

Aligning with God's Purposes

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[0:00] We're going to turn now to our Bible reading for this morning. So please turn your Bibles to Matthew chapter 6. If you don't have a Bible with you, we have Vista Bibles scattered around, so do please grab one of those.

You'll find it on page 811, 811 in the church, Vista Bible. So Matthew chapter 6, and we're in the series at the moment thinking about how to pray, and we're considering in particular the Lord's Prayer here in Matthew 6.

So we're going to begin our reading, Matthew 6 and verse 5. These are Jesus' words to his disciples.

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 might be seen by others.

Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. 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.

[1:17] And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think they will be heard for their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

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. Well, amen.

[2:22] And may God bless to us his word this morning. Well, do pick up your Bibles, and turn with me, if you would, to Matthew chapter 6, to the passage that Paul read to us.

And as he said, we began last week thinking about how we pray. And we're focusing on this pattern that the Lord Jesus himself taught his disciples here in Matthew chapter 6.

And what I hope we began to see is that what Jesus gives us here when he speaks about prayer is not at all about techniques. It's not about programs. It's not about formulas.

Nothing at all of that nature. It's not like a how-to book, the sort of thing that you often see in our bookshops. Now, what Jesus shows us here is that prayer is not even about religion at all.

It might surprise you. But what he's telling us is that prayer is all about relationship, real relationship with God our Father in heaven through Jesus Christ the Son.

[3:41] And that means that real prayer, as opposed to pretend prayer, what we might pretend to other people is prayer, what we might even present to ourselves is prayer.

No, real prayer can't happen at all unless there is already a real personal relationship between ourselves and God himself. So real prayer is not about seeking the praise of other people.

It's not to display our piety to others so that they think we are prayerful people. Nor is prayer trying to manipulate God, to get God to give us what we want.

In contrast to that, real prayer is simply the communication of those who know God as Father, the Father in heaven. That we can't talk to God unless we know Him.

And what Jesus teaches all the way through the Gospel is that we can only know God as Father through Jesus the Son. There is no other way to know God, truly. And Jesus is very, very plain about that all through the Gospels.

[4:47] If you doubt it, actually just turn over with me a couple of pages to Matthew chapter 7. Look at the end of Matthew chapter 7 at verse 21. Very clear. Not everyone who says, Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom of heaven.

So saying, Lord, Lord, is not enough. Who enters? The one who does the will of my Father in heaven.

So prayer begins when people come to know God the Father through Jesus the Son. Jesus says there, whoever, verse 24, whoever hears my words and does them is the one who knows the Father in heaven.

So prayer begins with coming to know God the Father through Jesus Christ the Son in that relationship of obedient faith. It's only those that can address God personally.

So as we saw last time, real prayer can't then be the fraudulent prayer of the Pharisee and that kind of religiosity. Because that's done to impress people, not to speak to God.

[5:56] Nor can it be the frantic prayer of pagan religion because that is just seeking to prise out of God's hands the thing that we want to manipulate God. No, real prayer is the simple prayer of those who know God as Father.

Verse 9, our Father in heaven. And so the first step towards that real prayer is to do what Jesus says a bit further down in chapter 6, verse 33.

It is to seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and then all these things that you ask and that you need will be added to you.

And in a sense, the first half of what we call the Lord's Prayer helps us to focus on that first priority because it's teaching us exactly that. It's teaching us to seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness.

righteousness. And if we don't get first things first, then everything else is going to be wrong, isn't it? But if we do get those first things right, well, everything else in our thinking about prayer and in our practice of prayer will fall into place.

[7:08] That's what Jesus is saying. So I want to look at these first petitions today so that we can see what it means to seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness in prayer because that's what this is all about.

So having seen that we can and indeed that we must address God personally in prayer, we need to see that our first priority when we do that, the first thing that we ask for God in prayer is that we should be aligned with His purposes.

