

2023 Theme - Focus On What Matters
Sermon Series - Focus on Righteousness
Sermon Title - Prayer Under the Microscope (part 2)
Sermon Text - Matthew 6:9-10
Sermon Presenter - Pastor Larry

Introduction:

The second verse of that song says so much about prayer! Listen...

"I love Your voice, You have led me through the fire, In darkest nights, You are close like no other. I've known You as a father, I've known You as a friend. I have lived in the goodness of God"

Here's the question: Do you love to hear His voice? Do you long to experience the reality, the beauty, and the power of Almighty God in prayer? I can tell you without a doubt that God wants to connect with you in prayer. Prayer is a conversation, a conversation between you and the God who created you. Let's pray and ask God to help us understand and comprehend more deeply what prayer is all about! Pray...

"Father God, I come before You this morning to ask You to please teach through me in a way that will help folks learn the beauty and power of having a conversation with You. Thanks for allowing us to talk to You! What a privilege! What an honor! What a comfort! What a help! As we examine Your teaching on prayer let us be inspired by Your Holy Spirit to engage more often in speaking Your Name and calling on Your Name, and then listening to Your voice as You speak by Your Spirit and through Your Word to our needy hearts! I love You and thank You for hearing this prayer! In Jesus Name, amen!"

Last week we talked about how God has been working in amazing ways to direct our church to focus on prayer! At the end of July our women will be having a night of prayer here at the church! Watch for the announcement and put it on your calendars! Last week we put prayer under the microscope and looked at the motive of prayer, the method of prayer, and the measure of prayer. We discovered that the greatest and most noble motive for prayer is the desire to have a relationship with our Creator God! We discovered that the method of prayer is not as important as it is that we pray, and we discovered that we can pray anywhere we are at any time. We also learned that the ability to pray anywhere is developed in those secret places and times of being alone with God. Why? Because in those quiet times alone with God we learn to recognize and listen to the still, small voice of God's Holy Spirit! We discovered that the length of our prayers and the exact verbiage is not as important as our awareness of God's attentiveness to our prayers and our acknowledging that He knows what we need before we even ask Him. Jesus was not saying that we don't cry out to God or that we don't repeat a request to God, but that God doesn't require that we beg.

And it's not that we don't plead our case before God, but we must know and remember that God is not like an unjust judge who simply grants a hearing because he is tired of being bothered, rather God loves for us to come to Him, to bend His ear, to share our burdens, our needs, our heart's desires, yes and even our wants. But we must remember that God has our best interest at heart! And we must never forget that we don't always know what we really need and sometimes what we think we need or what we think we want is not at all what is best for us. Therefore, the Makeup of our prayers is extremely important. So let's put prayer back under the microscope and discover what Jesus had to say about...

The Makeup of Prayer

Matthew 6:9a "This, then, is how you should pray:

Okay, let's stop right there. Jesus states, "this then, is how you should pray:" Many of you know this as the Lord's Prayer! And while Jesus taught this prayer, it is more a model prayer than a personal prayer prayed by Jesus. There are other personal prayers of Jesus found in Scripture like the very personal prayer of our Lord in John 17 where He prays for Himself, His disciples and then for all believers. The prayer we're examining today, in the sermon on the mount, is a model prayer which gives us the makeup, and the framework, for prayer. It doesn't include every aspect of prayer that we find in the Bible, but it has all of the major components. And as we put prayer back under the microscope we find that one of the major components, or ingredients in the makeup of prayer is...

Faith

Matthew 6:9a "This, then, is how you should pray: " 'Our Father in heaven...

When Jesus says we are to pray to our Father in heaven, we must understand this implies faith. "Our Father in heaven." If you don't believe God exists then it's obvious you won't pray to Him. Prayer cannot exist without faith and faith dies without prayer. It is a symbiotic relationship. E.M. Bounds, who wrote volumes on the subject of prayer, had this to say...

