How Shall We Pray?
Scripture Text: Matthew 6:9-13

Introduction

The time of the year is Lent, a time of preparation for Easter. To prepare us to celebrate Resurrection Sunday, I thought we could spend some time learning about prayer so that we can draw closer to God and be more effective in praying. One of Jesus’ disciples once asked, “Lord, teach us to pray.” So, for the next few weeks we are going to look at what Jesus taught concerning prayer. First, what is prayer? One pastor said, “Prayer is one way communication with God.” It is one-way because God does not pray to us. We pray to Him and He reveals things to us. Prayer is important because God told us to do it, but prayer is also the practice of the presence of God. When we pray, we come into the presence of God. If we are to have a relationship with God, we must pray. I need to be a praying follower of Jesus Christ. We all need to be a praying people of Jesus Christ. The health of the church is dependent on us having a more intimate relationship with God and discerning His will for the church. We cannot afford to do things our way or to plow through the future without God’s lead. It takes all of us praying together.

Right in the middle of the most famous sermon of all, the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus spoke about prayer. He told us that when we pray we must not be like hypocrites who love to show off their fake spirituality to others in public. Rather we ought to pray privately to God. Jesus did not condemn all public prayer, though, because He prayed in public, too. In fact, Jesus’ prayer in this passage uses the words “our”, “us”, and “we” indicating a prayer for us and for when the church gathers together. However, our motivation in praying is very important. Praying privately allows us to focus more exclusively on God, which should be the main point of prayer. Jesus also told us to not use a lot of empty words. Some people will often repeat the same things over and over, as if the amount of words spoken makes their prayers more powerful or helps God listen better. It does not! When you pray to God, do not use mindless, mechanical repetition. Speak plainly, say what you mean and mean what you say.

The Model Prayer

After Jesus told His disciples what to do and what not to do when praying, He then gave them a model for praying. This model prayer is what many refer to as the Lord’s Prayer. Actually, the “Lord’s Prayer” is probably a better description for John chapter seventeen, when Jesus prayed for His disciples just before His crucifixion. Jesus’ prayer here in Matthew chapter six may be better entitled “The Disciples’ Prayer”, as it was for us. It is also a model prayer because Jesus told His disciples, “Pray like this,” not, “Pray this prayer.” Jesus did not mean for us to pray these statements repetitively without much thought, but He gave us an example for how we should pray. There are six petitions within this model prayer that can be divided into two groups. The first three petitions focus on the greatness of God and asking for God to be glorified, while the last three focus on our personal needs. Thus, the prayer puts God and His interests first, ahead of our needs, which is the way we should pray. Let’s look at each of these six petitions.

Scripture quoted from the English Standard Version (ESV) unless otherwise noted.
Revere God and Ask Him to Glorify Himself

The first petition is the most important one. It is the one from which the others flow.

Matthew 6:9 ⁹ Pray then like this: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.

The first thing we see in this model prayer is that we are to address God as “our Father in Heaven”. What is the difference in praying to “our Lord” or “our God” as opposed to praying to “our Father”? It is not that we should avoid addressing Him as Lord or as God, but praying to God as “our Father” conveys the idea of kinship — that we are His children. The good news of the Gospel is that anyone who believes in Jesus Christ and confesses Him as Lord is adopted into God’s great heavenly family. Praying to God as “our Father” demonstrates the warmth and intimacy of a loving father’s care for His children. As His children, we can and ought to go to Him as our Father. Referring to God as our Father in Heaven also reminds us of God’s sovereign rule over all things. He reigns over all creation from His throne in Heaven.

Secondly, this petition says, “Hallowed be your name,” which may not sound like a petition. It sounds more like a statement. To hallow something means to make it holy or to revere it as holy. We might understand this statement as asking God to make His own name hallowed. This would be like praying that God does whatever He needs to do to bring Himself glory. We should want God to be glorified. But, we could also look at this petition that we hallow God’s name, meaning we treat His name or His character with reverence and honor. We should want to treat God with the highest honor. Everything we do ought to be for the glory of God, for that is the purpose for which He created us. But, when I wake up in the morning, or drive to work during the week, or respond to someone who says something hurtful to me, I do not think about glorifying God. I need His help in my life to give Him the glory He deserves. So, acknowledge God as holy and glorious, and pray that He helps you to honor Him as holy and glorious.

