

## ***THE PRAYERS OF THE CHURCH***

***Luke 11:1-5***

### ***INTRODUCTION***

Jesus Christ was a man of prayer. In his humanity He set a worthy pattern for us in His prayer life. Luke gives special emphasis to His prayer life in his Gospel. On this particular occasion Jesus seems to have been praying with His disciples, or at least where they could observe Him. This prompted the request by the unnamed disciples.

It is of special interest that the disciples felt the need for instruction in prayer. They had learned prayers to be prayed to God from their earliest days. But when they observed the prayer life of Jesus they saw a reality in communion with God that had escaped them. They wanted to share in this reality.

The response of Jesus to the request was their great discussion on prayer. First, He gave them a prayer to pray, then a parable about prayer. This morning we will focus on the prayer.

You will recognize the prayer here is somewhat shorter form of the Lord's prayer that is found in the Sermon on The Mountain. In both instances it is obvious that Jesus meant the prayer to be prayed by the group. All of the pronouns are plural. We are to pray for "our--daily bread, forgive "us", lead "us", and deliver "us". So this is a prayer for the church as well as the individual.

Most of our emphasis upon prayer is upon the prayer of the individual. But there is a special place for the prayer of the group, the church. Your prayer life will tend to become selfish if you do not share experience of prayer with the church. I am excited about the different prayer groups that have emerged in recent days. The prayer can be used as an actual prayer by the church, and it can be used as a guide. All of the people of the church, if they are to be effective, must experience the attitude reflected in this prayer. Let us see the things that should guide the church in its prayers.

### ***I. THE CHURCH SHOULD PRAY WITH CONFIDENCE.***

The prayer expresses this in the opening word of address. The prayer begins with an address to God as "Father". This was the way Jesus regularly addressed God. The confidence comes from this relationship that we know with God through Jesus Christ. Jesus is the only Begotten Son of God, and by faith in Him, we too become the son of God. Being sure of this relationship with God through Christ, we dare to come to Him as sons approaching their father.

This means that we come with a confidence that we will be received and helped. This relationship makes all of the difference in the world in how we come to God. So the church approaches God in prayer with a confidence.

### ***II. THE CHURCH SHOULD PRAY WITH REVERENCE.***

"Hallowed be thy name." The first petition of the prayer expresses this attitude of reverence. It is a prayer that God will be revealed to men in such a way that they will hallow or regard as holy the name of the Lord God. In the Bible the name represents the person, the revelation of the character of the person.

This attitude will make a difference in how the church prays. The prayer time of the church should be filled with a deep sense of awe and reverence. The church is actually standing collectively in the presence of holy God. We are standing in the presence of the consuming fire. Every heart should be awed before Him. The attitude of our hearts should be that of the seraphim as they use four of their wings to cover their face and to cover their feet. They cover their face because they are unworthy to look upon His holiness. They cover their feet because they are too ugly to be uncovered in His presence. At the same time they are saying, "Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord of Hosts". Our approach to God needs to be inspired by the same reverence.

### ***III. THE PRAYERS OF THE CHURCH SHOULD BE SUBMISSIVE.***

"Thy Kingdom Come". In the better Greek manuscripts, "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven" is omitted in this instance. However, that does not change the prayer substantially. The latter is really an expansion of "thy kingdom come". This is a prayer for the rule of God in the affairs of man. While the prayer may look forward to the day when the rule of God will be universally manifest the consummation of the kingdom, it can also refer to the rule of God in the present. Men can now come under the rule of God and share in the joys of the kingdom of God as they submit to the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

The church prays this petition because it desires to be under the rule of God fully. The church that is not submissive to the rule of God it surely cannot pray for any larger expression of the rule of God. So the prayer of the church must be submissive.

This means that prayer is not the means of manipulating the will of God, but rather a way of participating in the doing of the will of God. God's will is not to be changed, but rather done.

### ***IV. THE PRAYERS OF THE CHURCH SHOULD EXPRESS DEPENDENCE.***

"Give us this day our daily bread". In this petition the prayer moves from concern about the things of God to concern about the things of man. "Bread" should be understood as representing all that is required to sustain the life of man. The petition is addressed to God because He is the source of all that we need for life. We are utterly dependent upon Him for everything.

The word translated "daily" is one that bothers the exegetic, It is difficult to pin down the exact meaning of the word in this context. It should probably be understood to mean "that which is necessary". In other words, we are to pray

only for the physical necessities for today. Like Israel received their manna one day at a time, so we are to look to God for what we need in each day.

The church should approach God with that kind of dependence. We must believe that God is able to measure out to us exactly what we need to do His will today.

We do not need provisions for the next year, only enough for today. We will depend on Him for the provisions for tomorrow when tomorrow gets here.

Do we pray like everything depends on God? Does the world gather from our prayers that we are utterly dependent upon Him?

#### ***V. THE PRAYERS OF THE CHURCH SHOULD BE PERSISTENT.***

"Forgive us our sins for we forgive everyone indebted to us." The church does not have to be sinless to pray, but it does have to be persistent.

It must be ready to acknowledge that it has "missed the mark", run up a debt with God that it cannot pay. To forgive is to cancel a debt, to dismiss, to send away.

It is really a petition for God to bear the expense of our sins.

The clause that is added to the petition has been misunderstood. It is not the grounds of the petition. We cannot claim God's forgiveness on the basis of our having forgiven others. Our forgiving those who sin against us does not build up merit before God. Rather it reflects an attitude that is essential to receive God's forgiveness. Only the forgiving has recognized the size of their debt before God. Since we have sinned so greatly against God there is no room for a hard and exacting spirit when we deal with our fellowman.

But do we need to pray in this spirit every time we pray? Absolutely! We never arrive at a level in which we are not in need of the mercy of forgiveness. We will always be sinners as we approach the God of mercy--so we need a persistent spirit.

## ***VI. THE PRAYERS OF THE CHURCH SHOULD BE WITH HUMILITY.***

Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil." The last clause is omitted in the better Greek manuscripts, but it is really included in the first. It should be understood as an expansion of the petition that God not lead us into temptation. The petition does not suggest that God is responsible for our temptation. Rather it is an acknowledgement that- God is sovereign in our lives. We will not be confronted with temptation without the sovereign Lord's permission. He does "order" our steps.

The petition exposes a deep self-assurance. It comes out of the assurance of frailty, and weakness before temptation. It acknowledges an inclination toward sin and evil. It-acknowledges that we are no match for the tempter. There is real humility in the petition.

Such a petition is the opposite of pride. Evidently some feel that they can face whatever life brings in their own strength. Such pride goes before a fall. The Apostle says, "Let him that thinks he stands beware least he fall". The church that moves the world will be the church that prays with such humility.

## ***CONCLUSION***

The prayer gives us a standard by which to measure our prayers. We must constantly be evaluating and measuring our approach to the Lord. If things are amiss, it will be because of the attitude we are expressing and because of the words we are using.

God helps us to pray. Only eternity will allow us to realize the potential that is present in the prayers of the church. It is of special interest that the one passage that discusses prayer for healing makes it a church ministry. The elders are called to prayer as a group. If we want to realize our potential in the kingdom. of God

we must become a praying church as well as praying individuals. "There is a principle in physics that tells us that strands of thread twisted together have greater power to lift and sustain than single strands. The twining together of our petitions in prayer guarantees greater lifting power". (Louis Evans)