West Salem
BAPTIST CHURCH

Matthew: The King and His Kingdom

Series: The Manifesto of the King, Part 19: Prizing the Great Gift of Prayer

Matthew 6:5-15 June 26, 2011 Pastor Nick Shaffer

So far, this chapter has been a very challenging one in the Sermon on the Mount. Here in chapter 6, as we have seen over the last couple of weeks, Jesus has been dealing with the very real danger of spiritual hypocrisy – using religious acts, using legitimate means of expressing devotion and faithfulness to God as a means to impress other people and to gain their approval. It is a very real and present danger in the household of God. We can all testify to the temptation to do certain things, or profess a certain level of sanctification, or to be hyper-spiritual about everything, or to hold certain biblical convictions in order gain the approval or the respect of certain other believers.

Jesus warns us here against such foolishness saying: **(Matthew 6:1, ESV)** Jesus lets us know that this no small sin. In someone who has never known the forgiving grace of God in Christ, who ***never has truly known Christ as Savior and God as Father***, spiritual playacting and pretending to be righteous will result in eternal loss and judgment. In the case of the true Christian ***who really does know God as Father but has been seduced by the desire to live for the praise of men and not God***, who performs acts of righteousness before other people to be seen and applauded by them, there will be the revolting realization of rewards forfeited and a life wasted and worthless for the Kingdom of God.

How do we rightly treasure prayer and how do we avoid prostituting and misusing such a wonderful gift from the Lord for our personal glory? How do we avoid making a mockery of prayer? Just like we did last week, as we consider these words from Christ, particularly as we live on this side of the cross and resurrection, I believe that first,

1) We must rightly treasure prayer as a costly gift of God's grace that it is. Foundational to our right handling of prayer is to realize that prayer that pleases God is less about technique

and more about treasuring prayer rightly. The writer of Hebrews tell us: **(Hebrews 10:19–22; 4:16, ESV)** In the book of Ephesians Paul tells us that it is through Christ that we have boldness and access with confidence in One Spirit to the Father. **(Eph. 2:18; 3:12)**

I mean for us to see this. Prayer is not fallen man's right. Approaching God, coming to the throne of grace, seeking God's help in time of need, free and unhindered access to God in prayer – this is not the right of fallen man. It was forfeited by the sin of our father Adam in the Garden of Eden and confirmed as of-limits by your own sin. Despite what anyone may think. Despite the thought that God is always available at all times for everybody. No sinner can just approach God in whatever way he wants, in any manner he chooses. He is a holy God, a righteous God. Fallen man, the worldly, think that it's God's job to listen to prayer, to help out and be on call – you can just throw up a quick prayer for blessing to the "man upstairs" and he is obligated to respond – but the truth is something altogether different. Fallen man has no right of access to God, no right to be heard or received by God, no right to expect that God would hear anything from him other than a the prayer of repentance and faith in Jesus Christ.

Prayer is not the right of fallen man; it is a gift, purchased at the cost of the pure and perfect blood of Jesus Christ, and given to believers in Christ as a costly gift of His grace. The only way that we have access to a Holy God is through the blood of Jesus Christ spilt for us, the covering of His righteousness applied to us, by His work as the mediator between God and man. To open the way of free and full communion between God and man, to open the way of prayer, Christ had to suffer and bleed and die. He had to give His life as an atonement for sin so that we could have peace with God and access to His throne. We do not enter the throne room by right, but by privilege. We do not enter the throne room by nature, but by covenant with God written in Christ's blood. We enter the throne room clothed in the righteousness of Christ, by the mercy and grace and love of God in Christ. Do we really understand the greatness of the gift of prayer? Do we value this way of access to the presence of God the Father? What does our practice of prayer say about its worth to us? This is not something to be taken lightly or to be perverted for purposes of theatrical righteousness. It is a gracious gift– given to you beloved, if you are a child of God, a valuable gift, a gracious gift, a loving gift. Prayer is gift to be treasured and delighted in and engaged in with great thanksgiving and reverence. **We must rightly treasure prayer as a costly gift of God's grace that it is.** And here is why, because:

