

Reading: Matthew 6:5-15

Theme: Remembering Who We Pray To.

We have seen that what we are on our own with God in prayer is what we are. Prayer is the highest activity of the soul and the measure of our spiritual health and wellbeing. The Lord's Prayer is not only a model or pattern prayer, but a measuring line, a standard for our praying and we can use it to see if we are praying correctly. It is a guide to instruct us in prayer for it causes us to focus on God's priorities which are to become our priorities – for both our lives and prayers. It also acts as a safeguard to a wrong approach to prayer as it prevents us being self-centred and full of self in our prayers (iPrayers). We will consider the Lord's Prayer over a number of weeks and see it is a perfect summary of all we can ever rightly pray for.

We could question the title '*The Lord's Prayer*', as such a title is not given in the Bible. Indeed, the Lord Jesus could not have prayed it – He had no sin or debts to be forgiven. The title is used to emphasize it was taught by Him, given by Jesus as a love gift to the Church to help and encourage us in our praying. Scholars usually divide this prayer into 3 sections – the Preface, the Petitions and the Conclusion. This morning we will look at the Preface. The Westminster Shorter Catechism asks "*Q100: What doth the preface of the Lord's prayer teach us? A100: The preface of the Lord's prayer, which is, "Our Father which art in heaven," teacheth us to draw near to God with all holy reverence and confidence, as children to a father, able and ready to help us; and that we should pray with and for others.*"

This is where Jesus wants us to start in prayer. Not to look inward, concerned for self alone and leap in with all our cares and woes, but to look Godward. Great men and women of God agree that as we come to prayer, our 1st step should be **recollection**. We

remember, recollect what we are doing and to Whom we come. In a sense we shut up and say nothing initially. Job poured out his griefs and complaints to God and only after God makes Himself gloriously known does Job realise he should have been quiet and recognised to Whom he came (Job 40:3-5).

When we come to prayer, private prayer in particular, we should not rush into God's presence, but take a short time to recollect what an awesome and solemn thing we are doing – we are asking for the eyes and ears of the Almighty to be on us and what we pray. The Preface helps us in this area of recollection as it causes us to consider to Whom we come in prayer and shows us what the true essence of prayer is - "*Our Father*". Prayer is not just words, even religious words (*short or long*) or ritual or eloquence. True prayer begins with, is founded upon, springs from a right relationship with God. We start to truly pray when we know "*God is my Father*", when we know we are born-again as His child. The Christian is a person who has a relationship with and reverence for God. Let's note 3 things:

1. The Importance of This Relationship.

Prayer is impossible if there is no relationship with God. We only mouth words however fine or felt if this relationship does not exist. People may say they prayed to God and He helped them. Yes, but He helped because His very nature is good and He helps those who have no relationship with Him, just as in His goodness He senses rain and sun on the righteous and the wicked.

True prayer is not words alone, even length of time saying such words. God does not clock up our hours of prayer or record our amount of words! True prayer begins, exists only because of our relationship with Him - as Father and child. This is what gives us access to His Almighty ear. It is true only of His children. We and

we alone as Christians have the intimacy of children with the King of Kings - what an amazing privilege! Not all and sundry can pray and rightly say “Father”, but only those who are His born-again children. We may hear of the universal fatherhood of God; the brotherhood of men, but this is not what the Bible says. Yes, it acknowledges that God is Creator of all and in that sense, He is Father of all, as He gives life and sustains all, but He is not the Father of all in the intimate sense of the word.

Man in his natural state does not honour God, but rebels against God in greater or lesser ways. Mankind fails to honour or glorify God. Sin has turned us away from Him and in each one of us there is a bias away from God which breaks out in open animosity and hatred to God and His ways in some people.