"In any study of the principle and procedure of prayer, of its activities and enterprises, first place, must, of necessity, be given to faith. It is the initial quality in the heart of any man who essays to talk to the unseen. He must, out of sheer helplessness, stretch forth hands of faith. He must believe, where he cannot prove. When faith ceases to pray, it ceases to live."

God's Word tells us this about faith in many places but listen to what we find in 2 Corinthians 5:7...

2 Corinthians 5:7 We live by faith, not by sight.

And then in Hebrews 11:1 we read...

Hebrews 11:1 Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.

But here's a beautiful thing. As we walk by faith, we begin to see things we were once blinded to! In prayer we begin to see God in all of His righteousness, majesty and glory! You see, faith is the doorway into a relationship with God. Faith is believing and God's Word says clearly...

Hebrews 11:6 And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.

So if you were looking at the table of contents in a book on prayer, the first chapter should be on faith. The reason? Believing that God exists and wants to talk with you is the first step in having an effective prayer life. I found the following story in one of my old sermons on prayer. I looked but couldn't find my original source. Back in the early part of the 20th Century there was a Scots-Canadian by the name of Rab Lindsey! He was raised on a farm by very devout Christian parents. He became a well respected surgeon in a San Francisco Veterans hospital. He prayed before he did surgery. One of his patients asked him to tell him why. He shared that He was the oldest of nine children. The family saved every penny they could so he could go to college and study to be a doctor and come back to their backwoods community and be a doctor. They had saved 100.44. He got 100. He ended up being a star student. But here's what happened. He said:

"In college, finding I could stay near the top in all of my classes, I soon became self-assured--even cocky. I had visions of a medical practice among the wealthy in some large city--preferably, New York. I even began calling my father's farm, 'Our country place.' By the end of the fourth year, my ego'd become so inflated that I no longer felt the need of God's help. Later in medical school, after one of my professors told me I was destined to be a great surgeon, I began thinking of myself as an atheist. During discussions with student friends, I'd hold forth at great length on superstitious religious beliefs.' Belief in God was a fine thing for the timid, the ignorant and the inept, I maintained, but the strong man--the deep man--the thinking man--that man was his own god. And so it was throughout my internship. And so it was during my first years of practice." (He didn't go back home.)

He continued his story..."Success came quickly, for I was a good surgeon. Two years followed in which almost everything I undertook turned out right. Operations that had seemed hopeless, resulted in cures...I felt self-assured--even smug. Then shortly after the beginning of my third year of practice came a series of shocks. In one week, I lost two patients because of unforeseen complications. The following week, I looked up from my desk one afternoon and saw what I thought for a moment must be a ghost--a man named Chapman. Nine months earlier, I'd told Chapman that he had no chance to live. I'd said to him kindly:

'Your malignancy has gone too far. Chapman. Surgery can't help you--nothing can help you.' 'How long do I have, Doctor?' he'd asked. 'Three months, Chapman--four at the most,' I'd answered. And there was Chapman standing in front of me nine months later--obviously a well man. My hands trembled. Chapman grinned. 'Fooled you, Doctor! Thought you should know

that there was help for me.' Mr. Chapman then shared with this atheist doctor his testimony of how God had healed him.

(Let me interrupt the story for just a moment! I think we all know in this room that God sometimes works through the surgeon's hands to heal, and sometimes He does things that defy scientific and medical understanding. And sometimes God chooses not to heal in this world, but He promises to never leave or forsake those who trust in Him, and He will give the health and the strength needed for a person to live long enough to accomplish their purpose in life, and then in God's perfect timing He will give them a beautiful grace to make the transition to their eternal home in glory and receive their complete and final healing! Thank You Lord.)

