



MATTHEW

THE KINGDOM COME

WHEN YOU PRAY
Matthew 6:5-18

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Ethan Ezikian

I. Introduction

Prayer

Let's pray.

Father in Heaven, the kingdom belongs to you, all the power in the universe belongs to you, all the glory of a billion galaxies is yours. You are beautiful, and powerful, and good. So we ask that you would make much of yourself in Union Church today. Cause your name to be honored. Make your kingdom more visible through us. Help us to hear your voice and obey quickly. Father, we come to you as needy people. Please give us what we need. We need many things, Lord, but you are our greatest need. We come to you as sinful people. Thank you that the shed blood of Jesus has opened up a way for us to come before you with confidence, because in Christ our sins are forgiven and washed away. Father, don't let the enemy have his way in us. He hates us and he hates our church, and he hates your creation. Guard us, Father. Lead us away from temptation. Rescue us from the snares of the enemy. Lead us in the way everlasting. Fix our eyes on Christ. Especially now, in these next moments. I ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Welcome

Well, good morning! My name is Ethan. I'm one of the pastors here at Union and it's my joy to open up the Word with you this morning. If you have your bibles, why don't you turn to Matthew 6, if you haven't already! If this is your first Sunday with us, I'm grateful and humbled that you're here. If I haven't met you yet I genuinely want to! So please, let's make that happen after the service.

Where We're Going

We're continuing in our walk through the Gospel of Matthew. And for the last few weeks we've been working through this very famous section of the Gospel of Matthew called the Sermon on the Mount. Today, we're coming to, maybe, an even more famous section within the Sermon on the Mount. It's a section of scripture that I'm guessing you know or you've heard regardless of your experience with Christianity and that's the Lord's prayer. It's Jesus' teaching and modeling for his disciples how to pray.

Now I don't know your experience, but I grew up attending a church where we recited the Lord's every Sunday. Every week a pastor would stand up in the service and pray for a long time... my

friends and I used to bring a stopwatch and time the prayers. Can you believe how sacreligious I was?! (I guess the Lord had the last laugh because now I'm a pastor who prays long prayers. Incidentally, the longest prayer was over seven minutes.) But anyhow, the signal for the end of the prayer was always when the pastor would cue the congregation to pray in unison the Lord's Prayer. Now, in my younger years I would have strongly rejected that as just wrote tradition and today I would probably tell my younger self to slow my roll because I actually see a lot of value in it. But one of the dangers of saying something over and over and over again is that it might become empty words. Something we say, but we don't spend the energy to comprehend or live out.

And that's actually what Jesus is getting after as he teaches his disciples how to pray. Jesus' teaching on prayer falls within this broader teaching where Jesus is making it clear for his disciples that the way to live in his kingdom isn't simply through surface level obedience, like the Pharisees. He's been telling his disciples, "Don't just obey the letter of the law. That's what the Pharisees do and you need a righteousness that exceeds that of the Pharisees." Which would have been crazy for Jesus to say because the Pharisees were seen as the "holier than thou" people in that day, but Jesus says, "That's not enough. Citizens of the kingdom need to go beyond the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees. As you obey the law about anger or lust or oaths or taking revenge its not enough to follow the letter of the law, I want your heart." And in the beginning of chapter six he's gonna say, "As you give to the poor, you've got to go beyond what these hypocrites do. They give to the needy to be seen by man, but you've got to give in order to be seen by your Father in heaven." Later in chapter 6 he'll say, "You can't just fast like the Pharisees. Again, they do it for the recognition of others, but you are to fast to receive a reward from your heavenly Father." And today as we unpack Jesus teaching on prayer Jesus is again going to say, "I'm calling you to pray in a way that exceeds the 'righteousness' of the Pharisees. I'm teaching you to pray, not for the attention of other people, but out of your hunger for God. See the Pharisees had their motives and methods for prayer, and in our world today the term "prayer" encompasses a lot of different faith and perspectives, but Jesus is calling us to be a different kind of people. **We pray out of our need for God to be our loving Father, our holy King, and our caring protector.**

II. Our Need for God

Now before we dive in, I should confess to you that I am not content with my prayer life. I am not standing in front of you as someone who feels like I have a lot of personal accomplishment to draw from as I teach on prayer. So as much as I'll exhort you from text this morning, I will be exhorting my own heart.

