



Red Letter City
Praying
June 26, 2016
Courage Church, Detroit, MI.

I want to start today's message by asking you a question:

Do you pray?

Are you intentional to carve out time in your day where you actually sit down and pray to Jesus.

The truth is, today you are going to learn a lot about the prayer that Jesus tells us to pray... but all the information in the world will not change a thing about your life if you don't start practicing it. You can't learn about spiritual things, and then think that you have them.

They are things in your life that you have to catch. And you have to make a part of your life intentionally and the more you do it, the more natural it will become.

and it is crucial that prayer become a regular part of your life if it is not already.

Because, today, we find ourselves in a place in our series on the sermon on the mount, where Jesus begins by talking about our works of righteousness. The works of righteousness that he refers to are: giving, praying, and fasting... and for all three of these things, he words it very intentionally...

When you give... these are the boundaries.
When you pray... these are the boundaries
When you fast... these are the boundaries.

So the assumption is incredibly clear... if you have a relationship with Jesus, all three of these things are a part of your life.

But do you do them?

Next week we are diving into fasting... now, fasting is something that takes incredible discipline... it can be very taxing on your body.

But for me, I think in some ways, fasting is easier than praying. Because fasting is a tangible act that I can achieve by abstaining from something. You can choose to not eat, and as long as you do not eat, you have successfully achieved not eating.

But fasting, at least from a spiritual sense, is worthless if it is not coupled with prayer, because there is no good in giving up something if you aren't supplementing it with something else... and prayer, to me, is a much harder discipline to get a handle on.

For me, I can deprive myself of anything.

I can go several days without eating... even if I am not fasting, if I am driven enough in a moment for something, I get irritated if I have to stop to eat. I do love food, but I also like to focus. But it's very hard for me to focus on prayer. Probably because I prefer to be doing things, tangible things, that I can see the immediate result of.

But looking back in hindsight: I have seen the long term effects of my prayers, and I have seen the long term effects of my "lack of" praying.

One is beautiful, and the other is very dark.

But I think that a lot of us, if we pray, we pray because we think that we should, mainly because we are taught that we should...

but we aren't all that sure that it really works.

We throw up these prayers and then we feel like we never see results, and we get really frustrated and it discourages us from praying again, because

there is nothing more frustrating than the moments that it doesn't seem like God showed up for. There are not many things that can hurt a person's faith more than seeing God not come through in the way that we believed that he would.

So it is easy for us to NOT see the way that God is working through our prayers because he is not working the way that we think that he should be. As if there is a formula for the way that God *has* to respond to our every wish in exactly *our* timing and in exactly the way that we think it should be.

There are not many spiritual disciplines surrounded more by doubt than prayer.

Or maybe for some of us, we just don't know where to begin.

And that is okay. Luke's gospel (Luke 11:1) records an incredible moment where the disciples ask Jesus an incredibly human question. A question that you would never think that the guys who followed Jesus around all the time would ask, but they did. They asked Jesus:

"How do we pray?"

They asked Jesus to teach them how to pray. They said to him, "John the baptist taught his disciples how to pray... can you teach us?"

Which is telling in and of itself, to the truth that prayer is not necessarily EASY for people...is not necessarily something that comes naturally to people right off the bat.

Even Jesus' own disciples, who spent every waking moment with Jesus, walking with him, talking with him, watching him, gleaning off of him, they still asked to be taught.

How many moments were there before this in which they had watched him pray and had the opportunity to ask and learn from him... But when it came time for them to do it, they still felt inadequate...

so they asked Jesus a question that still rings true to us today.

How do we take part in this ancient practice in such a way that it actually works? In such a way that it is a benefit to our lives and our relationship with Jesus, and not just a waste of our time.

And so there, in Luke, Jesus gives the disciples a variation of what we are going to study today.

He gives them a variation of “The Lord’s Prayer.”

a prayer that in the sermon on the mount, he includes as one of the works of righteousness. A really important thing that everyone must do, BUT WHEN YOU DO THEM...

here is how. Here are the boundaries...

So lets look at how.

