May 22, 2016

“Praying for Our Needs”

Matthew 6:11-15

**FCF**: Our hesitation to go to God with our needs

**PROPOSITION**: (anchor) Jesus tells us to pray to our heavenly Father.

(magnet) That changes the focus of our prayers.

**SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION:**

Some people just have a hard time asking for help. Wanting to stand on their own, some young adults hesitate to go to their parents. Thinking themselves to be a burden, some older parents hesitate to go to their children. Some people just have a hard time asking for help.

And that principle applies to prayer. Many of us hesitate to tell and to trust God with our needs. We hesitate to go to Him and to ask for help. We doubt He will hear. We question if our needs are significant enough. We wonder if we are significant enough and if He actually cares.

Jesus speaks directly to this in our text, the second half of the Lord’s Prayer.

**SCRIPTURE READING**: Matthew 6:9-15 (vv.11-15)

**PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION**

**SERMON INTRODUCTION:**

We were in Kansas last weekend and, among other things, visited the Oz Museum. Among the displays were reminders of prequels and sequels, and different tellings of the tale. Of course, none will ever take the place of the 1939 film starring Judy Garland. That’s a classic.

How are we introduced to the Wizard? (READ quotes) The smoke clears and a giant head shouts, “*I am Oz, the great and terrible! Who are you?*” Dorothy tries to respond but the Wizard booms, “*Silence! The great and powerful Oz knows why you are here! Step forward, Tin Man*.” Which he does. “*You dare come to me for a heart, you clinking, clanking, clattering collection of caliginous junk?*” To the Scarecrow, “*You have the effrontery to ask for a brain, you billowing bale of bovine fodder?*” To the Lion, “*And you, Lion?*” At which the Lion faints.

Some see God as like the Wizard – great and powerful but not approachable. How do we see Him? Our view of God shapes our prayer to God. Jesus says God is “our Father in heaven”. Why is that important? Who we pray to drives how and what we pray. The how and what are set forth in these six petitions, the first three of which we looked at a couple of weeks ago.

Those first three have to do with God’s name, God’s rule, and God’s will. They come first. His concerns are to be our priority. But a focus upon His concerns then leads to attention to our needs – our provision, our pardon, and our protection. You see, a true understanding of God does not eliminate our coming to Him with our needs. It establishes it. It opens it up.

Jesus tells us to pray to our heavenly Father. That changes the focus of our prayers.

1. **OUR PROVISION**

Looking at our needs, we see the first prayer is for our provision (READ Matthew 6:11).

1. *All of Life*

This is a prayer for God’s provision, relying upon His supply for all of life.

1. Bread as essential

This is bread for the physical body, a staple for most. But also a symbol for all our food.

1. Essentials of life

In that sense, bread is essential. But it stands for the essentials of life. As Martin Luther said (READ quote), it stands for “everything necessary for the preservation of this life, like food, a healthy body, good weather, house, home, wife, children, good government and peace.”

1. *For Each Day*

So we look to God for His provision for all of life. And we are to do it for each day.

1. Not amassing

This is not a prayer of amassing. It is not “*Give us today a storehouse full of bread*.”

1. But immediate

It is a prayer for the immediate. “*Give us today our bread for tomorrow*.” We are to be living a day at a time, looking to the Lord. Just as the Israelites were called to do in the wilderness as they journeyed from Egypt to the Promised Land, daily gathering the manna from heaven.

(READ Matthew 6:11) This means asking God for our provision.

*Application:*

What does it mean to pray like this? It doesn’t mean ruling out our working for a living. God works most often through ordinary means. So we should be thankful to Him not only for the fruits of our work but our ability to work, through which He has been pleased to supply.

Ours should be a dependence upon the Lord for our provision. This was obvious in the 1st century when days without work meant disaster for an ordinary laborer. That is veiled from us today. Ask folks where their food and clothes come from and all they know is WalMart and Amazon. We are just as dependent as Jesus’ hearers sitting on that hillside by the Sea of Galilee.

We should pray, “*Father, we need your provision*” and then come with specific needs in mind. Jesus tells us to pray to our heavenly Father. That changes the focus of our prayers.

1. **OUR PARDON**

He then moves from our physical to our spiritual needs (READ Matthew 6:11-12, 14-15).

1. *The Nature of Sin*

We get some important insight here as to the nature of sin. This is worth noting.

1. As a debt

Sin creates a debt. Given who God is, we owe Him complete obedience. Every sin – whether a sin of omission or commission – puts us in debt to Him. It puts us further in the red.

1. As a trespass

So sin creates debt. It’s also a trespass. Which, of course, assumes that God has established and stated His standards – lanes in which we are to live and lines we are not meant to cross.

1. *The Necessity of Forgiveness*

Which, given that we are trespassing debtors, creates the need for forgiveness.

1. A definition

In a sense, forgiveness means a writing off of the debt, absorbing the damage of the trespass. And God, in His mercy and grace, does this without strings. Even at great cost to Himself.

1. A clarifier

But we need a clarifier. Jesus makes a strong statement about the tie between God’s forgiveness of us and our forgiveness of others. In fact, it is so important that He repeats it to reiterate the point. What does He mean? Understand that Jesus is not saying that God’s forgiveness of us is conditioned on our forgiveness of others. That would be mercy by merit. What He is saying is that God forgives the penitent. And a mark of the penitent is a willingness to forgive.

