

THIS IS HOW YOU SHOULD PRAY

Matthew 6:7-13

TEXT: *And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. "This, then, is how you should pray: "'Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.'*

In Jesus' name, my fellow redeemed:

A number of years I read about an incident that illustrates beautifully what our Savior warns against in regard to praying "Our Father." There was a small Protestant congregation on the outskirts of town that was upset that a local businessman bought a restaurant with the intentions of turning it into a tavern. The bar and restaurant was within the legal zoning limits of the community, yet closer to their church than they desired. Despite their protests, the businessman completed his project and announced the grand opening date for his new business. With no other recourse, the congregation announced a special prayer service, asking God to step in to stop what they considered to be an insult to God and to their faith. To the joy of the congregation, the night before the grand opening, lightning struck the new restaurant, burning it to the ground. Elated, they counted this as a sign from God and a great moral victory.

Their celebrating ended, however, when the businessman sued the congregation, blaming them for the lightning strike and the fire since they earnestly prayed for God's intervention. The congregation secured their lawyer, and in court they argued that they could not be blamed for a random act of God. The judge, on the other hand, put the congregation to shame when he declared that the businessman obviously believed in the power of prayer more than did the congregation who now tried to disclaim that God had acted in response to their fervent prayer service.

What do you think? Does God answer prayers? Was this a coincidence that backfired since it also caused the congregation who prayed to now deny their faith in prayer?

How blessed we are to have Jesus Himself teaching us how to pray our Heavenly Father in this portion of His Sermon on the Mount. **THIS IS HOW YOU SHOULD PRAY: Know that your prayers are heard by our Father in Heaven; and, Know that He knows how to answer our each and every prayer.**

Have you ever had to listen to someone talking who had nothing to say? They just babbled and babbled? Well, that's not what Jesus is referring to here. People who talk a lot actually do have something to say even though we may not be interested in hearing them. Some are just blessed with the gift of gab. Little babies "babble" and yet they are actually communicating something even though they do not yet understand our language. Years ago on a trip from Minneapolis to Michigan our little girl babbled incessantly the entire trip. Yet she was not babbling as our Lord here speaks, but from her perspective was offering her parents her childish thoughts over and over and over again. Just because I was wearing out from listening did not mean that her thoughts and words were not heartfelt and sincere.

Here our Lord refers to an act of unbelief when He says: ... *when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their*

many words. Do not be like them ... The word translated here as "babbling" refers to meaningless and thoughtless repetition of words. Jesus says that the unbelieving pagans do that in their efforts to get the attention of their gods. Jesus also mentioned that the unbelieving Jews were guilty of this, as they liked to pray over and over the Psalms using the name of God over and over without knowing that God was in Christ Jesus. Today the Roman Catholic joins in this sin as they pray their Rosary and Hail Mary over and over, thinking that this exercise merits the Lord's favor. And even the Lutheran joins in this meaningless exercise whenever we pray our well-know table prayers and even the Lord's Prayer with thoughtlessness and with a heart far removed from what it is that we are praying. Will you pay attention to someone babbling thoughtlessly just to get your attention? You would tell them to stop. That's why Jesus tells us: **they think they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them ...**

While we might tire of hearing a child's constant babbling, we do not disown them because they are our children. We love them and realize that as they mature they will improve in their communication skills. Sometime later, when Jesus' disciples asked him again about how to pray, Jesus told them to pray boldly and incessantly and then said: **Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? 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!** Lu 11 God, who so loved the world that He gave His Son Jesus to be our Savior, not only knows how to sort through our childlike requests in order to give us what is best for us, but He also gives us His Holy Spirit! This is significant! This is the greatest gift from God! His Holy Spirit is the creator of faith, the Giver of Wisdom and understanding, and all that we need to live here before we enter eternal life in Heaven! Concerning this blessed gift of His Holy Spirit, Paul wrote to the Romans: **...you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father." ... 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 with groans that words cannot express. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will.** Ro 8 Don't babble thoughtlessly, but with childlike confidence in your Heavenly Father's love, babble away with childlike thoughts and words and the Holy Spirit will sort it all out with **groans that words cannot express.** And know that He knows how to answer our each and every prayer.

To add to this assurance, Jesus then gave His hearers the perfect prayer that is to this day known as the "Lord's Prayer... The prayer that Jesus taught us to pray." **This, then, is how you should pray: "'Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.'** We do not have the time to review the full meaning of these blessed requests, these 7 Petitions. Each one involves a depth of gracious blessing that can be comprehended only by a true child of God. That is why a study of the Lord's Prayer should always come at the end of any systematic study of Christian Doctrine, for it is a summary of a proper understanding of both Law and Gospel. Even in our study of Luther's Small Catechism, the study of the Lord's Prayer

comes at the end because it is blessed review of all that the child has been taught throughout the year.

One thing we can point out in regard to how our Lord would answer our prayers is noted in the ratio of spiritual petitions to earthly requests. Of the seven petitions, six are requests for spiritual gifts: *Hallowed by thy name* ("give us the faith to live lives worthy of the name by which we are graciously called..."); *Thy Kingdom come...* ("give us the faith to remain members of your blessed kingdom..."); *Thy will be done...* ("do what you have to do to get me to heaven..."); etc. Yet we are to ask for all that we need for body and life as we live on this earth: *Give us this day our daily bread...* While it is our nature to focus more on earthly needs more than spiritual needs, God does not overlook the importance of these bodies He has both created and redeemed by the blood of His Son, Jesus. And if Jesus Himself teaches us to pray for what we need for our bodies and life, you can be certain that each and every day, day by day, God will surely provide for us despite our foolishness in how we often live.

That Christian congregation who prayed and prayed for the Lord's intervention in regard to the businessman who wanted to open a tavern near their church should have known these things, and they should not have been surprised when the lightning struck. But when you pray, know that your prayers are heard and that God knows how to answer. And the best prayer is the one He has taught us to pray! Pray that prayer frequently and thoughtfully. Amen.