Sermon- The Jesus Prayer: Bringing our needs before our Heavenly Father

Scripture: Matt 6:5-15 NLT September 10, 2017

Last week as part of our sermon series on prayer, I started a subseries focusing specifically on Jesus’ teaching on prayer in the Lord’s Prayer. We saw how the first part of the Lord’s prayer is focused on centering ourselves on God. We start will a plea to God to magnifying Himself in our own minds and rectify His place in our minds in the midst of all the corrupted associations we have of God’s Holy name in our mind. Then we plead for this awesome rule of his kingdom to be extended to the earth and finally we plead that everything that happens on earth will be God’s will and God’s will alone. We said that in Jesus’ teaching on pray, God was not a generic energy force that extends across the universe but the complete Trinity. God the Father who rules all creation, God’s Son who redeems human kind and God the Holy Spirit who helps us by giving us the power to follow God’s will. ***Our Father who art in heaven, Hallowed be Thy Name, Thy Kingdom Come, Thy Will be Done, On Earth as it is in Heaven.*** It is only when we have centered ourselves in our triune God do we have the alignment and intimacy with God to ask him for our own needs in the right way. In the following 3 verses, verses 11-13 of the Lord’s prayer now you will find 4 petitions to God addressing our needs. I thought I would be able to cover all 4 today but I realized that that is too ambitious so we will cover just verse 11 and 12 today.

These two verses are two distinct petitions to God.

The first petition is, “give us this day our daily bread”. Let me start with the obvious. When our Lord Jesus Christ says “bread” he means all our basic needs. What are basic needs? Well you can start with the big three, food, clothing and shelter. But it really goes beyond that. No human being is an island and relationships with other human beings are a basic human need. Solitary confinement after all is the highest form of punishment second only to the death penalty right? So we need relationships. But if we have all 4 and don’t have a sense of safety, it does not mean much, right? If you don’t have saftly you have to constantly look over your shoulders and be prepared to fight or flee. Nothing good really happens in that kind of an environment. So you can add safety to your basic needs. And safety not just from people but from the forces of nature too. You can be praying for the state of Florida right now. But all 5 things that I mentioned right now get you to survival. But if you read about God and what he wanted for his people in the Old Testament, when we came and made his promises to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, he never said, my promise to you is that you and your future generations will survive, right? God never sees his people as merely surviving. He has always visualized his people as prospering and being blessed tremendously so that they can go out and be a blessing to others. That is God’s desire.

But let’s turn to human nature for a minute. Now we human beings also want many things beyond survival, right? The economy of the whole world is build on the idea that companies will go on making things and people will go on buying things. And every seller wants to make you crave their products and tells you that if you get this kind of car or that kind of vacation or clothes according to the latest fashion. So human beings have wants that never end. There is no limit to human greed right. When you take a big look that the US economy, you see how human greed works in numbers. You see, US income disparity has widened and widened and widened over the last 30 years so that the top 1% in 1980 owned about 25% of the total wealth of the US. Today, the top 1% own more than 40% of the total wealth of the US and the bottom 50% own guess how much? Just 1% of the US wealth. So the rich and got twice as rich over the last few decades, the poor has got poorer and guess what the rich are lobbying for in Washington these days? More tax breaks so they can keep more of their money in their pockets while the government goes into deeper debt and has to cut back on programs for the poor. That is human greed for you.

Now at the human level, greed looks like this. I was listening to a radio program on NPR that was reviewing some movies and TV shows. And one of the shows was about this person who is a very happy married in the 1940’s but somehow time travels to all kinds of time periods and gets into all kinds of relationships. And the reviewers were saying, what they liked about this plot is that it is about people fantasizing about what their life could be like even if they have a perfect life. And I heard that and I said, this is exactly what the Bible was talking about right there is Gen 3 in the garden of Eden. Here you have Adam and Eve in the most perfect place with all of their needs met and they can even walk with God and ask him anything, and what happens? The serpent manages to convince them that they are missing out on something very big in life and they should go to the extent of disobeying God so that they can get more out of life than what they have right now. And they were in the Garden of Eden for heaven sake! That is the greed of human nature. We fantasize about everything, whether they are houses or cars or jobs or even spouses even if there is nothing wrong with what God has already given us. And that is why before we approach God about our immediate needs we need to humble ourselves before the Father, Son and Holy Spirit and align with his will first.

