

Luke 11:1~4, part 1

The New Testament commands us to pray. It commands us *to pray without ceasing*, It commands us *to continue in prayer, to pray always*. It commands us *in everything by prayer and supplication to make our request know unto God*. Those are but a few of the numerous commands us to pray, and not just offer up a prayer, but to pray all the time. All of which is intended to relay the simply truth, that prayer for us is to be a constant, unending daily way of life for us. I kind of liken it unto spiritual breathing. Just as the air we breathe in and out is necessary to sustain our lives, so it is with prayer.

You can never pray too much, since you're commanded to pray all the time. You can never pray about too many things, since you're commanded to pray about everything. You can never go before Him in prayer with your request, too many times that He becomes weary of you, for He has commanded us to come all the time. (Proverbs 15:8...*God delights in the prayers of His people...*)

Given all this, it goes without saying, that for the Christian, praying is to be looked at as one of our top priorities. Given it's importance, and the place it is to occupy in our lives, it becomes all the more important, that we "*understand how to pray.*"

That brings us to our scripture passage this morning, found here in Luke 11:1~4... Where we find the disciples asking Jesus to "*teach them to pray.*" How are we to pray, was the question. A question that prompts a whole section on prayer. Not only is verses 1~4 a lesson on prayer, but 5~13 as well. In verse 1~4 we have the teaching of how to pray, which has become commonly known as, "*The Lord's Prayer.*" Whereas in 5~13 we have the application and illustration of praying.

So needless to say, given the importance of prayer, and the role it plays in our day-to-day lives, we will be taking a slow, long, hard look at this passage. I expect that we will be here in the text before us, for a few weeks. Over the next several Sunday mornings, we will take a closer look at this matter of prayer.

This morning, will simply be more of an introduction than anything... For we will not even begin to study the particulars of the prayer, but rather, this morning, we will take an overview of the prayer, looking at the various elements and overall structure of the prayer.

First of all, it's important to clarify, that this is not "*a prayer*" that we are to recite word for word, as "*our prayer.*" This is not "*a prayer*" to recite, (as many have taken it to be.) You could say this prayer, and it would be a prayer, but you'd miss the point. Nowhere in the N.T do we ever see the disciples or apostles praying, by reciting this prayer. It's extremely important that we establish this, because misunderstood, we will miss the whole point, and thus still not learn the lesson here on how to pray.

This is **not** **WHAT** we are to pray...but rather, **HOW** we are to pray... It is critical that we memorize it, not just so we can recite it as "*a prayer,*" but because it becomes the "*framework*" of "**ALL** our prayers." This is to be a *model* for prayer; the *framework...a skeleton on which you put the rest of the flesh.*

The words that Jesus gives us here, are to serve as the boundaries or the confines, in which we are to pray. They are to lead us and guide us into *praying in the right manner*. As we get into it, this will become more evident and understandable. Each element of is designed to create a "*right spirit and a right attitude*" in us.

For example, the first two elements... "When you pray, say "*Our Father which art in heaven...Hallowed by thy name...*" That is two separate aspects, but both of which speak to the matter of "*how we are to approach God*" in prayer. "*Father*" speaks of intimacy, in that we are to approach Him as a child would his own father. While at the same time, "*Hallowed by thy name*" serves as a reminder of His holiness and how righteous He is. Which reminds us, that not only can we come as a child to his father, but we are to

come with reverence and respect. There is a right way and a wrong way to come before God. Thus, we must give ourselves to understanding the proper way we are to approach Him. And that is what this passage does...it teaches us **HOW** *we are to pray*...

To further support this, let us look for a few moments to Matthew chapter six, where we find Jesus teaching this same pattern. It's important to point out, that this one in Matthew was given at the beginning of His ministry, while the one here in Luke was near the end of His ministry. But what is more important to point out, is the fact that in both cases, **He teaches the very same thing**...

(Mt. 6) ⁹*After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. ¹⁰Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven. ¹¹Give us this day our daily bread. ¹²And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. ¹³And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.*

“This is **the manner** you are to pray...” ...“This is **how** you are to pray...” Listen, as far as “teachings found in scripture, on how to pray,” to my knowledge, these are the only two, and both teach the exact same thing. This is **HOW** we are to pray...

Now, having established that, I'd like to spend the rest of our time this morning here in Matthew six, looking at a very important teaching that Jesus offers here, that He does not in Luke, concerning “How to pray.” That being, “How **not** to pray...” To teach them “How to pray,” He first taught, how NOT to pray.

(Vs 5~8) ⁵*And when thou pray, 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. ⁶But thou, when thou pray, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which sees in secret shall reward thee openly.*

⁷*But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking. ⁸Be not ye therefore like unto them: for your Father knows what things ye have need of, before ye ask him.*

Before He teaches them “How to pray,” He first addresses the matter of “How they are NOT to pray.” This is an important aspect in teaching, that we sometimes neglect to do. Anytime you are teaching TRUTH, we must be careful to make sure we take the time to teach, what is not right! Jesus didn't want His disciples to simply “Add” His teachings to their current understanding of how to pray, because that would be pointless...

(Vs 5~6) We learn that prayer is to be a “Private and Personal thing” between us and God.

