

The People of the Prayer Matthew 6:9-13

By Phillip G. Kayser at DCC on 6-13-2010

Introduction (vv. 5-8)

Later in the service we are going to be ordaining Gil Dykstra as a deacon. Those who have been through the diaconal training know that the diaconate is a very important office for me. It is one of the most significant vehicles for the outreach of the church in the first few centuries. Chadwick says that more people came to Christ through the church's mercy ministries than just about any other vehicle. But it can't happen through programs. We saw that last week. It doesn't happen by the diaconate doing all the work of the ministry. They are leaders who are supposed to be stirring up the people for the work of ministry. But if the people themselves are not on fire for the Lord, there won't be much to lead. If they don't catch a vision for what God can do through them, there won't be much to lead.

The kind of changes that occurred in the first few centuries are changes that can only happen as the church is so filled with the love of God that they overflow in God's goodness to a lost world. Though this sermon is not directly related to our evangelism series, it is certainly a key foundation to a successful evangelistic outreach. And even though it is not directly related to this ordination, it is certainly a key foundation to the success of the diaconate, and a successful body life.

This morning I will not be preaching on the theology of prayer, or the method of prayer, or the content of prayer, or the attitudes of prayer. I think all of those topics can be found in this little passage. Instead, I want to look at what this passage implies about the *people* who are praying it. Most of the context shows that the disciples *themselves* were supposed to be different. Not just different prayers, but different people. In verse 5 He says, "**And when you pray, you shall not be like the hypocrites.**" There must be a different character in the people. In verse 8 He says, "**Therefore do not be like them.**" In verses 14-15 He tells them that they need to have *hearts* that are different. In fact, the whole Sermon on the Mount revolves around changed character, not merely changed actions. Even pagans can have changed actions and can pray. Buddhists pray. But they don't have the characteristics implied in *this* prayer. And if we are people of the prayer, our prayers will be revolutionized, and our ministry will be revolutionized. And

it is my prayer that the diaconate and the elders would have a congregation who truly could be described as the people of this prayer.

I. A Fellowship's Prayer ("Our . . us . . . we")

First, this prayer is a fellowshipping's prayer. The people who pray it have a strong bond of fellowship with others. This bond will drive them out of selfish prayer into intercessory prayer. They are so connected to the body that they say "we, us, our" instead of me, myself, and I. Notice the plural pronouns used. He starts with "Our Father" and goes on to say "Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one." The one who prays this prayer is not just thinking of his own needs. He is so covenantal in his thinking that he prays intuitively for the needs of the congregation as a whole. He sees himself as part of a body. And prayer warriors have this strong sense of obligation and relatedness.

The diaconate will not be able to function if the people as a whole are not burdened for the body as a whole. If the church is not a body that pulls together for the cause of Christ, there will be little interest in following the leadership of these and future deacons. When we pray rightly, it changes our thinking about who we are. Yes, God hears the prayers of individuals, but He has been pleased to ordain powerful answers when the church develops a corporate attitude in prayer and in ministry. The Puritan, Thomas Manton, said, "Single Prayers are like the single hairs of Samson; but the prayers of the congregation are like the whole of his bushy locks, wherein his strength lay." And his point was that the church has been completely sapped of its spiritual power like Samson, because the hairs of corporate identification have been cut off by our individualism. I think this is a major difference between the Christians in Korea and the Christians in America. Think of yourself as covenantally part of a body, and the "us" and "ours" of this prayer will take on new meaning. Are you fellowshippers? Are you covenantal in your thinking?

II. A Child's Prayer ("Our Father")

Related to this is the expectation that you will feel a part of a family. He says, "our *Father*." This is a family prayer. Yet it is not a house-church prayer. The "our" makes it broader than the nuclear family. You and I are related. We are a spiritual family. Our unity is not the unity of a corporation, or even of a football team. It is the unity of a family. It implies sonship, and privilege, and daily communing and fellowship with God. It implies that we

can come to God with confidence. Now it is true that you can be generous to a beggar who comes to you for aid, but it is unlikely that you would be as generous with him as you would with your own son or daughter. The person who is confident of his sonship, and whom the Spirit has ushered into an “abba Father” relationship will be much more bold in prayer than the person who is only making petitions as a servant. And automatically he is going to be looking out for the family name and the family interests. This is why in the diaconate the spiritual family needs to take priority over the needs of unbelievers. We need to minister to both, but Scripture calls us to do good to all men, especially to those who are of the household of faith.

