“APPROACHING THE KING”

Scripture: Matthew 6:5-15.

This morning we will be continuing our study of the Sermon on the Mount, the first recorded sermon of Jesus. We will be looking at what Jesus had to say about prayer in Matthew Chapter 6. Before getting started ask for a few volunteers to share a brief personal testimony about prayer…anything at all about an experience they have had with prayer.

In the first part of Matthew Chapter 6 prayer is discussed along with two other spiritual disciplines – giving and fasting. They are used as examples of things we do to God and which are, therefore, acts of worship. Jesus teaches His disciples that motive is everything. If we do something, no matter how good it is, in order to be seen and admired by others then we are doing it for the wrong reason. Jesus uses the Pharisees of His day as examples of people who perform religious acts for the wrong reasons. He calls them “the hypocrites” – people who are pretending to be something they are not. In verse 2 He says, “Thus, when you give to the needy, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward.” In verse 5 Jesus says, “And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward.” In verse 16 our Lord says, “And when you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward.” Instead, in all three cases – in your giving, your praying and your fasting – do them in secret “and your Father (speaking of God the Father) who sees you in secret will reward you.” Jesus’ lesson does not just apply to giving, prayer and fasting but to any activity we do unto the Lord. I believe it extends to teaching, preaching, singing, serving – all aspects of our church and religious life. We need to examine why we do what we do.

It is in the middle of this broader discussion that Jesus gives us what has been called the Lord’s Prayer or the Disciple’s Prayer or the Model Prayer. And that will be our focus this morning as we look at verses 5 through 15.

So, let’s talk about prayer. Is prayer merely a religious act, a spiritual discipline, that we perform? No, there must be more to it than that. Why should we pray (if God’s will is ultimately going to be accomplished then why bother praying)? The scriptures instruct us to pray. For example, 1 Thess 5:17: “Pray without ceasing.” 2 Corinthians 1:11: “You also must help us by prayer, so that many will give thanks on our behalf for the blessing granted us through the prayers of many.” James 5:16: “Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working.” The Bible clearly teaches us that we ought to pray. But is it merely a religious duty? No it is obviously more than that.

Throughout the Bible we see men and women praying to God in all kinds of circumstances – people like (in alphabetical order) Abraham, Asa, Cornelius, Daniel, David, Elijah, Elisha, Ezra, Gideon, Habakkuk, Hannah, Hezekiah, Isaac, Jabez, Jacob, Jehoahaz, Jehoshaphat, Jeremiah, Job, Jonah, Joshua… and on the list goes – I just got to the J’s!! So a lot of people in the Bible prayed to God.

And of course there is the Lord Jesus Himself, our ultimate example, who prayed constantly. Consider the following: in Luke 3:21 when Jesus is being baptized and the Holy Spirit descends on Him like a dove…He is praying. In Mark 1:35 early in the morning Jesus gets alone and prays. In Luke 6:12 Jesus goes up to the mountain and prays all night. In Luke 9:28 Jesus and His disciples go up to the Mount of Transfiguration with the sole purpose of praying. In Luke 10:21 before Jesus commissions the 70, He prays. In John 11:42 before Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead, He prays. In John 17:21 when Jesus is in the upper room with His disciples before the last supper, He prays to His Father. In Luke 22:41 Jesus prays in the Garden of Gethsemane. In Luke 23:34 after being nailed to the cross, Jesus prays. And just before He dies in Luke 23:46, Jesus prays. Prayer was obviously a very important part of Jesus’ life while He was on this earth.

So at the very heart of prayer is a personal relationship with God. Just like any human relationship I have involves me communicating with them in order to get to know them better, so too my relationship with God involves me communicating with Him in order to know Him. And I do that through prayer. The problem is this: unlike my human relationships, there is not a dialogue back and forth. He does not respond back to me in an audible voice. God is spirit and so He communicates to us through the Holy Spirit and through His inspired Word. So what do we pray about? What do we talk to God about? I made a long list in preparation for this lesson and came to the conclusion that we pray about almost everything!

So how do we pray? Jesus gives us His insight into how to pray. He wants us, His followers, like Himself, to be able to communicate effectively with the Father. And it starts by being real, by being completely honest with God, not hypocritical. All that said by way of background as we look at Jesus’ words beginning in verse 5…

READ Matthew 6:5-8. When we pray we must realize we have an audience of one and that is the Lord God Himself. We come humbly and reverently before the God of the universe. But we also, as Hebrews 4:16 reminds us, “with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace in time of need.” Prayer is a deeply personal conversation with God. Jesus teaches here that it should be done in secret, in private.

Jesus’ example of not heaping up empty phrases as the Gentiles do (what some translations call “meaningless repetition”) goes back to pagan practices in His day. If you know anything about the various religions around the world you know that this goes on even today. Many of the false religions practiced repetitive prayers just to be sure their gods heard them. Jesus reassures us that our God, the one True God, DOES HEAR US. And not only does He hear us, but He knows what we need.

READ Matthew 6:9. “Pray like this” does not mean use these exact same words every time. Jesus just addressed this in the previous verse. Rather Jesus teaches us that our prayers should contain some basic elements. As we will see, our prayers should include first and foremost the worship and adoration of God, seeking and committing ourselves to do God’s will, and petition for needs (for others and for ourselves).

