

Luke 37 – Prayer

One of the most important parts of the Christian life is prayer. It is so important, in fact, that it can be hardly called a “part” of the Christian life. It is more like the foundation of the Christian life. No Christian will ever succeed and be what God wants unless he prays. A person may not have talent, but if he is in regular prayer to God, he will be used by the Lord to do His will. If you pray, you are in good company. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Moses prayed. David, Elijah, Isaiah and Daniel prayed. Paul, Peter, and the disciples prayed. Jesus even prayed, though He was God. We have seen this before in the book of Luke, and we will see it again today.

Many people have different ideas about prayer. Some feel that simply being in nature and taking in what nature has to offer is the same as prayer. Some practice yoga and call it prayer. Others say that prayer is saying a formula that has been written down and is to be recited. While there is confusion about the nature of prayer, we can clear some of these misunderstandings through looking at the Bible. The Bible says many things about prayer. The word “prayer” and all of its derivatives is found in the Bible over 240 times. God says that He hears prayers in Psalm 5:3 which says “My voice shalt thou hear in the morning, O LORD; in the morning will I direct my prayer unto thee, and will look up.” Prayer is a privilege that every believer can enjoy.

The foundation of prayer is a desire for fellowship and friendship with God. God does not accept prayer from those who first do not want a relationship with Him. God wants to have a relationship with us, and desires us to pray to Him to draw closer to Him. This desire for a relationship with God is found in Luke 10:38-42, which says “Now it came to pass, as they went, that he entered into a certain village: and a certain woman named Martha received him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, which also sat at Jesus' feet, and heard his word. But Martha was cumbered about much serving, and came to him, and said, Lord, dost thou not care that my sister hath left me to serve alone? bid her therefore that she help me. And Jesus answered and said unto her, Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things: but one thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her.”

We see that Jesus goes to visit his friends Mary and Martha. John 11 tells us that these two sisters have a brother named Lazarus, and that they live in Bethany. Luke simply calls it “a certain village.” Meal preparation in Jesus’ day was not as simple as what we Americans enjoy, and took much work. In this story, we see that Martha is doing most of the work of preparing the meal while her sister Mary sits at Jesus’ feet. This was an idiom that meant that Mary was learning from Jesus’ teaching, whether she was physically sitting at his feet or not. Luke tells us that not only was Martha busy, but she was “cumbered” which meant that she was burdened. What she is doing is good, but she is allowing herself to be crushed under the load of her service. It is no longer about being hospitable as much as it is getting the job done. She requests Jesus to tell Mary to stop. Why she doesn’t address Mary directly is unknown. Notice that she does not simply request help, but subtly accuses Jesus of being unfeeling toward her by allowing Mary to remain at His feet.

Jesus responds by offering a gentle rebuke of His own. He uses her name gently, and tells her that her priorities are not right. He says: “thou art careful and troubled about many things. but one thing is needful.” Jesus was not ungrateful for Martha’s work in preparing a meal, but told her that she needn’t put such an emphasis on something that was not as important as hearing His Word. He was teaching about things that were much more important than eating and serving. Jesus Himself proved over and over again that He did not need food, nor comfort, nor clothing, nor houses. He had said at one point: “Take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed?... for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.” God says that there are higher priorities in life than meeting needs.

Too many people in our churches are focused on serving God rather than building a relationship with Him and learning from Him. Churches need those who are willing to work and serve, this is true. But God did not send Jesus Christ on this earth to save people to gain for Himself servants, but sons and daughters. Our first priority

is to have a relationship with Christ. I believe that service will naturally flow out of that relationship, but we must not mix our main concerns. Keep first things first, Jesus says, and “Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her.” The Bible does not say how Martha then reacts, but this is a good segue between loving God in the previous passage, keeping our relationship with Him first, and prayer, which is in the next passage. Foundational to a good prayer life is the fact that we need to have a relationship with Him.