So this prayer implies a relationship with each other in family, and a relationship with God in the family. Rather than letting others in the family fend for themselves, this prayer helps us to see them as spiritual relatives.

III. A Saint's Prayer ("Hallowed")

Third, this prayer assumes a passion for God's holiness. It says, "**Hallowed be your name.**" May it be held in holiness or sanctity. Now there are two applications I want to make on that point. The first is that we must have a greater desire that God's name be hallowed in the *world*. If we really want God's name to be hallowed in the world, we will be involved in evangelism and cultural transformation. You can't pray this prayer and really be indifferent to the fact that God's name is trampled into the dust in the public arena. The more we pray this prayer, the more we should desire to be used by God for changing this sin sick world.

But the second application is that we must have a greater desire that God's name be hallowed in our own lives. The person who prays this prayer is passionate to see God's name lifted up in everything that we do. Well, this too will affect how we relate to the church. It will certainly affect our prayer life. For example, 1 Peter 3:7 says that your prayers will be hindered if you are unreconciled with your spouse. Psalm 66:18 says, "**If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear.**" Thomas Brookes once said, "If you would have God hear you when you pray, you must hear Him when He speaks." This phrase implies prayerful holiness, and holy prayerfulness.

IV. A Subject's Prayer ("Your kingdom come")

The next phrase, "Your kingdom come," implies not only that we are subjects, but that things are not as they should be in the world. There is a need for God's kingdom to manifest itself on earth. You simply can't be

satisfied with the state of the world, the nation, the city, your family, or even your own personal development and be able to pray this prayer. You have to have a holy dissatisfaction for the state of affairs. And if you had God's perspective on life, you would be dissatisfied no matter where you looked in the world. When the former chaplain of the US Senate, Edward Everett Hale, was asked, "Do you pray for the senators?" He replied, "No, when I look at the senators, I pray for the country." Knowing the state of the senators, he knew of the need for God's kingdom to come. We need to have a holy dissatisfaction with the state of affairs on every level of society, and pray, "Your kingdom come." Do you have that kind of dissatisfaction that drives you to both prayer and action? Part of what the deacons are about is to lead people in advancing God's kingdom. We are citizens of a heavenly king who want to see more and more of His kingdom coming.

V. A Servant's Prayer ("Your will be done")

Well, God's kingdom comes by His will being done on earth as it is in heaven. And so the fifth point is that this is a servant's prayer. Now isn't that interesting? Earlier we saw that we are children of the King, but we are also servants of the king. The apostles frequently called themselves servants of Jesus. And this too is appropriate for a diaconal ordination. The word deacon means servant. The word minister means servants. We are deacons of the word, and they are deacons of other things. But all of us are called to be servants.

But what does it mean to ask, "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven?" God's will is perfectly done in heaven by the angels, but that is not the case yet on earth. So this is giving us a huge vision for the future. We are praying that righteousness would cover the earth as the waters cover the ocean beds. Warren Wiersbe once said, "The purpose of prayer is not to get man's will done in heaven, but to get God's will done on earth." Our prayers, even for personal needs, should be with the ultimate purpose of serving God and advancing His cause. If we pray for health, it should be with the desire of doing God's will more effectively. If we pray for relaxation, it should be with the desire that we will be refreshed to better advance His kingdom. We are the servants, and God is the Lord. And yet in many prayers that relationship is reversed. People treat God like a cosmic bellboy who is at our beck and call for every whim and need that might come to mind. People sometimes treat elders and deacons that way. But the effective prayer warrior who can pray this prayer from his heart, has a servant's heart that looks always to the master's best interests, and they will

love serving *with* the deacons and serving *with* the pastors. All of us are servants, which means that all of us are deacons and ministers. We just aren't all ordained.

