

PRAYER

*Second Sermon Preached
by Rev. Loyce C. Carver
on July, 1979*



WE want to learn something that enlarges and deepens our understanding and illuminates our vision on the subject of prayer. The Bible is the only Book that can move and inspire and thrill everybody, from the young to the old.

Let's turn to Matthew 6. This is the Master Teacher, the Lord Jesus, teaching His disciples how to pray:

"But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth:

"That thine alms may be in secret: and thy Father which seeth in secret himself shall reward thee openly.

"And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward." They received their reward as soon as someone saw them because they prayed to be seen and they were seen. That was it.

"But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly" (Matthew 6:3-6).

If we have the privilege of having many prayers answered, we won't have to say anything about how humble we are or how successful we are in the ministry of prayer. It will be obvious. We won't need to blow our trumpet and say, "Let me tell you a story about what God did when **I** prayed!"

The Lord's Prayer

The Lord gave us to understand how we ought to pray. Jesus said:

"Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name.

"Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.

"Give us this day our daily bread.

"And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.

"And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever, Amen" (Matthew 6:9-13).

God is teaching us more than just a grouping of words that have a certain cadence and rhythm and beauty to them.

Let us look at the first verse: **"Our Father which art in heaven."** This is addressing God in Heaven as our Father. If you can honestly look up into Heaven and say, "Father, hear me," you have already passed some wicket gates along the way. You have been born again and become a member of the Family of God. Before that, you wouldn't approach God and say, "Our Father." That means, "I'm Thy son," or "I'm Thy daughter."

"Hallowed be thy name." In other words, you say, "Father, holy, hallowed, precious, and glorious be Thy Name." That's the way the Lord said for you to approach God: not with many words but with a few words fraught with real meaning. In those selected words, there are depths of meaning.

"Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven." How is Christ's Kingdom going to come? This Kingdom will first be in the hearts of people. It is not an earthly kingdom like you read about in history books, but a spiritual kingdom. The Kingdom of God must come into your heart, so that when you say, "Thy kingdom come," you are saying, "Fulfill in me the mission You have for me: to advance Your Kingdom, to teach the people of the glories of Your Kingdom, of the holiness of Your Name, of the reasons they should worship You and approach You in the right way. I should be able to teach them that when they pray they can believe and get an answer. So, oh God, let Your Kingdom be alive and grow and develop in me!" Would you dare say, "In everybody but me"? No, no.

"Thy will be done," is an elementary lesson in prayer. Do you want to advance your own ideas everywhere you go and say, "Everything has to be subject to what I think"? It has to be "Thy will be done," even if it is God's will that we eat humble pie.

The founder of our church, Sister Florence Crawford, used to compare the true Christian who is walking in the will of God to an old garden hose, willing to be used or not to be used. The hose may lie there out of sight, or where it may even be stepped on, but when it is in use, life-giving water flows through it to the thirsty plants. The hose may be coiled and hung up for awhile, and if it is a good hose, it will be ready for use again when uncoiled. But it may become hard and brittle, and then be useless. Have you seen Christians who were once useful in the Lord's service, but something happened to make them "brittle"?

If we are saying to the Lord, "Thy will be done," we are saying, "Place me, Lord, where You want me and I'll stay put. I'll wait. I'll be there when needed, ready to do Thy bidding. I'll let You speak, and I will answer, 'Here am I, send me.'"

"Thy will be done in earth," means in you, in me, in all of us, "as it is in heaven." We are given a little glimpse of Heaven in the Book of Revelation: the New Jerusalem coming down from God out of Heaven, the streets of gold, the gates of pearl and walls of jasper. The River of Life will be there, trees that are planted for the healing for the nations. Jesus Christ will be there, dwelling among His people. All tears will be wiped away. Oh, the glory of it! We can't grasp it all, but there will be no discordant notes there. All will be done according to the will of God. Now is our time to pray, "Lord, help me to fit into Your pattern; make me pliable, willing and obedient."

"Give us this day our daily bread." And some people spend their whole life in nothing but that! I don't mean praying for it, but in getting it, when God has promised it. That's not the most important thing in life. To be sure we have to eat to live; God made us that way. We have to keep at that quite faithfully or we have some problems. Sometimes food isn't easy to come by in some quarters, and we have to employ the help of God to get it.

Even in the land of plenty, it would be a refreshing exercise to do what God wants us to do — to remember that we didn't get it, really, on our own. God helps us to work by giving us strength and wisdom. These are gifts of God and if we lose them, we realize how great the loss is.