Please open your bibles with me to Matthew 6:5-15:

“And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. ⁶ But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

“And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words. ⁸ Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. ⁹ Pray then like this:

“Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.”

Lets Pray.

There is a lot packed in these verses. There is a lot at the front end, before he gives us the actual prayer... there is a TON packed into the prayer, and there is a heavy load that he unloads on us right there at the end.

Now remember, Jesus starts this whole section about works of righteousness, in Matthew 6:1 by saying:

“Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them.”

The literal is “in order to be a public show for them.” And he shows us these three ways that people can act righteous, while not *actually* being righteous. And when it comes to prayer, Jesus says that when we pray, it should be in secret.

It should be in a quiet place where nobody else can hear you - Jesus says “Don’t be like the hypocrites who love to stand in the synagogues and pray loud prayers on street corners so that the public can see them...

and pat them on the back.

Now, Jesus is not saying that we should never pray together... he says in another place (Matthew 18:20) that when two or more are gathered in my names sake, I am there with them!”

Jesus is about the things in life that bring us together.

What Jesus is doing here is addressing the issue of “what is driving your prayer life?” What is the intent behind what you are doing?

Notice the word that Jesus uses, hypocrites.

when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites.

When you pray, you must not be like the stage players... the actors... the ones who want to look good without actually being good.

Jesus just goes to town in this whole section of the sermon, on the people who don't do things for the right reason.

Prayer is something that can actually be beneficial to you! God wants to respond to your prayers. He wants to reward you by answering your prayers..

But if you are praying so that people will see you praying, then the moment that people see you pray, you have achieved the goal that was actually in your heart.

You weren't praying to get closer to God or to hear God or even to be heard by God...

you were praying to be heard by man. So the moment that man hears you, have you received your reward.

You did it! You achieved the goal that was buried deep in your heart.

But Jesus says that there is a better way, and one with a much better reward.

Jesus says that when you pray, you should go into your room, shut your door, and pray to your Father.

The Lord's prayer is a private prayer, but it is a petition before God that is asking that He make you a Kingdom person. A person who doesn't do things just to be seen, but instead does things because they are right. A person who doesn't wear a mask and put on a show, but instead lives every day dependent on the God of the universe to show up on their behalf.

It is not a long prayer. It is *not* a prayer filled with empty phrases that don't mean anything to God. It is a prayer of a very few words. In the Greek

language, the prayer consists of only 48 words. The English translation that I just read to you was only 52 words. But those 52 words basically covers everything you could ever need.

So where did it come from?

There was a famous Jewish prayer in Jesus' day known as "the Qaddish" (Ca-deesh)

It is still a large part of Jewish tradition and is prayed in the Jewish prayer service, and this is what the Qaddish says:

"Magnified and hallowed be his great name in the world He created according to His will. May He establish His kingdom during **your** life and during **your** days, and during the life of all the house of Israel, speedily and in the near future. And say Amen."

This was a *common* prayer.

So when Jesus' disciples ask Jesus how to pray, he gives them, really a rendition of a prayer that they would have already known. But he does what he does best, and he takes that prayer, and he makes it better.

And here is what Jesus does with the Qaddish (Ca-deesh).

Our Father who art in heaven
Hallowed by thy name
Thy kingdom come
Thy will be done
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread
and forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.
lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.

Basically, everything in the second half of the Lord's prayer, beginning with "give us this day our daily bread" - is new. Jesus added that in addition to the Jewish prayer that they would have already known.

but The whole first half says almost the same thing as the Qaddish (Ca-deesh), with one important difference.

One is all about what God will do for YOU.
and the other is all about what God will do for US.

The Lord's prayer adds an incredibly personal connection to God and us, and he makes it clear. You are not meant to live life alone. Your life is not all about you and your prayers shouldn't be either.

Right from the beginning, it is not my Father... it is OUR Father.

We are a community, and a family, and citizens together in the Kingdom of heaven...

and this is our prayer.

Lets look at this. We are going to go line by line, and I am going to try and explain to you the gist of what you are saying when you say these Holy words.

First of all,

"Our Father, who art in heaven."