John Owen said, "He who prays as he ought, will endeavor to live as he prays." He has a servant's heart. And the more our hearts are gripped with a passion to see God's interests served and His cause advanced, the more we will be driven to action. And the more we see we are called to do, the more we will sense our need of God and will pray. The elders and deacons of this church will be very satisfied when it is the heart's cry of every person to say, "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." Lord, may Your will be done in my life, in my family, in my church. I give myself as Your servant.

VI. A Dependant's Prayer ("Give us")

Now that does not mean that we cannot bring our needs before the Lord. God delights in us doing *just* that. That shows our dependence upon Him. Servants have needs; children have needs. And so the prayer continues, "**Give us this day our daily bread.**" We as servants are totally dependant upon the Lord. And I think this is another key that distinguishes us from people who pray in third world countries. In our wealth we have lost our sense of dependence. And so, sixth point, this is a dependant's prayer. If you think the deacons can do great things without the Lord's help, we will be in trouble. They need our prayers. If you fail to pray for your pastors, you are acting as if they can do the work of the ministry in their own strength. In fact, all prayerlessness is a sign of pride. It is saying in effect, "Lord, I don't need your help." If our evangelism is to have success, we must be on our knees. If the deacons are to have success, we must be on our knees.

VII. A Sinner's Prayer ("forgive us")

Seventh, this is a sinner's prayer. Thank God! It means I can be a part of this prayer. The one who prays, "**forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors**" recognizes his spiritual bankruptcy. He can't pay the debt. He asks for forgiveness for his debt. He can't be self-righteous and hold the finger at someone who has wronged him, because he knows how often he has wronged God. And a recognition of our sinfulness will lead us to prayer, and the more we pray, the less self-righteous and the less holier-than-thou we will be in our own eyes. The first command to pray in the New

Testament is the command to pray for our enemies. That's pretty interesting. God wants us to appreciate His grace by getting us to be gracious; and graciousness is treating others in the body and outside the body better than they deserve. The person of this prayer can pray for his enemies because he knows what an enemy of God he has been, and how God has saved and loved him. And so the person of this prayer has been humbled into an awareness that he is a sinner. We are saints because we are clothed in the righteousness of Jesus, and yet we still have sin that needs His cleansing. The greatest prayer warriors have been those who are keenly aware of their own sinfulness.

VIII.A Traveler's Prayer ("And do not lead . . . ")

Eighth, this is a traveler's prayer. Christ tells us to pray, "**And do not lead us into temptation.**" The word "lead" implies travel. The person who prays this recognizes that "there, but for the grace of God, go I." This is a man who recognizes that he is on a path of holiness and he has not arrived yet. He has a sticker that says, "Be patient, God has not finished with me yet," and because the Lord's Prayer is in the plural form here, he has the charity to have the same patience with others that he hopes for himself. I think you can see that if the people of our congregation had the characteristics of this prayer, it would be much easier for the deacons and elders to do their jobs.

IX. A Warrior's Prayer ("Deliver us from the evil one")

Ninth, this is a warrior's prayer. One of the chief obstacles to God's will being done in our life is of course, Satan. And in our opposition to Satan, prayer is the key weapon. Give a spiritual prayer cover to Larry, Gil, Trevor, and the elders. Satan loves to try to take out leaders. He undermines them like Absalom. He divides them like Adonijah. He discourages them like the ten spies. He accuses them.

So this is also a Warrior's prayer. Verse 13 says, "**deliver us from the evil one.**" Why do we need to be delivered? Because he is constantly after us. In one of his table talks, Luther said, "Prayer is a strong wall and fortress of the church; it is a goodly Christian weapon." But that implies we are using the weapon. It implies we are warriors who are skilled at detecting Satan's strategies and warding them off. And when you hear gossip, division, bitterness, discouragement, smell sulfur in the air and resist Satan. Paul speaks of "**striving in prayer.**" It's hard work. It's resisted by Satan.