But here's what happened in our story. The atheist doctor was baffled by the guy's testimony. He took some time off and went on a search for some answers. He said: "Back in America, I questioned religious leaders of all denominations, ministers, rabbis, priests...I also discussed prayer with several highly competent physicians and surgeons, and learned with something of a shock that most combined prayer with their medical and their surgical techniques. I became more and more troubled...One day while discussing my problem with Dr. Clyde Randolph, a minister versed in philosophy and literature, I burst out,

'After all, is it so strange that I should have denied the existence of God when so many great scientists and philosophers have been atheists?' "Dr. Randolph looked a bit surprised, and said: 'To which ones are you referring?'

"I thought for a moment, then said, 'I'm not certain, but it seems to me that Einstein. . .' I paused questioningly. "'go on,' Dr. Randolph said.

"Well, Einstein, Voltaire, Spinoza, the early Greeks, the psychologists...I can't remember all of them, but I've heard, and I've read...'

"Do you read a lot?'

"I've never had time to read very much besides medicine, but it seems to me that if great thinkers couldn't believe...'

Dr. Randolph interrupted him...

"You should begin to do some serious reading, Dr. Lindsey,' he said, 'because you don't really know what you're talking about. Einstein, Spinoza, Voltaire, and many of the Greeks, and many psychologists, believed in God, and said so. Einstein--the scientist who reached farther into the stretches of the universe than any other man who ever lived--summed up his life's work by saying that his researches had led him to the belief that all was created and controlled by a Supreme Being. He called that Supreme Being "God," for in discussing the orderliness of universal laws, Einstein wrote that he did not believe that God played dice with the universe. "Voltaire, in *La Henriada*,' Dr. Randolph went on, 'said: "God has made thee to love Him..."

But read for yourself, Lindsey. And stop thinking of yourself as a great man. Instead, think of yourself as God's man.'

And after hearing several other examples of those who were once agnostic, this young doctor said this...

"And so, on my knees, I abandoned immature thinking--I realized and acknowledged that whatever talents and capacities I had, came from God. I undertook to live thereafter not as my own man, but as God's man. "I was now eager to resume practice, and would have done so the following day except for a telegram which arrived from my brother, Donald:

"Doctor says Mother has only a few days to live. Come quickly."

He ended up having to do surgery on his own mother. He said...

"I silently cried to God for steadiness and quick perception...It was a long, difficult operation--one that presented several intricate problems--surgery that would have resulted fatally had I made a single mistake. Yet it went smoothly--perfectly. Never before had I worked with such skill and assurance...I operated on her, and God healed her! And that's the way it's been ever since--I operate on them, and God heals them."

So now we know why that successful surgeon prayed before all of his operations. But he had to come to a place of belief! Without faith prayer has no rationale. Now, if you don't have much faith, don't worry about that. It only takes a mustard seed to move a mountain, and God wants us to be honest about our doubts. He won't get mad at you, He will help you. In fact, I'm going to help you out a little bit on this question of does God really love you even if you are struggling with having faith in God. Jesus said this in the Gospel of John...

John 3:16 "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

John 3:17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.

So Jesus didn't come to condemn you, but to save you. He has chosen to love you and to save you, but you have to respond by believing. So let me encourage you to take a small step of faith even if you don't know for sure if this God thing is real or not. Just give Jesus a chance! Let Him know that you're open and willing to explore a relationship with Him and ask Him, in prayer, to help you with your unbelief. And to go along with John 3:16 & 17 there's Ephesians 3:16-19...

Ephesians 3:16 I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being,

Ephesians 3:17 so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love,

Ephesians 3:18 may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ,

Ephesians 3:19 and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

When you realize that the God of the Universe has chosen to love you and desires to have a personal relationship with you, that should motivate you and move you to pray! And when you do you will begin to glimpse God in all of His glory, His majesty, His holiness, and you will begin experiencing His boundless love and amazing grace! And when you experience His love and grace, the makeup of your prayer will naturally move to praise and worship! Jesus said...

Matthew 6:9 "This, then, is how you should pray: " 'Our Father in heaven, Hallowed be Your Name!

