depth of understanding. Yet this one word ‘Father,’ together with ‘Our,’ contain all these concepts yet at the same time reveals them as intimacy, as love, as a unique, unrepeatable and joyful union. ‘Our Father’ – here we find the meaning of love, and the answer to love, here lies the experience of intimacy...here faith opens into trust and dependence yields to freedom, intimacy, and ultimately unfolds as joy. This is no longer an idea about God. No, this is already communion with God in love, in unity, and trust. To address God as ‘Our Father’ is already the beginning of eternity, the beginning of eternal life.** And this eternal life is nothing less than eternal communion with God...communion with the Father, through the Son, and by the Holy Spirit.

My friends, in this prayer, and especially in praying this prayer, we’re able to discern that the Christian Life is not simply a set of doctrines (it, of course, includes that, but it’s more than that). For the Christian Life above all is a relationship, a relationship with God who is our Father, our loving Father who knows us and who knows our needs. And this itself is the most intimate of relationships as it is a relationship forged through the agonizing triumph of Jesus’ cross and resurrection. For in Jesus, we learn that Christianity begins and ends with the fatherhood of God - that in Christ, God is our Father and we are his children - his children who aren’t called to earn or maintain his favor, but who’ve been given

his favor as a gift. And it's because of his favor and out of his favor that we are to be reoriented. Our desires are to be reoriented away from self toward him who is our true life. For a life oriented to self, can only shrink and ultimately die, but a life oriented to God is a life that grows and blossoms. That produces a beautiful human life that longs for and lives for God's name to be honored, for his kingdom to come and his will to be done; a beautiful human life that's learning to depend solely on God for sustenance, and forgiveness, and deliverance. For knowing that Christianity is first and foremost a relationship changes our outlook from one of regarding the Christian Life as being a life of mere duty into regarding it as a life of marvelous delight, delight in the reward. And what's the reward? Well, it's to know and to have God as our loving Father, our Father who is bound up his own glory, his own reputation, with our good.

But not only does it give us delight it also gives us confidence. And oh how we need confidence in a world filled with so much brokenness and brutality, in a world overrun with fear and uncertainty, disease and death. To know God is our Father and to know that our Father cares for us is the foundation our confidence, especially in times of peril and perplexity. And to know that our Father is in Heaven, which simply means he's on the throne, on the cosmic throne, gives us stability amidst uncertainty, for we can trust that no matter how bad things get, our God, our Father, is and will be at work for our ultimate good. And therefore, every time we pray this prayer it's a deep reminder that God loves us and that he's for us, that he's our Father in Heaven and we are his beloved children in Christ.

And then **fourth**, we're to pray The Lord's Prayer because...**every time we take it upon our lips it's a call to action**. To the action of embodying and modeling this prayer in our lives. It's a call to take serious all the pleas of this prayer...For our Father's name to be honored and for his Kingdom to set up in our lives. It's in this prayer that we learn the action of dependence, of depending on our Father to know our needs and to meet our needs (and not simply give us our wants). This prayer is a call to the action of depending on him for our necessities, for our rescue from evil, and for our forgiveness of sin as well as for our ability to forgive others when they sin against us. For when we pray this prayer, we quickly learn that we're part of the answer to this prayer, as our Father transforms us more and more into his kingdom people...his people who are learning to live for his honor and who've been given a new desire and ability to bend our will to his will. And therefore, in order to pray this prayer properly, we can't pray it passively. No, we must pray it ready to live it out by God's grace and for his glory.

HOW SHOULD WE PRAY THIS PRAYER?

Well, there's the why, but what about the how...**How Should We Pray This Prayer?**

Well, **first**, we're to pray The Lord's Prayer...**seriously**. As the writer Frederick Buechner has put it...**We do well not to pray this prayer lightly. It takes guts to pray it all. We can pray it in the unthinking and perfunctory way we usually do only by disregarding what we're saying. 'Thy will be done' is what we're saying. That's the climax of the first half of the prayer. We're asking God to be God. We're asking God to do not what we want but what God wants...And at the same time it takes guts to pray the second half of the prayer, for it takes guts to face the impotence that is ours. For we can do nothing without God, for without God we are nothing.**

And that's why we're to pray this prayer seriously, meaning what we say when we pray then like this. So let me encourage you to ponder these phrases. Reflect on what you're actually saying when you pray them. When you pray that your Father's name would be honored above your name, when you pray that his kingdom would come and not your kingdom, and when you pray that your will would more and more match up with his will, being reminded that it is only by his will that we've been given everlasting life. For we have no life apart from our Father who is life and gives life. Hence, the reason we're taught to

pray...deliver us from temptation and evil, and in particular the temptation and evil of thinking that our life is a right rather than a sheer gift. For only in God do we live and move and have our being.

Second, (and this is related) we're to pray this prayer...**boldly**, remembering that through Jesus and by the Spirit we have access and confidence to approach the Father's throne of grace. Because God is our Father and we are his children we're to approach him with a humble boldness that acknowledges that we have no right to be here and yet by his grace we are here, that he's made a way for us to come into his presence in order to pour out our hearts before him. For our God isn't an uncaring tyrant. No, he's a loving Father who has gifted us with his very best...the gift of his Son, who paid the price that we might pray this prayer. Therefore, don't neglect the privilege you've been given to address God boldly in praying like this. The door is open. Therefore, come in prayer to your Father.

Third, we're to pray this prayer...**communally**. Now The Lord's Prayer can and should be prayed individually, but the most common place where it's to be prayed is in community and particularly on the Lord's Day when we gather as the Body of Christ. For together, we're to join our voices with one another as well as with the church globally and historically in order to address God who first addressed us in the gospel. For remember Jesus said...**Pray then like this: Our Father**. He didn't simply say...**My Father**. For this is *your prayer* individually, but first of all it is *our prayer* collectively. It's the church's prayer and it's primarily within the church, among God's people, that we learn to believe and to pray and to live as becomes the followers of Jesus. And because this prayer is to be prayed communally, let me encourage you to commit to keep tuning in on Lord's Day, that together we may address our Father as he first addresses us in his Word.

And then **lastly**, we're to pray this prayer...**daily**. For throughout church history, Christians have been encouraged to pray this prayer on a daily basis, in some places to pray it even up to three times a day. Why? Well, because (again) this prayer is Jesus' gift to us...his prayer that teaches us to pray and to live a life of prayer. Therefore, commit to pray this prayer every day. And if you haven't yet done so, memorize it. And learn to use it as the pattern for your daily prayers. And one simple way to do this is by using one petition per day throughout the week, letting that petition shape your prayers for that particular day. For example Sunday's prayer would be...**Our Father, hallowed be your name**. And then Monday's prayer heading would be...**Our Father, your kingdom come**...and so on and so forth throughout the week. Let this prayer shape the way and the what of your prayers.

Let this prayer shape you into a person who addresses the whole of your life to your Heavenly Father, resting in the reward of knowing him, even more, of being known by him in Jesus. For what we need most, God the Father has given, for in Jesus and by the Spirit, God has given himself to us...given us his love and his life that we might pray like this...**Our Father**.