

The Prayer of Kingdom People

Matthew 6:5-15

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Good morning. Welcome to Christ the King. If we haven't met, my name is Penny and I'm the senior pastor here. And friends, it is good to be with you. And if you are new with us, you are joining us in the midst of the sermon series in looking at the Sermon on the Mount. So if you have a Bible, you can turn to Matthew 6. The Sermon on the Mount is found in Matthew chapters 5 through 7. And we've been going through this for the last number of weeks, few months actually. And if you were with us last week, then you would maybe remember that I mentioned that we're beginning a new section of the sermon last week in chapter 6. And Jesus is introducing us to this new section, this new topic in chapter 6 by discussing three disciplines of the faith. So giving to the needy, so giving of alms, prayer, and fasting. And what Jesus pointed out to us last week was how these disciplines, how these acts of piety were being done by the people of God and by others as a way of drawing attention to themselves, right? To do these things publicly so that people would say how pious they are, how spiritual, what a wonderful relationship they have with God. That Jesus was addressing the manner in which people were going about these acts.

You see, they were performing these acts of giving, of prayer, of fasting, not because it pleased God, but because they wanted the praise of man. And so last week, we looked at alms, giving of alms, and fasting. This week, we're going to look at prayer. That's where chapter 6 is drawing us. And this is the Lord's Prayer, this prayer that we're all familiar with. If you're grown up in the church, even if you're not in the church, I'm sure that you've probably uttered this prayer before. But it's the Lord's Prayer that we're going to look at. And I just want to acknowledge from the outset, we're not going to break it down like line by line over the next, you know, eight weeks, okay? So, I realize some of you might, would really appreciate that. And for those of you who would like some more kind of line by line teaching, we actually did a sermon series on the Lord's Prayer a number of weeks ago. It was six or seven. Yes, I just said that. I'm six, seven. Yeah. Sorry. Yeah. My kids will poke at me later. If you have no idea what I'm talking about, you're better off. Don't worry.

But anyway, it was like six or more weeks when we did that sermon series a number of years ago. And you can go online and download those sermons and listen to them. If you have trouble finding them on our website, give us a call. We'll help you out. But so, for this morning, what we're going to do is we're going to look at the whole Lord's Prayer in its entirety in this one sermon. So, with that in mind, let's read Matthew chapter 6, beginning in verse 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. 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.

“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. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. Pray then like this:

“Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name.
Your kingdom come,
your will be done,
 on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread,
 and forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation,
 but deliver us from evil.

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.” (ESV)

Friends, this is the word of the Lord. Let me pray for us.

Heavenly father, thank you for your word. And when we come to it, God, we recognize we need your help. Your help to understand it, to weed through it, to discern what you are saying. And so, so we ask for that now. We ask that you would be with us, you'd be present amongst us, that by your spirit you would open our eyes, you would soften our hearts, you would unplug our ears, so that we would know of your grace and cling to it. We pray all this in Christ's name. Amen.

Well, Barbara Walters was a famous newswoman. I'm sure many of you remember Barbara Walters from 20/20, right? There was that news program 20/20. I have no idea if it's still on or not, but Barbara Walters was known by pretty much everyone in our country as this newswoman. And one time, Barbara Walters said this, she said, “although I don't go to church or synagogue, I do pray every time I get on a plane. I just automatically do it.” Now, Barbara Walters is acknowledging that she is not religious, at least not in any sort of formal sense, right? She doesn't go to church, she doesn't go to synagogue. And yet, in her time of need, in a time of crisis, in a time of unsurety, a time of anxiety, when she is out of control, right? And when you get on a plane, you are out of control, right? We're not in the cockpit, we're not behind the controls. When she is in this sort of situation, what does she do? She prays. And that's what people do, don't they? I mean, people who are religious or irreligious, people who are nominal or people who are committed. We pray instinctively in time of need, in time of anxiety.

