

Matthew 6:5-15

Prayer: Expressing our Fellowship with God

Each of us here is expressive. As I look out I see some wearing black and white but I also see some color. Is anyone here today wearing something that they don't like? I also see some of you sitting real close to another person. Is there anyone here sitting next to someone that you don't like? Why are you wearing the clothes that you are wearing and sitting next to who you are sitting next to? You are expressing yourself. Take my wife and me for example. If you didn't know that she was my wife and I was standing in a mixed group of several men and several women what are some of the ways that you could guess that she was my wife? Maybe she is sitting next to me; maybe we have matching rings; maybe we are holding hands; maybe I am calling her darling. There would be ways for you to tell that I am my beloveds and my beloved is mine.

Its a good thing to express a relationship that you have with clothes and sitting next to people, and always a good idea to express your love for your significant other. But there is a way to express an invisible reality with the visible. How do you express the reality of your fellowship with God? Prayer.

READ TEXT

Two truths today about prayer.

### **1. We Have a God Who Speaks *and* Listens (9-10)**

Never forget what a privilege prayer is. Pray is a privilege that has been forged from the precious blood of the spotless Lamb of God - our One Lord Jesus Christ. He, through redemption, has made us to be partakers of the divine nature, that is, our lives are now hid with God on high, and our lives have been enfolded into eternity. So prayer, is this privilege that we get to express our fellowship with God.

The sweetest part of prayer is not so much that we get to speak, but that he listens and responds to us. Listen to Jeremiah 33:1-3:

*The word of the LORD came to Jeremiah a second time, while he was still shut up in the court of the guard: 'Thus says the LORD who made the earth, the LORD is his name: Call to me and I will answer you, and I will tell you great and hidden things that you have not known....*

Prayer is our faithful (or faith filled) expression of our existing fellowship with God. We don't just pray anyway, we pray in a certain way - always in response to who he is. Prayer is a way in which we worship and as such we are captivated not so much by our requests as we are by the God whom we pour our hearts out too. Consider this awesome truth for just a moment: The Lord God knows our needs before we ask, knows our days before there are yet one of them, and still delights in our coming to him. Prayer's starting place is not us, prayer starting place is a benevolent Creator who not only speaks but listens.

Prayer is usually categorized under the general headings of request, intercession, confession, and thanksgiving/praise. These categories themselves reveal that prayer is our response to the speaking God. Prayer is that point of contact between his speaking and our responding to what he says. Don't miss this: Prayer is the expression of fellowship with God and a longing to be more with him. This point is where the doctrine of the Trinity helps us think through this. God has always been in communion with each member of the Trinity in himself. This communion involves mutual relationship and love and of course communication (not argumentation - they are one in mind and will) - eternal agreement. Through the work of this God - the whole work (Creation - where he expressed his love towards us by saying from nothing let there be something; Redemption - where he takes his broken creation and sets it back on track through the creative work of faith in the Son; and ultimately through Restoration - where the perfect plan of God will be realized for forever) he has denied out of love to allow us to share in this divine fellowship.

So, we pray - *Our Father who art in Heaven, hallowed be thy name*

Notice the balance here between the intimacy of fellowship (*Our Father*) and the majesty and infinite greatness of God (*In heaven*). When we pray *hallowed be thy name* we are reminding ourselves by confession of his holiness as well as desiring the whole creation to recognize his holiness. This is the whole point of verse 10 - we long for God to bring his kingdom and realize that through Christ the dawning of that kingdom has begun.

Look at verse 10. Praying in such a way ensures our continuing in the fellowship. By praying this way we persevere in the will of God. If we are praying in this way, we must live this way. Prayer is what unites our head with our heart.

Listen to what two men from antiquity say about prayer. John Calvin says that Christians pray "to alert themselves to seek him, to exercise their faith by meditating upon his promises, unburdening their cares by lifting themselves into his bosom, and finally to testify that from him alone, all good for themselves and for others is hoped and asked." Augustine says, "Prayer cleans and purifies the heart and makes it more capacious for receiving the Divine gifts. God is always ready to give his light, but we are not always ready to receive. By praying we open channels through which blessings, which are always ready, may flow." (L. Morris, *Matthew, PCNT*, 142, fn. 28)

Not only does God speak, he listens. Number 2:

## **2. God's Care For Us Secures our Devotion (5-8, 11-15)**

Notice the shift from God and his cosmic plan to our personal needs. This ordering tells us the way for our focus. This is more than a just "oh yeah, don't forget about me", but is a means of confident expression. Because our God is great we can and should rely upon him for our daily needs. In this way we pray, *Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you.* (Psalm 73:25)

The cosmic plan of God undergirds our daily living. We live now in light of eternity. We can trust the God of the ages with our most significant (or insignificant needs)

Look at verses 12 and 13. Because we depend upon God, we want unhindered fellowship with him. (By the way, don't miss the confession aspect here - we often miss this vital point to our praying. When we pray we pray in confidence but with contrition. Remember prayer is an expression of our fellowship with God - both our present fellowship as well as our longing of more fellowship with God. This is why we must see prayers starting point with his reality and not our needs. If we only start with our needs we will miss his majesty. We say our Father and then remember how hallowed his name is).

One of the greatest hindrances to our fellowshiping with him is unforgiveness. This line takes us all the way back to verse 9 (*Our Father*) understanding that being able to call him Father is through forgiveness. Calling God Father is a right that has been bestowed upon us by the Work of God in Christ (*But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.... - John 1:12 ESV*). This verse also takes us back to verses 5-8 and reminds us that God's desire when we pray is to no be hypocrites who already have their reward. We aren't seeking to appear like we have fellowship and fooling others or even ourselves, we desire real genuine fellowship with God. Real fellowship with God is available by forgiveness. And, as verses 14 and 15 say, the expectation of those sharing in the divine life, those in fellowship with God, the proof of the work of grace, is their quickness to forgive. Forgiveness is the foundation of our life with God and so we forgiven just as we have been forgiven. To what end? Our desire for unhindered fellowship with God.

This is why we pray in verse 13 for strength to endure. As we pray we are declaring our fellowship with God, and as long as we will need bread, we will need the Lord's sustaining grace to guide us through this barren land - we will need him to deliver us from temptation. Prayer is our defense for temptation. As one wise sage put it, it is hard to stumble when you are on your knees. Temptations desire is to direct our focus away from life, is to make us forget who we are in Christ, to make us believe that we need something outside of this life with him to satisfy us. God delivers us and sustains us, he keep sis walking with him.

Apart from God there is no life. But with him, there is not only life, there is abundant life. Perhaps you have prayed before. But have you ever prayed with the confidence of a child of God? To pray knowing that there is a God in heaven who promises that when we call to him, he answers. Only those who have received forgiveness, only those who come to him by faith in the Son can pray in this way. Is this you? Do you have faith in the Son - the one who for our sake and our salvation became incarnate, lived a perfect life, bore the wrath of God by being put to death on the cruel Cross for you and me, rose again from the dead, standing at the right hand of the Father as our great High Priest making intercessions for his saints, and soon coming again to judge the living and the dead and establish an everlasting kingdom here on the earth? If not, he is pleading for you to come to him and standing ready to make you his very own.

Let's pray.

Post Script. Some of you are wondering about the doxology - *For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory, forever. Amen.* The oldest and best manuscript evidence does not have this, meaning that it was probably an added addition. A great addition, but an addition nonetheless. What John Broadus says is appropriate: "It is more important to know what the Bible really contains and really means than to cling to something not really in the Bible, merely

because it gratifies our taste, or even because it has for us some precious associations.”  
(*Broadus' Commentary on Matthew*)