

## Church of Christ in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century – Lesson 10

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- John 17
  - One of the most beautiful passages of Scripture in the Bible (in my humble opinion)
  - It of course is 1 long prayer spoken by Jesus to God the Father
  - Jesus was God (John 1:1)
  - But even He when He was on earth used the avenue of prayer to talk with God the Father
    - That tells me that you and I need to use this avenue if we want to speak with God the Father (in Jesus' name of course which we'll talk more about later on)
    - And we need to use this avenue of prayer often
    - Take advantage of the opportunity to speak with our God – the same God who created the universe and everything within it
    - We should pray without ceasing (1 Thessalonians 5:17) – always in the mindset of whatever happens, whatever decisions I need to make, if something good happens – praise God, if something bad happens – ask God to help me through it
    - All via the avenue of prayer
  - And in verses 20-22, Jesus prays the following
    - *"I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one:"*
  - Jesus not only prays for those believers that were currently with Him, but He prays for all future believers who will come afterwards
  - This of course would in part, be us today
  - He prays for unity
  - Because He knows that He is only going to establish 1 church – not many
  - Not different denominations, but 1 church
  - Of which He is the head (Ephesians 1:22-23)
  - Of which, He is the King (Lamentations 5:19)
  - And we know that we can only achieve the unity that our Lord prayed for if we are members of the 1 church that He established – the church that Christ built (Matthew 16:18)
  - The church that belongs to Christ – the church of Christ
  - The same church we've been discussing this study
- Allow me to summarize briefly how we've gotten here
  - Lessons 1-4: foundational information of the church
    - Christ is the king, the head
    - The church is His kingdom (Ephesians 1 & Ephesians 5)
    - We are but servants in Christ's kingdom (Philippians 2, Mark 10)
    - There is 1 church (Galatians 1)

- Anything else is division and not the church our Lord established (1 Corinthians 1)
        - And we reiterated how we become a member of the church by looking at an example from Acts 8
    - Lessons 5-6: organization of the church
      - The eldership – how they are to shepherd the flock (Acts 20:28)
      - The deacons – how they are to serve in the church via assignments given to them by the eldership (Acts 6)
      - The qualifications for each – not just any person can serve in these roles (1 Timothy 3)
    - Now we've moved into the acts of worship of the church
      - Lesson 7 – the Lord's Supper
      - Lesson 8 – singing
      - Last week – preaching and teaching the word
      - This week – prayer
- Hebrews 1:1-2 – *“God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds;”*
- 2 Peter 1:20-21 – *“knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.”*
- 2 Timothy 3:16 – *“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God...”*
  - God speaks to us today via the words of the Bible
  - And His words are truth (John 17:17)
  - Take advantage of that
  - The creator of the universe had something to tell you and I
  - Let's read it and study it and tell others
- And we speak to God the Father through the avenue of prayer
- Again, the same avenue that Jesus used in John 17
  - We must take advantage of this as well
  - Anything that is on our mind – we can take it to God in prayer
- Let's begin by looking at how we pray
  - 1 – To God the Father in Jesus' name
    - **John 16:23**
      - Our prayers should be directed to the Father in the name of Jesus
      - Christ is our avenue to the Father
      - John 14:6 – *“Jesus said to him, ‘I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.’”*
      - This is true in everything – the only way we can get to the Father is through Christ
      - This of course is also true in our prayer lives
    - In the example prayer Jesus gives us in Matthew 6, notice that Jesus addresses His prayer to God the Father (vs 9)

- Not Mary, not His earthly father Joseph, not the Roman government – none of that
  - God the Father
- We find this same pattern repeated for us in John 17:1
  - Jesus addresses His prayer to the Father
- We must do the same and we do so in Jesus' name according to John 16:23
  - We know that Jesus intercedes for us
  - Romans 8:34 – *“Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us.”*
  - 1 John 2:1 – we have an advocate with the Father – Christ Jesus, the righteous
  - Not only does Christ intercede for us, the Holy Spirit does as well
  - Romans 8:26 – *“Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.”*
  - Sometimes, and perhaps many times, we don't fully understand what we need
  - But God's thoughts are not our thoughts – His ways are not our ways (Isaiah 55:8-9)
  - God knows what's best for us in all situations
  - The Holy Spirit intercedes for us in our prayers with groanings that man cannot even utter
  - Just like John was told to seal up the things in which the thunders uttered in Revelation 10:4
  - Or perhaps, man just simply cannot understand it
  - Either way – we know that the Holy Spirit will intercede for us in our prayer lives
- 1 Kings 18:20-46
  - 450 prophets of Baal prayed to Baal
  - They called on Baal from morning until noon
  - Nobody answered (vs 26)
  - Baal is not a god – but rather a statue
  - But when Elijah prayed to God, He answered
  - God is the 1 and only – there are no other gods
  - We must pray to Him
- 2 – Expecting God's will to be done
  - **Matthew 26:39**
    - Christ prayed for God's will to be done
    - From a physical perspective in this instance, Christ wanted the cup to pass from Him
    - But He knew that He was the plan of redemption and that it entailed the cross

