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TRINITY PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

JULY 28, 2019

EPHESIANS 3:13-21

LUKE 11:1-13

“HOW SHALL WE PRAY?”

*The main purpose of this sermon is to explore the points of prayer, the posture in prayer, and the power of grace in prayer. Jesus is not giving us rote instructions but teaching us the most important aspect of prayer is apprehending the grace of God*.

Three things we’ll look at this morning regarding how Jesus taught his disciples to pray:

>The Points of Prayer (verse 2b-4)

>The Posture in Prayer (verses 5-10)

>The Power of Grace in Prayer (verses 11-13)

**Points of Prayer (Verses 2b-4)**

Summer is almost over. Many of you have traveled. And you when going anywhere, we know that getting going in the right direction determines if you are going to reach your destination. Let me give you an example.

>I visited my brother in college, and when it was time to leave my brother gave me directions. And before I was even out of town, I made a wrong turn. Now, that’s not a big deal. I was in the area of where I was supposed to be going, but I didn’t catch the mistake. And so, an hour and a half later of driving in the wrong direction meant that I was really far from where I supposed to be. All because I got started in the wrong direction.

Getting going in the right direction matters for prayer. How does Jesus say we should start? “Father, hallowed be your name.” And remember, Jesus isn’t just giving us words to repeat. He’s telling us about the essence of prayer. What it’s all about. He’s getting to the heart of the matter. So, what is Jesus telling us through these opening words?

>*Father*. First, Jesus tells us to pray “Father.” Why? Because Jesus knows a quick way to suck the life out of prayer is to make it abstract, to make it mechanical and impersonal. Think about all the conversations you have throughout your day. Which conversations are the most personal and honest and intimate? The answer is obvious. It’s the conversations you have at home when your guard is down and you’re around the people who know you best. Who know your flaws and problems, but here’s the key, who love you the most.

You see, prayer is household language. And what gets praying going in the right direction isn’t having all your words tightly put together but remembering *who* you are speaking to. The God who created you and knows everything about you and loves you better than anyone else.

>*Hallowed be your name*. But what about the next part? Hallowed be your name. How does that set us in the right path? Hallowed doesn’t seem like a very helpful word. Sounds like a word you’d only hear at church and from a minister. What does it mean?

>Well, when something is “hallowed” it means it is set apart, so that it may be revered. We set things apart so we can see their value and admire them. Think about the fancy silverware and plates you have at home. The purpose in setting something apart is that it’s special. It has an importance beyond ordinary things.

>Jesus is telling us that prayer is set in the right direction when our most central request, the thing our hearts want most of all, is that God would set Himself apart as the most valuable and important person and reality in our lives. It’s not that we are praying that God be set apart like something in a museum, but that God would be *set up* in the most central place in our hearts.

>And here’s why this is so practical and important. Probably the best and certainly the most subtle way to ruin your life is to take a good thing, like your spouse or kids or career, and make it the center of your universe. But that’s what our hearts like to do. Take good things and make them *the* ultimate thing.

>And the reason this petition is first is because it determines everything else. It determines life itself. Just think about it. If God isn’t the ultimate person in your life, you won’t desire His Kingdom. And if God isn’t your complete and utter satisfaction and joy, you’ll never be content with simple, daily provisions. You’ll think you never have enough. All you’ll see is what others have and what you don’t.

>Think about how this relates to your sin. If God isn’t at the center, that means you’ll evaluate yourself, not against God’s standard and law, but against your own. And when you do that, you’ll always be able to find a way to make yourself not look quite so bad. Your sins will always be a little less and not quite so bad compared to everyone else. But if God is most important to you, you’ll long for forgiveness. You’ll be able to see how much your life hasn’t lived up to God’s glory. And you won’t be able to pretend you’re any better or more deserving than anyone else. And that’s the condition for being able to forgive and act with mercy.

>And when God is the most supreme person in your life, your aim will be to do nothing that displeases God. That’s why you’ll pray for protection and guidance, because you know there are many things that could harm your relationship with Him.

What Jesus tells us in these verses is that the point of prayer is that our relationship with God would become more and more central. That it would be the relationship that shapes everything else! That’s why prayer can never be abstract. Prayer is about growing in a loving, faithful relationship with God, so everything we do and think and say would show ourselves and everyone else who we love most and treasure above all other things.