His purposes. His purpose for all history, for all time, for all eternity. His purpose for this whole world. but of course also His purpose for our own personal lives.

And that's what it means you see to pray the second half of verse 9 and verse 10. Hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

It's a prayer for our priorities to be aligned with God's priorities, God's purposes. The real prayer isn't manipulating God to give us what our desires crave.

[8:20] Real prayer is about God molding us and shaping us into children whose wants and desires become filled with His perfect desires. We're to be aligned with His purposes.

So look at the first petition. First of all, hallowed be your name. I suppose we don't use that word hallowed very much today, but sometimes people do talk about it, don't they?

They say things like the hallowed turf of Murrayfield. I can almost hear Bill McLaren, the old commentator, saying, you know, to pull on a Scotland jersey and to walk out onto the hallowed turf of Murrayfield is the highest honor.

So it means to revere, doesn't it? It means to honor. It means to treat us as precious and holy, in fact. That's what it means to hallow. And that's what it means here in the Lord's Prayer, much more importantly, of course, than any turf or any football stadium.

What Jesus is saying is that the first concern that we have for this wonderful God who has created us and redeemed us, called us to be His children, to know Him, to have a privilege of relationship with Him, the first desire that we will therefore have is that His precious name, His precious reputation will be treated with respect, with great reverence.

[9:40] That's what it means for God's name to be hallowed, to be treated as holy. In the Greek translation of the Old Testament, in Isaiah 29, verse 23, it says this, they will sanctify.

It's the same word. They will hallow, treat us holy, the Holy One of Jacob. They will stand in awe of the God of Israel, to hallow, to sanctify, to stand in awe of God.

And Peter, in his first letter, in chapter 3, verse 15, uses exactly the same language when he says, in your hearts, regard Christ the Lord as holy. The NIV translation puts it this way, set apart Christ as Lord.

That's what it means to hallow, to set Christ on the solitary throne in your heart, to give Him the preeminence that is given to no other. And it's no accident that exactly that same language is used of hallowing Christ as Lord and hallowing God the Father, His name.

Because you can only hallow, you can only respect and honor the name of God if you honor and respect and hallow the name of the Lord Jesus, God the Son.

[11:00] That's so important. Jesus Himself was absolutely clear on that. Later on in the upper room discourses, you can read it later in John chapter 17, but Jesus says, He's praying to His Father and He says, I have manifested, I have made known your name.

I have made known your name. He says, I kept them in your name. I have made known to them your name and will continue to make it known.

Jesus is always talking like that in John chapter 12. He said, Father, glorify your name and the Father replied, I have glorified it and I will glorify it again.

Meaning that God's name would be glorified ultimately in the saving work of Jesus' Son on the cross. God's name is hallowed when Christ's name is hallowed.

That's why Paul says in Philippians chapter 2 that God has highly exalted Jesus and given Him the name that is above every other name.

[12:08] So that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow and every tongue confess that He is Lord to the glory of God the Father. So you see, the first step in hallowing God's name is to bow the knee to Jesus Christ, His Son.

It's to confess that Jesus is Lord to the glory of God the Father. That is to be aligned with God's purpose. And that's what we're commanded to pray.

That's why in our version of the Lord's Prayer that we sing, we sing this, we to Jesus bow the knee that your name may hallowed be. That's how you hallow God's name by bowing to the Lord Jesus Christ.

And that means therefore that the Lord's Prayer can't be prayed at all with any meaning unless we honor Jesus Christ as Lord. If you don't align yourself with the Father's purpose to make Himself known in the world through Jesus alone to exalt Him in and through His only Son, then you are not hallowing God's name.

You are not honoring His name as holy. So that means that no Jehovah's Witness can hallow God's name because they don't honor Jesus as the name above every other name as God the Son.

[13:29] No Mormon can hallow God's name. I love listening to a recording of the Mormon Tabernacle Choir with Andreas Bocelli singing that beautiful version of the Lord's Prayer.