We say words out into space, and people will hope that by doing this, somehow good vibes or warm feelings will return to them. We do this because in times of need, we know we need to ask for help. And so we turn to prayer, the religious and the irreligious. In fact, there was this woman that Kat and I had befriended a number of years ago, who's not a believer, she's not a Christian. She came and visited CTK once, but religion's just really not for her, that's what she would say. And this woman, she's a single mom, and she was having a surgery. And so she needed somewhere to stay and somewhere to recover. And so she stayed with us the night before her surgery, and then she stayed with us for a few days after. And the night before her surgery, this irreligious, non-Christian, very secular person asked me to pray for her. And so I said, “well, of course I'll pray for you”, right? “I've been praying for you, I'll continue to pray for you, but you have to know that as I pray for you, I'm going to pray to the God of the Bible, and I'm going to pray in Jesus's name, and I'm going to ask the Spirit to help me and to

help you.” And she said, “that’s totally fine, I don’t care who you pray to. You could pray to the God of the Bible, or to unicorns, or rainbows, or fairies, I don’t care, just pray.” Because the truth is, is that in our need, we’re going to look for somewhere, someone for help. The religious and the irreligious, the faithful and the secular, right? We’re going to pray. So how and what are we to pray for? Well, those are the questions that Jesus is answering in our passage.

The Prayers to Avoid

In our verses, he’s showing us how and what we are to pray for. He’s showing us the prayers we’re to avoid, and the prayer we’re to embrace. So we see the prayers we’re to avoid, and Jesus here isn’t actually focused on content. We’re going to notice that in a minute. He’s not focused on content, but actually the manner in which we are to avoid, the manner we’re to avoid. And we see this in two different ways regarding the praying life of religious people and of Gentiles. So you see the religious people in verse 5. Jesus says, “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.” Now this is reminiscent of what Jesus talked about last week with fasting and with giving to the needy. And so because of that, I’m not going to belabor the point, but the same principle applies. Jesus is not condemning public prayers, right? Like it wasn’t wrong for Doug to pray earlier in the service, and it wasn’t wrong for us to join our voices together in public confession, and it wasn’t wrong before and after the sermon for me to pray before us, right? Jesus isn’t condemning public displays of piety or faithfulness. What he’s addressing is the motivation for those displays. That we are not to pray so that others would see us or hear our prayers so that they would think well of us, so that they would think we’re spiritual.

You see, that’s what the people were doing. They were praying to be seen. That’s why Jesus calls them hypocrites. Because prayer is about our relationship with God. It’s about our communicating with the Lord, and yet these people, what they were doing was they were communicating for the sake of other people’s praise. And so he calls them hypocrites. And Jesus is saying that’s not how we are to pray. That we pray not to be seen by others, but we pray because we are seen by our Father. And so he’s saying avoid these prayers, these prayers to be seen. But there’s another group he talks about. He talks about the Gentiles. We see them in verse 7. And Gentiles is just this word that was used to describe those people who weren’t Jewish. So it’s talking about the nations. It’s talking about the people outside of the Jewish community. And what he says about them is that they pray by “heaping up empty phrases, for they think that they will be heard for their many words.” So that phrase, “empty phrases,” those two words, it’s a single Greek word. And this single Greek word means babbling. That’s what they’re doing. They’re babbling. They’re not really saying anything. Their words are meaningless. But they think that because of their words and because of how many words they’re uttering, whether they mean anything or not, that God will hear them. And what Jesus is saying is that’s not how we’re to pray, with meaningless phrases, to be seen by others.

The Prayer to Embrace

Now, those are prayers to avoid. In fact, in verse 8, he says it explicitly, doesn’t he? “Do not be like them.” Don’t pray like them. Why? “For your Father knows what you need before you ask Him.” Okay, so this isn’t Jesus saying, well, since your Father knows, you don’t need to pray. It’s not what he’s saying. Or he’s not saying, like, “well, they babble on and they go on and drone on and on and on. So don’t be like them. So simply, you know, Father, Amen.”

That's not what he's saying either, okay? No, what Jesus is getting at is that our Father knows our needs and He knows our fears and He cares about us. And He knows these things about us, not because of our piety or our flowery language or because our prayers go on and on. No, He knows and hears our prayers simply because He's our Father, simply because He cares for us. And so knowing that He hears us, Jesus calls us to avoid these prayers and to embrace true prayer. Because the Father knows us, we're to pray then like this, "our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive our debts as we have also forgiven our debtors and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil." That is how we pray.

a) It's Relational

Now, there are a few things I want to point out about this prayer. And the first is that it's relational. You see that: "our Father." You see, we're not just praying out into the void. We're not just praying into space. We're not praying, hoping for unicorns and rainbows. We are praying to our Father. Now, it's very easy for us to bypass this, to move over it very quickly, because we're accustomed to this, right? We say this prayer. We say it maybe daily. We say it regularly. And we're accustomed to thinking of God as our Father. But in Jesus's day, prayers were never spoken with this sort of relational intimacy. That would have been foreign to them. The prayers of his day would have spoken of God's sovereignty, of his lordship, of his power, of his glory. And on very rare occasions in the Old Testament would God be referred to as Father.

