

2022 04 10

Called to be a people of praise and prayer

Example from Palm Sunday

John 12:12-15

The next day the great crowd that had come for the festival heard that Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem.

¹³ *They took palm branches and went out to meet him, shouting,*

“Hosanna!”

“Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!”

“Blessed is the king of Israel!”

¹⁴ *Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it, as it is written:*

¹⁵ *“Do not be afraid, Daughter Zion;
see, your king is coming,
seated on a donkey’s colt.”*

Matthew 21:14-16

The blind and the lame came to him at the temple, and he healed them. ¹⁵ But when the chief priests and the teachers of the law saw the wonderful things he did and the children shouting in the temple courts, “Hosanna to the Son of David,” they were indignant.

¹⁶ *“Do you hear what these children are saying?” they asked him.*

“Yes,” replied Jesus, “have you never read,

*“From the lips of children and infants
you, Lord, have called forth your praise’?”*

It was the natural outflow of the excitement of the day. Both adults and children were responding to the immediate revelation that Jesus was King. Jesus does not criticize either the adults, who rapidly deserted him or the children, who were having fun. Rather he underlines the main difficulty we have this morning, which is what is true worship?

Our subject this morning is that we are called to be a people of praise and prayer.

So let's look at what Jesus had to say about prayer.

Luke 11:1-4

One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he finished, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples."

² *He said to them, "When you pray, say:*

*"Father,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come.*

³ *Give us each day our daily bread.*

⁴ *Forgive us our sins,
for we also forgive everyone who sins against us.
And lead us not into temptation.'"*

It might appear that there are two separate issues – worship and prayer, but I am not convinced. Prayer is the means to worship. So if I centre our thinking on prayer it is because in prayer we worship.

Secondly, I am going to concentrate on individual worship and prayer , rather than collective worship and prayer.

It was where I was heading in preparation when I read this written in ‘Christianity’ this month in an article interviewing Graham Kendrick. The quote is “If we don’t become secret worshippers, we could very easily become secret sinners.”

So the question this morning is not what was the worship and prayer today like in church, but what is the worship and prayer in your private life like?

John 4:19-24

¹⁹ “Sir,” the woman said, “I can see that you are a prophet. ²⁰ Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem.”

²¹ “Woman,” Jesus replied, “believe me, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. ²² You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. ²³ Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshippers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshippers the Father seeks.

²⁴ God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth.”

So Jesus' basic teaching on worship is not that it is about time and place or content but motivation, heart and mind. You can worship God anywhere at anytime but only if you worship in Spirit and truth.

Paul expanded on this in
Romans 12:1-2

Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. ² Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

Worship is not so much about what we do on Sundays, etc although this reflects on our worship the rest of the week, but what matters about worship is what we do 24/7. Ask not whether the worship was good today but rather am I a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God. You see the vital part of worship is what God sees. He looks at our hearts and looks for repentance, receptiveness of his grace, wonder at his greatness and glorying in what he has done and will do. That is why Communion is so significant. It takes us back to Jesus' death and resurrection to contemplate and rejoice in what he has done. But I said we would concentrate on private worship and prayer, so rather than express my own ideas, we are going to look at what Jesus said about it.

Matthew 6: 5

“And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. ⁶ But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. ⁷ And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. ⁸ Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

⁹ *“This, then, is how you should pray:*

*““Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,*

¹⁰ *your kingdom come,
your will be done,*

on earth as it is in heaven.

¹¹ *Give us today our daily bread.*

¹² *And forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.*

¹³ *And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from the evil one.’*

¹⁴ *For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. ¹⁵ But if*

you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.

Three things to be encouraged by.

Prayer is not about performance.

Prayer is about having a one to one with God.

Prayer is about simple honesty

Prayer is not about performance.

In Luke 18: 1-14 there are two parables about prayer. We will look at the second but you can consider the first as homework!

⁹ To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everyone else, Jesus told this parable: ¹⁰ “Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector.

¹¹ The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other people—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. ¹² I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.’

¹³ *“But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, ‘God, have mercy on me, a sinner.’*”

¹⁴ *“I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.”*

Prayer is about having a one to one with God.

One of the reasons Christian work is not as well published as it might be is quite simply this, we do before God not men. It is easy to sing worship songs enthusiastically, pray publically but what is it like when no one other than God is looking?

We have already read

^{John 4: 23} *Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. ²⁴ God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth.”*

So whether we are speaking of public or private worship, there has to be both the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives and an honesty before God. If you like me, stumble over what to do, then take heart.

^{Romans 8:26} *In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for,*

but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans.²⁷ And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God's people in accordance with the will of God.

So whether you pray prayer book prayers or have your own way of praying or just talk to God like you do to a friend, what matters is not the form of words but what your heart is thinking.

Prayer is about simple honesty

Jesus said:

⁷ And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. ⁸ Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

If you struggle to string words together, be of good cheer! The Holy Spirit understands your heart and he intercedes for us! So worship and prayer are not about your ability to say the right things but about expressing what is on your heart and in simple terms.

The Lord's Prayer is the example Jesus gave. It has 53 words in 10 lines but basically 6 statements.

If the example prayer is simple and straightforward then copy the example.

So let's return to the key element which is **what does God think about your prayers.**

First he enjoys them. In the Old Testament the prayers are visualised by the altar of incense. This concept is repeated right through to Revelation. For example 5:8

And when he had taken it, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb. Each one had a harp and they were holding golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of God's people.

Your prayers are the perfume of heaven! God likes them.

Second, God hears them.

One of the key statements in Exodus is
Exodus 3: 7 *The LORD said, "I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering. ⁸ So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey.... ⁹ And now the cry of the Israelites has reached me,*

Psalm 6:9 *The Lord has heard my cry for mercy; the Lord accepts my prayer.*

1 John 5:14 *This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us.*

Finally God responds to your prayers

we return to Luke 11 this time verses 9-13 where Jesus says

⁹ *“So I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. ¹⁰ For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.*

¹¹ *“Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? ¹² Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? ¹³ If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!”*

Homework this week is quite simple:

⁶ *Go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.*

Psalm 22:3

Yet you are enthroned as the Holy One;
you are the one Israel praises.

Psalm 32:6

Therefore let all the faithful pray to you
while you may be found;
surely the rising of the mighty waters
will not reach them.

Westminster Catechism

Q. 1. What is the chief end of man?

A. Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy Him forever.

In modern English:

Q.1. What is man's primary purpose?

A. Man's primary purpose is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever.

Scripture References:

1 Corinthians 10:31 **31** So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.

Psalm 73:24-26 You guide me with your counsel,
and afterward you will receive me to glory.

25 Whom have I in heaven but you?

And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you.

26 My flesh and my heart may fail,
but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.

John 17:22,24

²² I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one—²³ I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

²⁴ “Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world.