

Matthew 6:1-15 – “The Lord’s Prayer” – Jan. 1, 2023

1. Story of Peter the Barber

a. “A Simple Way To Pray”

2. VV.1-4 – “*“Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven. 2 “Thus, when you give to the needy, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. 3 But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, 4 so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.”*

- a. Before Jesus gets to teaching His disciples how to pray, He wants to clear away the debris of hypocrisy and self-righteousness
- b. This makes sense, before you plant a field you have to clear away the brush; before you renovate your kitchen, you have to remove the unwanted stuff that is in the way of what you want
- c. For our walk with God to be genuine and strong, we have to rid ourselves of any pretence of our own sufficiency or our own righteousness
- d. Many of Jesus’ confrontations in the Bible happen against those who are hypocritical and self-righteous
 - i. These people see themselves as both the source and the goal of religious life
 - ii. They feel they can pull themselves up by their bootstraps and through self-effort and self-determination, they can fit themselves for heaven

- iii. These are people who are like the foreign businessman at the karaoke machine that I like to use as an illustration
 - 1. He knows everything about the song he's singing except for what it means
- iv. Although the particular expression of hypocrisy and self-righteousness will look different in different cultures, this mindset remains among us today
 - 1. The old fundamentalism (drinking/smoking) has more or less been replaced by a softer gentler kind of self-righteousness (social justice)
 - 2. In both cases, it's all law and little to no gospel
 - a. "Deeds, not creeds" = "Law, not gospel"
- v. Just like a speed limit sign can show you the standard, but has no power over your car, so God's law can show us the standard, but it can't empower us to live up to the standard – only the Holy Spirit can do that
- e. Jesus makes application of how this hypocrisy works in the area of giving to the needy
 - i. The word 'hypocrite' comes from actors in plays – those who wore a mask
 - ii. These people pretend to be something they aren't
 - iii. Those who follow the law outwardly are doing so not directly to help the needy, and certainly not to bring glory to God through helping these people, but so they can look like respectable, top-tier citizens

- iv. Jesus says that when they make a show of their giving, the public praise is their full reward
 - 1. And what a petty reward that is compared to storing up treasure in heaven
- f. Over the years, I have done business with a number of people who are quick to let me know how generous they are and that their business is all about kingdom-building
 - i. I know of one case where someone tried to make a very lopsided deal with a fellow Christian, and then told the other party that he wants to maximize profits as a means to kingdom building
 - 1. The other gentleman was left wondering why a fair deal wasn't proposed so he couldn't also keep some profit for giving to the kingdom of God
 - ii. I don't know the disposition of a person's heart, and there is certainly nothing wrong with being profitable and growing wealth or growing a business; and it is good to use our resources in service of God's kingdom
 - 1. However, when people are quick to let me know how generous they are and how the kingdom will be more greatly served if the table is slanted their way than mine, I'd honestly have to admit that I'd rather do business with an unbeliever at that point
- g. We should be investing into the kingdom, we should be generous with those in need, but Jesus says that if we publicize it, our publicity is all the reward we get

- i. The lasting, eternal rewards come as we do this in secret, because this way we are showing we have confidence in the fact that God is being glorified, and He sees what human eyes cannot
- 3. VV.5-8 – “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. 8 Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.”*
 - a. Jesus shifts His application to prayer, where the same principles apply
 - b. Those who want to be pretentious and showy about their public prayers will receive their reward in full when people notice them
 - c. To do these things for public recognition tends to ring hollow
 - i. People who live for public approval spend so much time trying to impress people who don’t even really care, when that energy could be spent on real life, living breathing people in front of them, and they could exchange their own personal glory for the glory of God
 - d. When we make ourselves the star of our own show, we settle for far too little
 - i. The problem with self-centredness isn’t that it wants too much; it’s that it settles for far too little
 - ii. The span, the reach, and the impact of our brief 70 or 100 years is far too limited to become the main event

- iii. If we want to have the maximum impact, and ironically, receive the most intense and lasting glory, we must put our own little scripts aside and get swept into God's story – the big drama that spans eternity
- e. Just because something is abused, doesn't necessarily mean we abandon the whole project
- f. Giving to the needy was obviously being abused, but Jesus shows how to do it correctly
 - i. "**when** you give to the needy..." (v.2)
- g. Public prayers were also being abused, but Jesus doesn't tell us to abandon the practice – He assumes it should keep happening
 - i. "**when** you pray...(v.5, 6, 7)
- h. In v.7 & 8 it is clear that prayer isn't a negotiation between us and God
 - i. We are not trying to bend His will
 - ii. God is not impressed by our many words
 - iii. We are not bringing new information to Him that will help Him move to a superior plan of action now that we've instructed Him
 - iv. V.8 says that He already knows what we need before we ask
- i. So naturally the question arises – Why pray?
 - i. We also have instruction that persistence in prayer can be a good thing (the persistent widow of Luke 18:1-8)
 - ii. Prayer is not for us to provide God with information – it's not to change His will
 - 1. Prayer won't change God's will, but it does change ours

