

One Audience

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- [0 : 0 0] Well, I want to echo Jeremy's welcome to you all, and I'm also welcoming you into the very center of the Sermon on the Mount.
- So we've been going on a sermon series. We are looking at chapter 6 of Matthew, verses 1 through 18. I invite you to turn there right now. So Jesus teaches here in the very center of the Sermon on the Mount that our prayers are central to our lives as disciples.
- They are the very center of our life with one another and with God. Jesus showed this in his own life. In his ministry, and we see this in Matthew 2, he prayed every day.
- He prayed sometimes all night. He prayed in times of great crisis and need. And he showed that his relationship with God the Father was a living relationship because of his prayer life.
- And he showed us, he showed us disciples that so that we can enter into that same life. Now, this is easy for me to say because I know that all of you, all of you struggle with the life of prayer to a certain extent.
- [1 : 2 6] And it is, I think, probably the most difficult part of our life. And I'm not sure, I think I know why that is. Jesus is giving us an indication of this here.
- If you look at your own life, if you look at our life of prayer at St. John's, often the least attended meeting that we have in the year is our prayer gatherings.
- Why is that? Well, at the very beginning of Matthew, I think we find the clue. At the beginning of this Sermon on the Mount, I should say, Matthew 5. Because there it opens by saying, Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
- Jesus is saying, the fundamental need you have to come into the kingdom of God is that you know that you are poor and that you are needy.
- And the one who shows us perhaps this best is King David. In Psalm 86, King David says this. This is the one who is very wealthy and powerful.
- [2 : 3 5] He is successful. And he says to God, incline your ear, O Lord, and answer me, for I am poor and needy. I am poor and needy.
- Coming to God was central in his life. Coming to God in prayer was the stuff of his life because he knew he was poor and needy.
- And this is our need as well. Now, many years ago, 15 years ago, an archbishop from Malawi came to be our support and strength, to be our connection with the Anglican world at a time when our diocese was leaving what Anglicans believe, leaving what is true in the Bible.
- And he said this very memorable thing when he came to Vancouver from Malawi. He came at a time of great famine in his own country. And he said, you know, I came from a place of great poverty and need physically, but also a place of great abundance and wealth spiritually in our prayer life, in what we see we are receiving from God.
- And I've come to this place of Vancouver of great physical wealth and abundance and prosperity, yet it is also a place of spiritual famine and impoverishment.

- [4 : 04] Those were very wise words. Because he is saying that we had not seen in Vancouver our deep need for God and his grace and his mercy in our lives.
- And that is what prevents us from praying. That is what prevents us from really entering into the life of God in that way. So I want us to listen to Jesus' words today.
- Because they teach us three things about prayer that are fundamental for us. He teaches us why we should pray, how we should pray, and what we should pray.
- And he does this in ways that are very searching for us. Look at verse 1. He tells us why we pray. Jesus says, Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven.
- And he repeats that three more times. Your Father who sees in secret will reward you. There's two really important truths in that sentence that he tells us.
- [5 : 17] The first is that we have a Father in heaven. And the second thing is that he will reward you. Those are two tremendous incentives for us to pray.
- If you look at this passage, notice in the 18 verses how many times Jesus says, Your Father. It's ten times if you're counting really quickly.
- And he is affirming to us over and over again that God is your Father. In other words, the Almighty God who holds the universe in his hands, who created you, he adopts you as his daughter or his son.
- And that is at tremendous cost. By Jesus' sacrificial death on a cross for the forgiveness of our sins, by his powerful resurrection, God has made us to be his sons and his daughters.
- He has brought us into this deeply loving relationship with the one true God so that we can call him Father. Father. And that's why we pray in Jesus' name. It is by Jesus' power and his authority that he has done this tremendous miracle for us.
- [6 : 33] So that today, the Holy Spirit enables you and me to say to God with complete certainty, Abba, Father. So how can we not speak to him?
- How can we not spend time with him? I remember years ago, many years ago, when I was a youth director at a church far away, there was a grade nine girl in my Bible study who was not a Christian yet and had never really been to church.
- And she was part of this study. And I got to the verse in Romans 8.3 that says, You have received the spirit of adoption as sons and daughters by whom we cry, Abba, Father.
- And so I said to the group, Does anybody know what the word Abba means? Right away she raised her hand and said, It means daddy. And I said, How did you know that? She said, Well, my dad is Jewish by background and that's what I called him ever since I was really little and especially when I was little.
- And I said to him, Well, is that something that means a lot to you? She said, Yeah. She said, You know, when I think of saying Abba, I think of sitting on his lap as a little girl and just spending time with him.
- [7 : 49] And she said, That's one of my favorite memories that I have. And she said that she has a necklace that said Abba in Hebrew on it to remind her of her dad's love for her.
- And I thought there could not be a better illustration of what the Holy Spirit helps us to see about our relationship with God because of what Jesus has done.
- See, Jesus has opened up the very life of heaven. So as Jesus can call the Father Abba, we enter the same exact relationship.
- His Father is now our Father. And it's only because God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit that we can know the reality of this in our life.