But they're just singing a song. They're not truly hallowing the name of God because they don't hallow and honor the name of Jesus above every other name. The name of Jesus as the name of the Lord.

No Unitarian who does not worship Jesus Christ as God the Son co-equal with the Father is capable of hallowing the Lord's name.

It doesn't matter how often they say the Lord's Prayer. And certainly the Lord's Prayer could never be used as some kind of interfaith prayer. You have some sort of civic interfaith gathering with Christians and Muslims and Jews and Hindus and Sikhs and whoever else.

There are people who think well the Lord's Prayer is a sort of generic thing that we could all say together and we're all praying to the same God. No, not at all says Jesus. Because it is a prayer that treats as supremely holy and precious the living God whose name is made known fully only only and uniquely in the name of Jesus Christ God the Son.

[14:53] So it's a very exclusive prayer. But equally you see to pray hallowed be your name is actually to pray a missionary prayer.

Because it's to pray isn't it that all over the world men and women and boys and girls will bow the knee now to God through bowing the knee to Jesus Christ in his name. To forsake all other names and to hallow his name alone.

Because that is God's ultimate purpose. To him every knee will bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth.

And so we are to align our prayer with God's purpose when we pray like that when we pray to that end hallowed be your name. Of course it's also a personal prayer because we want God's name to be hallowed in our lives as Jesus Christ is set on a solitary throne in our own personal life.

So that his rule over us really is single party rule. There's no coalition government where Jesus gets a voice along with a whole lot of others. No. And that brings us you see to the second petition your kingdom come.

[16:08] because God's kingdom is the place of his realm. It is the exercise of his rule. And once again it's absolutely impossible to wrench these words in the Lord's prayer out of their context in Jesus' teaching and somehow make kingdom into some sort of vague notion some sort of generalized spirituality.

No. In Jesus' mouth it is absolutely plain what the kingdom of God is all about. The kingdom of God is the reign of Jesus. Matthew's whole gospel is about the coming of the king in the person of Jesus.

Read the opening chapters. We'll probably be looking at those at Christmas time. He is born king of the Jews. He's the son of David. He's the son of Abraham.

That's what the first chapter of Matthew is telling us. His coming brings light in the darkness as quoted by Isaiah the prophet. That's quoted by Matthew in Matthew chapter 4.

The people dwelling in darkness have seen a great light. And he goes right on to report Jesus' very first sentence in his public ministry which is repent for the kingdom of heaven is now at hand because Jesus is here.

[17:30] And Matthew records Jesus' ministry as preaching and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom. And he shows him demonstrating the power of his heavenly kingdom and healing every sickness and disease.

Everywhere Jesus is we see the life of the kingdom of heaven appearing here on earth. The kingdom is where Jesus is.

So in Jesus' person and his work is the dawn of the kingdom. It's the end the beginning of the end of the curse of sin and sickness and death. And it's begun in Jesus' coming.

That is the message of the Christian gospel. It's begun not yet complete it's not yet consummated and again Jesus makes that very very clear right throughout his teaching.

Read on in Matthew's gospel to chapter 13 where he gives all these parables of the kingdom and tells us his kingdom is growing it's spreading it's multiplying it cannot be stopped even though at present to many to most it does seem to be hidden.

[18:39] It seems to be small but its growth is real like the leaven unseen leavening the loaf like the mustard seed which seems tiny but ultimately produces a huge tree.

But the day is coming says Jesus when all will be revealed and the kingdom in all its full glory will be seen. And you see to pray thy kingdom come is to express both a longing for that great day acknowledging that that day is coming to the world acknowledging that that is where our real priority lies not in just this world but in the coming of that great day it's to be future oriented in our prayers but it's also of course to express our faith and our trust in the spread and the growth of Christ's kingdom now in this world as Christ's rule is extended throughout the world in the preaching of his gospel.