2. As we pray, we are acknowledging our own insufficiency and God's total sufficiency
3. We pray because we know something is beyond our ability to manage, and that the King of heaven and earth is free to move as He pleases
4. Prayer changes our wills – it is the means by which our plans come into alignment with God's plans
5. Prayer also changes the situation – how does this fit with the fact that prayer doesn't change God's counsel?
 - a. God decrees not only the ends, or the outcomes, but the means by which He accomplishes His purposes
 - b. If He has determined to move a certain way in a difficult situation, He has equally determined to do it *through* the prayers of His people
 - c. Prayer brings us on board as we bring our cares to Him, and it brings Him glory as His people depend on Him
 - i. Prayer changes things, it makes us more holy, and it brings Him more glory
 - ii. This is why we pray – this is why we share prayer requests as a church to get others to join in our prayer
 - d. And this is why praying specifically and persistently are good

- i. Persistence is not to be in the “name it and claim it” mould, but the right kind of persistence in prayer shows a long-lasting trust that God at work and that He is free to work in the most unlikely situations
- ii. We have been praying for a specific building for some months now
 - 1. God has not promised us that building
 - a. We may never have it
 - 2. But we’re praying specifically enough that we’re trusting God has power to act in a very specific way
 - a. If He answers us differently than we’re asking for, then that is the better path, but our persistence and our specific request is a sign of trust
 - b. For the most part, I think we as Christians could be more specific in our prayers – yes we hold our requests with an open hand, but we should also pray in such a way that we can see how God moves in real life situations

- i. A generic prayer that God would bless everyone we know is good, but difficult to see how God has acted in the specifics
 - j. Jesus doesn't warn against repetition here – he warns against *vain repetition*
 - k. I am one who makes a defense of repetition – it is a powerful learning tool
 - i. Through almost all of her history, perhaps until less than 100 years ago, the church has trained her young people through creeds and catechisms
 - 1. Our use of creeds and catechisms is very intentional
 - ii. Why can you recite the alphabet with ease? Because you sang it enough times that it's now in your bones
 - iii. Many of us can recite the Lord's Prayer because we said it every morning, 5 days a week, for 13 years
 - iv. Just saying the words without thinking about them isn't the goal, but if we know the prayer, we have all the information that we're able to see the parts that make up the kind of prayer that Jesus teaches us to pray
 - l. In Luther's little book he wrote for Peter the Barber, he saw four main parts here and in other prayers in Scripture
 - i. They can be summed up with the acrostic ACTS
 - 1. Adoration
 - 2. Confession
 - 3. Thanksgiving

4. Supplication

4. V.9 – *“Pray then like this: ‘Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.’”*

- a. Jesus teaches us to pray to the Father
 - i. While in one sense, prayer is Trinitarian, so we are allowed to come to the Father because the Son has escorted us into the Throne Room, and the Spirit takes our imperfect words and carries them perfectly to God, but in the final analysis, our prayers are ultimately directed to the Sovereign, to the King, to God the Father
 - 1. One of the wonderful things about the Spirit cleaning up our requests is that God hears them even if we pray imperfectly
 - ii. Strictly speaking, we pray to the Father, and not to the Son or the Spirit
- b. What does it mean that God is in heaven?
 - i. Some people think in spatial terms – i.e. – heaven is outer space
 - ii. The biblical way of seeing the universe involves several uses of the word ‘heaven’
 - 1. The first heavens, or the firmament heavens, is the dome that surrounds the earth – what we today call the ‘atmosphere’
 - 2. This is where clouds and birds and planes are
 - iii. The second heaven, or beyond the firmament, on the other side of the ozone layer is outer space
 - 1. This is where satellites and stars are
 - 2. The Soviet cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin commented on his return from space that he saw no evidence of God when he was in this heaven