Jesus makes this possible by his work on the cross. The Holy Spirit makes it real in our lives by the living presence of Jesus with us, bringing us into this relationship with God the Father.

[8 : 50] That's why we celebrate Trinity Sunday today. It means everything to us. You see, it's because God is our Abba that we are praying people. It is only natural, if you are his child, that you will praise him for all his goodness.

It's only natural that you will thank him for all we receive. After all, you are a child. It's only right that you would confess your sins to him, that you would receive his correction and his change in us so that he's bringing us to maturity in Jesus.

And it's only what we are as children that makes us tell him what our needs are. This is our great motivation. Children talk to their parents.

They spend time with them simply because it is what children do and because it is very, very good. That is why we pray. There's a second reason, though.

It's very interesting. Jesus says over and over again, he talks about reward. And the way C.S. Lewis puts it, he says in the gospel, you see this unblushing promise of reward and the staggering nature of rewards that are promised by Jesus.

[10 : 10] He is right. That's what they are. They are staggering. They are unblushing. And Jesus promised that the God, the Father, will reward you through your prayers.

It's not something that we earn. In fact, the rewards are, a big part of that reward is what Jesus has accomplished for us on the cross.

It is the gift of the spiritual blessings of heaven, which are immense. We cannot imagine them. But more than that, they are rewards that happen here on earth as well.

We experience rewards in our praying that come just out of that practice of prayer. And you see those rewards in the Psalms when you see the experience of David praying.

And it's in my experience, I know that you've shared with me what those rewards are as well, because in prayer, you see more and more of God's goodness.

[11 : 10] It's like the grace that he has for us is made clearer and clearer. There are disappointments in prayer. There's times when we don't understand God's timing.

He seems slow to act. And it's hard to actually sit down and do the discipline of prayer. But as you pray, there's this growing understanding that I do have a Father in heaven who really is the giver of every good gift.

And what happens is my faith and my trust increases as I depend upon God for my needs. I think you really see how trustworthy God is when you exercise your faith, when you come to him with what you truly need.

And wonderfully, your gratitude increases as you see him respond to you and as you meditate on what God has done for you in the past and what his promises are for the future.

Those are some of the earthly rewards, but all of them, if you want to summarize, it has to do with the flourishing of your relationship with God, your Father. And it's because you've spent time with him, meditating on his truth and obeying his commandments, believing his promises.

[12 : 31] Well, the second thing after saying why we pray, what is our great motivation of God being our Father and that he rewards us, is secondly, Jesus teaches us how we pray.

And he says two things, basically. He says, be sincere and have confidence. So if you look at verses five and six, he says, pray with sincerity.

Don't be a hypocrite. If you want to be very blunt, he says, don't be like those hypocrites who love to stand and pray in the synagogues and the street corners that they may be seen by others.

Jesus is not against public prayer, by the way. He prayed publicly in the synagogues. The Lord's Prayer is a public prayer as well. He prayed the Psalms. God taught us how to pray the Psalms as a group together.

What he is saying is don't be a hypocrite in your personal prayers because a hypocrite is one who plays a part. The role that we play outwardly can be different from what is happening inwardly.

[13 : 40] And that's why Jesus used an example of a person who is standing up publicly speaking to God but inwardly he desperately wants to impress the people around him.