If you don't look closely... this prayer seems like a distant prayer, to a distant God who is off in some far away place...

And even worse... for many who hear the term "Father," all you want to do is run as far away as you can.

Because if this Father is anything like your Father, then you want nothing to do with him...

Some of us have had great dads, and if that is you, there is probably nobody you would rather have be your personal image of the face of God than your father.

but the reality is, it is a word that brings up a different emotion for just about everyone.

A lot of peoples image of a Father is, at best,

A distant one.

A person who was never around, or who didn't take care of them.

But Fathers like that are Fathers who did not do their job.

Because A Father's job *is* to take care of his children.

The word Father means *supplier*. It means the one who will provide everything that *you* have *need* of.

And I just mentioned this, but I always loved how the language was plural.
Our Father.

This is a private prayer but it is a petition on behalf of a community, as much as it is on behalf of yourself.

"God. TAKE CARE OF US. I am a part of a community and when that community is healthy, I am healthy."

and you are telling God:

"I know that it is in your nature to take care of us because that is the nature of a Father."

and in the first century, even moreso than today, the Father's job is to provide for the whole family.

Jesus is making a very clear distinction here... no matter what your Father was like...

This Father will provide.

and when it comes to this Father... you can go to him with anything.

and then it says who art in heaven...

and we have talked about this a couple of times but its one of the most powerful parts of this whole prayer. At first glance -- "our Father who art in heaven" sounds, at best, like a deadbeat dad who lives in a trailer park in the South somewhere, hardly ever visits, and sends a child support check once in a while when he gets his SSI.

He is there.

We are here.

We get some of him, sometimes.

But are always left wishing for more.

And so everything about God, we equate to distance.

But the word for heaven is actually the Greek word *ouranos* (uw ron ase) and it can actually be translated as "air."

The most valuable commodity in all of the world... the one thing that we all rely on every single day... the one thing that has never *not* come through for planet earth.

The thing that is in every room with you, every moment you are alive.

For everyone who is still alive... Air has been faithful.

and that is the way that the Hebrew people viewed God. It wasn't an image of someone off on some far away planet waiting to cast judgment on you the first time you slipped up... it was the idea of someone who was with you in every moment... in the highs and the lows. and when your God is close, and not far away and distant, then you are never alone. And the fear that has maybe taken hold of your mind can not hold you because you are in the presence of something so much greater.

To the Hebrews, it would have sounded more like this:

“Our supplier, who is as close to me as the air that I breathe.”

Hallowed by thy name.

Hallowed is the Greek word “hagiazō” (hag-e-ots-o) and means to render or acknowledge something.

Take Philippians 2:9, it is an acknowledgment... it says that “He is the name above all names” and when you hallow his name you acknowledge his power.

You acknowledge, “God, there is no other name above yours. and you are all that I need.”

Now, the Greek word for *name* is “*onoma*” (on-a-ma) and this word is powerful. It is like the power of attorney.. It means that everything God is, you have access too.

Which becomes the most powerful statement in the world when you realize that God literally holds the entire world in his hands.

Are there needs in this place? Are any of you sick? Are any of you going through something emotionally right now that you can't seem to manage?

Are any of you uncertain of the future? Of what is next?

Certainty is in the name.

It is all in the name.

No, we do not know what tomorrow holds but we do know that God holds it.

and that is powerful.

There is healing in the name.

Acts 3:16 tells us that healing comes *in the name* of Jesus, and faith in that name.

You have “the power of attorney” - and it is in God’s name.

“Our supplier, who is as close to me as the air that I breathe.
We acknowledge that you are the name above all names, and that you have given us all power in your name.”

Your Kingdom come your will be done.

This line speaks of something, of infinite importance.

Something that ultimately is the main theme of the entire sermon on the mount. The Kingdom of Heaven invading earth.

A lot of people minimize salvation down to a “get out of hell free” card... a one time decision that flips the switch from darkness to light and that changes the course of your eternity forever...

and it does. If you give your heart to Jesus, he will do those things for you.

He wants to share eternity with you.

But if you minimize your salvation to an *experience* then you will miss the bigger picture of your life and of God’s mission for the church.