Luke 11:1-4 says “And it came to pass, that, as he was praying in a certain place, when he ceased, one of his disciples said unto him, ‘Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples.’ And he said unto them, When ye pray, say, Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, as in heaven, so in earth. Give us day by day our daily bread. And forgive us our sins; for we also forgive every one that is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil.” It is true that Jesus prayed to God, though He was God. He found it to be the source of strength and direction from God while He was on the earth. It is true that while Jesus was on the Earth, He did not operate in His own power. Philippians says that Jesus laid aside some the attributes of deity when it says: “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.”

Jesus Himself said that He was dependant on God the Father and God the Holy Spirit. He said in John 5:19 “The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do: for what things soever he doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise.” He said in John 3:34: “For he whom God hath sent speaketh the words of God: for God giveth not the Spirit by measure unto him.” Therefore, given this dependence, it is no surprise that we find Jesus praying. He did this on several occasions. We saw that He prayed in Luke 9 on the Mount of Transfiguration. John 11:41 says: “Jesus lifted up his eyes, and said, Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me.” Here Jesus does the same thing: He talks to His Father. That is the second foundational truth about prayer that I will mention. Prayer is first born out of a desire for a relationship with God, but second, and growing from that, it is a conversation with Him. It is not a formula or a poem that God needs to hear, but should be as natural as talking to another person, which God is.

Jesus’ disciples hear Him pray and make a request. Could He teach them how to pray? Apparently John the Baptist had taught his disciples how to pray, and they would like to know how to pray as well. Why did they ask Jesus about this? Perhaps they thought that there were certain words God wants to hear. This is unlikely, since God is not accessed by incantations, as many religions taught back then. Besides that, God knows the heart, as it says in 1 Samuel 16:7 “the LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart.” Perhaps they felt as though God wanted to be approached a certain way. Certainly, there is a degree of respect and fear that people need to have in approaching God in prayer.

More likely is that they want to know what their prayers should include. Too many times, our prayers consist of mostly requests. In church we pray, “Dear Lord, please help Mrs. So-and-so and her bad knee, and help Mr. such-and-such and his arthritis. And I ask that I would get a raise at work and that it wouldn’t rain tomorrow.” It wasn’t until I was a little older that I realized that prayer requests aren’t the only things that are included in prayer. Think about it this way: If every time your friend called you up, it was to ask things, how would that make you feel? If it was always, “Say, can I ask a favor?” you would start to wonder what kind of relationship it was. Now, it is true that God loves to answer our requests and to give us what we need and want, but that doesn’t mean that that is the sole reason for prayer. There are other things that should be in our prayer.

It was taught to me by looking at my five fingers and determining that there were five aspects to my prayer: praise, thanks, request, supplication, and confession. Perhaps this morning your prayers are too wooden or too heavy on one of these things. Perhaps you, too, need to be taught how to pray. Let this message this morning be instructive and helpful as we look at the way that the King of Kings talked to His Father and taught His disciples to do the same.

The model prayer that Luke offers is mirrored, though different, in Matthew 6:9-13. It says this: “After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.” These two prayers are often known as “The Lord’s Prayer” and are quoted in many church services every Sunday. They are quoted verbatim, but is that what Jesus intended? In Luke, He says, “When you pray, say...” But in Matthew, He says, “After this manner therefore pray ye.” Again, this is not meant to be a formula prayer regurgitated as a rote exercise. It is a model prayer, one from which we can learn. Don’t treat it like something God needs to hear from you word-for-word. Let us then, learn from it.

Jesus first emphasizes again to whom this prayer is directed. He says. “Our Father, which art in heaven.” The fact that God is the Father of Christians gives us the access we need through prayer to our Heavenly father. Ephesians 2:17-18 says: “[Jesus] came and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh. For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father.” Romans 5:1-2 says “Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.” Notice that this access to the ear of God does not come automatically as a human, but is provided for us by Jesus Christ and is obtained by faith. We must remember that we are sinners and as such are separated from God. But through the death of Christ we have access to God. He is our Father, and Romans 8:15 says: “ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father.” God is the Father of those who believe in Christ and have put their trust in Him.