You will sometimes need to wrestle even to subdue your flesh into going to prayer. But prayer requires warfare, and warfare requires prayer.

Andrew Murray, in his book *The Ministry of Intercession*, said,

"Surely, of all the gifts of the early church for which we should long, there is none more needed than the gift of prayer. When Peter was kept in prison, 'prayer was made without ceasing of the church', Peter was delivered. Stone walls and double chains, soldiers and keepers, and the iron gate all gave way before the power of prayer from heaven; that prayer brought down the rescue. The whole power of the Roman Empire as represented by Herod was impotent in the presence and power of the church of the Holy Spirit yielded in prayer."

X. A Devoted Lover's Prayer ("For Yours is")

The last half of verse 13 indicates that the one who prays this prayer is a devoted lover. He wants to step out of the limelight and shout the praises only of God. That's what a lover does. He's not just thinking about himself. He wants everything to go to God. Verse 13 goes on, "**For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen** [or "so be it.]" In our prayer life, do we have that devotion that can say, "Lord, I love you so much that I want everything to go to you? I don't want to receive the glory in this. I want you to receive it." There are two spiritual gifts that are most commonly found among deacons – the gift of helps, which loves to see others succeed, and the gift of service. Well, the gift of helps is the closest to the heart of the Holy Spirit who is always looking to glorify others and keep out of the limelight. It is one the most marvelous of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. And when a church is full of people with either the gift of helps or the gift of service, it is a church that thrives. How the church would be transformed if we had this passion to glorify God!

Sometimes we don't even think of God's glory when we pray. We are thinking about what others are thinking. It's just a ritual. Like the father who just wanted his son to go through a ritual at the dinner table. The guests had been seated and the father asked the son to pray. The boy said, "But Daddy, I don't know what to say." And the mother chimed in, "Oh, just say what you've heard me say." Obediently the boy bowed his little head and said, "'Oh Lord, why did I invite these people here on a hot day like this!'" The parents were embarrassed by that, but which was really worse? That prayer, or a ritual that is not really meant from the heart? Prayer is

ultimately a verbal love relationship with God. And what does a lover do? He wants to glorify God and lift Him up. He's passionate about God's glory.

XI. A Believer's Prayer ("For Yours is the kingdom . . . ")

One last characteristic of the person of this prayer is that he is a person of faith. For people to be able to say, "**For Yours is [present tense] the kingdom**" in this chaotic world, takes real faith. But every petition in this prayer is really a manifestation of faith in God's promises. When I was in my first year in Bible school I heard about a pastor in Africa who had called a prayer meeting for rain. Apparently they had had a terrible drought. Well, when he arrived at the church at the appointed time, he was embarrassed to find that he was the only one not carrying an umbrella. "Prayer is asking for rain. Faith is carrying the umbrella." And I'm afraid that I have prayed many times without faith. In fact, just this morning in my devotions the Lord rebuked me for my anxiety. It was Proverbs 10:24 – "What the wicked fears will come upon him, but the desire of the righteous will be granted." We tend to dread or fear the future. But that will almost guarantee failure. Job said, "that which I feared has come upon me." Have faith, not fear.

Years ago I used to read Our Daily Bread for devotions, and one of the little sayings that it had was, "When the prayer of faith goes to market, it always takes a basket." Do you take a basket with you expecting God to fill it? Let's take baskets with us as we pray for these deacons, and by faith let's expect God to explode things in this church. Let's expect huge amounts of money in the diaconal fund. Let's expect conversions in our evangelism.

Conclusion

This prayer tells a lot about who we are, or at least who we should be. Next time you go through the Lord's Prayer, precede that prayer with a prayer that God would transform you into the *person* of this prayer. And may each of the deacons and the elders be people of the prayer so that we could be powerfully used for the advancement of God's kingdom here in this hardened city. May it be so Lord Jesus! Amen.

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