

West Cannon Baptist Church

Lord's Day July 11, 2010

Morning Worship

Teach Us to Pray

Introduction

When the disciples approached Jesus with the request to be taught to pray one could easily assume that they never prayed or at least seldom prayed. Jewish males were taught to pray very early in life. The day began each morning with the recitation of *Shema* followed by the praying of *Tiphilla* (18 benedictions memorized and recited in Hebrew). The same procedure was followed in the evening as one prepared for sleep; reciting *Shema* and praying *Tiphilla*. Joseph and Mary no doubt taught Jesus to pray this way when He was a child. Prayers were included in the Synagogue service. Thanks were offered both before and after meals. The Jewish heritage gave a very large and significant place to prayer. When the disciples made this request of Jesus, it was because He did not follow these patterns nor did He pray in Hebrew. In fact, He prayed in Aramaic, the everyday language of the people and He prayed when it was not time to pray. It seems clear that these changes in the normal practice of prayer prompted the appeal.

Three Theological Propositions Concerning Prayer

1. This is the **Age of Prayer** and of the Spirit. Since Jesus' resurrection and ascension, prayer takes on significance in the kingdom that it did not have in the past nor will it have in the future. It is the link between the victorious Christ and His people on earth.
2. Prayer is an **Christological Activity**. In his redemption, Christ has conquered sin, death, pain, sorrow, crying, disease, and evil, and has reversed the consequences of the first Adam's sin. When God answers our prayers, it is based on Christ's redemptive victory and not the sheer omnipotence of God. This is what it means to pray in Jesus' name.
3. Prayer is an **Eschatological Activity**. In the future, Christ's victory will be fully applied in earth history. When we pray for healing, we are asking that the power of the age to come be brought into our world today, so that God's Name will be made central, His kingdom will come and His will be done.

Setting of the Lord's Prayer in Matthew 6

Matthew incorporates Jesus' teaching on prayer into His ordered memorandum of Jesus' moral teaching that we call the Sermon on the Mount. He gives a short catechism on the three secondary works of piety in the Jewish faith of Jesus' day. The six works of piety were: Torah study, Sabbath observance, Temple reverence, almsgiving, praying, and fasting. The first three are considered the primary elements of piety, while the last three are considered the secondary works of piety. Jesus addresses these last three with the contrast between the performance of the Pharisees and His disciples. The primary issue is whose attention is sought when giving alms, praying, or fasting. If one seeks the attention of men, then there will be no reward from the Father in heaven. The unit on prayer adds that much speaking, like the pagans, does not add to the efficacy, nor does the repetition of details help when the Lord already knows. After giving the prayer, Jesus adds a codicil on the fifth petition; *forgive us our debts as we wherewith forgive all those indebted to us*. He warns that if we do not forgive those indebted to us, that the Father in heaven will not forgive us.

Exposition of the First Three Petitions

1. The Address—Being a child in the kingdom makes all the difference when it comes to prayer. The intimacy of the Aramaic word *Abba* brings to prayer the relationship of a child to the Father. To be adopted into the family of God and to have God as our Father makes not talking with Him unthinkable. To pray *Our Dear Father* brings to the fore some very important truth. Being a child of the Father involves (1) certainty of our participation in the future salvation. Jesus affirms that not one of these little ones will be lost and the children should not fear, for it is the will of the Father to give unto them the kingdom. (2) It also brings everyday security to the child. The Father knows, so His goodness and care is boundless. (3) Certainty of salvation and security in the present gives the child courage to submit to what is unexpected and unpredictable in the divine will. Even death takes on a new perspective, and the unfathomable problem of evil is left in the Father's hands. Although the intimate word *Father* is used in the address, He is still the Sovereign whose saving rule comes from heaven.
2. The Three *Thou* Petitions
In these petitions, we ask God to do something for Himself. He is asked to cause His name to be central on the earth as it is in heaven. The codicil at the end of the third petition, *on earth as it is in heaven*, is intended to go with all three petitions. There is coming a day in the consummation when the name of God will be central on the earth. This will happen as a consequence of Christ's redemptive victory. When we ask God to do it today, we are asking for the power of the age to come to be present in our world today.

Please cause your kingdom to come on earth as it has in heaven is the essence of the second petition. His kingdom will come in the consummation when the fullness of Christ's redemptive victory is applied in earth history. The kingdom of this world will become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ and He shall reign forever and ever. Again, this petition asks for the power of the age to come to be present in this world so that God's kingdom will be manifested, and His name will be central.

The final petition of these three asks God to cause His will to be done on earth like it is in heaven. There is a sense in which these petitions are synonymous parallels asking the same thing in different ways. It is clear that each of these petitions shows that there is some lively activity going on in heaven where God's Name is central, His kingdom has come in fullness and His will is done with joy and spontaneity. The reference to the will of God in this petition is focused on His moral will for His people.

Summary

The address and the *Thou* Petitions are intended as a handrail to guide us in composing our prayers. The first and most important thing in prayer is God's program and not our needs, desires or agenda. The reason we pray for the salvation of a person is that if God grants the request His name will be central, His kingdom will come and His will done. Above all else, that is what is important to us.

(to be continued)

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