

**Reading:** Matthew 6:5-15

**Theme:** Introduction to the Lord's Prayer.

There are areas we may find difficult in the Christian life, but the area that causes most problems to lots of Christians is the whole area of prayer. Sadly, the prayer meeting in a lot of churches is usually one of the worst attended and supported. Yet we have noted that if we are Christians we are to pray and our Saviour expects that we do so (v5, 6, 7, & 9). Prayer should be the air we breathe as Christians. Thankfully there are many prayers in the Bible to help and encourage us, to challenge us to stir ourselves up to pray. We have just read what is often termed, the Lord's Prayer and all I'm going to do this morning is to introduce it and then next year we'll go on to look at it in more detail. As we go on to look at the Lord's Prayer my aim will be to encourage us to develop our prayer life. Hopefully we will put into practice what we will learn from the Lord's prayer. Prayer has been described as the highest activity of the human soul and we are at our greatest and highest when we are in prayer, as we come face-to-face with God.

It is only in prayer that we see the measure of what we are in spiritual terms. The truth of our Christian life is revealed there in prayer as we meet God, for as we really and truly pray, we are exposed, opened up, revealed as to what we are and because of this we are to examine our lives in prayer before God. That means prayer becomes not only the highest activity of our soul, but it also reveals to us the true condition of our soul. As we look at the Lord's Prayer I will have 4 aims in mind for us all:

**A. To Encourage and Help Our Prayer Lives:** both as individuals and as a church. The Lord's Prayer has been described as the Lord's masterclass in prayer (v9 and Luke 11:1b-2a). The Lord's Prayer acts as this encouragement and help. It is a loving and basic lesson in prayer by the Lord Jesus; it is also our final lesson in prayer and all our other lessons in-between too! Here we have the Lord's own guide and instructions about prayer.

**B. To Measure Ourselves against This Prayer:** we are to pray, but this prayer is the growth chart by which we are to measure our spiritual lives and prayers. Prayer is difficult, but we are to measure ourselves against this pattern prayer, to this standard - for it helps and encourages in our praying.

**C. To Focus Our Attention on the Gospel:** here in this prayer we have the gospel fundamentals, the gospel abbreviated... God's glory, the kingdom of Christ, His return, our dependence on God for all things, for forgiveness of sins, for deliverance from evil. Knowing the Lord's Prayer focuses our attention constantly on the real issues of life and hence the gospel.

**D. To See the Way of True Blessing and Even Revival:** as we see our Lord's priorities in prayer, we are to realise they are to be ours also; our prayers life should more and more conform to His priorities and secondary things should take a backseat. This may seem exaggerated, or unbelievable, but it is to be so. Prayer and lifestyle cannot be separated. Often we may say our prayers and yet we do not pray!

Perhaps it's because we do not have a real understanding of what prayer is. The Westminster Shorter Catechism asks in Q.98 "*What is prayer?*" The answer it gives is "*Prayer is an offering up of our desires unto God for things agreeable to His will, in the name of Christ, with confession of our sins, and thankful acknowledgement of His mercies.*" In other words, prayer has 3 main parts - petition, confession and thanksgiving i.e. we can ask for things, confess our sins and give thanks to God for all He is, does and gives to us.

We are to desire to pray aright as we can miss out on the greatest blessings in the Christian life through failing to pray as we should. We need instruction, need to be taught. Thankfully our loving Saviour has provided us with this in the Lord's Prayer. Here we have a perfect summary of how to pray and what to pray for. The Lord Jesus says "*This, then, is how you should pray:*" (NIV); "*After this manner therefore pray ye:*" (KJV).

It is a pattern prayer for us to learn from and to use. Very often we cannot get beyond ourselves, our problems, troubles, daily needs, anxieties, our little molehills that seem as mountains. As we come to the Lord's Prayer we were realise that these things must recede, disappear from our view. We are shown that we are to begin with God, His glory, His will, His kingdom. We are to realise that in all our prayers, all that we ever ask for self must be governed by and for His glory, kingdom and will. The Lord's Prayer corrects our view, our sight - for we are so short sighted, introverted and we need to look up and see the greatness of God and see our perspective of life from His viewpoint.

Does this mean that we can simply repeat the Lord's Prayer in parrot fashion and that's it, we have prayed and we do not need to pray anything else? Obviously not - as we noted last time. Our Lord shows us the way in which we are to pray, not necessarily using the same words repeated in an unthinking parrot fashion, but He shows us the areas which to cover in our prayer. John Calvin wrote "*Christ is not telling His people to pray in His form of words, but only showing them the direction along which all their supplications and prayers should tend. Thus, the petitions include everything that we may rightly wish from God.*"

Amazingly the Lord's Prayer covers everything in principle that we may rightly pray for. Some argue we can never go beyond its scope, nor add to it as nothing is left out. Here we have this all-inclusive, perfect summary of all we are likely to ever rightly pray for. If you like we have before us the outline sketch, plan, headings of our prayer life and we have freedom to take these principles, headings, avenues and use them, expand them, base our every petition, confession and thanksgiving on them.