(READ Matthew 6:12) This means asking God for our pardon.

*Illustration:*

The gospel is a message of God’s grace to us. As His Spirit works that message into our hearts, it then frees us to be gracious to others. Imagine a traveler making his way with a guide through the jungle. After crossing a river, the traveler is horrified by the leeches attached to his legs and reaches to pull them off. But his guide stops him, warning him of causing an infection. The best way to be rid of the leeches is to soak in a warm balsam bath. That will release them.

Bathing in the gospel is what releases the leeches of bitterness and resentment.

*Application:*

What would it mean to pray like this? We need to see that our relationship with God and with others is tightly linked. There is a relationship between the relationships. Which allows us to do some diagnosis. If we see the ugliness of our sin and what it cost God to forgive us, we will then be impelled to forgive. But if we are crippled by an unforgiving spirit towards others, we need to then reckon with the hypocrisy of going to God and asking Him to forgive us.

There’s something else. We have a daily need for such a prayer because we are daily sinners. Which leaves us with options. We can blame others and make excuses. We can deny what we’ve done. We can wallow in it and work harder. Or we can ask for the Lord’s pardon.

We should pray, “*Father, we need your pardon*” and then come with specific sins in mind. Jesus tells us to pray to our heavenly Father. That changes the focus of our prayers.

1. **OUR PROTECTION**

But this prayer for pardon then leads to a prayer for protection (READ Matthew 6:11-13).

1. *From Ourselves*

Our dependence on the Lord is in view. It’s a prayer of protection, first from ourselves.

1. The reality of trials

We have to reckon with the reality of trials. The word translated here as “temptation” often means “trials”. God never tempts us. But He will allow trials and times of testing in our lives.

1. The reality of our weakness

So we know the trials will surely come. And, with them, the temptations. It’s how we respond to trials. For we know we are weak. We are broken. Our hearts are crooked and bent. So the prayer is, “*Let us not be brought into temptation, into such a trial that we would fall into sin*.”

1. *From Satan*

Protect us from ourselves. And from Satan – not just evil but the evil one himself.

1. What he is

We know Satan to be a liar and deceiver, an accuser and tempter bent on destruction. When you go back and read Matthew 4, you see that Jesus has just done battle with him in the wilderness. And that experience surely has to inform something as to why this is included here in the prayer. Satan is but a fallen angel. He is no match for the Son of God. But we are no match for him.

1. What we need

And so we are to pray, “*Deliver us! Save us from his schemes to tear us apart and asunder*.”

(READ Matthew 6:13) This is a prayer for our protection.

*Illustration:*

In the College and Careers class, we are working through a study of C. S. Lewis’ *The Screwtape Letters*. Here is what Lewis wisely notes in the preface to the book (READ quote):

There are two equal and opposite errors into which our race can fall about the devils. One is to disbelieve in their existence. The other is to believe, and to feel an excessive and unhealthy interest in them. They themselves are equally pleased by both errors and hail a materialist or a magician with the same delight.

My sense is that we tend to make too little of the evil one. And we ought to reconsider that.

*Application:*

What would it mean to pray like this? We need to hear the emphasis on our spiritual vulnerability, our dependence on the Lord, and the reality of a spiritual war. Other places and times have known this better as well. And sadly, we can be so very blind and foolish here.

We really do need to reckon with our weakness. Just as we are still called to work, we are still called to watch our steps. That may mean physical places. Or things on a screen.

We should pray, “*Father, we need your protection*” and then come with specific needs in mind. Jesus tells us to pray to our heavenly Father. That changes the focus of our prayers.

**CONCLUSION:**

These three petitions are comprehensive, speaking to all of life. And they clearly express our dependence on God for all of life. Which ties back to the axiom I mentioned earlier – our view of God shapes our prayers to God. If that’s true, it would seem obvious that we need a true view of God. We need to hear what Jesus is saying to us. We need to hear and to embrace His description of God as “our Father in heaven”. So, here’s the critical question on which so much hinges. “*Do we believe it?*” Do we believe God is great in mercy and might towards us?

C. S. Lewis’ *The Chronicles of Narnia* is a classic of children’s literature suitable for all ages. Some of you may know that *The Chronicles* is actually made up of seven separate books, the third of which is *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*. It’s the story of a voyage and search for seven missing nobles. One of the places visited in the course of events is Coriakin’s Island. Coriakin is a wizard charged by the great Lion, Aslan, to guide the Duffers in wisdom. But the Duffers proved to be so dim-witted and stubborn that Coriakin had to cast a spell that merged their two legs into one. They then felt this to be so awful that they used his magic to make themselves invisible. They saw their guide to be a tyrant, though he meant only their good. The Duffers are ridiculous not just in their appearance but in their suspicions and behavior. They are absurd and foolish. One would even say comical, except that we can see ourselves in them.

My fellow Duffers, Jesus clearly wants us to pray to whom? To our Father in heaven. We need to know that God is not ignorant, needing to be informed. Nor is He hesitant, needing to be moved. For He is our Father in heaven. With that in mind, as Jesus shows us, our prayer is to begin first with a focus on our Father’s concerns. That then flows into presenting and trusting Him with our needs. My friends, He wants us to pray. And, in His kindness, He shows us how.

**PROPOSITION**: (anchor) Jesus tells us to pray to our heavenly Father.

(magnet) That changes the focus of our prayers.