

"HEAR YE HIM"

A Devotional Series For Radio

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The Sermon: OUR FATHER WHO ART IN HEAVEN

Scripture: Matthew 6:5-15, Inspired Version

When thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites; for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men; for verily, I say unto you, They have their reward. But thou, when thou prayest enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut the door, pray to the Father who is in secret; and thy Father who seeth in secret shall reward thee openly. But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the hypocrites do; for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking. Therefore be ye not like unto them; for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him. Therefore after this manner shall ye pray, saying, Our Father, who art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth, as it is done in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And suffer us not to be led into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever, Amen.

Ask, and it shall be given you; seek and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you.

Jesus' life was a life of prayer. It is recorded that he prayed at the time of his baptism. Before beginning his ministry he spent forty days in the wilderness, fasting and communing with God. Before choosing his twelve apostles, he spent all night in prayer. Prayer prepared him for the mount of transfiguration. Prayer preceded the miracle of the loaves and fishes, and his walking on the sea. He prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane before his crucifixion, and he prayed from the cross. He prayed for his disciples, and he prayed for his enemies.

Luke introduces his version of the Lord's prayer with the request of the disciples who came to Jesus saying, "Lord, teach us to pray." Notice that they do not say "Teach us how to pray," but "Teach us to pray." Although prayer is to some extent instinctive, it is very easy to forget or neglect this duty. Many of us today who know at least something about how to pray, need to be taught to pray -- the duties, the obligations, the blessings, pleasures, and benefits that inevitably grow out of prayer.

What is prayer? Many people think of prayer only as an asking for something. Certainly that is a part of prayer, but

it is not the only part, or even the most important part. Jesus taught us to pray to "Our Father, who art in heaven." A child who thought of his father only as an unfailing source which granted his every request, but who did not respect his father, or love him, or obey him, or enjoy being in his company or talking with him or listening to his wise advice and counsel, would be a warped and most unsocial, unpleasant personality indeed. So, while it is well that we should think of God as one from whom we can ask any necessary gift, if we come to him as "Our Father," there are other aspects of prayer than simply asking for what we think we want.

Prayer involves first, adoration. We come into God's presence boldly, because he has taught us to call him Father, and to come to him as to a Father; but we come to him also in awe, in reverence, in wonder, and in love -- to worship and to adore -- to contemplate the majesty and grandeur and light and love and perfection which stream from his presence. Having come to adore, we remain to commune. We present our petitions, and wait for his reply as he speaks to our hearts by the still small voice of his Spirit.

Prayer also involves confession. As

we contemplate God's perfection, we must inevitably be made aware of our own imperfection, of our faults and failures, of our sins, both of omission and of commission. Only through confession can we come to God with proper humility.

Another proper element of all prayer is thanksgiving. As we ask for new blessings needful for a new day with its new needs and new opportunities, we must not forget to be grateful for blessings vouchsafed in the past. And the last element of prayer, which we have already partially mentioned, is supplication: that is, asking for the things we need. Supplication may be of two kinds -- petition for our own needs, or intercession for the needs of others.

In Matthew's gospel, the Lord's prayer is prefaced by Jesus' instructions as to how we shall pray. Jesus cautioned against hypocrisy in prayer. It may be interesting to note that the word "hypocrite" comes from a Greek word root which means "one who acts in a play." Jerusalem in Jesus' day was full of hypocrites -- play actors who sought out synagogues or busy street corners as the site for their prayers. Of them Jesus said, "They have their reward." They prayed to be seen and admired of men -- not with any expectation of being answered: and when men saw them, they had their reward. If we expect God to hear and answer our prayers, we must pray without hypocrisy, posing, pretending, ostentation, or self-righteousness.

Jesus also cautioned against praying with vain repetitions. Many of the religionists of his day had special forms or magical arrangements of words which they said over and over in an attempt to weary God into paying attention. It was this insincere, superstitious practice that Jesus condemned. He did not mean that we should never ask for the same thing twice. On the other hand, he expressly commanded importunity in prayer, illustrating his command with the parable of the widow and the unjust judge. He himself prayed three times in Gethsemane, "If it be thy will, let this cup pass from me." We pray with importunity not so much to break down God's indifference or his unwillingness, as to prepare ourselves and make ourselves worthy to receive and use that for which we ask.

We must pray in faith, believing that we shall receive the things for which we ask. "Faith cometh not by signs, but signs follow the believer." God does not work miracles for skeptics in order to convince them that he is; but he does answer the prayer of faith from men who

come to him believing that he is, and that he is a rewarder of those who diligently seek him.

We must pray in the Spirit and in the name of Christ. If we pray as the Spirit of Christ directs, we cannot pray selfishly. We cannot pray in the Spirit, and nurse a grudge against any, or permit an offense that we have given to another to go unreconciled. If we pray in the Spirit we shall be able to ask for and receive specific, definite blessings and results which we need, and which it is God's will that we should have if we know how to receive and use them. If we pray in the Spirit, we pray submissively, willing to abide by God's decisions. If we pray truly in Jesus' name, and in his Spirit, we shall always pray for that which is in harmony with God's will, and we will always receive that for which we ask.

The Lord's prayer is a sample prayer -- a pattern to be followed rather than a ritual to be slavishly and endlessly repeated. It is both a personal and a social prayer. In the first portion, our thoughts are directed to God and to his purposes. We are taught to pray not "My Father," but "Our Father." All mankind is included in the family of God. The first petition of the Lord's prayer is that all men might hallow his name. The second petition is that his kingdom may come on earth. The third petition implements that coming. The kingdom already exists; it will come on earth when God's will is done on earth as it is done in heaven.

The second portion of the Lord's prayer is devoted to man's needs. Again we are reminded that all mankind is God's family as we pray "Give us this day our daily bread." We do not pray for a lifetime of security, but for the needs of each day as it comes. We do not pray for luxuries, but for the simple needs of life -- not for cake, but for daily bread. We pray then for forgiveness of our past sins which stand as debts against us -- debts which we can never cancel by our own resources. We make our own forgiveness contingent upon our forgiveness of all others who have trespassed against us. Then we pray for deliverance from future temptation and evil. The Lord's prayer closes with a doxology of praise to God.

"Lord teach us to pray." When we can come to God as to "Our Father," presenting our worship and our petitions to him in the name and in the Spirit of Christ the Mediator, we may ask what we will, and it shall be done unto us by Him who always delights to give good gifts to his children.