Pray for God’s Kingdom to Come

The second petition in this prayer is about God’s Kingdom. Look at verse ten.

Matthew 6:10 ¹⁰ Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

What does it mean for God’s Kingdom to come? What does this look like? God’s Kingdom is wherever He has authority and rule, which is everywhere. God’s Kingdom also refers to the reign of Jesus Christ in the hearts and lives of people. It refers to the reigning presence of Jesus Christ in His Body, the Church. This petition refers to God’s Kingdom manifesting itself on earth so that we honor Him, obey His commandments, reflect His love, do good for all people, and proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ to the whole world. Do we really want God’s Kingdom to come? Israel did not. Most of them wanted a kingdom of their own choosing. Most of them wanted a king whom they chose, not a Savior born in a manger who preached redemption and forgiveness. Israel wanted a warrior king, and thus, most of Israel rejected Jesus and His Kingdom.

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Do we want God’s Kingdom to come? Are we ready to give up our sovereignty and pray for God to reign in our lives? We should pray that God’s power and reign and rule will come on this earth as it is in Heaven. We should pray that God’s Kingdom will burst forth and demolish the enemy’s rule and oppression that is here on this earth. We should pray for an end to the slavery of sin and death and evil that is so prevalent among mankind. We should pray that men and women everywhere will reject Satan and come to Jesus Christ. We should pray for God's Kingdom to come on this earth so that Jesus is honored, Satan is vanquished, and those who are perishing will find salvation. Yes, we should pray for this. Father, may your Kingdom come quickly.

Pray for God’s Will to be Done

Similar to God’s Kingdom to come, the third petition is that God’s will be done. Just as God’s will is perfectly done in Heaven, Jesus prayed that it would be experienced on earth. The will of God will be ultimately realized only when God’s Kingdom comes in its final form, when Jesus Christ returns in power and great glory. While we wait for Jesus to return, we ought to be praying for His will to be done now. How many of us really want God’s will to be done? More than likely, we really want God's will to be done as long as it accords with our will. When we pray this prayer, we often mean that we want what we desire and we really hope that is what God wants, too. But our prayer should be, “Father, make your will be done on this earth, regardless of what I want.”

What does God want? What is His will? Is it what I want? We need to have God’s desires. Our lives are a battle between sinful desires and godly desires. It is a battle between what we selfishly want and what God rightly knows is best. We need God’s will to reign supreme. We need His desires to become our desires. When Jesus prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane right before He was betrayed, beaten and crucified, He prayed that if possible He would not have to endure the suffering to come. But, He then prayed, “Not as I will, but as You will.” (Matthew 26:39) Sometimes, what God has planned for you is difficult, but if it is God’s will, it is always right and it is always best. We should be a people who desperately want to see God’s glory, God’s Kingdom and God’s will here on earth. Are you praying for His will to be done? May it be so!

Pray for God to Meet Your Needs

The next three petitions in this prayer are about our needs. Let’s look at the fourth one.

Matthew 6:11 11 Give us this day our daily bread,

Sometimes we jump right to this section of the prayer. Many of us have no problem with this petition. Many of us give thanks or say grace before eating a meal. We all want to be fed, but oftentimes we think a little too much with our stomachs. I know I do. We should never treat prayer as a vending machine: say a prayer and expect to receive something in return. Prayer should not be like that. Nevertheless, we should go to God for what we need. God knows what you need even before you do. You are not going to surprise Him with your requests. Ask Him and then trust Him to provide what you need.
Notice that this request is for “our daily bread” for “this day”. Now, I do not think Jesus meant for us to live solely on bread. I believe the main point here was Jesus wanted His disciples to live in a state of constant dependence on God for His provision. We need to recognize that God provides everything we need and we need to acknowledge our daily dependence upon Him. This petition is very much like one found in Proverbs.

Proverbs 30:8–9  
8 Remove far from me falsehood and lying; give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with the food that is needful for me, 
9 lest I be full and deny you and say, “Who is the Lord?” or lest I be poor and steal and profane the name of my God.

We need God more than we need food or anything else. We also need to rely upon Him to provide what we need. Do you trust God to provide what you need?

Pray for God’s Forgiveness

The fifth petition in this prayer is about forgiveness, something else we all need.

Matthew 6:12  
12 and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.