And of your roll in that mission.

Everything about what Jesus came to do was for the purpose of establishing a Kingdom.

A Kingdom right here and now, that is different from the one that we are experiencing when we aren’t walking with him.

This prayer re-centers us on our purpose by taking our minds off of the cares of this earthly kingdom, like our *relationship problems* and our

financial problems and the things that we can't solve in our own strength or with our physical paycheck.

It reminds us that we truly are citizens of a different kingdom, with a different currency.

and what we are saying here is:

“Bring that Kingdom to earth through me today, God.”

And then he says:

“On earth as it is in heaven.”

and this is powerful.

You see, there is already a Kingdom that Jesus has established, and its beautiful. And it functions at the highest capacity imaginable, and it is good.

What we are saying when we say “Your Kingdom come, your will be done, ON EARTH AS IT IS IN HEAVEN” is we are saying:

“God, let our lives be the image of the invisible here on earth.”

Let us bring whatever is in Heaven to earth today through our lives.

Let our daily lives be a reflection of what your Kingdom looks like already.

Its an amazing concept of *self-evaluation*.

You look at your life, and your schedule, and your routines and your habits and you ask yourself “Which of these things are as they should be?”

“What areas of my life truly reflect the God that I claim to serve?”

Or am I living in my own kingdom, and abiding by my own rules, and hoping to glean the benefits of the Kingdom of God?

If you want the benefits, then you have to accept the citizenship... and if you accept the citizenship, then you have to follow the constitution.

It is self evaluation as to whether or not you are doing that.

“Our supplier, who is as close to me as the air that I breathe.
We acknowledge that you are the name above all names, and that you have given us all power in your name. Let my life on this earth be a reflection of your perfect and eternal Kingdom.”

“Give us this day our daily bread...”

Now this is what is fascinating about daily bread. It such evidence that God is in the details. He is in the small things. He cares about what your life looks like when it is going through high impact moments, and he is there with you in the routines. and the 25 redundant days in a row where it feels like nothing is changing and nothing is growing, and its all repetitive and none of it is fulfilling you.

In those moments, He is there, and He cares.

Now remember, everyone in that culture knew the Torah.

They knew all about daily bread, because Moses wrote about it.

When the Israelites were wandering for 40 years, each and every day God gave them daily bread, and it was exactly what they needed for that day.

but every time they tried to store up more, it went bad...

Because God was trying to teach them something.

“I will take care of you.”

I am your Father. I am your supplier.

and the moment that they tried to take care of themselves and take matters into their own hands, the process became cursed, the bread went bad, and

they wasted all that time and effort trying to do something in their own strength that God promised to do in His.

You can't depend on God and depend on yourself all at the same time, and if you constantly are trying to get to a higher and higher place then you are showing God all of the reasons that you don't need him, and making your life impossible to work through.

Its like what Proverbs 30:8 says:

"Give me neither poverty nor riches; lest I be full and deny you and say
"Who is the Lord?"

Give us this day our daily bread is literally saying,

"God, we trust you to take care of us, lest we fall into the lie of our *own strength*."

"Our supplier, who is as close to me as the air that I breathe.
We acknowledge that you are the name above all names, and that you have given us all power in your name. Let my life on this earth be a reflection of your perfect and eternal Kingdom. We trust you to take care of us, lest we fall into the lie of our *own strength*."

"Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors."

Now. Lets hit pause here for a moment.
Because Jesus puts a double emphasis on this one.

He says it here, and then he comes back to it at the end of the passage and reminds us of its importance, so lets cover it all now.

At the beginning of the sermon on the mount, he gives us the beatitude that says "blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy."

It is the first and only beatitude in which the reward is the same as what is asked of you.

Most of the beatitudes give you a blessing that corresponds, or would be a practical solution for what you are going through... for instance those who mourn are comforted. Those who hunger and thirst are satisfied.

But the fifth beatitude gives you exactly what you give.

Jesus ends the parable of the unforgiving servant the same way, by saying:

“So also will my heavenly Father do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart.”