2) Rightly treasuring prayer will guard us from the perversions of prayer. (v. 5, 7-8) Look again at Jesus words in verses 5, and 7-8. First look at verse 5. The first perversion of prayer we talked about a couple of weeks ago. Let me refresh your memory. The Jews stopped to pray three times every day, and if you were able, you were to go to the temple during that time. If not, you were to go to a synagogue or, in some manner, mark the hour in a particular way. The issue is not praying in front of other people, the issue is praying to impress those who hear you and to draw attention to yourself. It is being showy in prayer. What Jesus is getting at in verse 5 is praying to impress your hearers, praying to get the praise of men, overly polished, flowery or theatrical prayer. The Pharisees were masters of this and Jesus wants us to avoid that pitfall. Prayer is not a means for self-promotion but a great privilege from God purchased by the blood of Christ. Then He moves on to the Gentile perversion of prayer.

Look at verses 7-8 The second perversion of prayer is the "empty phrases" and "many words" of the Gentiles. The word that is translated as "empty phrases" is the Greek word "battalogeo." It means to babble, to speak indistinctly, incoherantly or without thinking. The word for "many words" is just the piling up of word upon word upon word. We are familiar with this in our day. The Buddhists have their prayer wheels, Hindus their prayer beads and mantras; Muslims have their five compulsory daily prayers. Roman Catholics by the millions pray through all the beads of the rosary. After confession, to make penance for their sins, they are told to say so many Hail Marys, this number of Our Fathers and so on, thinking they will receive pardon for their sins. In the evangelical world we see the so-called prayer language of so many in the Charismatic movement who speak incoherent and indistinct sounds and syllables without understanding and believe that it is the biblical gift of tongues despite the clear evidence of the book of Acts which shows us that the gift of tongues, in reality, is the ability to speak in real, earthly languages in which one has never been trained. The so-called "prayer language" is not and never has been unique to Christianity. It was common and still is common in pagan religions. It was practiced in ancient Greece, in ancient Corinth, by a number of tribes in modern Africa and can be found among Muslims, Eskimos and Tibetan monks. All of these things stand in direct opposition of the teaching of Jesus in verses 7-8. All of this is a superstitious view of prayer and it comes from a deficient and false view of God.

In fact, the picture that Jesus is drawing here of the Gentiles is heaping up any possible name of God, all manner of words or sounds, to God whom he does not know, so that he might hopefully include either the name of a god which will grant his request, or say the

right word or make the right sound or utter the right syllable or through his many words, to wear that god down through constant repetition and get him to give him the answer to his request.

In a sharp contrast to such foolishness, Jesus calls for a settled trust and assurance in the Father who need only be approached as Father and who will give all necessary and good things, all blessings according to His will, to those who truly are His children by grace through faith in Christ, because He cares for them and knows what they need before they even ask. Prayer is not a means of coercing God and manipulating Him, but it is an invitation to communion and fellowship with Him. Jesus tells us what our prayer lives should look like. He shows us a picture of

3) Proper praying in light of God's grace. (v. 6a, 9-15) So then, if prayer is a gift of God's grace purchased for us at the great cost of the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, then how is it that we should pray? How should we rightly handle, how should we rightly engage in such a gracious gift? Jesus tells us. In the first part of verse 6 He says: ***"But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. "*** **(Matthew 6:6a, ESV)** What does Jesus mean here? Well, remember that He is giving these instructions in the context of public, showy, theatrical displays of prayer and so He is pointing to the gravity and the weightiness of prayer. For that reason, He is emphasizing the essential character of prayer which is this -- the audience of prayer is not other men or women, but God. Prayer should be done with a view to God alone. Moreover, Jesus means for us to see that the core of our prayer life should be private and not public. Public prayer only has its validity; it is only legitimate, as an overflow of a faithful and true prayer life. Public prayer should find its source in faithful private prayer. Private prayer should shape us and fashion us.

