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## Prayer with Thanksgiving at EEF (Phil 4:6-7)

**Introduction** – The aim of this sermon is simply to call us to be a people of prayer. But it is not the aim of this sermon to burden us with prayer as so many sermons on the topic can do. Prayer is not a burden, although it is work, when we know and believe that prayer is God's appointed means to God's victory through His people empowered by His Spirit over all evil. And prayer is not a burden when one realizes where we have been invited to go when we are called to pray.

**The Lord's Prayer and the Perspective of Jesus** (Matt 6:9-10) – There are many wrong ways to pray and many false motives for praying, but they can look deceptively humble and pious (Matt 6:5-7). When Jesus gives positive teaching on prayer, He instructs us to pray a kind of prayer that requires unimaginable faith. He instructs us to pray far beyond what we would ever ask or think could happen. He tells us to plead before the Father of all grace that His name would be hallowed over all the earth as it is in heaven, that His kingdom would come, established and fully consummated on this earth as it is in heaven, and that His will (that is His law, His justice, His mercy) would be done on this earth everywhere, as it is in heaven.

Jesus cares about your particular, individual needs (and so He teaches us to pray for our daily bread). But in praying for both in one prayer (the global victory of God and our individual concerns) we learn the perspective of Jesus. The cares and concerns you have about your marriage, your kids, your job, your struggle with sin, your health, your future – are all cares connected to the work of God's final and complete victory on this earth. Christ calls you to see your simple, seemingly insignificant life and all of its complexity as connected to the victory of God. His people (you), His church (this little local congregation), and the kingdom of God (heaven and earth), are all connected in the plan and purposes of God.

**Thanksgiving by Faith, Before and During the Prayer of Need** (Phil 4:6-7) – With that in mind, an example of such confident praying is given to us by Paul as he instructs the church at Philippi. These people had real problems and real needs. Some were very personal, some were relational within the church, and some were due to real or soon expected persecution from the world. Paul teaches that in such times we may not be anxious, and tells us how to avoid that. We must not only pray, but even plead (supplicate) before God. We do this not out of panic, but with thanksgiving – and this is a gift of God – it's not natural.

**Because the "Lord is at hand"** – that is, because the Lord is near (Psalm 145:18, but see vv 17-21). Whatever the situation, the Lord is near to those who are calling upon Him.

**Because the Lord is at Work** – We have no trouble giving thanks for God in times of abundance, even though in unbelief we could worry that He is fattening us for the day of slaughter (James 5:5). But in faith, we give thanks, receiving this from the hand of the Lord. So also when we are afflicted, we give thanks and in giving thanks we acknowledge the hand of God. Humbled before Him in such times, we confidently trust Him to lift us up, *and the peace of God guards our hearts and minds through Christ Jesus*.

**Broken Confidence at the Throne of Grace** (Is 37) – Jerusalem found herself in a helpless state before the great and powerful Sennacherib, king of the wicked nation of Assyria. And she deserved it. Hezekiah, himself an imperfect king (he will end his life badly), tears his clothes, covers himself with sackcloth and goes before the Lord in prayer (v1). This is both a symbol of his own humility as well as a righteous anger over what is transpiring. He knows only God can change the course of what is before them and he prays and pleads that He would do so (vv16-20). Here is why we pray – God hears our prayers and acts according to our prayers (v21). And what can prayer accomplish? (v36).

**And Elijah** (James 5:17-18) – In recalling a similar amazing story, James emphasizes to ordinary Christians like you and me that Elijah was an ordinary man – that is "*with a nature like ours*." God loves to answer the prayers of the righteous. He has invited us to His throne of grace. We are to come boldly.

**Prayer at EEF** – Do not despise the call to prayer we give to you, because prayer, although hard work, is not a burden for those who understand God's appointed means to victory. This is why we have taught you all to sing and recite the Lord's Prayer. This is why we are giving ourselves diligently to singing God's Prayer-book, the Psalms. This is why we emphasize a time of corporate prayer led by men representing all of us and calling upon all of us to heartily add our "Amen."

**More Prayer** – The great battle today is not fought with swords but with the gospel of Jesus Christ (Eph 6:12). And we certainly feel the need to seek the Lord for the growth and sanctification of our own body in these days. Join us in praying for the victory of God to be manifest in our own congregation, in our homes, in our worship, in our preaching, in the tough relational work of life, and in our communities so that supremacy of Christ would be known everywhere, including and starting in our own hearts. Join us in praying that God would keep us in the unity of the Spirit while growing us up into a unity of faith. Join us as we seek Him to open doors for the gospel and to send forth laborers, to save our neighbors and bring salvation to the world. Let us humble ourselves in prayer before the Lord – but a humility that is drenched in thanksgiving and expectation, for the Lord is near and He is good.

*Dave Hatcher – January 8<sup>th</sup>, 2006*