- And He was submissive to the will of the Father
- We must be no different – we must realize that God’s will will be done and that we must be submissive to that
- James 4:3-6
  - The prayerful attitude of “I’m going to ask of God, that I may spend His blessings on my personal pleasure – is condemned
  - In fact, if we ask with this attitude – we’re asking amiss and we will not receive
  - We must pray to God knowing that His will will always be done
- 1 John 5:14-15 – *“Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him.”*
  - If we ask in accordance with God’s will, God will hear us
  - Now we obviously do not always realize the will of God
  - We may pray that someone may get better from an illness, but maybe they don’t
  - It just wasn’t in God’s will that this person get better
  - In 2 Kings 2, I don’t get the feeling that Elisha wanted God to take Elijah
    - When a member of the school of prophets in Bethel says to Elisha *“Do you know that the Lord will take away your master from over you today?”* in vs 3, Elisha responds *“Yes, I know; keep silent!”* (vs 3)
    - This same situation happened in Jericho in vs 5
    - The sense that I get out of this is that “hey – I know Elijah is going, I know God’s will is going to be done, but I really don’t want to talk about it”
    - Elisha knew that God’s will was going to be done and he accepted that even though perhaps if he had his choice – Elijah would have stayed a little bit longer
  - God hears our prayers – and He answers
  - It’s not always the answer we want, but if we ask in accordance with His will – then we have the petition that we asked of Him
  - Matthew 7:7-8 – *“Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened.”*
  - Bring your requests to God – He wants to hear from you
- 3 – Pray with thanksgiving
  - **Philippians 4:6**
    - There’s nothing we should be anxious about in this world – because we should be putting our faith in God to work things out in His way
    - We must submit to that
    - David was not anxious when faced with Goliath in 1 Samuel 17

- Saul was, but David knew that the Lord was with him (1 Samuel 17:36)
  - We should not be anxious of anything either – because we can go to God in prayer and turn our present situations over to Him
  - And we must do so with thanksgiving
  - God has blessed us in ways that we don't even understand
  - Let's try to remember to thank Him when we go to Him in prayer
- While we're discussing how we can pray, let's briefly mention how we are not to pray
  - Matthew 6:5-8
    - Jesus says here, do not be like the hypocrite
    - The hypocrite prays publicly with the intent of being seen by men
    - Their goal is to be accepted amongst men as righteous – not to be accepted of God
    - And Jesus says whatever feeling of accomplishment they receive from men – that's all the reward they will get
    - Galatians 1:10 – *“For do I now persuade men, or God? Or do I seek to please men? For if I still pleased men, I would not be a bondservant of Christ.”*
    - Paul says that those who are trying to please men as the hypocrites in Matthew 6, are not bondservants of Christ
    - In Luke 18:10-14, pray like the tax collector who humbled himself before God and was too ashamed of himself to even look towards heaven
    - Not like the Pharisee who was very arrogant in his prayer and was only looking for the approval of man
- Now that we've looked at a few examples of how and how not to pray, let's look at when we pray
  - 1 – during the assembly of the church
    - Acts 2:42
      - This of course is just after the church was established at Pentecost
      - Many souls were added to the church by God after they were obedient to the gospel (vs 47)
      - And the church was assembled together as we are this evening for Bible study
      - As we will be on Sunday for worship
      - And when they were gathered together, they did at least the following: continued in the apostles' doctrine (subjected themselves to preaching/teaching), fellowship (so they were assembled), breaking of bread (so they partook of the Lord's Supper), and they prayed
      - So perhaps most directly – here we have the example of the church praying together when assembled
  - 2 – Without ceasing
    - 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 – *“Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.”*
      - Now we know that we cannot always, 100% of our lives be actively praying

- Else of course, we would not have time to study the Bible, wouldn't be able to sing, or preach, etc.
- But we are always to be in a prayerful mindset
- We must always know that we can turn our situation over to God and He'll answer us as we talked about previously – He'll answer yes, no, or wait
- We must always have faith in God and be ready to turn our situations over to Him
- 3 – Fervently
  - James 5:16
    - The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much
    - Fervent – pray with intensity, pray often, and pray knowing that God is in control
    - James 5 clarifies this statement with the example of Elijah from 1 Kings 17 & 18
    - James summarizes it well, so who am I to deviate from his explanation
      - Elijah was a man, just like you and I
      - There was nothing special about him in that regard
      - And he prayed earnestly that it would not rain nor there be any dew (1 Kings 17:1)
      - And James tells us that it did not rain for 3.5 years (a fact confirmed for us in 1 Kings 18:1)
      - So the Holy Spirit through James here clearly illustrates how an effective, fervent prayer avails much
- 4 – Irregardless of our situation
  - Philippians 4:11-13
    - Paul says whether we are abased or whether we are abound, we can be content
    - He was content in both of these situations, and we can too
    - Because it is Christ who strengthens us and allows us to make it through whatever physical situation we may find ourselves in – whether we are abased or abound
    - Whether we are poor or rich, hungry or full – it is Christ who gives us our true strength
    - True strength does not come from anything worldly – but Christ
    - And we can be prayerful in both situations
    - Thank God when you are well off in life and thank God when perhaps you aren't so well off
- Now let's answer the question of why we pray
  - The simple answer is because we are told to do so – but let's dig a little deeper
  - 1 – God wants to hear from us
    - Matthew 6:8
      - The Father knows what you need before you ask Him
      - He knows our needs better than we do

