

Matthew 6:9-13 (With doxology)
Teach Us to Pray

At the heart of the Sermon on the Mount Jesus teaches his followers to pray. Don't miss the significance of this. The Sermon on the Mount is considered by many the most significant collection of the teachings directly from the mouth of the incarnate Christ that we have today. Every preacher who has preached has preached all or some section of the Sermon on the Mount. The themes in the Sermon on the Mount are repeated everywhere in Scripture. At the heart of this significant passage, our Lord teaches us to pray.

I have been to the site of the Sermon on the Mount in Israel. Overlooking the Sea of Galilee, the Roman Catholic's have built a gorgeous church that sits on top of the ruins of a Byzantine era church. The Church of the Beatitudes is octagonal in shape with each side representing one of the eight Beatitudes. It is a beautiful structure, perhaps the most beautiful in all of Israel.

There is a reason why we have been looking for so long into this prayer. There is a reason we have labored, and I leave Oxford laboring, over this prayer at the heart of the Sermon. It is fitting that the Lord will crystalize our time together considering this prayer in the Sermon on the Mount.

Prayer is significant because it forces our focus on matters of eternity. Jonathan Edwards, in his Resolutions famously said, "When will all our worldly enjoyments be, when we are laid in the silent grave? Resolved, to live as I shall wish I had done when I come to die. Resolved, to live as I shall wish I had done, ten thousand ages hence. Lord stamp eternity on my eyeballs." Nothing will force us to see eternity than when we take our hearts to a posture of prayer.

READ TEXT

Prayer is an awesome privilege. When we pray we are touching eternity and asking God to bend our present circumstances to conform to his will. The context of the prayer fits with this. In the Sermon, Jesus is drawing a contrast between the world that we know and the world that he is bringing. Look at 6:5 to see the contrast: *And when you pray...* and then look at verse 8: *For your Father knows what you need before you ask him.* Which leads us perfectly into verse 9, *Pray then like this: Our Father.* By teaching us to pray, Jesus is telling us "This is the posture of my people, a posture of prayer, a posture of a people who live by faith and not by sight, a people who depend on God." Jesus is making a people of overcomers, a people who overcome by the blood of the lamb and the word of their testimony (Revelation 12:11)

And that is our first point this evening:

1. God Calls His People to Pray

When God was leading the Israelites out of Egypt to the Promised-Land, they were to be a nation of priests, not a nation with priests, but a nation of priests. A priest is one who stands before God. Each person was to be a priest, and not stand in need of a priest. However, something went wrong, because of the hard-heartedness of the people, they became a nation *with* priests as God established Aaron and his sons to the office. Christ has

come to fulfill what was promised and make a new people, a holy people, a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a people for his own possession as 1 Peter 2:9 tells us. We stand before God on our knees as we pray in our

Sweet hour of prayer! Sweet hour of prayer!
That calls me from a world of care,

The joys I feel, the bliss I share,
Of those whose anxious spirits burn
With strong desire for thy return!
With such I hasten to the place
Where God my Savior shows His face,
And gladly take my station there,
And wait for thee, sweet hour of prayer!

Oh, what a joy to pray, what a privilege of fellowship when God's people pray. There is no one else on the earth who can pray this prayer except God's people. No one can call him Father unless the Son has given them the right by grace through Faith. God has his ear bent to hear the sweet aroma of his people praying. We are the Church and we pray.

As Robert Wilken reminds us:

The church is not an instrument to achieve any other ends than fellowship with God. It serves society by being unapologetically itself and by bearing witness to the justice that alone makes human community possible, the justice due God. The greatest gift the church can give society is a glimpse, however fleeting, of another city, where the angels keep 'eternal festival' before the face of God.... (Spirit of Early Christian Thought)

We serve society by being unapologetically ourselves, and regardless of what the on-looking world thinks or says, we, we his people, pray! We are the church, we are the ones that God has called out of the darkness into his marvelous light, and we fulfill our calling as his people when we pray. Prayer? Is it really that big of a deal? Probably to most people its not, even to some Christians, unfortunately. I don't see how a Christian can go too long without prayer, but statistics tells us, that God's people aren't enjoying praying.

Listen to me, I am talking specific. I am not suggesting that Christians aren't praying. We get together for a prayer meeting like we are tonight but look over our list and then look at the prayer in Matthew 6 before you where Jesus says pray like this and see how much praying we are planning on doing tonight. We don't know what prayer is. And we show it often when we pray and God answers and then we say something silly like, "Prayer works." Every time I hear that I scratch my head. Maybe I should give people the benefit of the doubt, but theology, matters of eternity, weighty matters like prayer, require precision. Hopefully we don't treat prayer like some magic formula, or do we? Maybe a better way to express our thanks to God for answering our prayers is not to say prayer works, but the God to whom we pray to hears when his Children cry out to him. But I probably need to shorten it so that it is as catchy as "Prayer works, or prayer changes things." Why am I harping on this? I don't want your faith to be in anything else other than God! I don't want us to pray because we believe that prayer works, I want us to pray because there is a God in heaven who hears us when we call to him, who acts on behalf of his people.

