

EASTSIDE COMMUNITY BAPTIST CHURCH
SUNDAY, AUGUST 8, 2021
SERMON: PRAYER...MORE THAN JUST WORDS
TEXT: MATTHEW 6:1-15

When I was in my first year of bible college, I was in the concert choir. For some reason, there was a girl in the choir that did not like me and was often confrontational. Over time I tended to give back what I received, and it wasn't good. Before a special concert, we broke into groups to pray for each other and for the ministry. I mentioned in my small group that I was having troubles with this individual and I didn't want the conflict to continue. A friend of mine, during the prayer time, prayed for me and the situation. It wasn't more than a minute after we prayed that a door opened for me to make an unkind remark about this individual. My friend who had offered the prayer, took me aside, and chastised me for the fact that we had prayed, and I immediately acted as if we had not! I was convicted at that moment about the fact that prayer is more than just words...it demands action.

Last week we looked at the one who prays and desires to pray in the "will of God." Today we look at the prayer itself and see what is demanded of us as we say our prayers according to the "will of God."

Let's start with our scripture lesson which is Matthew 6:1-15:

6 "Watch out! Don't do your good deeds publicly, to be admired by others, for you will lose the reward from your Father in heaven. ² When you give to someone in need, don't do as the hypocrites do—blowing trumpets in the synagogues and streets to call attention to their acts of charity! I tell you the truth, they have received all the reward they will ever get. ³ But when you give to someone in need, don't let your

left hand know what your right hand is doing. ⁴ Give your gifts in private, and your Father, who sees everything, will reward you.

Teaching about Prayer and Fasting

⁵ “When you pray, don’t be like the hypocrites who love to pray publicly on street corners and in the synagogues where everyone can see them. I tell you the truth, that is all the reward they will ever get. ⁶ But when you pray, go away by yourself, shut the door behind you, and pray to your Father in private. Then your Father, who sees everything, will reward you.

⁷ “When you pray, don’t babble on and on as the Gentiles do. They think their prayers are answered merely by repeating their words again and again. ⁸ Don’t be like them, for your Father knows exactly what you need even before you ask him! ⁹ Pray like this:

Our Father in heaven,

may your name be kept holy.

¹⁰ May your Kingdom come soon.

**May your will be done on earth,
 as it is in heaven.**

¹¹ Give us today the food we need,

¹² and forgive us our sins,

as we have forgiven those who sin against us.

¹³ And don’t let us yield to temptation,

but rescue us from the evil one.

¹⁴ “If you forgive those who sin against you, your heavenly Father will forgive you. ¹⁵ But if you refuse to forgive others, your Father will not forgive your sins.

This section that we look at today really drives home the truth that prayer and the Christian faith itself is far more than just a set of rules or a concept or an idea. If you profess to be a Christian, you are expected to be “hands-on!”

This passage from Matthew that we are looking at is commonly known as "The Lord's Prayer." It may be better characterized as "The Disciples Prayer" as Jesus uses it as a template at the disciples request to learn how to pray as Jesus prays. What you might not have recognized is that this portion is actually part of a greater section of scripture that we know as "The Sermon on the Mount." Jesus has taken his disciples aside and is teaching and preparing them for the ministry that is at hand. Jesus plans on using these twelve average men to take His message and through their obedience transform the world. The transformation begins in the hearts of Jesus' followers – and that is still the same procedure today.

Leading up to this section we read today, Jesus has already taught them the Beatitudes. He has covered what it means to be salt and light in the world and has talked about their own laws. Jesus covered anger, adultery, divorce, making vows, revenge, and loving our enemies. The content of the Sermon on the Mount is not philosophical! It is practical for every day living. And we pick up the teaching in the middle of his masterclass on how to be a disciple.

DON'T SHOW OFF

As Christians, we are meant to be "in the world and not of it." We are meant to be influencers for Jesus Christ – but we do not seek a reward here on earth. Christians should offer "behind the scenes" benevolence. As we act as the hands and feet of Jesus, we don't draw attention to ourselves...and that can be a hard pill to swallow at times. We look around at the world and those who are considered to be philanthropists and we see names on buildings and wings of hospitals and universities. It is wonderful to have people who are exceedingly generous! As Christians, we take a different route. Hand-in-hand with the message of salvation is the fact that part of our "job" as a Christian is to take care of those in need. This has always been a major theme throughout the Old and the New Testament. James 1:27 tells us:

²⁷ Pure and genuine religion in the sight of God the Father means caring for orphans and widows in their distress and refusing to let the world corrupt you.