Praise

Hallowed be Your Name! The word Hallow means...

Hallow: To make holy, to set apart for holy use: to revere!

This is why one of the Ten Commandments tells us that we never take the name of the Lord in vain. We are to revere His name, respect His name, cherish His name, and honor His name. We do this when we refuse to use the Name of the Lord in vain but choose to praise the Name of the Lord! In fact the meaning of the word praise is a Latin word that means value or price!

Praise: From a Latin word meaning "Value" or "Price"

When we praise God we are proclaiming His worth, His merit, His glory, His greatness, His love, His mercy, His forgiveness, His provision, and His great power which He chooses to use on our behalf! The Psalmist certainly understood what it meant to Hallow and to Praise the Name of our God! Let me give you a few examples...

Psalm 7:17 I will give thanks to the LORD because of his righteousness and will sing praise to the name of the LORD Most High.

Psalm 20:7 Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the LORD our God.

Psalm 113:1 Praise the LORD. Praise the LORD, you his servants; praise the name of the LORD.

Psalm 113:2 Let the name of the LORD be praised, both now and forevermore.

Psalm 113:3 From the rising of the sun to the place where it sets, the name of the LORD is to be praised.

Psalm 113:4 The LORD is exalted over all the nations, his glory above the heavens.

Psalm 113:5 Who is like the LORD our God, the One who sits enthroned on high,

Psalm 113:6 who stoops down to look on the heavens and the earth?

Psalm 113:7 He raises the poor from the dust and lifts the needy from the ash heap;

Psalm 113:8 he seats them with princes, with the princes of his people.

Can you see why He is to be praised and honored? He cares about the poor and the needy. And here's the thing, whether you are poor or rich, when it comes to our wretched sin condition we are all needy! Paul put it this way in Romans...

Romans 3:21 But now apart from the law the righteousness of God has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify.

Romans 3:22 This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference between Jew and Gentile,

Romans 3:23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

Romans 3:24 and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.

Romans 3:25 God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of his blood—to be received by faith...

Think about it: justified freely by His grace! Redeemed by Christ Jesus because God presented Him as a sacrifice of atonement for my guilt and shame! And all of this is through faith in His Blood that was shed on the Old Rugged Cross! And when I realize these truths how can I not hallow His name? How can I not praise His Name and ascribe the highest value to His Name?

There was an old gospel song written by Gorden Jensen that I used to sing. Let me read the lyrics to you and I hope you will understand why our praying should always contain praise for our God! Listen to these words...

"I was guilty with nothing to say and they were coming to take me away
When a voice from Heaven was heard that said 'Let him go and take Me instead'

Oh I should have been crucified, And I should have suffered and died. I should have hung on
the cross in disgrace, But Jesus, God's Son, took my place!

That crowns of thorns, the spear in His side, And the pain, it should have been mine
Those rusty nails were meant for me Yet Christ took them and let me go free

Oh I should have been crucified, And I should have suffered and died
I should have hung on the cross in disgrace, but Jesus, God's Son, took my place"

And listen to the words of this song which will someday be sung in heaven. It's about the One who was crucified for you and me, Revelation 5:9. Andrew Belmore read this last week. It's from one of my favorite passages in all of the Bible...

Revelation 5:9 And they sang a new song: "You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation.

As we are nearing the end of our time for today, there's a couple of things that go hand in hand that this message would not be complete without. For starters there's something closely related to faith, and depends on faith, but if used will take faith to the highest levels of belief. It is...

Trust

Jesus continues His discourse on prayer in His sermon on the mount...

Matthew 6:9 "This, then, is how you should pray: " 'Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,

Matthew 6:10 your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Are we willing to not only believe and have faith in God, but are we willing to trust Him with our very lives? With the details of our lives? With the plans of our lives? With the future of our lives? You see, faith is believing God can do something, and trust is believing God will do something! Trust is letting God's will be done in your life! Trust is saying I want God's will in my life as it is in heaven. You could apply that by replacing the word earth with where you live.