In fact I was thinking as I wrote this sermon about how some mornings, I will wake up earlier than my kids. And in my head, the ideal picture is for them to come downstairs and find me immersed in scripture, contending in prayer because I want them to know me as a Dad who loves spending time with Jesus. And that's maybe true sometimes, but sometimes I wake up and just putting my eyes on the pages of my bible puts me back to sleep, let alone bowing my head and closing my eyes in prayer. And so I'm a little ashamed to admit that once or twice on those mornings when I'm struggling, I will hear my kids pitter pattering down the stairs and quickly rouse myself enough to open my Bible again and fold my hands and try and look like I'm that spiritual giant. But mostly I feel like Jesus'

disciples. In the gospel of Luke Jesus disciples see him praying and even though they've grown up praying in synagogue, praying multiple times a day, they see Jesus praying and something about how Jesus prays causes them to ask, "Lord, teach us to pray." I'm eager for Jesus to teach me how to pray.

Now I'm being vulnerable, but don't lie - you've prayed for the sake of the people watching you. Or at least you've experienced it. Anybody ever been around the dinner table or in a small group and all of a sudden you realize, this isn't a prayer, this is a sermon! Somebody is trying to be a bible teacher in this prayer right now! Or the prayer becomes a passive aggressive thing. Or when prayer just becomes a way to dip our gossip into a spiritual sauce, "Lord, we pray for Ethan and Dana because we heard about how he fakes his devotions every morning."

Those things are what Jesus is teaching his disciples not to do. "When you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites," he says. "For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others." Their motivation for praying is to be recognized as holy people by others, but Jesus says, "[don't be like them]... when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you." You see, prayer is not for educating people, prayer isn't for correcting others, prayer isn't for accruing good works - like sometimes you'll hear in the Catholic Church, "say seven 'our Fathers' and seven 'hail Mary's'" to make up for your sin - prayer isn't for centering yourself, it's not for mindfulness, it's not for sending positive vibes.

Prayer, in the kingdom of God, is aimed at communion with God. The motivation and the goal isn't to be seen by others, but to be seen by God. It's like when a child says, "Dad, watch this!" and you watch and then the kid realizes they hadn't thought that far ahead and actually have to produce something for you to watch. Their motivation for saying, "Watch this" isn't because they have a skill to perform, it's because they crave communion with you. That is us when we come to pray to God.

This is why we pray: because we need communion with God. We need him! You may or may not realize this, but you were designed for relationship with God. God made people to enjoy communion with him. When sin entered the world through Adam and Eve it did to them, what it does in us today. You know, in that moment of failure - when they took the fruit and mistrusted God and rebelled against his good commands and broke the whole universe with their disobedience - in that moment they needed to pray! They needed to cry out to the Lord and confess their failure and ask God for his forgiveness and for his help! But instead they hid from God. We were made for communion with God. To be in his presence would be our greatest satisfaction. Augustine says, "our hearts will be restless until we find rest in him" but in so many ways we are tempted to hide from him because of sin.

Do you find prayer to be too vulnerable? Maybe to talk to God is an uncomfortable thing because it's difficult to be real with him. It's all too easy to hide behind religious jargon or other people's prayer requests. But Jesus is teaching us to pray to a God who sees in secret. Hiding from him is as useless as covering our nakedness with fig leaves. He sees you. He knows.

In the Old Testament, the prophet Isaiah is given a vision of the throne room of God. And as he comes into the presence of God, he is undone. Not with joy, but with despair. "Woe is me" he says, "for I am a man of unclean lips and I come from a people of unclean lips." For Isaiah, coming into God's presence was terrible because his hidden sin was revealed. And the presence of God, the Holy Holy Holy God was terrible for him until God cleansed him of his sin.

The way that Jesus is teaching us to pray to the God who sees in secret would be nothing but bad news and terror for us, except that Jesus has shed his blood on behalf of his people. The book of Hebrews, chapter 10 says, "we have confidence to enter the holy places" - not terror, not an urge to hide, not a feeling of unworthiness. Confidence! - "we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is through his flesh."