I have heard some people say, “Prayer changes things.” I would agree in one vein, and disagree in another. A more accurate statement would be that when a believer prays, God hears and changes things on Earth according to His will. We must never think that our prayers in and of themselves have any power, or that we ourselves are effecting the change. We must remember that prayer is the privilege given to us by the Almighty God of the universe, who has chosen to give His love to us. This is why Psalm 100:4 is such an important verse. It says: “Enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise: be thankful unto him, and bless his name.” When we go to God, we ought to go with thankfulness, since God has allowed us to pray to Him.

The second phrase of the Lord’s Prayer here is “Hallowed be thy name.” This is an act of praise. As said before, prayer is not simply making our requests known to God, but involves other things as well. One of the aspects that should be part of communication with God is praise. Webster defines praise as follows: “Commendation bestowed on a person for his personal virtues or worthy actions, on meritorious actions themselves, or on any thing valuable.” We ought to praise God for who He is. We ought to acknowledge who God is for who He is. He is good, patient, loving, kind, and generous. Psalms 52:9 says “I will praise thee for ever, because thou hast done it: and I will wait on thy name; for it is good before thy saints.” Spend time praising God for who He is and what He has done in your life.

This is different than thanksgiving to God, but is similar. Praise is acknowledging that God is good in His person and holds all His attributes in perfection, but thanks is a heart of gratitude saying that God has acted out of His attributes toward us. In other words, we praise God for who He is and thank God for what He has done. Our prayers should be full of thanks to God. Psalm 92:1 says: “It is a good thing to give thanks unto the LORD, and to sing praises unto thy name, O most High.” Thankfulness not only is a form of praising God, but it shows our dependence upon Him. When we thank God, we acknowledge that we could not have or do certain things without His intervention in our lives. Thanksgiving should be a part of our prayers.

The next phrase in the Lord’s Prayer is “Thy kingdom come.” We have spent much time talking of this in the past, but the idea of the kingdom of God is one that goes back to the first man and woman. God had given mankind dominion over the earth, which man in His sinful rebellion subsequently turned over to God’s enemy Satan. Since then, God promised that He would send someone who would re-conquer the world. Throughout the ages, God has had His hand in the workings of the nations of the world. Daniel 2:21 says “[God] changeth the

times and the seasons: he removeth kings, and setteth up kings: he giveth wisdom unto the wise, and knowledge to them that know understanding.” God’s kingdom was always a promise, but a partial fulfillment came in the arrival of Jesus Christ on the earth. Matthew 4:23 says “Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the people.” The message of John the Baptist was similar.

This kingdom did not come to fruition during Jesus’ lifetime because of the rejection by the elders of Israel. Instead, Christ set up a kind of spiritual kingdom that would set the tone for the future physical kingdom, which is yet future. This will be a time that Isaiah the prophet describes like this: “The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, and the lion shall eat straw like the bullock: and dust shall be the serpent’s meat. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain, saith the LORD.” This will be a kingdom that will display God’s original intention for the world, had Adam obeyed back in the garden. This is in stark contrast to the tragedy, wickedness, and corruption that is in the world today, this kingdom will display love, peace, and sinlessness. This is something for which we should yearn and for which to look. Jesus wants us to keep this in mind as we pray.

The next few phrases say: “Thy will be done, as in heaven, so in earth.” This is another acknowledgment of our dependence upon God, but it is a prayer that He would work His Will on the earth. This means that we ought to pray that God would continue to make this world to look less like Satan’s kingdom and more like Jesus’ kingdom. Though it does not look like it, God is doing just that in the world. Things are not necessarily getting better and better, but the kingdom of God is growing. Jesus said in Luke 17:21 “behold, the kingdom of God is within you.” God’s kingdom means that more and more people are coming to know Christ as Saviour. They are coming to know God in a more full way, and letting Him change their lives. God is accomplishing His Will this way.