"Your will be done in my family, my work place, my school, my town, my everywhere!

I think we would all admit that placing our trust in the Lord is not always an easy thing. Trusting Him with our daily decisions, our goals in life, our personal relationships, our finances, our attitudes, our actions, and even our physical health is something we all need to grow in. Moving from faith, believing God can, to trust, believing God will, is so necessary!! What do the words "your kingdom come" have to do with trust? It has everything to do with trust. You see, the Kingdom of God or as Matthew would say, the Kingdom of Heaven, are both New Testament phrases to describe any place where God rules or has Kingly authority. Of course we all know that ultimately God rules everywhere, but He has chosen to give us rights of refusal. You see, someday every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, but in this life, in this world, we have been given the choice of trusting God to rule over our hearts and lives or we can reject Him and live as our own lord, which I do not recommend, because I've been there, done that, and it's no fun! The fact that we have a choice is why we are to pray for God's Kingdom to come. While God rules the universe, His greatest desire is to be allowed to set up His Kingdom in your heart and life. In fact the desire of God to set up His kingdom in people's lives was the central theme of much of Jesus' preaching. It was one of the very first things Jesus preached as He started His ministry. Listen...

Mark 1:14 After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God.

Mark 1:15 "The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!"

Mark 1:16 As Jesus walked beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen.

Mark 1:17 "Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will send you out to fish for people."

Mark 1:18 At once they left their nets and followed him.

Jesus said the Kingdom of God was near because all of the prophecies of the Old Testament which were to be fulfilled in The coming Messiah were being fulfilled in Jesus and He was going to make a way, through His life and death, for people to be able to be made right with God. But He made it clear that they had to choose to repent and believe! How amazing is it that the God of the Universe has given us the power to choose and that His heartbeat is for us to allow Him into our lives so He can be our king! That in itself should tell you what kind of King He is and that He can be trusted! And why is this so important? The reason is this: If we think He is an evil, mean spirited, selfish, and vindictive God motivated by a desire to simply show us how powerful He is, then we won't trust Him and we'll certainly not want His kingdom to come! But Jesus had come to this earth to show us the heart of the Father and He did that by His own actions. Check this out...

Mark 10:42 Jesus called them together and said, "You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them.

Mark 10:43 Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant,

Mark 10:44 and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all.

Mark 10:45 For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

Once again, Jesus is showing the difference between God and man. He tells them to think about how men love to rule over people and exercise power over them for the sake of exercising power over them and showing off their great strength. But Jesus states emphatically this is not the way it works in God's Kingdom and then speaks of the sacrifice He will later make on the cross.

"...and to give His life as a ransom for many." One of my favorite professors in Seminary, Dr. Fisher Humphreys put it this way in the Holman Bible Dictionary...

"In His preaching Jesus regularly invited people to enter the kingdom of God, that is, to open their lives to the ruling of God. It is important to notice whom He invited. He invited everyone. That is the great surprise. He did not restrict the invitation to the respectable people, or the religious, or the wealthy or powerful...(In Jesus' day wealth and power were often thought to be signs of God's blessing) Jesus included everyone without distinction. He spoke of God sending His servants out to highways and hedges to urge people to come into the kingdom...In brief, God is very gracious and loving toward all people, and His kingdom is offered to everyone."

Oh and by the way, God does not give out memberships to the kingdom based on how good you are! People who think they're good enough are full of just enough pride to keep them outside the Kingdom of God. Listen to what Jesus told the prideful religious leaders who had questioned His authority...

Matthew 21:31b...Jesus said to them, "Truly I tell you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you.

Matthew 21:32 For John came to you to show you the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes did. And even after you saw this, you did not repent and believe him.