And of course Jesus says the same thing as he concludes the Lord's Prayer. He says:

“If you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.”

If you do this...
then you get that...

But since when is the gospel an IF/THEN type of circumstance?

This is very different from what Jesus says most of the time. Because the entire gospel of Jesus Christ is Jesus telling us:

you deserve _____

but instead Jesus is going to give you something better. Something you don't deserve.

So what makes forgiveness different?

There is a moment in John 20:23 that I believe sheds some light on it. It is after Jesus died, and rose from the dead, and begins appearing to the disciples, and it's an incredibly empowering moment in the bible because Jesus comes to these disciples and he says “peace be with you... just as the Father sent me, I am now sending you. (John 20:21)”

He tells them, in the same way I was sent, you are about to be sent.

Then Jesus breaths on the disciples...

and this is what he says:

“Receive the Holy Spirit.”

Jesus literally breaths the spirit into the disciples in that moment... He empowers them with the Holy Spirit... giving them more power than any person had ever had *before* that moment... and then he says this:

“If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld.” (John 20:23)

Jesus hands us the reigns on this. He tells us that we hold peoples future in our hands to do with it what we will. If you want to crush somebody by the weight of your unforgiveness in response to what they did for you, you have the power to do that.

Forgiveness is different because it involves someone else's future.

And as ambassadors of Christ in a Kingdom that so desperately needs him, that seems like a lot of power to give to someone who is as broken as I am.

But that is why in the beatitudes, being poor in Spirit comes before mercy. Because until you can realize just how much mercy you have already received, you will constantly struggle to offer it to anyone.

and for many of us, it is easy to think, of course I will forgive...

until you REALLY get hurt. Until you really have something that happens to you that in your heart you wonder... “maybe it is *worth* it to not forgive.”

your parents abandoned you, your wife cheated on you, your kids won't talk to you... your best friend betrayed you... *This* person took advantage of you, *this* person hurt someone in your family.

We can keep going... and we can find things, one that is worse than the last, and not as bad as the next. Because our world is so broken. And the things that we do to each other are so awful. And it seems like every time we turn on the news somebody figured out a way to do something even worse.

I don't know what it is for you, and the last thing I want to be, is insensitive to the wounds of your past because those things are very real... but the truth is that they are SO REAL that they *can* define your future. They have that kind of power if you let them... and if tomorrow is defined by today's unforgiveness then the days of your life are only going to get darker and darker and darker...

because it is poison.

God has given you the ability to withhold forgiveness from others, but it comes at the highest of costs to you.

Kingdom people forgive.

The Lord's prayer is a reminder of everything that we have access to in Christ... which means that we have a lot to lose.

and if you think that you can pray to God for his Kingdom to be made manifest in your life, while you are walking around holding a grudge against another person, you are dead wrong.

Grace matters when you pray.

There is a moment in Hebrews (4:16) when the writer tells us that "with confidence we should boldly approach the throne of grace.."

WHY?

so "that we may receive mercy."

We should be able to go to God in prayer confidently expecting the grace that we do not deserve, because of two things.

1. First, because it is part of the nature and character of God to forgive. To be gracious. To grant us new mercies every single day. But it is impossible to boldly approach the throne of grace if you have not done the second thing...
2. and that is show grace.

We can boldly approach Jesus in our mess, when we do it knowing that we are not any better than anybody else, and are not expecting anything more than we believe anyone else should receive.

Grace is the apex of the Christian faith.

Without it we are nothing and because of it, nothing in our lives should ever be the same again.

Including our character.

If we truly are becoming more and more like Jesus every single day, then we should be becoming more gracious.

and I can't speak for everybody, but I would have a really hard time boldly approaching the throne of grace boldly if I didn't work my hardest to live graciously toward others... offering grace at every opportunity... erring on the side of grace in all circumstances.

The word forgive is the word "aphiēmi" (ă-fē'-ā-mē) and it means "to send away." - it means you can boldly approach Jesus knowing that everything that you once held onto you have sent away. You aren't carrying it anymore.

