

The Face of God

Matthew 6:9-10; Luke 22:42

Introduction

A journalist was assigned to the Jerusalem bureau of his newspaper. He gets an apartment overlooking the Wailing Wall, a famous wall at the temple-mountain where Jews go to pray. After several weeks he realizes that whenever he looks at the wall he sees an old Jewish man praying vigorously.

The journalist wondered whether there was a publishable story here. He goes down to the wall, introduces himself and says: "You come every day to the wall. What are you praying for?"

The old man replies: "What am I praying for? In the morning I pray for world peace, then I pray for the brotherhood of man. I go home, have a glass of tea, and I come back to the wall to pray for the eradication of illness and disease from the earth."

The journalist is taken by the old man's sincerity and persistence. "You mean you have been coming to the wall to pray every day for these things?"

The old man nods.

"How long have you been coming to the wall to pray for these things?"

The old man becomes reflective and then replies: "How long? Maybe twenty, twenty-five years."

The amazed journalist finally asks: "How does it feel to come and pray every day for over 20 years for these things?"

"How does it feel?" the old man replies. "It feels like I'm talking to a wall."

Today we wrap up our 2-part series on prayer. Prayer is a truly remarkable practice in that it puts us in direct communication with the One who made it all. Last week, we talked about prayers for the hand of God. These were prayers in which we prayed directly for our own needs. Today, we're going to talk about a different type of prayer. Most of us fully grasp and understand the need to pray for the things we want and need in our life, but ultimately, if our prayer life stops with prayers such as these, then it can become somewhat self-centered. Today, we're going to talk about prayers for the face of God. Rather than asking God to directly meet one of our own desires, prayers for the face of God involve prayers for God's will, and for his presence in our lives.

I'll preface this sermon by telling you what the number-1 responsibility of the Christian life is. That responsibility is to glorify God. We must remember that as surely as God does desire to help us and see us live good, joyful lives, that ultimately, it's not about us in the end. It's about God. To that point, praying for God's presence and will to be seen and done on Earth in addition to praying for our own needs is an important half of the overall picture of prayer. Today, we'll look very briefly at a couple of biblical examples of praying for the face of God, and we'll determine how best we can pray for God's will on Earth.

Secondarily, we're going to wrap up our discussion on prayer by taking an important look at where we pray, and though we can of course pray anywhere; we'll look at the value of having your own place of prayer, and how it can enhance your prayer life.

I'd like for you to turn with me in your Bibles, or follow along on the screen, to the book of Matthew, chapter 6, beginning in verse 9. Here, Jesus is teaching the disciples how to pray. This prayer is well-known as the Lord's prayer, and it contains both prayers for the face of God and prayers for the hand of God. Follow along with me. *Here we'll learn that we should...*

Pray for God's Will

Matthew 6:9-13 – 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. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.'

This verse really contains 6 distinct prayers. The last three are prayers for the hand of God. Why? Because they are prayers about us and our needs... The first three, however, are distinctly different. They are not about us, are they? They're about God. Praying for God's name to be 'hallowed' in the original Greek is a prayer that God's name be seen as Holy. This is followed by a prayer for God's kingdom, that is, His ruler-ship of the world and His presence to be realized on Earth. And this is followed by a simple but important prayer that above all else, God's will, whatever that may be, be done on Earth as it is in Heaven. Prayers that are God-centered are prayers for the face of God in our terminology. Prayers such as these are characteristic of a true heart of worship and praise for God, and we must not forget to include such prayers into our daily life.

Perhaps the greatest example of a simple but full prayer, that is, one containing prayers for the Hand of God and prayers for the Face of God, is found in the book of Luke, when Jesus is praying at the Mount of Olives shortly before he would be crucified. Let's take a look at Luke chapter 22 verse 42. It reads as follows:

Luke 22:42 - Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done."

Jesus makes a distinct prayer for Himself, asking God the Father to take the cup of God's wrath for sin from Him, and yet, in the same breath, he says, "yet not my will, but yours be done." How many times have we prayed such a prayer? God, please do this for me, yet not my will, but yours be done. For some of you, the answer may be many times. For others, we've perhaps never considered the value in praying for God's will in our lives or in our world. We must remember always that God is transcendent, and so far beyond our ability to comprehend fully. There is NO better will to be seen in our lives, and NO better will to be seen on Earth than God's will. If we're not praying for that on a daily basis, then why aren't we?