The Lord Jesus is so gentle and kind as He gave the disciples and us a beautiful pattern, model prayer to teach us how to pray. What a privilege we have to take it, enlarge upon it in our hearts, to frame our words in line with it and to bring our desires in subjection to it. Here we have a simple, yet comprehensive memory aid to prayer and are able to use it to guide, prompt and stir us up as we pray. It shows us how and what we are to pray for. This prevents us becoming "mystical"

in our approach to prayer as we are not to be driven by a whim, a notion or an impulse, but we have a structure, have certain things to bear in mind as we pray. This should cause us to pause, not to rush into prayer in a light, flippant or proud manner.

The Lord's Prayer will help us overcome some of the dangers in prayer. Our Lord was aware of them and mentions them in v5-8, as we saw in more detail last time. They concern pride in self, they include the 'I' factor, the I in the centre of pride, sin and we become so modern and use iPrayers, but would become like the Pharisees of old, specially the Pharisee in the temple in Luke 18:11-12 *"The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: 'God, **I** thank you that **I** am not like other men.... **I** fast twice a week and give a tenth of all **I** get.'"* The word translated 'about' is a word of direction 'to, towards, unto, at' – an iPrayer. The Lord Jesus showed their praying to be false and hypocritical. Yes, they prayed like this in public, but for the attention it brought to themselves and to be considered very godly - as we saw last week.

Thankfully we would never be like them, or would we? Sin is so deceitful, crafty, especially as pride and arrogance, that it can even be with us as we pray, especially in public. We pray, feel we can pray well, out come our words and petitions, even confessions and everyone thinks we are such a praying person (*as we do ourselves*) - pride has triumphed! I said that in prayer a person is at their highest, but sin is so deceitful, so sinful it would trap us as we pray; even in our highest efforts to please and know God, sin dogs our heels. Satan tempted

the Lord Jesus in the wilderness when He prayed alone with God. Do we think he will leave us alone when we pray?

Sin would follow us into the very presence of God and would pollute us there. We are to be so very careful of our motives in prayer, especially public prayer so that we do not become guilty of the hypocrisy of the Pharisees. The Lord's Prayer acts as directions and safeguards to prevent this occurring - such is our Lord's care for us that He has provided this wonderful pattern prayer for us poor stumbling creatures.

As we noted last week, the Lord gave us warnings not to approach God in prayer in the wrong way, by being inward looking, or to concentrate first and foremost on self and not on the One to whom we pray. We noted that we can be like the Pharisees - very earnest in prayer, have long prayers and yet not really pray. The length of prayer, our time in prayer, our eloquence does not indicate how spiritual we are. Yes, it is true that great people of God have spent much time in prayer, but that was because they knew God, had no sense of time, were taken up with Him and His presence. Prayer became their life and they were not concerned for a 'prayer time'. George Muller said *"I live in the spirit of prayer. I pray as I walk about, when I lie down and when I rise up. And the answers are always coming."*

The correct approach to prayer is to pray in secret, in seclusion, not doing things to draw attention to our self and we can do this even in a public prayer meeting as we pray audibly. The Lord in v6 & 8 intimates to us how real prayer is to be and we see that it involves:

## **1. Exclusion.** (v6)

we are to exclude as far as possible things that would distract us. In private this could be easier - go to our room alone, but it also applies to praying in public, when we pray to lead people in prayer as they listen and follow, we are not to be over concerned about them listening, for we should pray 1<sup>st</sup> of all to God and not to impress those around us. Even in public prayer we are praying to God, yet we also remember that we are leading people around us in prayer to the throne of grace. CHS said *“It is necessary to draw near to God, but it is not required of you to prolong your speech till everyone is longing to hear the word ‘Amen’!”* Yet in our private prayers we also have to exclude ourselves and shut out our own cares, so that self and self-interest do not strangle our prayers and become iPrayers - focusing only on ourselves, our wants, needs and troubles. Yes, there are times when those things have to be dealt with first and foremost in prayer as they are so distracting and oppressing our hearts, but if it happens every time, it would seem we are not praying after the pattern of the Lord’s prayer. Then we see there is:

## **2. Realisation.**

We have to realise to whom we pray, which sounds pretty obvious as we pray to God and Him alone. Yet so often we may feel we have rehearsed a wish list to the ceiling, so we need to realise we pray to the Almighty God, who hears our least sigh and groan and to Him every word is precious. He knows our need, so we don’t need to use long prayers, rambling as if to win Him over, or to create the right formula and so make Him give us what we want (*that is magic not*

*prayer*). We come seeking what He wants for us. We are like the fisherman, pulling the rope as if to draw the land himself, but he draws himself in his boat to the land - we lay hold on God and pull ourselves to His will. Then we are to pray with:

### **3. Expectation.**

Yes, we are to realise to whom we pray, but He is more than God Almighty, for we draw near and say “*Our Father*”. It is amazing that Jesus says God is our Father. As the perfect and loving Father, He knows our need and provides for us; He delights to bless us. Not because we make much ado about nothing, or we use repetition, but because He has purchased us in Christ and desires to bless us with all He knows is good and right for us. God is more willing to give such to us we realise. We are to expect much from our Father in heaven.

May we all learn to pray in a right way and ask the Lord to teach us as individuals to pray more as this year comes to an end and a new year begins.