CALLED TO PRAY

1. Introduction

a. In the last few decades I believe the Spirit has been preparing the Church for the greatest revival and the most intense pressure in human history. We are living in days when we are being prepared for Jesus returns (Rev. 19:7) which means that what the Western church accepts as normal will change dramatically as the Spirit moves to change the expression of Christianity in a generation.

b. How do we cooperate with the Spirit so that we may walk in the intimacy and power that the new testament church walked in? Part of the answer is to embrace the fasted lifestyle that we have been looking at in recent weeks as taught by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount . This speaks of walking in the spirit of fasting in food, finances, and the use of our time, words, and energy.

c. One of the big changes we have seen in recent times is a greater call to pray – this is a significant transition in the church as we give our time much more to standing before the Lord rather than using our time for our own agendas and position. Prayer seems weak and pointless to those who do not know God but to those who have encountered Him it is our greatest joy and our greatest weapon.

Eph. 6:13-18 *[13] Therefore take up the whole armour of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. [14] Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, [15] and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. [16] In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; [17] and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, [18]* ***praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication***

1 Thess.5:16-18 *[16] Rejoice always, [17]* ***pray without ceasing****, [18] give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.*

d. The key characteristic of the church at the end of the age will be a praying church – the ekklesia. The warrior bride who delights in her intimate relationship with her Bridegroom King and takes her place to partner with Him to enter into the age to come.

e. But how do we pray? We could take many weeks to answer that question but this morning we are going to stay focussed in the Sermon on the Mount.

2. When you pray

Matt.6:5-6 *[5] "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 may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. [6] 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. [7] "And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words. [8] Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.*

a. This does not mean we should not pray corporately; in fact, Scripture is very clear that it is as we come together in prayer that we see things change. There is power in agreement – agreement with God and agreement with one another. What Jesus is addressing here is our heart attitude in prayer. Are we praying for others to hear us or are we praying to God? Who are we looking at as we pray?

b. Jesus is warning us against the prayer of the gentiles (those who don't worship Yahweh). They come to their gods and their idols crying out to be heard and to receive what they want. But our God is a

Father who sees our needs and loves to give us good things and who calls us to come and agree with what He desires. So Jesus goes on to show us how to pray. In Matt.6:9-13 Jesus shows us that our prayer is first to focus on God's glory – prayer is first about God not us.

Matt. 6:9-13 *[9] Pray then like this:* ***"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 this day 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 evil.*

3. The model prayer

a. It is a great gift to learn about prayer from the One who had the greatest prayer life and the greatest teaching ministry in all history. Matthew 6:9-13 is one of the most familiar passages in the Bible, yet so few have searched out its deeper treasures. Its over-familiarity has resulted in many being content with a superficial view of its glorious contents.

b. Jesus gave us a model of prayer (Mt. 6:9-13) based on what God is like and on the nature of the kingdom. It covers all the foundational basics that are expanded on throughout Scripture. Jesus told us the things that we must know and keep central in our quest to grow strong in prayer.

Matt. 6:9 *[9]In this manner, therefore, pray: our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name.*

c. Jesus pointed out six requests to pray regularly. **The first three focus on God's glory** (His name, kingdom, and will). **The second three focus on man's needs** (physical, relational, and spiritual).

4. Our Father in heaven

a. Jesus' teaching on prayer starts with a strong focus on who God is—He is *our Father in heaven*. Foundational to a strong prayer life is a right view of God as our heavenly Father. A. W. Tozer insists that a low view of God has been the biggest problem in the Church in every generation. As we pray, we must intentionally take time to recall who He is according to His Word and to focus on His nature.

[9]Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name.

b. ***In heaven*** points to God's transcendence. Jesus combined two ideas about God—He is **powerful and personal**. He combined God's fatherly love with His heavenly power, His transcendence with His tenderness, and His being exalted so high with His humility that bows so low.

c. Our Father in heaven is so kind, yet terrifying, in His majesty. We are to draw near to His tender heart with great confidence, adoring love, awestruck humility and wholehearted obedience.

   i Some only see His heavenly glory, but do not see His nature as a Father with deep love. They depersonalise God, presenting Him as majestic, but distant, cold hearted, and even harsh.

   ii Others only see Him as a tender Father, without seeing His heavenly glory. They see a Father who is kind and personal but without trembling before His transcendence. They portray God as a familiar and fun-loving buddy. It is based on bad and shallow theology and little personal experience of God.

   iii Jesus set the context of intimacy with God within His **sovereignty** and **majesty**.

d. ***Our:*** He is not only *my* Father, but *our* Father. Our prayers requests are tempered by the realities of who we are to God as one family. We are to pray inclusively for the whole family of believers, and not for ourselves only. Prayer is connected to a corporate reality.