For an unknown child to approach a man and say “*You’re my father*” is ridiculous - no relationship, no blood tie. Even if a child was fostered and used the name “father” it would have no legal weight. So also with God - we cannot just call Him “*Father*” in the intimate sense of the word if there is no adoption, no blood tie, no legal transaction to make us His and no relationship. The Bible shows us we need to have the Holy Spirit working us, to regenerate us i.e. to make us born-again and new creatures in Christ, to witness we are the children of God, to be the Spirit of adoption in our lives whereby we cry “*Abba Father*”. We need to know the blood of Jesus has cleansed us from every sin and by a legal transaction in heaven we are made God’s adopted children and He has entered into a loving relationship with us. Then and only then can we say with boldness and confidence “*Abba Father*”.

Our prayer life has to be based on this relationship alone and will develop only as the quality and depth of this relationship develops. Many believers of old had a tremendous relationship with God and

so they spent much time in prayer with God. As we come in prayer we have to realise the wonder and importance of this relationship with Him. We need to remind ourselves of it, to recollect and come into prayer knowing this love relationship exists. It may be we cannot pray aright for the relationship is spoiled in some way - sin, coldness, wrong thoughts about our Father in heaven, or even because we have never had a relationship with Him. Prayer is not just saying our prayers, but is the outworking of the relationship we have with the God of heaven who is our heavenly Father. Now see:

2. The Impossibility of This Relationship.

Some parts of the ancient church prayed the Lord's Prayer with these words of introduction: "*Grant that we **dare** to call on Thee as Father and to say 'Our Father...'*" We can have this relationship with God and call Him "Father", but to the Jews this was an amazing thing. They knew very little intimacy with God. He was in heaven and they were on earth. Naturally this is so with us. We are dead in trespasses and sins, we are children of wrath, of our father the devil and we can do nothing to alter our state. **We could never have had any relationship with God except for the Lord Jesus Christ** and all He has accomplished - His perfect life, His atoning death, His resurrection and Ascension, His interceding for us at God's right hand for us even now.

We can only go to God in Jesus' name. Not using it as a magic charm, or as a password, but it includes all He is and what He has done on our behalf. He is God's Beloved, His only begotten Son, but when we believe in Him, trust Him as our Saviour, we are accepted in the Beloved as children of God (John 1:12) and God becomes our Father. God is our Father because He is Jesus' Father and we are accepted because of all He has accomplished for us (John 20:17) and we are made His brothers and sisters. Yes, we

pray in Jesus name - not merely tagging those words onto our prayers, but the very fact we pray to God as Father means we come in Jesus' name, because of who He is and what He's accomplished and His relationship with us. We are to realise this wondrous fact. I have to ask if we have entered into this relationship with God as our Father through the Lord Jesus? If not, then we do not have any relationship with God except that of our Judge. Moving on we see:

3. The Implications of the Relationship.

Firstly: we pray "*Father*". We are individually adopted as God's children. We are individually loved, made heirs, joint heirs with Christ. Now we should not view God as one to be appeased, or be made willing to hear and answer our prayers. He is not some spiritual ogre who needs to be pacified, battered into giving us blessing and good! Not at all; He is the Perfect Father, the best, the kindest of fathers. We can always trust Him, always cast ourselves on His mercy, even though we are still at times ungrateful, sulking, rebellious, headstrong and sinful children. He always loves and cares for us. This should encourage us as we pray! He loves and cares for us in our present condition and situation as He has a perfect fatherly love and concern about us. He knows and understands our weaknesses, heartaches, pains, sighs, anxieties, fears, doubts, problems, joys, moods, ups, downs, ins and outs. Yet though He knows all that about us, He still cares for and loves us.

Secondly: we pray not just "*My Father*", but "**Our Father**". As we come in prayer we are to remember we are part of a family. Many of the family are on earth, many are still to come after us, but many are already with Father in heaven. We are to be aware of our heavenly Father's family. We are not to be merely concerned about self, but be concerned for others in Christ. We are to pray with and for one another as family, God's family. We

are to ask the Lord to deal with us all, both as a local family and as a worldwide family.