This is also a reminder to pray according to God’s Will and not our own. Too often we pray with our own best interest in mind. We ask, “God take away my pain!” or “God, would you please provide for me!” when God’s Will may be something quite opposite. We ought to pray, “God, your will be done in my life.” God wants us to pray according to His Will, and He says so in verses like 1 John 5:14, which says: “And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us.” Again, too often we ask for things for ourselves, and God is not obliged to grant us our requests. James 4:3 chides Christians when it says, “Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts.” Pray according to God’s Will, and this phrase is a reminder to seek first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness.

This is not to say that we cannot ask for things that we need or want. Many times I have asked for things I feel will help me or add to my own happiness, and God has granted them. God is a loving Father who delights in giving us what we want, something we will look at later in this passage. In fact, the next phrase shows this. It says, “Give us day by day our daily bread.” This next aspect is requesting. We are not only allowed to make requests to God, but to encouraged to. But notice, Jesus wants His disciples to pray for “daily bread.” What is this? In America, we enjoy the benefits of access to all kinds of wonderful food, produced so that anyone can buy what they need. Not many Americans have had to wonder where to find a loaf of bread. This has not been so throughout the centuries around the world. Bread was not only scarce, but difficult to make, so that though it was a staple, it was precious. Jesus tells us to ask for our bread, but He says, “daily bread.”

Every morning, the women in the household would get their grain and their handmill out. They would pour the grain into the top of the upper millstone while someone else turned the mill, grinding the grain into flour and pouring onto a cloth. This flour was then taken and made into bread for the day in an oven. Since there was no such thing as refrigerators or sealed containers, this bread had to be made every day and did not keep very well. Therefore, the phrase “daily bread” refers to the bread you need only for that one day. It is not a prayer for the assurance of food for the next two weeks, but for that one day. It is prayer for God to sustain you for today. Again, we Americans don’t know what this is like, since we have an abundant supply of food.

God wants us to make requests to Him, and He wants to supply our needs. He says in Philippians 4:6: “in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.” God delights in meeting our needs, but also wants to foster dependence on Him. When you pray, the Bible says you should ask in faith, as we mentioned before. When you do, the Bible says God will meet them. Philippians 4:19 says “But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus.” Requests should be another part of our prayers, and often is. Do not be ashamed of making requests, but do not let it be the only thing you do in prayer.

The next phrase highlights another part of what our prayer should be. It says, “And forgive us our sins; for we also forgive every one that is indebted to us.” This is the aspect of confession to God for our sins. The fact is that we are all sinners. Ecclesiastes 7:20 says “For there is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not.” Romans 3:11 says “There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God.” This sin has the unhappy consequence of separating us from God. Isaiah 59:2 says “But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear.” This separation hinders our prayers. Psalm 66:18 says “If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me.” Before God will hear us, we must be in a right relationship with Him. What do I mean by this? I mean that sin clouds our thoughts and judgments. How can we ask for God’s Will to be done when we, through our own sin, have already proven that we only want our own will? How can we show dependence on a God who we do not obey?

The solution to this problem is confession. The word “confess” means to say the same thing as God. When we say the same thing as God about our sin, we say, “God, I acknowledge that what I have done is a violation of your law. I agree that I deserve punishment.” It is as if we are in a Great Courtroom, and God is trying us at the bench. Confession is taking the stand and going on record against ourselves. It is joining God in our condemnation of our actions. This is to be done between God and us, not some religious figure, as some churches teach. We confess to God, and when we do, we find a surprising result. God says in 1 John 1:9: “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” God says that if we will agree with Him about our sins, He will bang the gavel and pardon us for what we have done. This is not a simple “I’m sorry,” but a real grieving in the spirit about what you have done. When this takes place, God says that the just thing to do is to forgive and cleanse us. Confession ought to be a part of our prayers as well.

