

January 11, 2009

“Lord, Teach Us to Pray”

Fred Nowell

Growing up, I heard prayers on *very* limited occasions. Family gatherings at Nana's a couple times a year would have been a place where one would have been offered. Beyond the walls of the large white and green house at 242 North Main Street, prayers were seldom, if ever, heard.

When this writer first attended the services of the Lord's church in NH, I noticed that prayer was offered many times throughout the services. Shortly after obeying the Gospel, it was understood that it was just a matter of time before I would be asked to pray out loud before the congregation. Having no clue how to pray, I listened to those Christian men around me to get a feel for what to pray for and how to speak to God properly. I can still recall and recite the beginnings and some of the content of many of those prayers. When the time came for me to pray, I could do so with confidence knowing that I was following a pattern of godly men who were also following a pattern.

In John 11, Jesus teaches His disciples the structure of prayer. Prayer is to be directed with reverence to the Father through the Son (Jn 14:13-14, 15:16, 16:23-24), containing thanks and praise toward Him, with an honest and humble spirit (Jn 11:2-4). Prayer is much more than conversation with God. Prayer is the opening of one's heart before the throne of Almighty God. There, we not only give thanks and praise but also lay before God our petitions, requests, and entreaties. Paul advised those in Philippi, ***“Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God”*** (Phil 4:6). Indeed, prayer is a great privilege.

In John chapter 17, Jesus is about to be offered for the sins of the world (Mt 1:21; 1 Jn 2:2). As our Lord prays to the Father, He teaches us some important things to pray about as well. Consider the following.

Pray For Eternal Life

Eternal life can only be a reality for those that come to know and obey God. Speaking of Himself and eternal life that comes through Him, Jesus prayed ***“this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou***

hast sent” (Jn 17:3). In the parable of the sower (Mt 13:3ff; Mk 4:3ff; Lk 8:5ff), Jesus is teaching the responsibility of every Christian to sow the seed (God's Word, Lk 8:11) liberally, while also emphasizing the soil (heart) and how it must be in order for the perfect seed to take root and grow. The seed is **always** perfect but the soil is not. Man is saved by obedience to God's Word, the Gospel (Jn 17:17; 1 Cor 15:1-4). When Jesus returns, He will reward the faithful and punish the wicked (Mt 25:31ff). He will come **“in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ”** (2 Thes 1:8). Jesus is the author of eternal life for all who obey Him (Heb 5:9), so let us pray for the saved to remain saved (because we can lose or give up our salvation, Gal 6:4-6; Heb 6:4-6, 10:38-39, 12:15; 2 Pet 2:20-22, 3:17-18) as well as those that will obey the Gospel and come to know God.

Pray For Unity

As Jesus headed closer to the cross, He prayed that His followers would continue as one. **“I come to thee, Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one, as we are”** (Jn 17:11). Jesus was well aware that His apostles would soon be tested and tried like never before. It's no secret that division weakens any kingdom, city, house, etc. (Mt 12:25). While a separate string can be easily broken, many strings bound together are strong. The Lord's church is to be unified together in word and deed (Ps 133:1, 1 Cor 1:10; Rom 16:17; Phil 2:1-4, 3:16) to remain strong. Let us pray for the unity our Lord desires for us to have.

Pray For The World

“...that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me” (Jn 17:23). One of the most loved and quoted passages in all the Bible is John 3:16. This passage declares for us all the love of God, **“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”** It is the desire of God that all would be saved (2 Pet 3:9) but He will not save man against his own will. Jesus tells us that in order for any to be His friend, it is needful to do the things He says to do. Not that we are able to accomplish enough deeds or works to enter Heaven, but we are deceived if we believe that any will enter Heaven if they are an enemy of God or do not the things that He says

to do. Our Lord could not have put it any clearer than when He said, ***“If ye love me, keep my commandments,”*** and ***“Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you”*** (Jn 14:15, 15:14). Again, we cannot do anything to earn or deserve salvation, but we must understand that Jesus does *require* some things of us. When Jesus tells us to “keep His commandments” does that mean only the ones we like or does it mean all of them? Can we be a friend to Jesus if we choose to neglect the things He has commanded?

Before returning to Heaven, Jesus also put it about as clearly as He could so that we might understand that we have a role to play in our salvation as well as the salvation of others. ***“Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost; Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world... Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned”*** (Mt 28:19-20; Mk 16:15-16).

Our Lord teaches us some pretty powerful things to pray for. ***“Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls. Be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves”*** (Jas 1:22-23).