Jesus is teaching us to pray out of our need for God and he has made a way for that act of laying ourselves bare as weak, needy people before the God who sees to be a taste of what we were made to experience in the garden; a taste of what we will experience for eternity with him in the new heavens and the new earth because of the blood of his cross! We come into conversation with him confident and expectant and embraced by God!

We pray out of our need, we pray because through Jesus our need for God to be our loving Father is met.

III. Our Loving Father

As he teaches his disciples how to pray, Jesus is teaching us to approach God in prayer as our Father. "Don't pray like the hypocrites... pray to your *Father* who is in secret. And your *Father* will reward you... don't pray like the gentiles, heaping up empty phrases... for your Father knows what you need... pray like this: Our *Father* in heaven..." This is a level of intimacy that would have shocked the disciples. In our day we have a lot of familiarity and casualness about God and we need a greater reverence. But in that day there was so much reverence for God that to come to him and pray and call him Father would be totally counter cultural.

Now it's pretty common to hear phrases like, "we're all God's children," but actually that is not what the bible teaches. We are not all God's Children! We are all God's creations, but to be called God's children means to be his set apart people. In fact the bible says that apart from Christ we are aliens to God's family, strangers to God promises. We are the farthest thing from being his children! And yet, in Christ, to all who receive him and believe his name he gives the right to become children of God (John 1:12). Once we were slaves to sin, bound by fear, but in in Jesus we have "received a Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry out 'abba' Father!" (Rom 8:15). Ephesians 1 says "in love he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will to the praise of his glorious grace" (Eph 1:4b-6).

I have an awesome sister who is adopted. There was a day where my family stood in front of a judge and my parents made promises, and a judge declared this little girl to be British Eliana Ezikian. And now she will be my sister forever. She has every right to call my dad “daddy” and my mom “mommy.” She has all our love, she is 1000% a part of us because she has been brought into our family. When you trust Jesus and believe in him as your Lord and savior, your adoption papers are signed with the blood of Christ. And now as you come to the holy God of the universe, you have every right to call him Father forever!

And I know that for some of you that does not sound like good news. Some of you have had terrible, distant, wicked, or absent fathers. Some of you have been wounded by your earthly fathers. Listen, I promise you in every way that your earthly fathers have fallen short, your heavenly Father will exceed your expectations. In every way that you have been wounded by evil men, your good Father in heaven will be a gentle, kind healer. Your earthly fathers, no matter how bad or how good, are broken arrows meant to point you to the perfect love of the Father in heaven. So when you pray, pray to your Father in heaven...

III. Our Holy King

And when we pray out of our need for God to be our loving Father, we also pray to him as our holy King. After Jesus gives us a way to address God in prayer, he gives us a list of petitions - a list of things to ask for. And the first is that he would hallow his name.

Now that is an old English word if there ever was one! What does it mean to “Hallow” something? To “Hallow” something means to set it aside as sacred, to honor it. When we pray, “Our Father in heaven, hallowed by your name.” We are asking God to make himself honored and worshipped and revered in our own hearts, in our families, in our church, in our neighborhoods, in the nations! Our Father in heaven, you alone are worthy of all the honor and the praise, so glorify your name in all the earth!

When we ask for the Father to hallow his name we are aligning our hearts with the priorities of God. Because God is the most glorious! He is above all things. There is no one greater than him! And so that means that God is about God, God is working for his own glory and our good is found when God causes his name to be hallowed.

Then Jesus teaches us to ask God to bring his rule and reign, “Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” And this flows directly out of our asking for him to make his name honored. Because to ask God to hallow his name would mean nothing if we did not welcome his rule over our lives.

When we pray, “Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” We are asking God to come and take over. We are surrendering our will to his will. And this is the Christian life. Surrender after surrender, constantly putting the old self to death so that Christ might reign in us.

Lord, we are surrendering our ambitions, our hopes, and our plans and asking for you to come and accomplish your will in us quickly!