And when we do, we can ask freely everything we need to flourish. And God will give it to us. Yesterday, we had a big event on the UMKC campus. We had over 220 International students and about a 100 American volunteers. We wanted to give the International Students a welcome party to let them know that they are welcome in this country and city and that there are enough Americans who love and care for them. To do this well, we wanted there to be music and food that looked like a feast and great weather so that we all could enjoy the time together. And we needed time and resources and people to get everything accomplished. So we prayed for a week. And God answered every single prayer. I can tell you we had way more than bread on the table yesterday. And it was good. Here is the bottom line. If we are sufficiently aligned with the will of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, God will speak to us and call us for his purpose and you can ask for anything in His name for his purpose and he will be happy to give you all that you ask for and even more. When we are God centered, he will melt away our greed, he will evaporate our worries about tomorrow. He will help us to have clarity on what he wants us to do today and he will give you all the bread to need to make sure that you do well today. Give us this day, our daily bread, dear daddy in heaven!

The next petition is “forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us”. This petition addresses another basic human need. The need to be in loving relationship with others. Are these petitions in order of priority? I am not so sure, because it all depends on where we are in life right. Well, you may have hear that if a man is starving, there is no point in telling him of his need for God, you have to feed him first. That may be true if he was always starving. But I think human life is more complicated than that. It is quite possible that as the person is starving, he might be feeling guilty that something he did is causing God to be displeased with him and causing him to starve. Humans are complicated, but the point is there is the spiritual reality of human existence. And in our spiritual world we have our spiritual needs. And one of our most important spiritual need is the need to be connected to the spirit of God and even to the spirit of other people around us. And the Bible says that we cannot really be connected to God’s spirit if we are not right with God. We need for God to forgive us for all the things that we have done to hurt God. For that to happen you have to actually be aware of the things that we are doing that God is not happy with. So first we have to become aware of our sins and second, Jesus tells us we have to ask God to forgive these sins because we also are forgiving the people in our lives who have sinned against us.

See when God looks at us the situation is like the parable that Jesus gave of the unforgiving debtor found in Matt 18. In that parable, the King wants his accounts settled with all his servants. In that process he brings in his debtors who owes him millions of dollars. When this one servants accounts were reviewed and the debt was really big, the king decrees that everything this man owns has to be seized, and he and his family would all be acquired as slaves of the king. When the man hears this of course he falls down in front of the king, begs his forgiveness and pleads for patience and time to have the debt paid off. The king agrees, forgives his debt and releases this servant. As he is walking back home he sees one of his servants who owes him a few thousand dollars. So he grabs him by his throat and demands instant payment. His servant begs him for patience and more time. This fellow however shows him no mercy and has him thrown in prison. The king of course hears about this and mad at his servant and has him thrown into prison and tortured till he pays back every penny. Of course when he is in prison, he will hardly be able to pay back anything which means that he is thrown in prison to be tortured for ever. And you know what being tortured for ever is a metaphor for. Now everyone of our situations work exactly like this mans. Whatever anyone has done to us is like loose change compared to how much we have wronged God. Why? Because firstly, whatever good we have done for anybody else is nothing compared to what God has done for us, from creation to redemption, it is beyond imagination. Secondly, when people sin against us, they are sinning against a person who has their own faults. When we sin against God, we are sinning against someone who is completely perfect and has absolutely no fault. So when you combine how much God has done for us with his perfect faultlessness, what we owe God on account of our sins is infinitely greater than anything anybody owes us because of their sins against us. So God’s deal is this, he has a special provision to write of the infinite debt we owe God. All he expects of you and me to do is to write off the pittance the people around us owe us.

What does that mean in practical terms? It means this. When you pray for forgiveness, be specific. Think specifically of the things that you have done to hurt God. Then think of things that others have done to hurt you. Then tell God that you don’t hold anything against the people who have hurt you. That will reflect a Christlike heart in us and God will see Christ in us and forgive all our sins. Isn’t that a deal you cannot refuse? Forgive us our sins oh Lord, as we forgive those who sin against us.

Two petitions before God. Give us this day or Lord our daily bread and forgive us our sins and we forgive those who sin against us. These two petitions cover most of human life. But these petitions do not specifically address the fact that we will in a world where Satan is prowling to bring us down. We do need God’s help for the spiritual battle ahead of us. We will look at that next Sunday. But for today, know that we can ask God for anything under the sun if we are aligned with him and have a clear idea of what he is calling us to do. We also need to be in a right relationship with God and those around us. Those are two purposes of prayer we looked at today. Let us be a community that prays enough to know what God wants of us and is in a right relationship with God and each other. Let us pray.