The gospel is the scepter of Christ's kingdom that's how the great reformer John Calvin put it. And to pray your kingdom come you see is to align yourself with Jesus' priority to extend his kingdom by making that your priority by being devoted to the means by which that kingdom does extend and that is the spread of the good seed of the gospel.

The kingdom grows by the sowing of the seed the word of God Jesus said. That's what brings the harvest that's a constant battle he tells us very plainly there's an enemy and the enemy will seek to spoil things always.

they'll be precious from the world as the deceitfulness of the desires of the human heart but you must keep on sowing the seed says Jesus and the harvest will surely and certainly come.

[20:37] So to pray for your kingdom to come is a prayer that longs for that harvest. It's praying yes Lord may that great harvest come thirtyfold sixtyfold a hundredfold as the seed of your gospel bears wonderful fruit in this world for all eternity.

But if you long for that great harvest then you'll be devoting yourself won't you to sowing the seed that will lead to the harvest. That's what it means to pray your kingdom come.

It's a great missionary prayer. It's to pray for the rule of Christ for the reign of Christ to be advancing through the world through the spread of the gospel and through the fruit of that gospel being seen in the lives of men and women.

To pray your kingdom come is to be praying for people to come to know Christ as king because wherever he reigns there is his kingdom.

So it's a great outward prayer isn't it? and if our prayers don't seem to show that great outward focus don't seem to show any interest in the mission of the kingdom and the evangelism of people with the word of God with the gospel of Jesus then we're not really praying your kingdom come are we?

[21:57] it's a great outward prayer but it's also an inward prayer it's an inward prayer for ourselves now as kingdom people it's a prayer that the beauty of Christ's kingdom will be manifest now in us and that brings us you see to the third petition thy will be done your will be done in earth as it is in heaven in a way that's just another way of saying your kingdom come it's a plea for the renewal of the whole earth and everything in it so that once again the earth as man's dwelling place and heaven as God's dwelling place are reunited so that this whole earth is once again as it was in the garden of Eden where God and man dwell together in perfect fellowship in perfect harmony it's a prayer for the final consummation when Jesus comes again when he comes to usher in a new heavens and a new earth the home of righteousness as Peter puts it where everything will be put right forever when the relationship between

God and man will be once again and forever as it ought to be it's a it's a longing not just for the day when all the world will be put to rights when all wrong is done away with forever but it's a longing therefore for the day when we ourselves personally will be put to rights the apostle John says so wonderfully when he appears we shall be like him we shall be like him but of course John also says there we also are God's children now so you see when we're praying thy will be done it can't just mean Canada longing for the future when everything will be put right it can't just be a longing for the end of all sinfulness in the world and in our hearts it must express a desire among those who are already God's children through

Jesus the desire that we have who are who are already united with Jesus by faith a desire for those who are already filled with the spirit of the risen Lord Jesus to be growing more like him day by day we're called in the here and now aren't we to manifest the beauty and the goodness and the light of the glorious rule of God's kingdom now already in our lives and the church even in this earth even amid all the mess and the misery of our human society it's a prayer for us now asking God to do in us exactly what Jesus is speaking about in this sermon on the mount for example in Matthew 5 verse 16 where Jesus says let your light shine before others so they may see what well see your good works and give glory to our father in heaven so they may see in you something of the kingdom of heaven right here on earth now it's a prayer for the light of God's kingdom to shine now through us his people in this dark world to show that his will his rule is reigning supreme in our lives and to show the fruit of that that's why

Jesus goes right on there in Matthew 5 if you look down to verse 19 that's why he goes right on when he's speaking about shining his lights in the world to say that it's those who do and teach his commandments who will be called great in the kingdom of heaven because that's how his light shines in this world now that's how his people serve to advance his kingdom not to dishonor his name but to cause people to hallow his name to honor his name to bless his name see this world is only going to!

a glimpse it's only going to get a vision of the glory of Christ's kingdom to come it's only going to get a glimpse of that home of righteousness where all things are right if the people in this sad world now get a glimpse of it in the here and now in their midst isn't that right?