Prayers for the face of God needn't simply be broad and non-specific like the one's we've seen so far. How do we know what the will of God is? We know what the will of God is because we know who God is. And how do we come to know who God is? We come to know Him through reading about Him in our Bibles and understanding Him through our relationship with Him. This is a lifelong journey of learning, but as we become familiar with God, we can learn to pray both for His presence and in His will to achieve prayers for the Face of God.

There are a number of attributes of God that help us to understand who He is and how better to pray in His will. Let's take a look at a few of them now.

1. God is Truth – Not only is God real and true, but all that is true belongs to Him. So much of the world does not believe in the truth of God, so it would be perfectly appropriate to pray that the truth of God be realized the world over. Let people come to know Him as true, so that he might be worshiped by all, as He should be.
2. God is Mercy – God is the living embodiment of forgiveness and mercy, as seen by the sacrifice of His own Son for the atonement of the sins of all of mankind who would accept Him. We should pray that God's mercy be felt and seen throughout the world, again, so that He might be worshiped as the one and only true God.
3. God is Good – Like truth, all that is good belongs to God, and God is Himself good. We live in a world that often sees God's laws, those laws meant to give us a healthy and prosperous life, as nuisances and restrictions. Prayers that God's goodness be seen and realized are also very valuable prayers for the Face of God.
4. God is Omnipotent – Omnipotence means that God is all-powerful. He can intervene on anything at any time, and he has the ability to halt any evil without being rivalled. In a world marked with tragedy and wickedness. Prayers for God's power to be seen and felt in the world can be important in helping to make the world a better place.
5. God is Justice – God is the embodiment of justice, and He desires what is right in the world. He desires fair and impartial treatment of all people, including both men and women, minorities, the rich and the poor, and the homeless and those on the fringes of society. Prayers for God's justice to be realized are important.

Now I know that these prayers may seem a little 'ominous', but if I've said this once I've probably said it 100 times, even in my short journey as your pastor. BELIEVE that prayers like these are effective and powerful. Prayers for the Face of God require a lot of faith, because prayers for the presence of God, and for His general will to be done, are often more difficult to see the results of than the prayers that we pray directly for our own lives. Nevertheless, trust that prayers for

the Face of God are answered just as surely as God answers prayers for the things we ask for directly for ourselves.

Beyond the 5 characteristics I mentioned, we know also that God desires relationship with all of mankind. Such has been evidenced throughout the entire Bible, which is largely a ballad about God working to restore the broken relationship with Mankind since Adam, Eve, and the fall. We also know that he desires salvation for all of mankind through the sacrifice of His Son, Jesus Christ. The good news is, if you're a Christian in the audience today, you don't have to pray for your own salvation. You've already got it! This frees you up to pray for the salvation of the world around you. There are many other attributes and goals of God that, as you explore your Bibles and your relationships with God, you'll come to know. Pray for God's presence and his will not only in your lives, but also in the lives of those in the world around you. That's prayers for the Face of God in a nutshell.

I could end the sermon here, but if I did, I'd have to refund the door-charge you all paid, and I'm not prepared to do that. So I need to shift gears and talk about another important aspect of prayer, which has nothing to do with how or why, but actually has to do with 'where'. I want to make something perfectly clear before I start this piece of the sermon. We can, and should, pray anywhere, at any time. We'll make no mistake about that. The gift of communicating with God is yours to exercise in all moments. Some moments, and some places, however, don't lend well to quality prayer. What we're going to talk about next is the importance of having a 'prayer sanctuary' of sorts. And we'll see biblical examples of how this concept played out in the past. *Here we will see that we should...*

Seek a Prayer Sanctuary

Jesus understood the value of finding a solitary place to pray. Take a look at the following verses from Scripture.

Luke 5:16 – But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.

Also...

Mark 1:35 – Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed.

And finally...

Matthew 14:22-23 – Immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowd. 23 After he had dismissed them, he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray.

Put your friends on a boat, and then go pray...