Included in Jesus’ model prayer for forgiveness is the expectation that we forgive others as well. As forgiven people we ought to forgive those who have sinned against us. Matthew 18 tells the story well of two people who needed forgiveness. It says: “Therefore is the kingdom of heaven likened unto a certain king, which would take account of his servants. And when he had begun to reckon, one was brought unto him, which owed him ten thousand talents. But forasmuch as he had not to pay, his lord commanded him to be sold, and his wife, and children, and all that he had, and payment to be made. The servant therefore fell down, and worshipped him, saying, Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay thee all. Then the lord of that servant was moved with compassion, and loosed him, and forgave him the debt.”

“But the same servant went out, and found one of his fellowservants, which owed him an hundred pence: and he laid hands on him, and took him by the throat, saying, Pay me that thou owest. And his fellowservant fell down at his feet, and besought him, saying, Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all. And he would not: but went and cast him into prison, till he should pay the debt. So when his fellowservants saw what was done, they were very sorry, and came and told unto their lord all that was done. Then his lord, after that he had called him, said unto him, O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst me: Shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellowservant, even as I had pity on thee? And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him.” God wants us to forgive others as we are forgiven. Jesus is so strong on this point that He says: “if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there

rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.” Pray forgiving and seeking forgiveness.

The last phrase is “And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil.” God Himself will never lead us into temptation, but Jesus wants us to ask God for extra help in avoiding this temptation. It is again an admission that we need to depend on God for living for Him. This is not to say that we live lives blindly and carelessly, hoping we don’t stumble into sin, but we acknowledge that the power of sin is strong. God offers help and deliverance from our temptations. He says in 1 Corinthians 10:13 says “There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.” When praying, don’t forget in your requests to make spiritual requests as well. Daily bread while you constantly fall into sin is folly and useless.

The last part of prayer that can be added is supplication, which is not specifically talked about in this passage, but is in other places. It is a request made on behalf of others. In a church setting, this is what takes place most of the time. It is important, but not to the exclusion of the others. All five parts of prayer that can and should be included, then, are Praise, Confession, Thanksgiving, Requests, and Supplication. When you read through prayers in the Bible, see how many of these aspects appear. Then look at your own prayers and analyze how much of your own prayer time is spent in these things. It is our prayer that this will help you.

Luke’s account of the Lord’s Prayer is different than Matthews. Matthew tacks on an ending that goes like this: “For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.” This is another form of praise for God. On this occasion, Jesus chose not to include this ending in the prayer, which tell us that the Lord’s model Prayer is not to be recited rotely. Do not think you are doing God any favors by reciting the Lord’s Prayer. In fact, immediately before the Lord’s Prayer found in Matthew 6, Jesus says, “But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking.” This ends Luke’s account of Jesus’ prayer, but Jesus is not finished teaching His disciples. He says to them in the next few verses:

“And he said unto them, Which of you shall have a friend, and shall go unto him at midnight, and say unto him, Friend, lend me three loaves; For a friend of mine in his journey is come to me, and I have nothing to set before him? And he from within shall answer and say, Trouble me not: the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot rise and give thee. I say unto you, Though he will not rise and give him, because he is his friend, yet because of his importunity he will rise and give him as many as he needeth. And I say unto you, Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened. If a son shall ask bread of any of you that is a father, will he give him a stone? or if he ask a fish, will he for a fish give him a serpent? Or if he shall ask an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?”

Good friend, time is not going to allow me to explain everything that I would like to in this passage. Perhaps we will look it in more detail next week, but our time is drawing to a close. This teaching flows from what is previously said and cannot be divorced from the text. God is a loving God who delights in our prayers and wants us to come to Him. This can only happen, though, through the blood of Jesus Christ. Have you trusted Him as your own Saviour? If not, the Bible says that God will not hear you. The only prayer that God will hear from you is the prayer of a sinner needing salvation from a loving God. You can do this this morning where you are.