It makes me think of Leviticus 16, and the two goats that both represent Jesus and what he could accomplish on the cross. And how on YOM KIPPUR every year, the people would bring two goats before the high priest and one goat is slaughtered for the sins of the people, and the other

is sent away to a remote land, never to be heard from again. and the big idea to the Hebrew people behind the second goat was that your sin has left and it will never return again, it could never be brought up again. And it also meant that your neighbors sin which was done against you... it also left.

All the way back in Leviticus, when that goat left, so did anything you were holding against someone else.

You weren't allowed to carry last years grudges into the new year.

Jesus doesn't ask us to be perfect, but he absolutely demands that we be gracious toward one another.

Forgive each other.

"Our supplier, who is as close to me as the air that I breathe. We acknowledge that you are the name above all names, and that you have given us all power in your name. Let my life on this earth be a reflection of your perfect and eternal Kingdom. We trust you to take care of us, lest we fall into the lie of our *own strength*. Forgive us of the times that we have wronged you, as we forgive others for every wrong thing that they have done against us."

"lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil."

You are simply saying - "Guide my steps Jesus."

"God you know everything. Every right turn and every wrong turn. Give me the wisdom to know right from wrong, help me to steer clear of the problem areas of my life...

"and deliver me from my sinful nature."

What this is saying is "Lord, give me "self control," that my flesh would not have dominion over me."

We all know what our struggles are... and this part of the prayer is asking God to help us overcome the problem areas in *our* lives... the areas we struggle in... deliver us from those areas.

So, when you pray the Lord's Prayer, which I would recommend you make it a habit of saying it several times a day... what you are saying, in less words, is this:

"Our supplier, who is as close to me as the air that I breathe. We acknowledge that you are the name above all names, and that you have given us all power in your name. Let my life on this earth be a reflection of your perfect and eternal Kingdom. We trust you to take care of us, lest we fall into the lie of our *own strength*. Forgive us of the times that we have wronged you, as we forgive others for every wrong thing that they have done against us. Guide our steps, that we may walk in the light, and deliver us from *our* sinful nature and *our* sinful desires."

That is the Jacob translation.

pieced together from things that I have been taught and have read over the years by people who are far smarter than I am.

Now...

The thing that is so incredible about this prayer, is it teaches us a lot about what it means to be a citizen of the Kingdom of God.

This is a prayer asking that everything Jesus speaks about in the sermon on the mount be manifested through our lives. This is a prayer that the beatitudes be a manifested through our lives.

And though it may seem complicated its really so simple. This is what it means for our lives:

We rely on God, trusting that he is totally dependable, that there is more power in his name than any power on in this broken world...

We live our lives outwardly,

looking out for others and trusting that God will take care of us.

We don't seek to climb ladders and rankings and gain power, and instead, we trust that we have all the power that we need in Jesus name...

and we trust that he gives us what is right for us.

We don't desire wealth, nor do we desire poverty. Instead, we desire God's best for us so that we can move the gospel forward without getting distracted by our stuff.

Wealth can be an asset until it becomes an obsession.

I think a good way to word this, from the perspective of a Kingdom person, would be:

"God, give me only as much as will further your mission without distracting me from it."

We already know that God takes care of us. We know that he holds the world in his hand, and we know that we have a part to play in seeing that his kingdom invade this one...

we don't need more than what it takes to make sure that happens... and when we get more, THEN we do more for the Kingdom with it. But the moment life becomes about what we can gain for ourselves then you that your life has gotten off track.

But its important, even with money, to trust, "God gave me all of this. Its all his. I didn't do anything." The money comes from God. The bread comes from God. The air comes from God. The forgiveness comes from God.

And then, the central theme of the entire thing: grace.

We show grace.

We get grace.

It is the currency of the Kingdom of God.

It is what keeps us from evil, and from falling into bitterness, and other very dark places in life.

Jesus died to show us what it means to not hold peoples sins against them... he took them all onto himself. He forgave our trespasses by dying for them, and all He asks us to forgive others simply by not carrying them anymore.

To send them away.

What do you need to send away this morning? So that you can boldly approach the throne of grace with confident that your prayers are heard?