This means family life has to be as *Father wants* - love is to be shown to all, there is to be no bitterness or we'll be hypocrites when we pray "*Our Father*" having malice and bitterness in our hearts. We are to pray with hearts of love for our brothers and sisters, pray with thanks, aware of the glory that awaits us where many of the family of God are now - we do not pray for or to them in heaven, but are mindful of our eternal home in heaven and its glory.

I find it amazing and thrilling that in these words our Lord Jesus opens up heaven and earth for us to pray in. We could spend a lifetime considering our brothers and sisters in Christ, considering the privilege and wonder of calling God our Father, Jesus our Saviour, our Elder Brother who made it possible. How is it we say we cannot pray, or have nothing to pray! What a wondrous, magnificent privilege we have in just our beginning to pray and all this is based on our relationship with the Lord Jesus.

Thirdly: there is reverence due to our Father in heaven. Yes, I know that we come to Him with a close, intimate relationship, having fellowship with one another as believers and with God, but we dare not be chummy or overfamiliar with Him. Recollect, remember He is "*Our Father which art in heaven*". This does not mean He is confined to heaven alone, for the heaven of heavens is not able to contain Him and God is omnipresent - He is everywhere at all times in the fullness of His person. He is designated as in heaven to show His authority - He is Lord, Ruler, Creator, Sustainer of all, everything is subject to Him and His power - for all things are known and ordered by Him. This term "in heaven" separates God from the order of all created things and

beings. He has no limits to His power, He is exalted above the whole universe, He is incomprehensibly great.

When we go in prayer to our Father, we do not go hoping He could possibly answer some or a part of our prayers. We do not limit our prayers to our knowledge and understanding of God, but we come with the realisation, and understanding that He is the Almighty God, the eternal ever blessed thrice holy One, He is God alone, over all creation, having no flaws or defects. He is the awesome God, before whom angels have a holy awe and fear. We do not come lightly and carelessly to Him, with an over easy familiarity as many today feel they can. This is unscriptural. We need a reverent holy fear and approach to God, but the same time we dare to come boldly and with confidence to His throne of grace because there we find mercy and grace to help us in time of need. This is where He invites and wants us to come.

Fourthly: He is in heaven as our Father. Love and power combine for us who are His children, through our amazing relationship with Him. Part of our family is already there and as we consider these things we are to realise that that is ultimately our home and not this earth. One-day Father will welcome us there in heaven and we will be for ever with Him, so our view of life should be that of a pilgrimage - *“This world is not my home, I’m just a passing through”*. Heaven is where our Father is and to be with Him is heaven. The Preface *“Our Father which art in heaven”* underlines to us that while we live here on earth, we can do so in an intimacy with God and this should not destroy our reverence for Him, nor affect us in a way that will isolate us from other believers. If we could realise something of the truth and power of these words in the Preface it would transform our lives and praying.

The Lord Jesus says this is where we begin in prayer as we take these 2 great truths and never separate them. Remember, recollect that we are approaching the almighty, eternal, ever blessed God, but at the same time remember, recollect that He, in Christ, has become our loving Father, who knows all about us as God. As our Father He knows what is good and for our best. We are to keep these things together and remember them. God is almighty, He ever looks at you and me with a holy love and knows our every need; He hears our every sigh and He desires nothing so much as our blessing, happiness, joy and true prosperity. As we do that we are to remember that God *“is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think”* (Ephesians 3:20). He is more anxious to bless us than we are to be blessed. There is no limit to His almighty power. He can bless us with all the blessings of heaven. He has put them all in Christ and put us in Christ also.

This is where we begin to pray. Before we ask for anything - daily bread, grace, strength, forgiveness - we are to realise that people such as us are in the presence of the Lord God Almighty who is our Father in heaven. What an incentive for us, to move us to pray, to come before Him who is Lord of all as we are accepted as His children, knowing He will hear and answer us with what is truly for our good from a loving heart. How easy our enemy the devil hinders us from prayer, he blinds our hearts and eyes to the wondrous privilege we have. My desire is that we would all learn to pray to our Father in heaven and do so correctly, for His glory and do so with delight at such an amazing privilege.