

HALLOWED BE YOUR NAME

Week Commencing 03 October 2022

Notes for next week's sermon on "Our Father in heaven"

Our new sermon series which starts next weekend will take us through the Lord's Prayer, exploring each compelling phrase, line by line. Our readings during these weeks will be drawn from different parts of the Bible as we explore some of the significant doctrine we are encouraged to learn as we pray this prayer.

We should start of course, by reading the Lord's Prayer in its context. It occurs twice in the gospels - in Matthew 6 and in Luke 11.

DAY 1: Read Matthew 6:5-8

The Lord's Prayer in Matthew occurs in the context of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. In the section which extends from 6:1 to 6:18, Jesus identifies three areas in which people flaunt their religious attributes so that they might receive praise, recognition or admiration from others.

In each of the three examples Jesus gives, he exaggerates to make his point. People didn't literally announce their giving with trumpets (v2) nor disfigure their faces as they kept a fast (v16), nor pray standing on the corners. Jesus is exaggerating to make a point. But both sides of the illustration are exaggerated - because obviously you cannot literally give in such a way as your left hand doesn't know what your right hand is doing and praying in a closet (v6) is not altogether practical.

Nevertheless the point is absolutely clear and it cuts to the heart: have pure motives. Don't do anything in your Christian life to be noticed by others; to impress others; to show off; to show others how wise, how godly, how mature, how superior, how clever, how important, how prayerful you are. If your motive includes any of these then your only reward will ever be the kudos of other men and women. How shallow!

But when prayer is simply between you and God - then your Father - who sees what is done in secret and knows your heart - will reward you. I'm not sure of the actual nature of the reward but perhaps it is along the lines of the joy that comes from praying with pure motives; indeed the sheer joy of spending precious minutes with God in prayer.

This doesn't mean we should *never* pray in public or gather for prayer meetings. Remember - Jesus is exaggerating to make the point. But it will mean that when we *do* pray in public, our prayers will be real and genuine - never to impress others.

Vv7-8 challenges us in the area of meaningless repetition, as those in pagan religions were known to do with their mantras and chants. We don't have to impress God by chanting the same things over and over. He won't be more convinced to act if we repeat phrases. (Think how annoyed a parent gets when a child asks for the same thing over and over!) And the Lord knows our needs, so it's not as if we need to fill him in on what's going on. May the Lord help us to be people of deep, genuine and heartfelt prayer as we grow in our relationship with him.

DAY 2: Read Matthew 6:9-14

Please note carefully in v9 that Jesus says "This, then is *how* you should pray" not *what* you should pray. Jesus is telling us *how* to pray, not *what* to pray. He's giving us a model, not giving us the only words we should ever pray. In fact, there is a danger here isn't there with the Lord's Prayer? Sometimes I think we're in danger of using it in such a way as Jesus spoke against in vv7-8!! So we do need to be careful that when we say the Lord's Prayer we're not rattling off empty phrases without engaging our heart.

Note the balance of the prayer which ought to be reflected in our prayer – namely – that half of the prayer is given over to praying for the honour of God’s name, the coming of his kingdom and the doing of his will. Would half your present prayers be more about **God’s honour and glory** than about **you**? And then when the prayer comes to pray about our needs the emphasis is on sin, forgiveness and temptation. Only *one* line is given over to our needs and that in itself is wonderfully balanced to protect us from greed because the sense is ‘give us *today* the needs of *today*’.

Well there will be more detail on each phrase of the Lord’s Prayer in coming weeks. As we look at Jesus’ model in detail, may the Lord teach us to pray!! To pray after the model of Jesus! To pray about the really important matters such as the honour of his name across central and western NSW, the coming of his kingdom and the doing of his will!

DAY 3: Read Romans 8:12-17

The two opening words of the Lord’s Prayer tell us clearly that the context of prayer is **relationship**. Fathers - as it’s only *your* children who call you father (and *my* children who call *me* father) - so it is only those who are **God’s** children who can address God as **Father** in prayer. Although plenty of people may send up the odd prayer now and then, it is only those who are God’s children who have access to God in prayer.

Christians are of course, children of God by adoption - *as many as received them* says John in his gospel - *he gave the right to become children of God*. Have you received Jesus - welcomed him into your life? Then you are a child of God! Rejected him or ignored him? Then the privileges of prayer and relationship with God and his help and strength will not be yours until such times as you do come into the family.

However, once you are *in* the family - the privileges are enormous. Calling God "Father" is just one. John in his letter wrote - *see what love the Father has lavished on us - that we should be called children of God*. What great love indeed! For the disciples who first listened to Jesus, calling God "Father" must have been revolutionary! God had been seen as someone distant, far away – holy; too above them to relate to personally. You needed a priest to mediate for you. The Jew hardly dared to take God’s name on their lips! But if God is our Father and we his children, our understanding of prayer itself changes. We are not trying to twist God’s arm, nor do we have to work to get his attention; nor do we need any one else like a saint or Mary to pray for us. You are his child; he is your Father. In fact we are reminded that he is more ready to listen than we are to pray and wants to give us more than we either desire or deserve!

So this is the context of prayer - a loving relationship of Father to child. How wonderful! How encouraging! We have a Father, waiting for us to come and speak with him. He cares for us. He loves us. He is the one who has brought us into relationship with himself. We can be certain if he has given us his Son, he will not fail to give us all measure of good things.

DAY 4: Read Luke 11:1-13

In the context of Luke’s Gospel, Jesus teaches his disciples to pray at their request. *Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples*. I want to ask you today – would you like to learn to pray? Or would you like to pray in a more meaningful way? Then working through the Lord’s Prayer will teach you, just as it taught Jesus’ first disciples.

If the fact that we address God as *Father* teaches us that he is well disposed to hear his children’s prayers, the fact that he is *in heaven* teaches that he will be well able to answer our prayers.

Isaiah 66:1 teaches us that heaven is God’s throne. It is the place in which he dwells. It the place Jesus left to take on human flesh and walk with us here on earth. Where is it? What is it like? We don’t know a lot about heaven but we do know it is the place where God dwells and from where he reigns. He is all powerful and all mighty; nothing is too difficult for him. So when we pray we can have confidence that he is well able to hear our prayers.

Vv5-12 in Luke 11 are also teaching us about prayer. We are encouraged to be bold with God with our requests; we are encouraged to ask and seek and knock, confident of God’s reply and we are reminded again that God is for us: if flawed human fathers – despite our evil hearts – know how to care and give good gifts to our children, *how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!*

“Our Father in heaven.” Brothers and sisters, come before your Heavenly Father in prayer today as a child to a loving Father, confident that he loves to hear you pray, assured that he is wise beyond your wisdom;

certain that he will answer and be generous in ways he knows are best for us. Let us pray!