Don't wait until you are hungry to pray, "Give me my daily bread." Don't wait until you are sick to pray, "God, let the healing virtue of the Blood avail for me." Many times we wait till the "horse is out of the barn" before we close door. We should pray for His help to avoid getting into troubles.

"Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors." If we want God to forgive us, we will be forgiven as we forgive others. If you don't forgive, you won't be forgiven. If you have a grudge, you have a problem and it will take the Blood of Jesus to get rid of it. There is no other cure.

"And lead us not into temptation." Some play with temptation, hang around where it is, almost ask to be enticed and tempted. Have you forgotten to pray the Lord's Prayer? "Lead us not into temptation, **but deliver us from evil.**" If you will not let God lead you, and you walk into it with both eyes wide open, you are at the mercy of Satan. You will be tempted and overcome by evil. But if you pray the Lord's Prayer, and live by it, you will stay away from temptation, avoid every appearance of evil. Don't do anything that you know will lead you step by step until you are overtaken by Satan. You know what I am talking about — little things, big things, physical things, emotional things — all that pertains to you.

"For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen."

What a wonderful climax to a prayer! Get hold of this prayer and study it some more.

The Spirit of Prayer

In Psalm 19:14, we read:

"Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O LORD, my strength, and my redeemer."

This is a prayer of David. We are to pray without ceasing. Unless we can live in a spirit of prayer, we will miss many, many opportunities to have God's blessing and direction, and His fellowship.

You cannot be on your knees all the time. You cannot literally have your mind on words of prayer all the time, because you have other jobs to do. But, oh, you can catch those chances in between times! Start the day with prayer, pray as you go here and there; pray before you retire, and during the waking hours at night. God's Word tells us: "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee" (Isaiah 26:3).

Unless we do this, we may let our thoughts and meditations run off into undesirable — at least unprofitable — paths. We all have that faculty. We do not claim that we have our mind on a specific prayer at all times — we have many things to do, to think about, to talk about. But we want to keep in such an attitude that in an instant of time when in dire need we can get a prayer through to God.

We can keep our thoughts in control. "Whatsoever things are true, . . . honest, lovely, . . . of good report, . . . think on these things" (Philippians 4:8). Don't fret about tomorrow. Center on today; let it be a day of victory. If we have this prayer, God will help us to think on the right things. As we go about our work, we can ask God to give us this spirit of prayer and keep our minds on Him.

Praying During Adversity

In Acts 16:25, we have a good example of prayer during adversity:

"And at midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God: and the prisoners heard them."

Paul and Silas were in prison. They had been beaten with whips, and now their feet were in the stocks. They were ministers of the Gospel and had done nothing wrong, only rebuked the devil in a young lady who had the spirit of divination. She was delivered from her abnormal condition; but because her masters had lost their source of income, they incited the people against Paul and Silas. That was why they were in prison.

What a surprise it must have been to the prisoners to hear Paul and Silas praying and singing under such conditions! And God heard them, too, and sent an earthquake that shook down the prison walls. Everyone's bonds were loosed and they were free, but no one left. The jail keeper feared they had all fled and was about to kill himself, but Paul said, "Do thyself no harm: for we are all here." The jailer fell down before them and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"

If Paul and Silas had not prayed, the jailer would not have been saved. If they had reacted wrongly in their trying circumstances, how different the story would have been! What had begun so tragically turned into a revival, the jailer's family also being saved. That is what prayer accomplished.

When you are tempted to pout or to feel sorry for yourself when someone has done something to you, pray, "Oh, God, deliver me from evil! Don't let me become bitter about this! Help me!" God can help you to overcome all evil, anything that might tend to make you bitter. The defeat the devil had programmed for you will turn into a blessing, real victory, because you prayed. Often God does not help us until we pray. He loves to answer prayer and is waiting for us to call upon Him.

And Paul and Silas forgave their captors. You can imagine their praying: "**Oh** God, forgive the jailer and do something for those men who applied the stripes! Help those who do not understand why we delivered the girl from her bondage. They are on the outside looking in, and don't know how You did it so miraculously. Oh God, forgive them for their lack of knowledge and their reaction!" They must have felt like that or they would not have been able to sing in prison.

Whether or not they said those words, they prayed. And when you pray, you say something. It may not be in audible words, but even when you pray silently, words are coming from your heart.

The Dying Thief

Let us think of the prayer of the dying thief who was being crucified with Jesus.

And one of the malefactors which were hanged railed on him, saying, If thou be Christ, save thyself and us.

"But the other answering rebuked him, saying, Dost not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation?" (Luke 23:39,40).

The one man railed on Jesus, but the other faced facts. Both were condemned for their sins, and the one knew it.

"And we indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds: but this man hath done nothing amiss.