His attention is divided. In fact, his heart's far away from God. And I think that we can experience this certainly when we pray publicly.

I've experienced that and a number of times I've been asked especially in my first church. I was in a town where I was often asked to speak publicly, pray publicly, and I was often thinking about what people were thinking, how I was affecting them, and not about the person I was praying to.

Very easy to slip into. But what Jesus says here is he says what you want to do is to pray in secret. Well, what does that mean?

Does it mean that I have to hide myself every time I pray? Well, Jesus is not saying that. He is saying that secrecy is the genuineness of what is inward and what is unseen as opposed to what is put on for others.

[14 : 49] That's what secrecy is. Jesus wants us to have undivided hearts in our prayers. One that is focused on the one that we are praying to, our Abba Father.

And that's what sincerity in prayer is. You know, David is going to say later on in Psalm 86, unite my heart to fear your name.

I give thanks to you, O Lord my God, with my whole heart. You see, David is praying that when we come to God, we are single-minded with our prayers. That we are set on God himself in our heart.

That we are not distracted. That's one of the biggest impediments in our prayers. Distraction by other thoughts. By pressing concerns that things that we have to do and accomplish.

God says through David, unite your heart to fear God's name. And then the second how that Jesus says is to pray with confidence.

[15 : 55] When the Gentiles, he says, pray, and those are people who don't know what it means to know God as Heavenly Father in verses 7 and 8, he says, you know, they think they're going to be heard by the many words that they say. And that betrays a lack of confidence in God.

It says, I have to impress God. I have to persuade him to do what is right and good for me. That pagan idea of God's is that they are very fickle and need to be convinced.

Completely different from the understanding that God is your Abba, your Father, who knows what you need before you ask. That idea, which is very pagan, is most clearly shown in Elijah's life.

Do you remember the contest that Elijah had with the prophets of Baal? This was a contest to see whose God was real so that Elijah could convince the people of God to turn back to God, the living God.

And what happens is the prophets of Baal call down fire from above because that shows that God is real to burn up the sacrifices. 450 prophets cried, O Baal, answer us over and over and over again.

[17 : 07] But there's no voice. There's no answer. Elijah's a bit naughty. And he says to them, mocking them, he says, is your God asleep? Is he thinking about other things right now?

And he even said, maybe he's going to the bathroom behind that tree over there and he's indisposed right now. And that spurred them on to more words and emotion and powerful acts of cutting themselves and showing how serious they were.

But of course, nothing happened. No answer. No voice. And then Elijah steps forth with a very brief and clear prayer of complete confidence in God.

He says, O Lord, let it be known this day that you are God in Israel, that I'm your servant and that I've done these things at your word. Answer me, O Lord, answer me, that this people may know that you are Lord, you are God, and that you have turned their hearts back.

That's all he said. And immediately, fire came down and consumed everything very, very powerfully. Elijah had complete confidence that God would answer in that way because God is the living God who knows his people, who knows Elijah as well, and who commanded him to do it.

[18 : 28] Now we can very easily slip into a way of prayer that seeks to impress God or convince him by the volume of our words to do what we want. And Jesus is not against persistence in prayer.

He's not against praying for a long time because he did it himself. But Jesus says, your Father knows you intimately, and you need to know that he already knows what you are going to ask and what you need before you pray.

And therefore, you can pray simply simply and directly to God from your heart with an assurance that he knows, that he will answer, that he loves you.

And you might ask me, well, why should I pray if he knows what I need already? And the simple answer is that God wants us to ask. He knows that it is good for us.

He knows that there is reward for you in his relationship with you when you do that. So the point of what Jesus is saying here is that God the Father is far more willing to give to you than you are willing to ask.

[19 : 38] That's what it means to have confidence in God, that we will move towards this understanding of God's willingness to give to us what we need.

He is the God of grace. We don't have to convince or to impress. He has given his only son so that he could meet our deepest needs. You cannot get any more confident than that if you know that.

And we can pray with certainty that God alone, in him alone, all that we can hope for, all that we can expect that is good, comes from him. And finally, Jesus teaches us what we pray.