**Posture in Prayer (Verses 5-10)**

And the way Jesus encourages us to pray is by giving us a parable about the posture we should take in prayer.

Jesus starts by saying, “Suppose one of you has a friend, and you go to him at midnight, and say to him, ‘Friend, lend me three loaves of bread; for a friend of mine has arrived, and I have nothing to set before him.’”

>Here’s what Jesus listeners would have been thinking. “Of course, this friend would help a friend help a friend. That’s Hospitality 101.”

>The shocking thing about the parable isn’t that a friend would show up at a friend’s door at midnight asking for help. The shocking thing is that the friend would be so cold to turn him away. That would have appalled Jesus’ listeners.

>And verse 8 is the key to the parable. Why does the man get up? Two thoughts from commentators.

>Some think it is because the friend at the door was persistent. Maybe he was loud and kept up his request.

>But others argue, and I think more persuasively, that “persistence” isn’t the best way to translate the word there. They argue the word is closer to something like “shamelessness.” And that would mean the man gets up because *he* doesn’t want to be shamed the next day. The word describes the man inside the home. He doesn’t want folks at the Coffee Cup the next morning talking about what a jerk he is.

>Let me give you an example of this. I took piano when I was a kid. But I wasn’t interested in piano, and I certainly didn’t love it. But I would practice, some. I would come in from shooting hoops or something else and practice just enough. Why? So, I wouldn’t be totally embarrassed during my lesson.

>That’s a horrible motivation! There’s nothing admirable about that. And what Jesus is telling us in this parable is that the Father isn’t like a grumpy neighbor or a stubborn kid who act with questionable motivations.

>Jesus is saying the Father is so much better and acts with the best motives. God doesn’t have ulterior or hidden motives. His desire is to give us what we truly need. God isn’t interested in doing just enough to save face. We’ve already seen how God’s desire for us is that everyone would recognize just how great and awesome He is (v. 2b)

Our posture in prayer is based on knowing that God isn’t reluctant. That’s why Jesus tell us to ask and search and to knock. Yes, we are to be persistent, but the foundation of persistence is trusting what Jesus tells about how much God loves to answer us and go beyond our requests. What we need to apprehend is that God is gracious. If we’re going to get anywhere in our prayer life, it will only taken place through really knowing God’s grace.

**The Power of Grace in Prayer (Verses 11-13)**

That’s what Jesus is saying in verses 11-13. He’s saying, “Look around, you see people (evil people as Jesus puts it) all the time giving others more than they deserve and things that are way better than their requests.”

>And the Father goes way beyond this. How do we know? Jesus tells us the Father will give “the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!”

>Here’s what that is meant to do. That promise of grace is meant to knock us to our knees. It’s meant to put us in awe and wonder of God’s grace.

But how does it work? How do we see just how amazing grace is? Well, there was another time, later in Jesus’ life, when he was praying. This time he was in a garden. And the disciples he taught to pray were asleep in his hour of need.

>And what did Jesus pray? He threw himself to the ground and asked his Father to remove the cup of suffering that was waiting for him.

>And if there was anything Jesus deserved most, after all he did, his perfect obedience up to this point, it was to avoid the suffering and humiliation and rejection that was coming.

>But the cup wasn’t removed. Jesus, the most deserving man, got a No from his Father. He was denied. He didn’t bail. He didn’t walkout on the sleeping disciples.

>And so, Jesus willingly went to the cross. Our evil was laid on him, and he received what we deserved, so we could receive by grace everything that rightfully belongs to Jesus.

>At the heart of your life, at the heart of your prayer, at the very center of everything, must stand the cross of Christ.

>Here’s why.

> No matter the precautions we make. No matter how well we try to structure things, we all experience suffering.

>And we sin and look at how the wreck we’ve made in our lives and wonder how we could ever be forgiven.

>But when you look at the cross, you see that Jesus went to the utter depths of suffering He tasted the fullness of death and was stripped of everything that was his. He experienced it all beyond any degree we could ever know, and yet out his suffering came good. And he did it all, so that when he breathed his last and gave up his spirit, that very spirit, the Holy Spirit, could be ours.

The reason we can pray is that God hasn’t held anything back from us. His love and mercy and grace, His very life is yours and for those who would ask. Amen.

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