

Sunday – August 7, 2011
Pastor - Rev. Walter W. Westbrook
Sermon – **Sermon on the Mount V**
The Lord's Prayer

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Scripture: Matthew 6:1-15

Jesus begins this section of the Sermon on the Mount by warning his followers to do nothing just for show. They should give alms - he's already told them to give to whomever begs from them - but they should not draw attention to it. They should certainly pray regularly - often, even. But, they should not pray in order to impress people who might be watching. There is nothing wrong with praying in public. But, we must also have a private, personal prayer life, as well.

Finally, our prayers do not need to be long and flowery. God is not impressed by lengthy prayers or beautiful phrases. So, when Jesus gives us an example of how best to pray - "Pray then in this way..." - he gives us what we have decided to call The Lord's Prayer.

The Lord's Prayer is the center of the Sermon on the Mount. It is placed in the middle of the Sermon, and it is the theological basis for the entire Sermon. John Wesley says it contains "all that we can reasonably or innocently pray for." He goes on to say that it contains "all that we can reasonably or innocently *desire*." Wesley says that this would be whatever promotes the glory of God, and whatever is needed or beneficial for us and everyone else. We should not desire what we cannot pray for.

The Lord's Prayer is a total prayer. It covers large and small issues, spiritual and material, inward and outward. Even 2,000 years later, it issues forth from cathedrals and obscure shanties. It is spoken by little children and by kings and queens. It is prayed at weddings and at deathbeds.

The Lord's Prayer opens by addressing God. "Our Father" is not a term for God that Jesus invented. The Jews were calling God "Father" for centuries before Christ. But, Jesus puts a much heavier emphasis on that image for God. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus calls God "Father" 15 times. In the course of the Gospels, Jesus uses many other images for God, but this may have been his favorite. By calling God "***Our*** Father," he indicates an

intimate, personal relationship that allows us all to be God's children, and thus, brothers and sisters to each other. It reminds us that God loves each and every one of us.

Then, Jesus gives three petitions, three imperatives:

1. For God's name to be "hallowed," God would be considered holy. It's intimate and direct, but not chummy. We are asking that we and everybody else recognize God for who He is, to properly honor, revere and love Him.

2. When we ask for God's Kingdom to come, what do we mean? We would submit ourselves to God's rule, while looking ahead to the Kingdom as we would experience in the next life. It comes to the person when that person repents and believes. It comes to earth when we *all* recognize God as the King of Kings. We need to ask ourselves what we are doing to help the Kingdom come.

3. When we do God's will, we are doing our part to bring about the Kingdom. How do we suppose God's will is done in heaven? It is done immediately, continually, perfectly, and with great enthusiasm and joy. That's what we need to try to be doing on earth, as well. We must do this ourselves before we demand that everybody do it.

Jesus follows these rather cosmic petitions with three more. But, these three are communal, asking things for us and our community.

1. Bread may seem like a pretty mundane thing. It's a part of everyday life, at least for most of us. It's not something huge like being cured of cancer, or for someone who has hit rock bottom, or for ruptured relationships. For most of us, daily bread is not something we even need God's help to get. We can get our daily food ourselves. So, why would Jesus include this?

First, when Jesus was teaching people to pray this, daily bread was not a given for most of his audience. But, today, Jesus gives us permission to go to God with the trivial matters of every day. What would our prayers be like if we were not allowed to include "the little things"? God welcomes our trifles. Things like being able to find a babysitter, or some peace and quiet, or patience with someone - these are some of our daily bread. And, let's not forget that we might be the way God chooses to answer someone's prayer for their daily bread, whatever that means to them.

2. Forgiveness - Is it a good idea to ask God to forgive us exactly as much as we are willing to forgive others? Honestly, don't we want more forgiveness than that?

God's love for us, and His willingness to forgive us, is enormous. It is bountiful. We could not exhaust God's love and forgiveness if we had a thousand lives. But, if we are not willing to forgive others, we clog up the system. It's not that God is forgiving us only as much as we are forgiving others, but we cannot recognize or accept God's forgiveness any more than we are willing to forgive others. Holding grudges just blocks God's forgiveness. God is raining down forgiveness, but it's bouncing off because we are not forgiving others. Sometimes it bounces off because we cannot forgive ourselves.

If we can remember that we sin every day, and ask forgiveness every day, perhaps we would find ways to ***be more forgiving*** every day. One very important reason to become more forgiving is that our forgiveness may bring someone closer to God, someone who has decided that they are unforgivable. Forgiving is like praying for our enemies. Perhaps, they will no longer be our enemies.

3. Deliver/Rescue us - God may test us. But, God isn't going to tempt us. God can help us resist temptation, but ultimately, it's up to us. The closer we are to God, the fewer temptations will be really tempting. But, and this is hard, the closer we are to God, the more devastating the temptations become. Little things won't tempt us. The things that tempt us will be more subtle, sneakier, less direct, and they will tempt us at a very basic level. God will help us with these, too, unless we think we are spiritually mature enough to handle them all ourselves. If we start thinking this way, we won't handle them. We won't even recognize them. We're doomed.

God is always ready to deliver us, to rescue us. But, if we don't ask, if we don't think we need God's help, we make it very difficult for God to give us a hand. The same humility that leads us to ask for God to give us our daily bread will be the same humility that brings us to God in times of trial.

A quick word on the doxology we say at the end of The Lord's Prayer - It's

not in the Bible. If you have ever been in a Catholic service and noticed that they don't include it, that's why. In ancient manuscripts, there are 10 different endings. The one we say, while ancient, is not as ancient as the New Testament.

Jesus follows The Lord's Prayer with one more reminder about, of all things, forgiveness. His reminder is, "Just Do It." Already, just in the Sermon on the Mount, he has blessed the peacemakers and merciful. He has strongly warned against anger. He denied the right to retaliation, saying, instead, to turn the other cheek. There will be more to follow. I hate to hammer too hard on the need to be forgiving people, but if Jesus does it, I figure I'd better do it too.