Jesus tells us that motive is important. Jesus talks about taking care of the needy, but doing it in such a way that it does not attract attention. God recognizes our good deeds and will reward them in Heaven! Motive matters! Why are you helping those who need it? If you are seeking glory and recognition on earth...Jesus tells us that you will get the glory you are looking for...but that is all you will get. Is the care, help, and assistance that you are giving leading people purely to the love of God. Do we represent God or ourselves. Jesus is so adamant about this fact that we are told symbolically that we shouldn't even "tell our left hand what your right hand is doing!" God knows and that should be all the affirmation we need.

PRAYER

Jesus turns his teaching towards prayer...and it is the same concept as helping the needy. There is no show needed when you pray...in fact, any type of showy presentation is not warranted or wanted. Prayer is to be thoughtful, respectful, and sincere. If you were a child brought up in the church then you can probably remember that one (or two) individuals, who would get up to pray publicly and you would think "oh no..." Why that reaction? Because you knew that individual would be praying for what seemed like eternity. Jesus tells us not to drone on like the hypocrites do. The term "hypocrite" came from the theatre. It was the person who would wear a mask. We are not to put on airs when we pray and we need to stay away from flowery, pretentious words that strive to convince others of our holiness.

On the same note, our prayers should be thoughtful and we need to see if we have fallen into the contemporary malady of "repetitiveness." Jesus

called it babbling. What is "babbling?" Simply defined is "saying the same thing over and over without giving it any thought." Two examples spring to mind. When Elijah took on the priests of Baal on Mt. Carmel, we read in 1 Kings 18:25 that the priests, trying to gain Baal's favour and action, cried out from morning until noon "O Baal, answer us!" In Acts 19:34, when Paul was ministering in Ephesus, an influential silversmith who employed many people with the making of little idols to the god Artemis, stirred up trouble against Paul when he found out Paul was Jewish, and we are told that for two hours, a mob called out "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians." During this time an even greater mob formed and attacked Paul and his travelling companions.

Prayer is meant to be a two-way conversation with God, but the truth is, if we talked with our friends and family, the way we often talk to God, they couldn't run fast enough away from us. It would sound something like this:

A wife asking her husband to get some things from the store:

Roger, can you pick up just some milk, Roger, while you are at the store, Roger, just, just, get the milk, thank you Roger. And Roger, would you just, just bring home some bread, just, just, bread, Roger, Thank you Roger, Roger, oh Roger, thank you Roger.

You would never hold a conversation with you spouse or friend like this! Why do we do it to God? Jesus, himself, tell us that when we pray not to babble on. A good part of not babbling when we pray is to pray more often and to get into the habit, and this can be by yourself to begin, and pray out loud. When a person takes a course on preaching, called homiletics, one thing that is part of the training is video and audio taping yourself preaching. They will often do this most public speaking courses. The goal is to see what type of idiosyncrasies and bad habits you need to break when you are speaking in front of people. You could become aware

of how many times you say “um” in a sentence to playing with the keys and coins in your pocket as you speak. If we take the time here on earth to be better communicators...do we not owe it to God to learn to talk to Him with ease, clarity, and sincerity?

This ease comes with practice and it is not bad to begin with a example to follow until you are comfortable praying. This was the reason I mentioned the ACTS method several weeks ago and why Jesus gave the disciples a model to follow in verses 9-13.

OUR MODEL

The Lord’s Prayer is not a command but rather an invitation for all believers to join Jesus in his prayer life. The prayer was never meant to be said “verbatim” or as written over and over since Jesus warned us about falling into a formalism. We should think of this prayer as a template or guide for our prayers.

We see that the prayer is set up in such a way to remind us that it is all about God! This was the way it was in the Old and New Testament. Before we do anything else, we need to acknowledge God’s power, His Character, His grace that He grants us. Whether you are offering a prayer in a public venue or you are talking with your Heavenly Father in the quiet of your room...God is front and center! The first three petitions in the Lord’s Prayer are all centered on God. Jesus, in the final three petitions, guides us through prayers for our needs and the needs of our community.

Jesus teaches us to pray on behalf of the great and the small. We see, included in the prayer, a prayer for the kingdom, prayer for His will to be done, yet we are also graciously allowed to approach God’s throne about our debts, debtors, daily bread and temptations we will face.

As the disciples are about to go live out the Sermon on the Mount, this template of how to pray ties in all the teachings of Jesus' sermon and makes it practical.

FOR TODAY

John 13:35 reminds us:

³⁵ Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples."

Galatians 5:22 reminds us of what we will produce as "hands-on" Christians:

²² But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against these things!

To continue vibrantly growing in Christ, to see your faith develop, and your will become entwined with the will of the Father, we must see prayer as something that is practical. Prayer is not an avenue to prove we are holy. Prayer is something to be cultivated, practiced, and examined.

As we develop our prayer life may we be excited about the possibilities for the Kingdom of God promised in James 5:16:

¹⁶ Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The earnest prayer of a righteous person has great power and produces wonderful results.

Let's pray...