- a. He saw plenty of evidence, and he also misunderstood
where he was
 - iv. The third heaven, or highest heaven is the place where God dwells
 - 1. This heaven is not so much geographical as it is dimensional
 - 2. It is a reality that encompasses all reality – it is everywhere
 - a. It is like the unseen world – all around us yet because we
have a veil over our eyes we don't see it as we ought
 - b. “Upside-down” from Stranger Things
 - 3. We often correctly say that God is both transcendent and imminent
– this is what is meant
 - a. He is on a different plane than us, commanding the
movement of the stars and the galaxies far above us, and
organizing electrons and molecules far beneath us
 - b. He is over all, and yet He is here in our midst this morning
 - v. God is in heaven, and His name must be hallowed – it must be made holy
in the way we think and talk about Him
 - 1. The word Father conveys both authority and closeness and
tenderness
 - a. “Daddy” – borders on disrespect and irreverence
 - b. “Sir” – is cold and distant and impersonal
 - c. “Father” is the language we are given
- 5. V.10 – *“Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.”*
 - a. Just like God's dwelling place in heaven is multi-dimensional, so is the kingdom

- b. What is a kingdom? It is any place under the authority of a sovereign
 - i. So in one sense, we could correctly say that all of creation is encompassed in God's kingdom
 - ii. Yet the language makes more of a distinction than that
 - 1. Because so many are blind to the reality and glory of God all around them, they don't see this kingdom
 - 2. As a result, some see the kingdom as strictly spiritual – it's just in our hearts with no cosmic or real-world significance, as though God doesn't break into the real physical world
 - a. The incarnation of Christmas is all about God's purposes to bring the seen and the unseen world back together, to put heaven and earth back in union with each other, to restore paradise – to heal the divorce that happened in the Fall
- c. We've seen in Matthew already that with the incarnation of Jesus, the kingdom has broken into the world
 - i. The kingdom is at hand (3:2; 4:17)
 - ii. Jesus also talks about the nearness of the kingdom in Luke 10:9,11
 - iii. In Luke 11:20 He says that if He casts out demons that is proof that the kingdom of God has arrived
- d. Yet here Jesus prays for the kingdom to come – this is a future reality
 - i. The concept of stages works best for me to conceptualize this
 - 1. Inauguration – Progression – Consummation

- ii. Like an engagement which establishes a new reality, that reality isn't completed or finalized until the wedding day when the couple consummate their vows
- iii. So we are in this overlapping age between inauguration and consummation
 - 1. And just like a bride spends her engagement by preparing and readying herself, so too the church is to spend her time making herself ready
 - 2. The overlap of history means that we work in glad anticipation of the new world even as we continue to struggle in the difficulty and the pain and groaning of the old one
- iv. The way we ready ourselves is to do *God's will on earth as it is in heaven*
- v. As we live out the real-world application of belonging to God, we are making His kingdom more and more visible
- vi. As we anticipate the return of the king, the coming of the bride-groom, we are busy making ourselves and our surroundings as suitable for Him as possible
 - 1. When a young lady builds her hope chest, and when she gets herself ready to be a wife and a mother, whether she knows it or not, she is symbolically living out her role as the Bride of Christ
- vii. We live in anticipation of the full heavenization of creation once again, when every tear has been dried, and all suffering is in the distant past

viii. This is what we do when we pray for God's will to be done on earth as it is in heaven – we are looking forward to a wedding day

ix. When we do God's will on earth as it is done in heaven, we are bringing the reality of His rule and reign, of His kingdom, into ever sharper focus

6. V.11 – *“Give us this day our daily bread”*

- a. This is again a multi-faceted truth
- b. God's normal way of giving us our bread involves our own effort and the effort of others
- c. This request isn't requiring us to be passive, but for us to see our work in subjection to Christ
- d. We see all the steps of how we get our bread – cultivating, planting, fertilizing, harvesting, processing, shipping, retailing, all the people involved in mining phosphorus for the fertilizer, and working steel for the trucks and tractors, and the ability and willingness of the farmer, and the trucker, and the girl at the checkout counter, and the job we have to pay for the bread
- e. But all of this is happening under the providence of God – without Him, not one of these steps can happen; the whole order unravels
- f. The aspect of this bread being daily is also significant – it is just in time
 - i. Never late, but often not far ahead either
 - ii. Just like the Israelites gathering manna, God kept them from having more than a day at a time, except for over the Sabbath

7. V.12 – *“and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.”*

- a. Forgiveness can be seen two ways – there is the one-time act of justification when we are accepted into God’s family
 - b. Then there is the ongoing forgiveness and grace that happens for the sins we commit even as Christians
 - c. Jesus is not teaching here that justification happens as a result of us forgiving other people – that would contradict the clear teaching of Scripture that we are justified by faith alone
 - d. This is showing the relationship between God forgiving us and then us forgiving others
 - i. The one who has been justified by faith and forgiven respond by forgiving others
 - ii. Put negatively, if you are hard and unwilling to forgive, perhaps you need to examine the state of your own soul – how well do you understand the gospel? Have you laid hold of it? If you see an unwillingness to forgive others you should not assume you have been forgiven by God.
 - e. Even apart from initial justification, forgiveness isn’t just a one-time thing, but is the constant duty of Christians if we want to keep and enjoy fellowship
 - i. We ask God to keep forgiving us, even after conversion
 - ii. We keep short accounts with others, both in our willingness to forgive and in asking forgiveness of others
8. V.13 – *“And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.”*
- a. This petition is further evidence that we are to trust God and not ourselves