If we would only learn to pray *this way*. Each time we pray *this way* we confess the eternity that God has made known to us in the sending of the Son. When we pray *this way*, we confess that the way things are presently are, bless God, not the way that things will be! When we *pray this way*, we participate in the purpose of God for the world. Did you hear that statement? Let it sink in. When we *pray this way*, we participate in the purpose of God for the world.

Revelation 8:1-5

When the Lamb opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour. Then I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and seven trumpets were given to them. And another angel came and stood at the altar with a golden censer, and he was given much incense to offer with the prayers of all the saints on the golden altar before the throne, and the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, rose before God from the hand of the angel. Then the angel took the censer and filled it with fire from the altar and threw it on the earth, and there were peals of thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightning, and an earthquake.

God uses the prayer of the saints to usher in the end of the age! This picture is important for us to consider who will inhabit the new creation after the old one has been consumed. Not me, not you. Oh, I'll be there, prayerfully you will be there, but it won't be just me, and it won't be just you, it'll be us.

Look at the plurals of the prayer. *Us*. This is the whole reason for this message. If God calls a people to pray, then he wants that praying people to be like him.

2. God's People Are Most Like Him When We Pray for Others

Prayer is an awesome privilege but praying for others is the way that we imitate our Lord Jesus Christ. It was Jesus that taught *us* to pray. He demonstrates the kind of care he wants is to have for others by generously giving us this prayer and teaching *us* to pray. How often when you pray do you use first person singular pronouns like *I*? How often do you use plural pronouns like *them*, or *they*? How often are you praying for someone else? I can testify tonight that I sure and glad that someone prayed for me, and I am glad that I know right now someone is praying for me!

Individualism is a sneaky demon. Our self-awareness can quickly become the center of our praying, and when that becomes the case the less likely we pray the way that Lord teaches us. I will give you an example of how subtle this is:

I am guessing that some here or someone that you know has an idea of heaven with some cabin next to a mountain stream away from everybody! How serene. You can almost hear the babbling brook, can't you? Or maybe you think that in heaven you are going to get your own mansion. You ever had a mansion to yourself? I bet it would get lonely. This idea of individualism has crept into the way that we read Scripture. John 14:2, a verse that I love, says, *In my Father's house there are many mansions*. When we read that we don't need to read through lenses of individualism.

Μονή is the Greek word (sounds like money doesn't it?). It means abode or dwelling place. The word is used again just a few verses later in 14:23 to refer to the Father and the Son, by means of the Spirit taking up residence with the one who loves God and keeps his word.

Which again leads us to consider the purpose of this message. Is there any way that we can know that we love God? Keep his commandments, but what are his commandments? Love one another. (John 15:12) How can we express our love for one another? James tells us in 5:16 – *Pray for one another*.

I believe Mr. Spurgeon was right when he said, "Intercessory prayer is the sweetest that God ever hears." (Evening, Feb. 6) Why? Because of Jesus. Look at the prayer that he taught us at the heart of the Sermon on the Mount. This prayer is often referred to as the Lord's Prayer, but we have learned that it is better to refer to this as the Prayer that the Lord Gave Us (there again, it isn't as catchy as the Lord's Prayer, but it is more precise). There are reasons why we shouldn't think of Jesus needing to pray this prayer. Really, just one clause tips us off – *forgive us our debts*. Jesus never needs to pray for forgiveness, he is too busy answering and forgiving our sins. He couldn't forgive us if he needed forgiving.

To find the Lord's prayer we need to go to John 17 right before his prayer in Gethsemane, right before he faces the cruelty of the Cross. In John 17 we see our great High Priest interceding for us. In his hour of distress, in his time of grief, when all sorrows were his, Jesus prays for you and me.

*For me it was in the garden,
He prayed: 'Not my will, but Thine.'
He had no tears for his own griefs,
But sweat-drops of blood for mine.*

*How marvelous! How wonderful!
And my song shall ever be:
How marvelous! How wonderful
Is my Savior's love for me?*

Here all of heaven was attending to the petitions of the Son, and what is it that echoed through the corridors of heaven? A prayer not for himself alone, but a prayer for you, a prayer for me, a prayer for us. He has given this sweet ministry to us. To pray, to ask for, to receive, not only our needs but the needs of others. We are most like Christ when we pray for others!

When I left Truett-McConnell College for Kennesaw I left the Baptist bubble for the "real world." One of my new roommates decided to introduce himself to me one time by holding a knife to my throat. Mike was angry, Mike was lonely, Mike needed Jesus. I talked to Mike for a year and a half about Jesus, was the brunt of his jokes for much of that time. I came to a point where I was ready to give up on Mike. The next morning, after I decided to give up on Mike, I was reading 1 Samuel 12 where Israel was asking for a king like all the other nations. Samuel comes along and warns them of judgment. It almost appears that Samuel is washing his hands with them. When I read verse 23, it hit me like a ton of bricks: *Moreover, as for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the LORD by ceasing to pray for you, and I will instruct you in the good and the right way.* How could I stop praying for Mike? It wasn't long after that Mike came to me and needed to talk to me. I led Mike to Christ on the balcony of our apartment!

Who are you praying for? Have you given up? Keep praying. Jesus won't give up. Maybe there are some listening to the sound of my voice. Everyone else has given up on you, not Jesus! HE is ready to forgive, ready to offer you life, you must come to him.