Again, what Jesus is exhorting us to is an understanding of the gravity and the weightiness of prayer. He does want us to treat prayer lightly or flippantly. Instead He wants us to pray meaningfully and with thoughtfulness – to pray with our minds and hearts engaged. What should be the character of our private prayer? Jesus tells us: ***Pray then like this: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.*** The first thing we are going to see the sheer God-centeredness of this model prayer.

God is spoken of as Father. While that may not be as shocking to some of us that have been in church for a while and have heard God called Father and have, ourselves, called Him Father, to the Jew this was something else. The Jews were used to referring to God in exalted terms, in transcendent terms so much so that a personal relationship with him could hardly be imagined. When Jesus taught His disciples to pray like this, He was speaking to men who were already convinced of the awesomeness and magnificence and grandeur of God. They did not have to be reminded that God was awesome. Instead, when they approached God as Father, they felt the tremendous privilege of coming to this glorious God in such a personal and intimate fashion. Unfortunately, in our culture, the opposite is true. So often, the idea of coming to God as Father does not grip us as it should because we have lost sight of the glory of God.

Jesus is not encouraging us to be chummy and comfy with God, like he is just some great Teddy –Bear. No, rather He is calling us to be amazed and astonished that the one that we call our Father in Heaven is the infinite God--the God of infinite intelligence and consuming glory and power; the God who is transcendent; the God of infinite majesty; the God who is omniscient, omnipresent, and almighty; the God who is the sovereign Ruler of the universe; the God who is all-holy, all-wise and just; the God of truth and mercy. When we call God our Father we should be struck immediately with the privilege of it. The grounds of our approach to Him as Father is the reality that by an act of His grace, we are not only saved from our sins by the blood of Jesus and redeemed from sin's curse, but we are now children of His household. **(Ephesians 1:3–8a, ESV)** At the very beginning of this prayer is the fresh reminder of God's grace to redeem us, a testimony to the gospel of salvation.

Notice too the reference to "our" Father. As Jesus gives us this model prayer, He wants us to understand the unity and the fullness of the family of which we are a part. He wants us to pray with the knowledge that it is not just about "me and God." It is not that it is wrong to refer to God as "my God." It's just that Jesus wants us to understand and embrace the truth that we are a part of a body of believers. We often think of things in terms of ourselves but Jesus is telling us that the ***pattern*** of our prayer must be broader than ourselves.

Our Father, hallowed be your name. What does that mean? What does it mean that God's name would be hallowed – it means that we pray that God would be set apart, and reverenced and honored as holy and worthy, that He would be held in awe. Really we are praying that God would defend and exalt His glory. David in Psalm 9 says, listen to these

verses: **(Psalm 9:1-2, 7-10, 19-20, ESV)** We acknowledge that we have come into the presence of the Holy. The book of Ecclesiastes says, **(Ecclesiastes 5:2, ESV)** In other words, let our words be well chosen. This prayer that God's name, His character, be hallowed and held in the highest of esteem and honor presupposes that it would begin with me. The idea is "May you be glorified and honored and esteemed and reverenced and revered and made much of, as you deserve, and let it begin with me." We begin our prayers with praising and worshipping God for His greatness and His grace and that is just fitting and right. Then Jesus tells us to pray