But there isn't a single instance, as far as I can tell, there isn't a single instance where the prophets or some leader is teaching the people to pray and they are called upon to call God their Father. That was foreign to them. In fact, in John chapter 5, the religious leadership becomes angry with Jesus and wants to kill him because he calls God "my Father." Now, because of who Jesus is, right, the second person of the trinity, the eternal Son of God, we shouldn't be surprised that he would call God his Father. But what is amazing is that he invites us to as well. And that's because he's brought us into the family of God. That by Jesus's death on the cross and his resurrection from the grave, he takes us, he takes those who are spiritually orphaned, people like me and you, and he makes us sons and daughters. So we're not fatherless any longer. But we have a heavenly Father, a heavenly Father in this Holy One. That's what it means that his name would be hallowed, that he is the Holy One. He is our Father. I mean, think about that, the creator of the universe, God himself, the one who formed and fashioned everything, the one who rules over this world, that is your heavenly Father. Y'all, that is remarkable. We've become so accustomed to it that we forget how amazing that really is. And because he's our Father who's in heaven, we come before him and we call out to him and we pray to him. Because this prayer, it's relational, it's not transactional. It's relational. So that was the first thing.

b) His Reign

The second thing I want us to see is that this prayer is about his reign. We see that, right? "Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven." Now, I think it's really significant and really important for us to note that before we get to our specific needs, our specific requests, things like bread and forgiveness and leading out of temptation, those sorts of things, before we get to our needs, what do we pray? We pray for God's will and his kingdom. And I think this is significant because we are asking for the thing that is going to orient all our other requests. As we make these other requests, they are always with the

caveat, “your will be done.” And we need this reorienting because often the desire of our hearts and the whisper of our lips is not “your kingdom come, your will be done,” but it's what? My kingdom come. My will be done. I mean, that's what animates our lives, isn't it? What we want, what we perceive our need to be, our desires, my kingdom and my will. But what this prayer is helping us to see is that what we ultimately need is God's kingdom and his will. And so when we ask for this, what we're asking is that everything in this world and everything in our lives would be oriented around his kingdom. We are asking God to bend our lives to his kingdom and his will, not his will to our lives. And y'all listen, that is a terrifying request. Your kingdom, your will be done in my life. I mean, that is terrifying if you're simply throwing that request into the universe, unsure of who you're praying to.

It reminds me of this scene in *the West Wing*. So Kat and I are watching that drama, *the West Wing*. I think this is like our 10th time watching through it and we're re-watching it. And just the other night there was this scene where the president's secretary, so *the West Wing*, for those of you who don't know, it's about a fictional president of the United States, President Bartlett, and the years he's in the West Wing. So y'all maybe knew that already, but whatever. So in this scene, the secretary for the president, Debbie Fitterer, that's Fitterer. That is right. That's how her name is pronounced. She's speaking to the first lady, and she says to the first lady how she's been praying very hard for her. “Just want you to know, I've been praying for you. I've been praying very hard for you,” because the first family had been through a traumatic event. And so the first lady responds with an expression of appreciation: “Thank you. I appreciate what you have done. I appreciate your prayers.” And the secretary responds to this appreciation by saying, “well, you shouldn't. You shouldn't be appreciative. Because I'm not very religious. So there is the risk that my praying could be taken as insincere or even an affront, which, if it's a vengeful God, could have made matters worse.”

And you know what? She's actually right. If the God that we're praying to is spiteful and resentful and nasty, it would be terrifying to ask for his will to be done, wouldn't it? We wouldn't want his will. We wouldn't want his kingdom. But y'all, that's not our God. That's not the God of the Bible. That's not the God that Jesus is inviting us to pray to. You see, the God that we pray to is the one whose kingdom we long for, whose will we desire. He is our good Father. And we know this because Jesus knew it. Right? I mean, think about it. Jesus actually prayed this prayer. Do you remember in the Garden of Gethsemane before Jesus is arrested, before he's beaten, before he's pulled in front of a kangaroo court and he's sentenced to death and he's crucified on the cross and he takes God's wrath upon himself? Before any of that happens, he's found in the Garden of Gethsemane and he's praying. And do you remember what he prayed? He prayed, “Lord, Father, take this cup of wrath from me. If it could happen, take this cup of wrath, but not my will, but yours be done.” He prayed these very words. And the reason why Jesus could pray those words, knowing that he was about to take the sin of his people upon himself and the wrath of God upon himself, the reason he could pray that is because he knows God's will is better than ours. Because God is good. And his will and his kingdom is good. So good that we should want his kingdom and his will over our own. And so we are asking for his reign over our lives. And in this asking, we're relying upon him.