- b. If we were trustworthy, we'd go into a season of testing and temptation with confidence in our ability to manage our way out of it; to deliver ourselves
- c. But here we are pleading with God to keep us from a situation which would otherwise drown us
- d. God does not tempt people with evil in the sense of planting fresh evil into their hearts
- e. The temptation here should be seen as a period of testing and training, but with the assurance that we will not be tempted beyond what He gives us grace for
 - i. He often gives us more than we can handle
 - 1. But He never gives us more than what He can handle as He gives us His Spirit and the strength to prevail
 - ii. James 1:12, 13 – *“Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him. 13 Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am being tempted by God,” for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one.”*
 - iii. 1 Corinthians 10:13 – *“No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.”*
- f. We can overcome temptation and be delivered from evil, but it's not because we can; it's because He can.

- g. The word translated ‘evil’ here can also be understood in the personal sense – ‘the evil one’
 - i. In either case, it is God who is able to deliver us – either from the schemes of Satan, or from the evil and corruption that comes from the world and the flesh
9. *“For thine is the power, the kingdom, and the glory”*
- a. We are all familiar with saying this as part of the Lord’s prayer
 - b. But as the work of uncovering manuscripts goes on, it has become a legitimate question if this closing petition in the Lord’s prayer is original, or if is perhaps a footnote that someone has later found and assumed to be part of the text
 - c. I don’t have a definitive answer on this – some of the oldest manuscripts contain this and others don’t
 - d. I think it is entirely fitting for the prayer for it closes on a note of reverence – of God’s power, rule, and glory
 - e. In many languages, there exist formal pronouns whereas in modern English we have only ‘you’
 - i. Eg. “Jie” vs. “du”
 - ii. I am supportive of modern English translations, but the majestic and familiar use of “thine” gives a formal sense that is fitting to use for God
 - f. To close the prayer with a recognition that all things are from God, through God, and to God is fitting
 - i. God has all power on heaven and earth; He rules as the sovereign and undisputed king of both asteroids and atoms, and to Him belongs all glory

- g. God's glory is the end point to which all our thoughts, theology, and practice should end – this is what the Reformation sought to recover
 - i. MLJ vs. other preachers in London
 - 1. This one preached the ethics of Jesus, this one preached love, *but MLJ preached God*
 - 2. May that be said of us!
10. VV.14-15 – *“For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, 15 but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.”*
- a. Christ here repeats what we've seen in the prayer – the importance of forgiveness
 - b. Our willingness to forgive others is an important test of the disposition of our hearts
 - c. If God has forgiven us so much in both our justification and then further in our ongoing Christian life, how ready do we need to be to forgive others
 - d. There seems to be a direct connection here, and this shows us that much more how important it is to keep short accounts

11. SUMMARY

- a. So what have we seen here?
- b. Christ strips away our sense of showiness, self-sufficiency, and self-righteousness and then takes us more deeply into the care and sufficiency of the Father as we bring our adoration, our confession, thanksgiving, and supplications to Him
- c. Prayer takes us both further up and further in in our Christian walk

- d. The model that Christ gives us for prayer can be prayed as-is, or it can serve as a kind of structure as we pray our own prayers, but all the elements of a balanced prayer are here

12. CHARGE

- a. *The distracting and empty busyness of our world often keeps us from prayer and deeper devotion. To make things worse, we live in a culture where vanity and narcissism are seen as virtues to be copied instead of as sins to be killed. This makes Christ's teaching against vanity, self-promotion, and unhealthy self-love even more jarring and important. Whether in our generosity or in our prayer life, we demonstrate faith in ourselves when we make a show of ourselves, and faith in God when we go about serving Him in humble obedience. Apart from what we pray, let's remember that the act of prayer itself is an admission that God is sovereign and we are not. His name alone is to be made holy. He alone brings His kingdom to earth. He alone governs the universe in such a way as to give us our daily bread. He alone can forgive. And He alone can keep us from sin and evil. Prayer keeps us faithful, it brings glory to God, and it is God's appointed means of moving us forward. This week, as we head into a new year, let our resolve be to be a people of prayer.*

13. BENEDICTION

- a. Romans 11:33-36 – *“Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! 34 “For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?” 35*

“Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?” 36 For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.”