To ask for the Father to hallow his name, to bring his Kingdom, to accomplish his will here on earth is to **pray out of our need for God to be our loving Father and our holy King...** and we ask for these things out of the conviction that our God is not a cruel tyrant, but a good Father, a good King who will take care of us... **we pray to him as our caring protector.**

IV. Our Caring Protector

This is what the last three petitions of the prayer are - asking for his caring protection. Since he is our good Father, of course we can look to him for our provision and protection. In Matthew 7 Jesus tells his disciples, "Which one of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for fish will give him a serpent?" The implication is, nobody would do that. Nobody would give their child something that is bad for them. And Jesus says, "If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!" (7:9-11)

So we ask God to give us this day our daily bread - to provide for the things that we need each day.

We ask him to forgive us our sin and help us to forgive.

We ask him to lead us not into temptation

And we ask him to deliver us from evil.

And when we ask these things of him after acknowledging him as our heavenly Father and our holy King, that means that we are prioritizing our desires beneath his desires.

That means that, when we pray for God to provide for us or to protect us and he doesn't answer our prayer in the way that we hoped, we can trust that it is not that prayer doesn't work.

When tragedy strikes. When suffering comes. When the years are lean. When it seems like blessing is withheld. When mourning multiplies. When weariness comes in wave after wave... It's not that God has forgotten you. It's not that he hasn't heard your prayers. It's that his arm is too short to save. It's not that he is not powerful enough. It's not that he is not good.

We pray to him as our heavenly Father, we ask him to glorify his name, we submit our will to his kingship... He is not failing to come through for us. He is, instead, operating out of a larger scope than us. And we can trust that he is working to hallow his name and establish his king, and care for his people.

So come to him out of our need for God. Cry out to him as your loving Father. Pray to him as your holy King. Trust him as your caring protector.

IV. Conclusion

And as you come to him, I want to tie a bow on this with some practice ways that we can listen to Jesus' teaching in our daily lives.

- Start with praying this prayer.
- Let this prayer become categories that characterize your prayer life. Remember that Jesus is not so much concerned with the words of our prayer as he is the character of our prayers. That means that in giving us these words he is meaning to shape how we pray.
- Prioritize Prayer.
 - "To be a Christian without prayer is no more possible than to be alive without breathing!"
 - Too often prayer is like a prescription we use to treat the things we can't handle on our own, but in reality we are like suffocating people who are ignoring the tank of oxygen available to us, only taking halting gasps every once in a while. If prayer is communion with God, if we really believe that through the blood of Jesus we have this kind of child to Father access to God, if Jesus tells us that our Good Father will give good gifts to those who ask, then we would be foolish, suffocating Christians
- Pray with others.
 - Jesus' instruction here about praying in secret was to correct and challenge the Pharisees who were motivated by the praise of men. But we also know that Jesus prayed with his disciples and the book of Acts is full of examples of the early church praying together. That means that here in Matthew 6 Jesus isn't calling for us to only pray in private.
- Make our Church a Praying Church
 - I've been reflecting on the short life of our church and what I'm seeing is that the only times we have really gained ground, the times I've felt like the things we are doing and the church we are becoming are sinking their teeth into the mission God has given us have been birthed out of prayer. When we've come to the Lord out of our need, out of our weakness, and asked him as our Father to glorify his name in our midst, to bring his kingdom here in Livingston County, to provide for our needs, to deliver us from the evil one.
 - Prayer is real spiritual work. Prayer accomplished things in us and in the world. Prayer shapes us as God's kingdom people.
 - If we do anything in 2022, let it be that we become a praying people as we meet in our men's and women's bible studies, as we gathering in Go Groups, as we build relationships with one another, as we gather for worship, as we spread the gospel - let all of it be marinated in prayer!

We are a needy people. And among all our needs, our hunger for God is our greatest need whether we acknowledge it or not. So **cry out to him as your loving Father. Pray to him as your holy King. Trust him as your caring protector.**

Let's pray to him now. I'm going to pray for us for a moment, and then today I'd like to end by praying the words that Christ taught us to pray together in unison. Those words will be on the screen.

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“Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name.
Your kingdom come,
your will be done,
 on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread,
and forgive us our debts,
 as we also have forgiven our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation,
 but deliver us from evil.

For yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever.
Amen.