c) Our Relying

That's the last thing I want us to see, our relying, our dependence. It's the last part of our prayer, relying on God for daily sustenance, for forgiveness, for strength to resist temptation. We see it in verses 11 through 12. “Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our debts

as we also have forgiven our debtors and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil.” So you see how this is addressing both our physical needs as well as our spiritual needs. So our physical needs, our daily bread, it's acknowledging the need for God to sustain us every single day, that we need God's sustenance every day. And so we ask for bread. Now that might seem like an odd request for us, right? It's not odd for them because every day they had to make bread, they had to mill it, they had to prepare it. But for us, like if we don't go to the store this week or next week or for a month, I'm betting none of us are going to starve, right? I mean, our food might be a rice, but we have food, we have it stored away. And so it might seem odd to us that we would ask for daily bread, but in asking for this, what we are acknowledging is that everything that we have comes from the hand of God. That to sustain us through the day, it is the gift of God.

Now, I know that we're the ones who go to work and we're the ones who earn the paycheck and we're the ones who go to the grocery store and we're the ones who make the meals. We do those things. But by asking this for this and by acknowledging this, what we are also acknowledging is that the one who gave us the ability to work, the intellect, the understanding, the one who gave us legs to let us walk into that grocery store, the one who gave us dexterity to create that meal, that's the Lord. I may have purchased the food, but he's the one who gave me the ability to work the job, to make the money, to go purchase, right? Everything that we have comes from his hand. And we need that. Our homes, our clothes, our food, our abilities, our relationship, they are from him. And so, we recognize that ultimately, everything is from him. And so, we pray, “give us our daily bread.” We are asking, give us what we need for life. And not just physical life, but spiritual life as well. It was Sinclair Ferguson who said, “if we have all the food in the world but no Christ, we will ultimately starve.” And he's right.

So, that's why we turn to God, not just for our physical needs, but we rely on him for grace and forgiveness. “Forgive us our debts,” we pray. “Lead us not into temptation.” “Deliver us from evil.” You see, we ask for forgiveness because we often live according to our own kingdoms and our own wills. We ask for grace, knowing that we have sinned against our Heavenly Father. We ask for his mercy because we know that apart from his work in our lives, we will give ourselves freely over to temptation and we'll turn again and again to evil. And so, we have to rely upon him for grace and mercy and forgiveness. And what is wonderful is that that's what he gives. That's why Christ went to the cross. So that his grace would come. So that our sins would be forgiven. So that we would know his mercy. He gives us what we need for our physical lives, for our spiritual lives.

Now, what's amazing as I was thinking about this prayer, what's amazing is that when we pray this prayer and when we know that we've been forgiven and as we live in light of God's kingdom and of his will and we rely upon the Father, it changes us. It transforms us. You see, that's what this prayer is doing. It's transforming who we are and how we live in this world. It's making us a people who forgive. That's what Jesus is getting at the end of our passage. 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. Now listen, Jesus isn't saying here that we earn God's forgiveness by our ability to forgive.

That's not what he's saying. What he is saying is that our forgiving is a reflection of the fact that we know we've been forgiven. Because when we know that it was my sin and your sin that sent Jesus to the cross, that there is nothing in me or in you that would cause God to turn to us in favor and grace and mercy, and yet he gave it anyway. When we know we've been

forgiven, how can we not forgive? That's what Jesus is telling us. Or another way to put it, in other words, if we are not a forgiving people, then we should ask, do we actually know God's forgiveness? Because friends, when we rely on our Heavenly Father, and when his kingdom comes in our lives, when his will is done in our lives, it transforms us. It changes us. It makes us kingdom people. It makes us sermon on the mount people. It makes us more and more like Christ. Let's pray and ask him to do that.

Heavenly Father, we thank you. Thank you that you have given us your son, this one who has gone before us, this one who prayed these very words. And so we thank you for his work done on the cross, his rising from the dead, his work of grace and mercy that he extends to us. We thank you for that, and we ask that as those who know that forgiveness, that you would make us a forgiving people. That these words that we pray, these words that we utter, that they would become real to us, that they would change us and transform us more and more into the likeness of your son. And so we pray, our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. We pray, Father, give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. We ask that you would lead us not into temptation, but you would deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever. And all God's people said together, Amen.