Now that's in verses 9-13. Preachers have preached 10-week sermons on this. very regularly on these commandments, but I'm going to do it, or this Lord's Prayer, I'm going to do it in three minutes.

And I apologize for that. But what we can see here is that Jesus teaches a pattern for our prayers. It shows us the format of our prayers.

[20 : 44] And notice what he does. There are six petitions. And the first three petitions are that God's name will be revered through the world, throughout the world, beginning with us.

That people would revere God. And secondly, that his kingdom will come. That more and more people will know his gracious rule and that Jesus will come again in glory.

And then thirdly, he says, pray that God's will will be done here on earth, both in my life and in the life of the world around us.

Not my will, but your will be done, God. And notice that those first three are all about God. It's all about worshiping God, completely focused on our Abba Father.

And then it's in that context that we pray the next three petitions, which is all about our physical, spiritual, emotional needs. And so we pray for our daily bread.

[21 : 46] You know, that everything that we need, we ask God for. It's a recognition that it comes from his hand. But it's also a prayer for those who are in need, who go without.

It's a prayer for God's justice in this world as well. And then secondly, we pray for the forgiveness of our sins. We ask for help in forgiving others.

And Jesus is going to say a little bit more about this in a moment that I want to refer to. And then finally, we pray for strength and help in our struggle against Satan, sin, and death.

Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. And that's kind of puzzling because it sounds like God leads us into temptation potentially. But it's actually saying, lead us away from temptation and deliver us from evil.

The way that Calvin put it, is saying that the meaning is that we are conscious of our own weakness and we desire to enjoy the protection of God, that we might remain impregnable against all the assaults of Satan.

[22 : 52] It's praying for God to deliver us from what Satan is doing in this world. And what we see in those three last petitions, that only God the Father, who is all-powerful, and who loves us dearly, can answer those three prayers.

It's the pattern that puts things right in the way that we pray. Because my inclination is to change the words of the Lord's Prayer. You know, to skip from the beginning to right to my needs.

Bang, right away. Here's my list. So I often pray the Lord's Prayer like this. Our Father who art in heaven, give me this day my daily bread. And there it goes. But Jesus is calling us here to grow in our prayers.

He knows we struggle. He's patient with us. And he strongly and clearly calls us to fill our minds with God's love for us, with his glory, and his powerful purposes for us.

Knowing that that will transform your life of prayer. To begin with God and his glory and his goodness to you. And I want to close this passage on prayer, which is inadequate, certainly, in its time.

[24 : 07] We didn't have time. But the thing that we see that is wonderful at the end is that Jesus talks about something very real for us that can harm our prayers, that can really diminish our relationship with God.

And that is our lack of concern or forgiveness, I should say, of others. He says this. He says, 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. That's how he ends this teaching on prayer. That's how we're ending it too.

Why would he do that? Well, he is saying to us that if we cherish sin in our life, if we hold on to those people who have hurt us, our prayers will be severely diminished.

You know, David said, If I cherished iniquity in my heart, the Lord would not have listened. There's a real block that happens there. And Jesus is saying, take it away in the most unequivocal way.

[25 : 20] Take it away, he says. And he understands how hard this is. There are painful things that people have done to you in your life. It is very hard not to hold on to something that has hurt you so deeply.

And Jesus doesn't take this lightly. He knows what that means for us. But we actually silence our conversation with God when we hang on to those sins of other people.

Jesus says, Let it go. Give it to God. Resolve to forgive even now. And that prayer killer will evaporate. It is one of the most difficult things that Christians do.

But there is a release and there is an openness in your prayers with God that result. That is part of the reward that comes. And we thank God on this Trinity Sunday that the Holy Spirit is your helper in all of this.

He prays for us in ways that we cannot do ourselves. So may you and I leave this passage knowing that we are poor and needy.

[26 : 25] But also may we know that we have a powerful, all-powerful, loving Father in Heaven who is your Abba. And may we ask Him to help us take away the obstacles and walk according to His ways.

To walk in His life of grace and forgiveness. The life of the kingdom is the life of forgiveness. May God by His grace help us to walk through that door that Jesus has opened to us.

The door of this relationship with God that transforms us and is the life of Heaven that He is preparing us for. In Jesus' name.

Amen. Amen. Thank you.