Your kingdom come… Again, I want you to notice the God-centeredness of this prayer. Jesus tells us to pray that God's name would be hallowed and then He instructs us to pray for His kingdom to come to fruition, and then that His will be accomplished on this earth. Do you see what Jesus is doing here? Before we ever get around to a single personal petition, our focus is directed to His name and His kingdom and His will. Now, what is the thrust of these words – "Your kingdom come"? It is not a prayer for God's sovereign reign over all things – God is God over all of creation and at all times, nothing can change that. Instead this is a prayer that all of God's rivals for the hearts of men will be brought to nothing. To pray for God's kingdom to come is simply to pray that God would take up reigning residence in the hearts and lives of those who are in now in rebellion to Him. It is a prayer for His redemptive rule. Jesus is instructing us to pray that the redemptive rule of God would become more and more a part of this world. **This is nothing less than a declaration of our confidence in the gospel.** We are praying that the work of Christ our Savior would have maximum impact on this earth. We are praying that God's Word would spread and that we would be the agents of its going forth, that we would be used for the great missionary enterprise of declaring salvation in Christ to all who will believe and that they gospel will become evident in our families, would infiltrate the workplace, and our government and even our universities. We are praying that everywhere and in every way, the rule of God would be obvious. The prayer "your kingdom come" is a prayer that God's saving reign will be expanded even now and even more, that God will usher in His consummated Kingdom when Christ returns. It is this thought that leads to the next.

Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven… What is the meaning of this? Well, think of it. If the disciples were eager for Jesus' power and authority and salvation to be manifested through them in their ongoing witness and they were. Acts 4 tells us that…read how they prayed for boldness and strength to preach the gospel. As eager as they were for Jesus' power and authority and salvation to be manifested through them. They even more desired

the return of Christ in all of His glory. They were, in the words of Peter, ***"waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. "*** **(2 Peter 3:13, ESV)**

How is God's will done in heaven? It's done joyfully, instinctively, immediately, and constantly. When will God's will be done on earth as it is done in heaven? When Christ returns in glory. This part of the prayer is meant to turn our heart and minds to the consummation to the return of Christ, to the new heavens and the new earth, to remind us that this is not our home, to remind us that the fullness of God's glory has not yet been revealed but it is coming and so it is meant to turn our hearts to the consummation of God's glorious plan and it is to have the present effect of creating the desire to obey God joyfully, instinctively, immediately, and constantly. And it is in this light of full submission to God that we must see these personal petitions that come next.

Give us this day our daily bread… Now we are not to take this literally so that the scope of our prayer can only be bread for food. That's not the idea here. This request has more to do with the totality of our physical life. The word bread is really a broad term meaning all of our physical needs. When we pray, "Give us each day our daily bread," we are saying that we trust God as the source to supply all the physical needs of our lives, and we affirm that He will take care of everything we need. This petition serves as a continual reminder that God is our provider, that God is our sustainer and that we are utterly dependant upon Him for life – both spiritual and physical – at all times.

Even more than that, the idea is this. Just like Agur in Proverbs 30, , our hearts should beat with this thought: **(Proverbs 30:7–9, ESV)** In other words, make my heart faithful and true and keep me fully and continually dependent upon you and make me to be completely satisfied in you. This prayer is a declaration of a Christian worldview. In this petition we are confessing our confidence that that God is, that God is good, that He is gracious, that we can trust Him, that He hears us when we call upon Him, and that He is willing to help us because He is a God of grace and Heis he source of every gift. Confident of God's provision and certain of His love, we can give ourselves even more to the declaration of God's glory and submission to God's reign and God's will. Then Jesus instructs us to pray:

And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. He enlarges and clarifies this point later in verses 14 and 15 when He says: ***For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.*** Jesus is not setting up a tit for tat arrangement here. Jesus is not teaching here that if we forgive others we somehow merit God's forgiveness. God's forgiveness is not grounded on the fact that we forgive others. It is grounded instead in the atonement of Christ.

Christ is assuming the utterly transformed nature of the Christian here. A transformed nature of one who has been forgiven much and so is forgiving of others. Paul expects the same when he writes: **(Colossians 3:12–14, ESV)** He is emphasizing the new nature of a Christian, one emphasized by the willingness to forgive others and one that is shown to be absent when we refuse to forgive others. A professing Christian who does not imitate Christ in having a spirit of forgiveness and who does not forgive out of appreciation for the mercy he has claimed to receive is not exhibiting the genuine fruit of conversion. If we are not willing to forgive others, we should question the reality of our professed salvation. If our life does not produce the *fruits* of salvation, why should we have assurance that we are saved? No, Jesus is assuming the reality of our salvation – a reality that produces a desire to be forgiven and to be in perfect fellowship with the Lord.