[26:31] like seeing the preview the trailer of a film when you go to the cinema there's all well you see that's what Jesus is teaching us to pray for that that the world would see in us in his people a living illustration now a foretaste of the rightness and the glory of his kingdom that's what he's teaching us to pray for not just for ourselves personally but for all of us corporately as his people as his church Christ's church is his household it's the people who belong already to the new heaven and the new earth and we're living out our waiting time here in the old earth feel like we're a colony living here on earth but living on earth for heaven and the world needs to see in us a little outpost a little embassy of the kingdom of heaven it needs to see that here's a place where the writ of the true sovereign runs freely you know that in the ancient world when the

Roman armies took on new territory they established what was called the Pax Romana the peace of the rule of Rome that was what was established and that's what Jesus is saying that we're to pray for here that it would be established on earth among God's people the Pax Christi the peace of the rule of Christ and that people are to see that and that that will be light in this dark world isn't there what Paul says to the church in Colossae in Colossians chapter 3 you put on then as God's chosen ones holy and beloved put on compassion kindness humility meekness patience bearing with one another and if one has a complaint against another forgiving each other as the Lord has forgiven you so you also must forgive and above all these things put on love which binds everything together in perfect harmony and the peace of Christ rule in your hearts see if this world sees and experiences that kind of kingdom culture that lifestyle of a home of God the home of righteousness in heaven don't you think that that has a powerful drawing power don't you think if people see that and witness that and experience that they will listen much more readily to the call of the gospel into that kingdom you see it's the culture that the

Christian gospel creates that empowers the call that the gospel communicates because that reminds us doesn't it that it's not first of all a prayer for other people to be like that we want the church to change but like charity change begins at home doesn't it so Jesus is teaching us that to pray that I will be done involves a very necessary negative that precedes it we saw those necessary negatives last week didn't we don't pray like this don't pray like that but Jesus himself demonstrate that necessary negative in his prayer doesn't he in the garden of Gethsemane do you remember he prayed thy will be done but what came first not my will but thy will be done not my will but thy will and you see

Christ's will won't reign supreme in churches and in Christians until Christ's will does reign supreme in our lives and that won't happen until our will my will is dethroned there's a surrender isn't there there's a submission there's a death even that until we embrace truly and wholeheartedly in our own lives means we can't actually be aligned with God's purposes a surrender a submission a death I wonder what that means for your life maybe an ambition that you must let go you must give up if you're going to align with God's true purpose for your life maybe a relationship that God has challenged you about that you need to give up maybe it's just the acceptance of a painful path that might be the consequence of past sin in your life past rebellion which you now just have to accept and not be resentful about because things won't be the way you wish they would be surrender submission death see

Jesus says doesn't he to you and to me if anyone would come after me let him deny himself not my will take up his cross a death and follow me thy will be done and that's where all real prayer begins says Jesus you see saying yes Lord whatever whatever the past may have been now align my whole life my whole life with your purpose lead my feet in your path not mine not my name and reputation but your name be hallowed not my rule and my ambition but your kingdom come and not my will but your will be done in our church in my ministry in my small group in my life in my relationships in every aspect of everything see when we're right with

[33:15] Jesus when our hearts are right when we're walking with him in his light not tugging against him well it's then isn't it and only then that our prayer is going to be right so Jesus says you then pray like this hallowed be your name your kingdom come you will be done on earth as it is in heaven well much for us to ponder and think about let's pray heavenly father we thank you that we can indeed come before you to pray that if we humble ourselves before you and seek your face we need not fear that our sins will make you turn away from us because you have turned your face towards us forever in Jesus Christ our savior help us lord we pray to learn from him to love him to serve him to desire above all things the glory of his name the advance of his kingdom and the fruit of his glorious righteousness in our own lives here on earth to help us lord and teach us to pray for we ask it in

Jesus name amen