5. Praying for God's glory (Mt. 6:9-10): three requests

[9] Pray then like this: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.[10] Your kingdom come,your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

a. ***Praying for God's name to be hallowed:*** God's name refers to His person, character, and authority. His name is hallowed when it is responded to in a way that He is worthy of. The very thought of His name stirs awe and holy fear in any who understand a little. This petition is that God's majestic name be revealed *to* us and then *through* us. We ask God to release His power to cause more people to see the truth about Him and to refuse to take His name in vain in jest or expressions of anger. This is a prayer that the Father receive the highest place in our life, heart, and worship. We revere God's name by not asking for anything contrary to His glorious name and will.

b. ***Praying for the kingdom to come:*** We ask for His kingdom to increase on earth. The kingdom is the place where His Word is obeyed, His will is done, and His power expressed.

   i The kingdom is manifest in part in this age and in fullness when Jesus returns to earth. The kingdom is "already, but not yet"—it is already here, but not yet fully here

   ii We are to labour in prayer for the kingdom to increase. The error of the church of Ephesus was to do kingdom work without prayer or connecting deeply with Jesus (Rev. 2:4). The Lord gives more if we ask for more—in the process of speaking to God and bringing Him these requests, we develop our relationship with Him, and this is what He really wants.

   iii This petition includes being kingdom-minded in our lifestyles and in our attitudes towards others. Therefore, we are to work together with other believers, instead of having a territorial attitude and being focused only on our own sphere of authority and influence.

c. ***Praying for God's will to be done:*** The third request includes our obedience in light of God's kingdom purposes. His will consists of His commands and our ministry assignment. This means not only being committed to changing the nations but having a high commitment to personal purity. We can't bring His kingdom into the world if we are not committed to Jesus and obeying Him.

6. Praying for our personal needs (Mt. 6:11-13): three requests

[11] Give us this day 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 evil.

a. The next three requests are for our needs—*physical* (daily bread), *relational* (forgiveness), and *spiritual* (deliverance from evil). Jesus commanded us to bring our personal requests to God in prayer. These prayers express our dependence on God in every area of life.

b. ***Praying for our daily provision:*** This request is for our *daily* provision, protection, and direction. We do not pray to inform God of our needs (Mt. 6:7-8), but to enhance our relationship with Him. Asking God for our needs does not free us from the responsibility of working. He meets our needs partially by giving us the ability and opportunity to earn a living.

c. ***Praying for forgiveness:*** This petition helps our relationship with God and people. This is a prayer for restored communion with God that also renews our relationship with others.

   i We are justified by faith, so prayer for our debts to be forgiven speaks of restoring our fellowship with God (1 Jn. 1:9), not being saved from hell. It is to cleanse our heart and thoughts.

1 John 1:9 *[9]If we confess our sins, He is faithful…to cleanse us from unrighteousness.*

   ii The proof that we have been freely forgiven is that we gladly forgive others. The man who knows he has been forgiven is compelled to forgive others.

d. ***Praying for deliverance from evil:*** This petition is that the Father lead us away from temptation. God never tempts anyone with evil (Jas. 1:13).

   i Jesus' point was to pray that God help us to avoid and escape temptations. He used a figure of speech to express one petition in two ways—lead us from temptation and deliver us from evil. The second half of the request defines positively what the first half expresses negatively.

   ii There are *opportune* times when demonically-energized temptations hit us like a "storm." To enter temptation speaks of something far more intense than the general temptations we all face. It points to a specific "storm of temptation" that occurs when three components come together—when demonic activity against us is heightened, our lusts are aroused, and circumstances are optimum for sin.

Matt. 26:41 *[41]Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.*

Luke 22:31-32 *[31]Satan has asked for you [Peter], that he may sift you as wheat. [32]But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to Me…*

   iii Pre-temptation prayers for help will remove or reduce a storm of temptation. Praying before the temptation expresses humility that depends on God's strength and acknowledges our weakness.

   iv We "take heed" by keeping our relationship with Jesus strong through a consistent prayer life. As the storms of the end of the age begin to come we need to be in the place of continual prayer. Jesus calls us to "pray always" to prepare for the snare of temptation in the end times.

Luke 21:34-36 ***[34]*** *"But watch yourselves lest your hearts be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and cares of this life, and that day come upon you suddenly like a trap.* ***[35]*** *For it will come upon all who dwell on the face of the whole earth.* ***[36]*** *But stay awake at all times, praying that you may have strength to escape all these things that are going to take place, and to stand before the Son of Man.".*