⁵*And when thou pray, 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. ⁶But thou, when thou pray, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which sees in secret shall reward thee openly.*

Now it's important to understand, that Jesus is not suggesting that “Praying in Public” is wrong...for that is something He Himself did on many occasions. And not only Christ, but many of the disciples and apostles did as well. The issue here is not “Praying in public,” but rather “praying **to be heard** of men.”

⁵*And when thou pray, 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.**”*

It helps to understand, by understanding who “**they**” are. He's referring to the Pharisee's and Scribes... These self-righteous, pious men, basically sought to impress others with how “righteous” they were. They would do things (in a subtle way) that would draw attention to themselves. This whole section, revolves

around the hypocrisy of these men. Here Jesus exposes “*their motives*” for giving, for praying, for fasting... And then sets forth, true giving, true praying, true fasting...

⁵*And when thou pray, 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.**”*

“*That they may be seen of men,*” speaks of that fact they were seeking to be “*honored by men.*” They were looking for the “*praise of men*”... That’s why Jesus went on to say, “*Verily I say unto you, They have their reward.*” Given that their concern was to be *honored by men*, then the “*honor from men*” would be what they would receive...certainly not anything from God!

I’ve had men to tell me that they didn’t want to pray publicly, for the fact they felt they “*didn’t have the right words,*” and “*for fear that some would laugh at them*”... And if that is the case, if they are concerned with “*what men think,*” I don’t want them to pray publicly, because God won’t honor it. It’s not the eloquence of the prayer, that makes for a good prayer... This is a good reminder, that some of the most well spoken, most beautiful prayers that we’ve heard in our time, may have not went any higher than the ceiling of the church.

When the concern becomes more with what “*men think,*” (seeking to impress men) those kinds of prayers are empty and useless... It doesn’t matter what men think, because we’re not praying to men!

I read a true story, that really illustrates this well... Lyndon Johnson’s press secretary, Bill Moyers, was saying grace at a staff lunch, and the President shouted, “*Speak up, Bill! I can’t hear a thing!*” Moyers quietly replied, “*I wasn’t addressing you, Mr. President.*”

Whether public or private, prayer is to be an intimate, personal thing between us and God. The reference to “*entering a closet*” didn’t mean that you literally had to enter “*a closet,*” every time you prayed. Now if you want to enter a closet and pray there’s nothing wrong with that, especially if you live in a house with kids...ha, ha. But the point is, whether public or private, we are to pray “*in secret*” to God...in the sense, it is to be between God and us alone... When we pray, we are to “*enter our closet*” as it were, alone before God, and pour out our heart to Him as though no one else was around. Not seeking to be honored by men, praised by men...but rather calling out to the Father to help us. And as Jesus says here, it is that kind of prayer that the Father honors...“*and thy Father which sees in secret shall reward thee openly.*” The reward here is a contrast between the rewards of men, “*praise*” and the reward from God, “*Answering the prayer.*”

(Vs 7) Jesus continues on, how not to pray...⁷*But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking. ⁸Be not ye therefore like unto them: for your Father knows what things ye have need of, before ye ask him.*

The issue here is *thoughtless chatter*... It is a reference to *a long prayer, with very little content*. It carries the idea of saying the same things over and over, in the sense of rambling on and on about the same thing. The Jews had picked up this practice from the Gentiles, who approached their Gods almost in the sense of seeking to persuade them... If you keep asking for the same thing over and over, he will give in and give it to you... “*for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking.*”

⁸***Don’t be like them:** for your Father knows what things ye have need of, before ye ask him.*

The point Jesus is trying to make here, is that we are not to see prayer as a pleading with God to give us what we need, *in the sense of talking Him into it*. The thought here is of one going before a distant, insensitive God, trying to persuade him to honor your request. As Jesus makes it clear, nothing could be

farther from the truth. Quite the contrary, according to Jesus, God knows our every need, prior to us saying a “Single word.” That speaks of the intimate knowledge God has of each one of us, He is not some far off, distant, unreachable God...but rather a God, who knows everything about me, one who knows my thoughts and my every need.

The image I get here, is that of a close and intimate God, who watches over me, who is concerned about my needs. Beloved, when we pray, we don't have to try and “*find God,*” and then plead with Him to help us! Just the opposite, when we pray, we know that He hears us! And not only does He hear us, but He knows our every need and is willing to meet our needs.

Beloved, we do not pray to “*Inform God of what we needs*”...for He already knows what we need... But rather, our prayer to God is more designed to “*Acknowledge our need of God.*”

At the heart of prayer, is the idea of communion... God wants to hear from us, He wants to commune with us. And in the most purest form, that's what prayer is for us, a time of fellowship and intimate communion with God...

Understood, verses 5~8 serve as a prerequisite for His teaching on How to pray...

First, we are to pray, “*in secret*”...we are to “*enter our closet*” as it were, alone before God, and pour out our heart to Him as though no one else was around... And we are to do so, with the awareness that He already knows our needs, and stands ready to help us... This point is, that when we come before the Lord, we come not in the sense to “*inform God*” of our needs and trying to get Him to grant our request, so much, as we simply come to Him, acknowledging Him as the provider of our needs!