

The Work of Prayer – *Matthew 6:9-14*

Introduction – Along with Bible reading, prayer is a key discipline for the Christian. It is something that permeates this Lord's Day service which then informs how we pray throughout the week. This morning, let's acknowledge the work that prayer is (it's hard), and let's be reminded of the worthwhileness of prayer (it changes things).

The Lord's Prayer (Matt 6:9-14, Luke 11:1-4) – In Matthew's gospel, Jesus says to pray "in this manner"; in Luke's gospel, Jesus says "When you pray, say..." Both are true; the Lord's Prayer is a prayer to recite and it is a prayer to shape your own prayers. A couple of brief overall observations –

Jesus intends for us to learn to pray through imitation.

The prayer He teaches us is brief, not wordy. And while it is profound, it is simple.

The prayer assumes an optimistic view of the salvation of the world.

The prayer is covenantal ("our"), but personal and comprehensive of our needs.

It presupposes an open honesty before God ("forgive, as we forgive...").

Imitate these attitudes in the work of prayer. Shape your prayers in this work and you will find that you are being shaped as well.

Our Father in Heaven – Jesus invites us to use the same name for God that He does, for we are His children in this covenant of grace and the gift of regeneration. It is by the Spirit that we cry out, "Abba, Father" in this close, personal way (Rom 8:15). This good Father cares about everything (1 Pet 5:7). This is the covenant we come and renew each Lord's Day.

Hallowed Be Your Name – This is a petition, "Let your name be hallowed," and just as Isaiah saw the Lord high and exalted, hallowed, and then realized his own sinfulness when before Him, so we quickly come to the realization of the need to confess our sins in His presence. Our Confession of Sin in the liturgy shapes this way of thinking for our own prayer lives as well. It is a good thing to regularly and simply confess your sin and your sinful tendencies to the Lord; it is good to always be consciously repenting. And it is good to be always reminded that you are forgiven – completely, fully, gladly (1 John 1:9).

Your Kingdom Come, Your Will be Done on Earth as it is in Heaven – In council with the King, we are invited to reign with Him through prayer/consultation over the situation on earth. For ourselves, we are praying that we would be more loyal subjects, for our sanctification and a zeal for His glory. For the world, we are praying that the gospel would be efficacious on this earth in every arena. We pray with the confidence (faith) that the earth has been transformed and is being transformed by His grace; His enemies are being made a footstool and His kingdom is extending to the ends of the earth. Our corporate prayer time is just one example of where we are doing this kind of praying, kingdom oriented, outward focused, with an expectation of efficaciousness in the work of prayer. We are not simply to wish, praying like you are throwing a coin in a fountain.

Give us This Day our Daily Bread – We are to recognize that man lives by every Word that proceeds from the mouth of God and therefore our daily bread and every material need we ever have is met by and through God's merciful and kind gifts. We learn to ask Him for everything, anything, and thank Him for all things. More than simply material things, we are to pray for daily mercies. However, as we pray, we must learn to pray and not worry, but rather pray and submit to the One to Whom we are turning. The ultimate example of this is Jesus' prayer in the Garden (Matt 26:36-43) where Jesus asked the Father for something He knew God would say "no" to. He put it before the Father, expressing His desire, and then left it in the Father's hands. This is the prayer that gives unreasonable peace (Phil 4:6-7).

Forgive us Our Trespases – We must confess our own sins as well as the sins of *our* people when we come before God in prayer ("our trespases"). And we are brought up short against any hypocrisy here as we pray that God would only forgive us in the way we forgive others. Here again, prayer shapes us, often more than we were ever expecting. This is also why prayer is hard work. But it is a work of grace, for the Lord's mercy knows no bounds (Zech 7:9, James 2:13) – for you, and through you for others.

Do Not Lead us into Temptation/Deliver us from Evil – We are to rejoice when we encounter various trials that the Lord gives (James 1:2), but we are also aware that God is able to rescue us from evil temptations (2 Pet 2:9, 1 Cor 10:13). Among other things, we learn in these prayers that God is "right there" while we are being tempted and that the "tilt" one way or another in the moment of temptation is faith in God right then, which is our victory (1 John 5:4). Short prayers for protection in tempting situations with honest contemplation on how God has already provided a way of escape – these are means of grace in our time of need. In those moments we often know what hard work prayer truly is. (Note: remember the "us" here as well – as you remember how tough temptation and evil can be to fight, pray for one another in this regard).

For Thine is the Kingdom/Power/Glory Forever – Consider these words together with the action of lifting our hands at the end of our service. Everything we've prayed we lift and place in God's hands. Everything we are we give over as a living sacrifice. Our hands represent all we will now go and do and we have offered in advance that all will be *Soli Deo Gloria*. Pray this way in our corporate worship – and let it shape the way you go about the work of prayer throughout your days.