Jesus pictures our sin as a debt that needs to be paid, as a debt that needs to be satisfied. So the question comes. If we have been justified at the moment that we believe in Jesus and all of our sins—past, present and future—have been washed away, and forgiven then why do we pray for our sins to be forgiven repeatedly throughout life? First**,** believers are expected to confess their sins. **"(Proverbs 28:13; 1 John 1:9, ESV)**

Second, although we were justified the moment that we believed and all of our sins were placed on Christ on the cross, we still must *experience* daily forgiveness because we continue to sin. When God views us judicially He sees the perfect righteousness of Christ but He commands us to acknowledge and confess our sins as we commit them. We need to *experience* the forgiveness of sin each day. Our faith in Christ is not a one-time act, but continues through life and is always clinging to Him and depending on Him for forgiveness. It is a constant reminder that: **(1 John 2:1, ESV)**

This is really nothing less than a prayer for authenticity and integrity in every area of our Christian living and for unbroken fellowship with God. When we are certain of God's ongoing forgiveness, we can give ourselves without reservation or fear to the pursuit of God's glory. Then Jesus concludes this model prayer saying:

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil… This last petition is what is called a litotes (light-toe-tease). It is stating something that could never happen in order to emphasize the opposite. We know that God cannot lead us into temptation to sin. James tells us in James 1:13-14: **(James 1:13–14, ESV).**

So the sense of this petition is something like this: Lead us Lord, ***not*** into temptation, for you could never do that, but far from it, away from it and into righteousness, into situations where, far from being tempted, we will be protected and kept righteous. It is a petition borne from the realization that left to ourselves, even for a moment and left on our own to face cunning of Satan, we would surely fall. And so, in this request we remember that without God's grace, we will find ourselves surrounded by temptations that will seduce our heart away from Him. And so, we are to ask God to keep us from falling into the power of trials and temptations. We are not strong enough to handle these on our own. **(Psalm 19:13, ESV)** We are reminded in this last phrase of the prayer, that we are truly in a spiritual battle – and Satan, the evil one, wants to take you out of the battle with temptations to sin and disqualifying wickedness. We need to pray this prayer that we would remain effective and useful in the Kingdom of God.

So, Jesus gives us a pattern. He shows us how we are to pray. This is the way that we are to pray. This is the way that we are to seek the face of the Living God. This is the prayer that God rewards and

4) The reward of prayer is answered prayer and communion with God both now and in eternity. (v. 6) Jesus makes this great promise to us: ***"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. "*** **(Matthew 6:6, ESV)** Certainly, the first thing we think of here is answered prayer and that, no doubt, is part of the reward of God.

But, true prayer an the desire for it is an evidence of saving grace received and so brings with it the certain expectation of eternal reward and during this life on the earth, the joy of intimate communion and fellowship with God. In other words, communion with God and the intimacy that comes with it is its own reward.

What Christ gives us in this prayer provides a whole range of matters for prayer. This model prayer focuses on the worship of the Father, and the kingdom of the Father, and the provision of the Father, and the grace of the Father, and the protection of the Father. And all of these subjects offer untold numbers of ideas for how you can pray to the Father in heaven.

5) Application questions

What is the condition of your personal prayer life? Is it consistent and vibrant? Do you invest in times of communion and fellowship with God in prayer?

Do you value prayer or do you treat it lightly? Do you realize the great privilege that prayer is, the cost it took to purchase for your access to the throne of grace, the throne of the Living God or by your lack of prayer do you declare that the shedding of Christ's blood to make the way of approach to the Father was poorly spent?

Last, can you call God, Father?

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