Here in verse 9 Jesus points out how prayer involves the worship of God. “Our father in heaven” Jesus tells us that if we are indeed His children then God is our Father. He is a personal God who loves us. “Father” recognizes God’s authority over us. He is to be obeyed. But we can fully trust Him because His hands are surer and steadier than ours. His heart is more loving than ours. His mind is wiser than ours. So, in our prayers we go to a God who is our Father, our loving Father. And we can go with a sense of intimacy. We can go with boldness and confidence as a child would go to his father. We can go to Him without fear.

Even though God is everywhere (God is spirit and one of His divine attributes is that He is omni-present) His domain, His throne, is in heaven. Jesus told His disciples in John 20:17, “I am ascending to My Father.” And then Jesus shortly thereafter ascended back into heaven.

“Hallowed be your name” speaks to the holiness of God. “Hallowed” means set apart as sacred, or holy. God’s name represents His character. He is holy. His name is to be set apart as sacred. He is to be honored and glorified. Jesus teaches us that as we begin our time in prayer we should meditate on who God is and worship Him. We should begin our prayers by talking to God about Him and acknowledging who He is. We start our prayers out by worshipping Him. Psalm 34:3 says, “Oh, magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt His name together.”

READ Matthew 6:10. “Your kingdom come” refers to the kingdom of heaven. It is a heavenly realm, an eternal kingdom ruled by The King – God Himself. It has two aspects – a present reality where the kingdom is comprised of the Godhead, the angels, the heavenly host, and all the saints throughout history including those of us here on earth living today who have placed our faith in Christ and are indwelt by the Holy Spirit. But the kingdom also has a future aspect – His kingdom will come to earth in the millennium. When Christ returns after the church age and sets up His kingdom on this earth and rules as King and Judge (Rev 20). After that His kingdom will fill the universe in the new heaven and the new earth (Rev 21-22). This prayer focuses on God’s ultimate plan to save all of His elect and usher in the millennial and eternal kingdom. Putting this part of the prayer into my own words it might sound like this: “God, I want to be on board with everything You are doing to build Your eternal kingdom. I put aside my own plans and agenda to focus on Yours and what really matters in the grand scheme of eternity.”

“Your will be done…” Again the focus here is on what God wants for us as being more important than what we want for ourselves. “God, make my plans line up perfectly with Your plans.” As Jesus prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane: “Yet not My will, but Thine be done.” (Luke 22:42)

“On earth as it is in heaven.” Would it come as a surprise to you that God’s will is done perfectly in heaven, but not on earth? Sin is not God’s will. For the time being God has allowed Satan to be the ruler of this world, to have some control. Job 1:7 and 2:2 tell us that Satan goes “to and fro on the earth” and walks “up and down on it.” First Peter 5:8 warns us that “Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.” The difference is the present of Satan and evil on this earth. Satan deceives people and desires to thwart God’s plans. Even in the lives of Christians, Satan tries to do whatever he can to discourage us, to distract us and to render us useless for God. So Jesus encourages us, as part of our prayers, to ask God that His will be done here on earth, in our lives today and now.

Well, we are about halfway through our prayer and we haven’t even asked God for anything about ourselves or other people yet. READ Matthew 6:11. It is perfectly OK to ask God to meet our needs – that could be food, clothes, a job, a home or whatever. Like I said before we can pray for just about anything. Jesus teaches us here to trust God to supply our needs one day at a time. Philippians 4:6 says, “Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.”

READ Matthew 6:12. This is a spiritual request. Jesus teaches that we need to ask God for forgiveness. The Greek word used for debts refers to a moral and spiritual debt incurred by sin. “As we also have forgiven our debtors” is explained in verses 14 and 15 READ Matthew 6:14-15. Here’s the bottom line and it hits hard for some of us: forgiven people ought to be forgiving people. Christians should be the most forgiving people of all because of all we’ve been forgiven of. Let me say this with all love. Sometimes the hardest person to forgive is yourself. You need to let go of your guilt and give it over to God. Give yourself a break and let God do a mighty work in your life. Quit being so hard on yourself. I tend to be a perfectionist and am generally my harshest critic, so this is an area I struggle with constantly.

READ Matthew 6:13. James 1:13 teaches us that God does not tempt us. However, God does allow testing and trials to come our way for a divine purpose, which is, to strengthen our faith in Him. I believe that Jesus is teaching here that part of our prayer life is to ask God to help us to avoid the snares of Satan, to help us to be watchful and alert. We should recognize our own weakness in particular areas of sin. We need to ask God in advance to help us to recognize and then be able to overcome the temptations that come our way. First Corinthians 10:13 tells us: “No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man (you are not the only one). God is faithful, and He will not let you to be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation He will also provide the way of escape, that you will be able to endure it.”

When we pray we partner with God in the battles we are facing – against sin, addiction, problems, fears, anxieties, depression, relationships, whatever. God knows our weaknesses and He wants to strengthen us. He wants us to be victorious in our Christian walk.

So is prayer important? It’s absolutely vital. Close with quotes.