"And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom.

"And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with me in paradise" (Luke 23:41-43).

His was a prayer offered sincerely in a time of desperation, for an apparent need. Jesus heard it and answered it.

When the bodies were taken down, one of the thieves had gone to be with Jesus in Paradise, but the one who had railed on Jesus was doomed to eternal hell. You can rail on Jesus now, but be sure you will reap your punishment. What a difference that dying thief's prayer made — the difference between Heaven and hell!

More Than Words

In the 18th chapter of Luke, we read of the difference in two men's prayers. Jesus spoke the parable to some people who were trusting in themselves that they were righteous, but despised others.

"Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican."

The Temple was the right place to go, the house of prayer. And they were going for the purpose of praying. We want to find out what happened when they got there.

"The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican.

"I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess."

That's one man's so-called prayer, which was no prayer at all. It was just words of self-approval, verbalizing his own thoughts on how good he was.

"And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner.

"I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other" (Luke 18:9-14).

There we can see what kind of prayers God answers. Hypocrites who pray long prayers do not help themselves at all: they may even cause other people to stumble. The publican who prayed, "God be merciful to me a sinner," couldn't even lift his eyes toward Heaven, but from the depths of his heart he cried out for mercy. He went down to his house justified.

The church is not a station for satisfied souls — it is a soul-saving station. If you have problems and are honest with the Lord, He will provide the remedy. He hasn't promised to answer your prayers for just anything you have set your fancy upon, something to consume on your own lust, to satisfy your fleshly

desires. If you do get things like that, they might become a curse to you. But if you are praying in the will of God, asking Him for something with which He will be glorified, which will be a blessing to you, believe Him and the answer will come. Faith will bring the blessing.

Faith Is the Key

The prayers of the saints are bottled in Heaven, ready to be poured out. In the Book of Revelation we read that the prayers of the saints go up as incense to God the Father. Prayers prayed in faith will have an answer. We don't know just when and how and the answer may be the opposite of what we expect — but when our trust is in God, we know He will give us what is good for us. Remember, we are praying, "Thy will, not mine, be done."

And you do want it done God's way. Put the sacrifice on the altar as they did in the days of the prophets. They came to offer a sacrifice before God and then had to shoo away the buzzards that came to devour the sacrifice.

When you pray, banish all the attacks of the devil, resist him and he will flee from you. When he says, "It can't be done," you say, "God has promised it and it will be done."

In James 5:13-18, we find more about prayer. Prayer is mentioned many times in this chapter.

"Is any among you afflicted? let him pray. Is any merry? let him sing psalms."

You can rejoice and praise God when you are merry, but if you have an affliction, something that really bears down on you, do you complain? That is not the answer. The more you complain, the bigger the problem gets. Should you tell someone else about it? Don't try that, because they'll give you a good load of their troubles. You had better pray.

"Is any among you afflicted? let him pray. . . .

"Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord:

"And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him."

Look at all the privileges we have here from simple prayer — healing for our bodies, forgiveness for our sins.

If something comes on us because of our transgressions, if we confess the fact that we have transgressed, God will forgive. We may feel our world has caved in — more has come to us than we can bear, physically, mentally and spiritually — but when we cast our all on the Lord, He forgives and lifts the burden. The Lord will heal us and restore that of which Satan has robbed us.

"Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed."

Confess your own faults, not something someone else has done. When we confess our faults one to another and pray one for another, we will have faith to be healed.

There are scores of people here who can testify of answered prayer. They proved God in times of trial, were healed of dread diseases, and of simple things that plagued them. God does not ignore the little things. He will heal you of a cold, or a headache, as well as of serious diseases. Yes, God can do any of these things when we ask Him, if we just believe Him.

But we must pray in faith, and make some wholehearted consecrations. Consecrations with reservations are no consecrations at all. God help us to live on praying ground, believing His promises, so that when problems arise we can reach the ear of God! It is His will to give good gifts to His children.

"The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.

"Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months.

"And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her

fruit."

In these few verses of James, you will notice how many times reference is made to prayer. In Verse 13, it says, "pray." In verse 14, "Let them pray." Verse 15, "And the prayer of faith shall save the sick." Verse 16, "Pray one for another. . . . The effectual, fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much." Verse 17, "He prayed earnestly." Verse 18, "He prayed again." Seven different times we are exhorted to pray. Oh, what a potential we have! There is nothing like it in all the world. The power of God is at our disposal.

God's promises are Yea and Amen to them that believe. So you can pray and God will undertake for you — save you, keep you, heal you, hear your prayers for other people. "According to your faith be it unto you" (Matthew 9:29). — L.C.C.