While prayer can be achieved anywhere, we're best suited to prayer like we're best suited to Bible reading, in a quiet place with no distractions. Too often, our prayers are broken or rushed because we're not in a place where we can clear our minds and focus directly on them. To this end, it's important that you find a prayer sanctuary in your life, a place where you can go to be with God and find yourself undisturbed. Your prayer sanctuary should have the following characteristics.

1. It should be Quiet – Wherever you look for a prayer sanctuary, be it inside or outside, in your home or outside of your home, it should be a quiet place. Quietness is important not only for our own ability to clearly articulate our prayers to God, but it is also important for our ability to hear God clearly when he responds. Elijah sought the presence of God in 1 Kings. Let's read his story.

1 Kings 19:11-13 – The Lord said, “Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by.” Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake came a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper. When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave.

God was not in the wind that tore the mountains apart, nor was he in the earthquake, nor the raging fire, but rather, God's voice was to be found in the gentle whisper. If God is to whisper into your ear, you're best able to hear him in a place of quiet. A place free of distractions such as the television, the phone, the sounds of traffic, or even the rest of your family, can be paramount to your ability to have an effective prayer conversation with God.

2. It should be Solitary – Remember, your prayer sanctuary is a place for you and God to be alone together. As such, it would be appropriate for the prayer

sanctuary that you choose to be a remote place, where you're unlikely to encounter other people. Find a place, inside or outside, that you know to be not busy and adopt it as your own.

3. It should be used only for Prayer – If possible, your prayer sanctuary should be used only for prayer. It should not be a place that you go to in order to do anything other than be alone with God. This may be a difficult aspect to achieve, but if possible, you need to strive towards it. This may eliminate many places from contention, but if your prayer sanctuary is a place that you dedicate only to God, you will be less likely to use it for other purposes.

In our sanctuaries, we must be prepared to speak, but perhaps more importantly, to listen. It is often difficult for us to quiet our minds, and even more difficult for us to endure moments of silence, but these are important practices towards hearing the voice of God when he answers our prayers. Be prepared to devote enough time to your prayer time to both voice your prayers to God, and to listen for any answer that He may want to provide to you immediately. Psalm 25 says this:

Psalm 25:4-5 - Show me your ways, LORD, teach me your paths. Guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my Savior, and my hope is in you all day long.

The first prerequisite of being taught is perhaps to first show up for class. This is your daily prayer time with God, and your sanctuary is probably the best classroom you could ask for. The second prerequisite of being taught is that we must be prepared to listen. As any student knows, if you ask a question, you must listen carefully for the answer, then take that answer to heart and act on it if necessary. Prayers for the Hand of God and prayers for the Face of God are no different. Perhaps you are to play a part in your own healing which you have asked God for. Perhaps you are to actually play a part in your prayer for God's kingdom to come on Earth. Be prepared to be still before the Lord so that you might hear anything that He has to say to you.

Conclusion

Prayer is both a powerful tool at our disposal, and a privilege that we share to be able to communicate with our Maker. Prayers can be broken down into two

broad types. Prayers for the Hand of God involve those prayers that we pray directly for our own needs. Prayers for the Face of God involve prayers for God's presence and for His will to be done. Combining these two types of prayers and praying in a dedicated place that is quiet, solitary, and conducive of a quiet conversation with God can bring powerful results to one's prayer life. Always believe that the prayers we pray are heard, answered, and powerful to change the world. Brother Lawrence a monk from the 1600s, wrote the following while in contemplation of seeking the presence of God in prayer:

...we should establish ourselves in a sense of God's Presence, by continually conversing with Him. ...It was a shameful thing to quit His conversation, to think of trifles and fooleries. – **Brother Lawrence**

Many trifles and fooleries, that is, distractions, will seek to pull us out of communion with God in our daily lives. There is possibly no better use of our headspace than to pray to God and to listen to his still small voice in return. Consider your own prayer life today. Do you seek both the hand and the face of God in your prayers? Is your prayer life important enough to you that it has garnered a special time and place in which it occurs? Pray to the Holy Spirit to help enhance your prayer life today! Please stand with me as we prepare for the invitation.

Invitation