What made the difference? The religious leaders could talk religion, but they were not willing to trust their hearts to the rule of God! They chose instead to use their positions of wealth and power for their own pleasure. The tax collectors and prostitutes did some terrible things, but when confronted with their sin, they repented and put their trust in God and became citizens of the Kingdom of God! The Pharisees may have been willing to mouth the words, "Your kingdom come," because they thought that went hand in hand with Israel being a world power again and that would bring them more opportunities to advance their own agendas. But they had a real problem with the last item for today on the Makeup of prayer...

Submission

Matthew 6:9 "This, then, is how you should pray: " 'Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,
Matthew 6:10 your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

When you live in a kingdom where there is a ruler, there has to be submission or there really is no ruler, so Jesus follows the words "Your kingdom come," with "Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven!" And this is where it all fell apart for the Pharisees and religious rulers. They didn't want God's will to be done, they wanted their will to be done. Now you know why they crucified Jesus! His ideas threatened their positions of power. Now what I'm going to say next may be a little hard to swallow, but how many times have we been hesitant to pray the model prayer and really mean it, because we knew if we asked God's Kingdom to come then we would have to submit to His will and we were afraid that might not match with our plans, our agendas, our goals, our wants and desires? But here's what we must understand: If we really trust God's heart and His motives, then we must believe His plans, His agendas, His goals, His wants and desires, and His ultimate purpose for our lives is far superior than anything we could ever conceive or conjure up! In order to submit to God's will we must trust His heart. Remember the old hymn I surrender all written in 1896 by Judson W. Van DeVenter?

All to Jesus I surrender, All to Him I freely give;
I will ever love and trust Him, In His presence daily live.

I surrender all, I surrender all; All to Thee, my blessed Savior, I surrender all.

All to Jesus I surrender, Humbly at His feet I bow;
Worldly pleasures all forsaken, Take me, Jesus, take me now.

I surrender all, I surrender all; All to Thee, my blessed Savior, I surrender all.

Isaiah had spoken of this kind of trust and submission to the Israelites way back in the Old Testament. And remember Isaiah was one of the prophets who spoke so clearly of the coming Messiah. God wanted to establish His kingdom beginning with the people of Israel and then out to the whole world. How do I know? Listen to the prophet's words...

Isaiah 12:2 Surely God is my salvation; I will trust and not be afraid. The LORD, the LORD himself, is my strength and my defense; he has become my salvation.”

Isaiah 12:3 With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation.

Isaiah 12:4 In that day you will say: “Give praise to the LORD, proclaim his name; make known among the nations what he has done, and proclaim that his name is exalted.

Isaiah 12:5 Sing to the LORD, for he has done glorious things; let this be known to all the world.

Isaiah 12:6 Shout aloud and sing for joy, people of Zion, for great is the Holy One of Israel among you.”

When you have this level of trust in God it's not hard to submit to His will because you begin to know that His will is superior to yours but this kind of submission requires humility! Again, I know it's not easy to surrender all! I'm not ignorant of the daily spiritual battles that take place between our human pride and its desires and the ever-present calling of the Holy Spirit for us to find pleasure in a higher purpose. And yes The Holy Spirit is not against pleasure. He doesn't want us to be miserable, but He knows the kinds of pleasures that truly satisfy the soul and the kinds that will destroy the soul! Satan wants you to believe that if you submit to God and His will then you will be the most miserable human being that ever lived. Satan wants you to believe that God's way is boring, no fun, un-rewarding, and ridiculous. But the truth is, when you begin living in God's Kingdom and allowing Jesus to not only be your Savior, but allowing Him to be your Lord, you will discover the greatest peace, satisfaction, meaning, purpose, joy and love there is to be found even in the midst of the most awful struggles and hardships this world can throw your way! Why? Because as Isaiah said...

Isaiah 26:3 You will keep in perfect peace him whose mind is steadfast, because he trusts in you.

Isaiah 26:4 Trust in the LORD forever, for the LORD, the LORD, is the Rock eternal.

Let's pray!