It is interesting that Jesus used the word “debt” here in regard to forgiveness. He is not talking about owing God money. He is talking about the debt of sin we each have. Every person sins, breaks God’s Law, and falls short of His glory. We each steal glory from God when we sin and we need forgiveness. We each have a debt to God that is only cancelled and paid by the blood of Jesus Christ. The forgiveness Jesus mentions here, though, does not mean that believers need to ask daily for salvation. Believers are declared righteous and saved forever from the moment they initially believe in Jesus Christ and confess Him as Lord. Rather, this is a prayer for our relationship with God to be restored when fellowship with Him has been hindered by sin. When we sin against God we ought to be broken by that sin, the very thing that sent our Savior to the cross. And being broken by it, we need to ask for His forgiveness and restoration of fellowship.

We not only need to be forgiven, but we need to forgive others, too. Notice that Jesus said, “Forgive us our sins, as we also have forgiven those who sin against us.” Our forgiveness from God is tied to our forgiving others who have wronged us. Everyone does or says things that are hurtful and sinful. Christians forgive others in response to God’s forgiveness of them. Those who have received God’s forgiveness should be so moved with gratitude toward God that they are eager to forgive those who sin against them. If we do not forgive others, does that cast doubt on whether we have truly received God’s forgiveness? Maybe! One of the most memorable parables of Jesus is the one of the unforgiving servant. How can we not forgive someone who owes us a few hundred dollars when the Master has forgiven our debt of millions? The master forgave his servant and he expected him to do the same. Could you pray this prayer, “Father, forgive me in the same way as I forgive others?” Would you want God to forgive you the same way you forgive others? If we do not forgive others, how can we claim God forgiveness for ourselves?

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Pray for God’s Help to Live a Holy Life

This final petition in this prayer addresses our battle with sin and evil. Just as we need forgiveness of sin, we need God’s help to resist temptation to sin.

Matthew 6:13 13 And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

We have asked for God’s forgiveness because we all sin and need His forgiveness. We also need God’s help to resist temptation and live a holy life. God has called the Church to be His saints, His holy ones. God does not save us from the guilt and judgement of sin so that we can just muddle our way through life while yielding to every temptation that comes our way. God wants us to live holy lives that represent His holiness. We need to acknowledge our need for God to lead us. We need to acknowledge our weakness to sin and our need for God’s guidance and protection. Do not be the tough guy who thinks he or she can handle it. Many Christians have fallen into temptation because they did not acknowledge their own weakness. Many churches fail to accomplish their mission because they do not seek God’s guidance or they yield to temptation or selfish concerns. Ask God to guide you and to lead you to be holy.

I trust God, but I do not trust myself. Given the opportunity, I will yield to my own temptations. That is why it is so important to place boundaries in your life. Never say you will not sin in a certain way. Never say that you would never do what someone else did. Since the Spirit led Jesus into a time of testing (Matthew 4:1), this petition might be understood as God delivering us from the power and schemes of Satan so as not to yield to temptation. One of my closest friends used to say to me, “Satan is a mean one”, and He is. He is a deceiver. He is the great Tempter. He is the Accuser of the Saints. We are weak without Christ, and thus, we need to rely on the Holy Spirit to lead us and to help us resist the Enemy and to lead a holy life. Think of someone who is starving for righteousness. They hunger for it. Do you hunger for righteousness? We should. The best protection from sin and temptation is to turn to God and to depend on His direction. Seek the strength of your Father in Heaven. He will provide!

Conclusion

In closing, the Lord’s Prayer is an excellent model for praying. We should not treat it as a prayer that we just recite by habit. The Lord’s Prayer is an excellent model for prayer as it shows us the things we each need to acknowledge when we turn to God in prayer. Each of the six requests in the Lord’s Prayer really goes back to making God’s name holy. May our prayers, our very lives, bring honor and glory to our Father in Heaven. May we be a praying people who desperately need God and who rely upon Him for everything. There is so much for which we need to pray. Let us pray for God’s church here and the work He wants us to do. Let us pray for His Kingdom to manifest itself here. Let us pray for His will to reign supreme. Let us pray that our needs, not our desires, be met. Let us pray for forgiveness and that we will forgive others. And let us pray that God will lead us and deliver us from every temptation we face. The Church does not have time to not pray. Will you commit to prayer? May it be so. Amen!

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