- Consider the lilies of the field – they neither toil nor spin
- Yet not even Solomon was arrayed like one of these (Matthew 6:28-29)
- The lilies of the field do not pray
- But you and I know that with metaphors such as this used in the Bible – the comparison of people to flowers and animals, etc. can only be taken so far
- We are not like the lilies of the field – we have minds and free will
- God does not need to hear from us – many choose to live life that way
- Not fooling with God in any way, shape, or form
- But He wants our all (Romans 12:1-2)
- And He wants to hear from us
- Think of your children
- You don't necessarily need for them to tell you the things they need
- But I guarantee anyone who is a parent will tell you that they'll never tell their children to not communicate with them
- God is the same way in this regard
- 2 – So we can have Godly peace
  - 1 Timothy 2:1-2
    - We are to pray for all men – even those in governmental authority
    - Why?
    - So that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence
  - Philippians 4:6-7
    - When we pray to God, not being anxious with anything – truly turning our physical situations over to God, it is then that He will grant us with the peace of God
    - The peace of God is knowing that whatever happens to us physically, we have a home in heaven promised to us
    - Peter felt this peace in Acts 12 – he was on death row most likely
    - But he was sleeping – he knew that whatever happened to him, God was going to take care of him regardless
    - Only when we turn our situations over to God in prayer can we have true peace
    - And then we free up our minds to focus on the things that are pure, lovely, noble, just, of good report, virtuous, praiseworthy, etc. (Philippians 4:8-9)
    - We pray so we can have peace
- Let's briefly look at the example prayer that Christ gives us in Matthew 6:9-13
  - Notice the following: Christ prayed to the Father
  - He addressed His prayer to His heavenly Father as He instructs us to
  - And He prays for the following
    - That the church come
    - That God's will be done

- Give us our daily bread (provide for our physical needs)
    - Forgive our sins and help us to forgive others
    - Help us in our spiritual battle with temptation
    - And then He honors the Father by saying that all glory belongs to Him
  - Now we cannot pray today that the church come, because it has already come – but we can pray for the well being of the church
    - We can pray for the elders, for the deacons
    - That they may perform their duties in accordance with God’s word
  - We can pray for God’s will to be done just as Jesus did in Matthew 26:39
  - We can pray for all these things
  - This is a good list of things to pray for
  - It is not all inclusive of course – Solomon prayed for wisdom which I think we would all agree is a good thing to pray for
  - We do not need and should not repeat this prayer vainly (Matthew 6:7)
  - But this model prayer Jesus gives us here is an excellent example that we can use as a guide for us in how we should pray today
- Finally, let’s conclude by looking at some benefits of prayer
  - 1 – Prayer works
    - **2 Kings 20:1-3**
      - Isaiah approaches Hezekiah with word from the Lord that he will soon die, set your house in order as a result
      - Hezekiah prays to God and God heard his prayer (vs 5)
      - And as a result, God added 15 years to his days and his people were delivered from the hands of the Assyrians
    - James 5:17-18
      - Elijah was simply a man – no different than you or I
      - But his prayer was answered
      - His prayer worked – it did not rain for 3.5 years
      - And when he prayed for it to rain again, it did
  - 2 – By prayer and specifically turning our earthly situations over to God, we will be granted peace
    - We talked previously about the examples of this from 1 Timothy 2 and Philippians 4
    - How when we turn our earthly situations over to God, we free up our minds to focus on Godly things and He will grant us with peace as a result
    - Let’s look at another example of this in **Hebrews 7:1-2**
      - Melchizedek was an earthly king in Genesis 14
      - The king of Salem (which would eventually become known as Jerusalem)
      - He blesses Abraham and Abraham pays tithes to him
      - And here in Hebrews 7, Melchizedek is referred to as the king of righteousness and king of peace
      - Why?
      - We know from previously looking at Philippians 4 and 1 Timothy 2, that righteousness and peace are closely related



- One cannot have true peace without righteousness
  - And a quality of a righteous person is to have a strong prayer life
  - So another benefit of prayer is to receive Godly peace
- I hope that with the passages we've studied this lesson, you can think about your prayer life and realize how valuable of a blessing it is to be able to go to God in prayer whenever we want to