



## DUDLEY'S MONTHLY MESSAGE

MATTHEW 6:5-11

JANUARY 2015

# Gospel-Praying

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*What difference does the arrival of the Kingdom of God in Jesus Christ make in mankind's praying? All men pray. Prayer is endemic to the human race. If not universal, it is global. Men everywhere pray.*

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Even a large percentage of professed atheists admit to praying. The concepts of God may change, but there is something inside that prompts all people at some point to pray. But how do Christians pray?

Sadly, many Christians pray the same way pagans do. They can be heard begging from an apparently reticent god, or negotiating with a merchant god. Some pray the way Old Testament saints did being still enamored with the shadows of reality that pointed to the day of the gospel. The question is: did Christ coming into the world alter the way believers (should) pray?

Evidently the disciples were intrigued when they heard Jesus pray. He prayed differently than what they were used to hearing. They asked him to teach them to pray. When he did, he addressed several common obstacles to prayer.

*When you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. They love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others.*

Matthew 6:5 (ESV)

When prayer is seen as a meritorious religious action, there will be a focus on how much, how often, and how pretty. When prayer is seen as only a duty, there will be expectations that demand a response. After all, if we do our part, God had better do his. When prayer is seen as currency, we focus on the amount we can muster, and many words from more people are better. When prayer is viewed as a means to control, we lose the primary purpose of communion and seek to bring all people and circumstances under our control. When

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people in exasperation cry, "Prayer doesn't work," they reveal that they have missed the point. When you always get God when you pray, it always works.

**"Our Father in heaven."** The privilege of gospel praying is the relationship we have by virtue of being in Christ. He has taken the orphan mentality and replaced it with a consciousness of being a son. We are given the same access to the Father as Jesus had while living as a Son on earth. Others may have God answer their prayer, but those who pray in Jesus' name always have the assurance that the Father listens to him.

I remember being admonished by well-meaning preachers that our prayers weren't being answered because of our sins using texts like this:

*Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save, or his ear dull, that it cannot hear; but your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you so that he does not hear.*

Isaiah 59:1-2 (ESV)

But we are not living under the same covenant that Israel was under when Isaiah wrote. Jesus has become our covenant head and not only paid the penalty of our covenant breaking, but he has kept covenant fully. The sin that could easily beset us is the refusal to believe him. Abiding in his word includes believing him regarding his finished work related to our sins.

For many, the very idea of talking directly with God is frightening. We tend to see ourselves as the Israelites who needed to come through the outer court with its laver and altar before we can approach the throne. Abiding in his word means we live in light of the present reality of a rent veil and an open throne room.

*"Therefore, brothers, since 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, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water."*

Hebrews 10:19-22 (ESV)

We are sons foremost! We are to live like sons and we are to pray like sons, so we begin every prayer: "Our Father in heaven."

Recognizing that he is in heaven does not mean he is limited to some spiritual locale. It means that his rule includes heaven. It is a higher perspective than earth, and it includes the powers that govern earth. He is not only our Father, but he is in charge of both heaven and earth.

**"Hallowed be your name."** His name is distinct. We are not praying to some inner part of ourselves. We are not getting in touch with some spark of divinity in us

or in creation. We are not just meditating toward a better part of consciousness. We are communicating with someone distinct in his character and person. He exists outside of us and the rest of creation. He is holy, separate from everything else, totally personal and knowable.

**“Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.”** We pray in light of the presence of the kingdom of God. Earlier saints were looking forward to this invasion of heaven into earth. It has happened. The King is now on the throne. He is the eternal son of David, and he rules over all that was redeemed in the death and resurrection of the Son. We are his representatives on earth, claiming what is his. He has empowered us with the same powerful love that brought him to earth and led him to the cross. Our prayers are mainly concerned with how his kingdom rule is to be injected and applied in daily life. We know that the whole creation will ultimately reflect his redemption. That is assured because he is already on the throne. Right now, we have been given the privilege

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of invading the earth with the message that dispels darkness and illumines the minds of those who have been captured by the ruler of darkness. Our prayers reflect

our dependence upon him to guide us and provide what is needed to get our job done. We pray as people of the kingdom now, who are assured of the consummation of the kingdom later. We are waiting, but not passively. We are engaged in implementing as much of the kingdom rule as possible under his guidance.

**“Give us this day our daily bread.”** Our Father likes the fellowship that daily dependence produces. Adam and Eve believed the lie that they could live better if they knew enough not to be dependent on God. Later God gave Israel manna on a daily basis, not because he didn't have enough, but because he likes to do life with us daily. Our bread for physical and spiritual nutrition is available daily. We ask for it and enjoy it as coming from our Father's hand. It is fresh, satisfying, and enough.

**“And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.”** We have been both forgiven our debts and empowered to break the bonds of bitterness and revenge. We rejoice in our release from guilt toward God and our judgment toward others. It is not that we are trying to earn God's forgiveness by offering ours to others. It is the recognition that forgiveness is so deep that as we experience it from God, we can pass it on to others and find even greater freedom. It is by this transfer that the kingdom of God is continuously coming into the world.

**“And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.”** We cannot rely

fully on our own knowledge of good and bad. They can look so deceiving. We need him to lead us past what looks so good and into what he knows is best. There is a battle going on, and there is a strategy to distort our message and deny our heritage. We pray for God's continuous guidance and protection. We cannot win the battle alone.

We have historically called the previous instruction: The Lord's Prayer. It is his instruction regarding what issues are worthy of daily prayer. The good news of the new covenant gives greater clarity to it than even the disciples knew when he gave it to them. It makes prayer a constant attitude and makes it pleasant as a holy habit. We have been given the greatest privilege in doing life with the living Lord. We must not ignore him. We must not be dragged back into religious duties trying to qualify for his blessings.

Jesus declared that he is the Vine and that we as believers are the branches. (See John 15:1-7.) Israel was known as God's vine in the Old Testament. This nation's assignment was to represent God on earth and display what living in covenant with him was like. Jesus is Israel fulfilled. He did what Israel failed to do and created a new people who would live on the basis of his (Jesus') covenant with God the Father. This people would produce the fruit of covenant living by living in communion with the Father and being his earthly partner. Adam had been given that mandate, but was crippled by sin's blindness. Now Jesus

is the new Adam, and those in him are commissioned to continue the partnership.

*If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.*

John 15:7-8 (ESV)

**"My words abide in you."** All previous words from prophets and scribes were partial and predictive. The words of Jesus are full and centered in himself and his work. His words reveal how the Father loves him, how he loves us, and how this love is the motivation behind all that we do. To abide in his words or to keep his commandments is to act out of this reality. We are to love as those unconditionally-loved, totally-forgiven, fully-established sons of God. We have received his love when we've done nothing to deserve it. We are to give it away in the same manner. Those who operate as captives of his love, pray differently.

Let us pray!



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