

**Sermon preached by Canon Jim Holbeck at the 6pm Healing Service at St. Andrew's Cathedral
Wed 16th November 2005 Reading: Matthew 6:9-15.
Title: "How God wants us to pray"**

What do you do when you come to that incredible realisation that an Almighty, all powerful God exists? Can you talk to Him? If so, how should you talk to Him? Will He answer? Jesus taught us about how we should, and how we should not pray to this Almighty God.

1. WAYS OF PRAYING THAT GOD DOESN'T LIKE. 6:5-7.

Jesus told us about these wrong ways in Mat 6:5-7.

i.. Praying with a hypocritical attitude. Going through the pretence of praying but it is really play-acting which is what hypocrisy means. It is praying so that other people notice.

- It is praying to win the admiration of other people rather than a simple praying to God. 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.*
- It is deliberately outward and very insincere and achieves its goal, human admiration, but it does not receive the blessing of God.
- The right attitude was to be inward and sincere. *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.* The focus is on God and talking to Him honestly in secret.

ii.. Praying with meaningless repetition. 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.*

- This wrong sort of praying has its emphasis on the quantity of the words used in prayer in an attempt to win God's admiration and His reward.
- But Jesus said, 8 *Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.*
- In other words when we talk to God in prayer we don't have to use a lot of words in telling Him about our needs because He knows everything about us before we tell Him.
- Nor do we need to use a lot of words in telling Him what He should do. He knows exactly what we need.
- He wants us to tell Him simply what our needs are so that we have the joy of knowing He has heard us and answered our prayers.

2. HOW GOD WANTS US TO PRAY. “Our Father in heaven”

Jesus went on to tell us how to pray in the way God wants. 6:9 *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.*

- Let's see how God is described as a “Father” in the New Testament.

GOD AS FATHER IN THE NT. He is a Father to every individual believer.

- Many people in Jesus' time saw God as being detached from the world, indifferent, uncaring and unmoved.
- But the NT writers describe God as a Father who knows, who cares, and who is motivated by love to do something for the needs of His children.
- Jesus encouraged His followers to trust in God as their Father in heaven as the One who loved them..

i. He provides for His children's material needs.

- Jesus taught that those who trusted in Him for salvation and became the children of God, didn't have to focus on the material things of the world.
- If they trusted Him focussing on the things of the kingdom of God, then their Heavenly Father would meet their needs. *Therefore don't be anxious saying what shall we eat or what shall we drink or what shall we wear? For the gentiles seek all these things; and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be yours as well.* Mat 6:31f.
- Later He added that if human fathers who have a bias towards evil, give good things to their children, then how much more would God as their Heavenly Father do so. *Mat 7:11 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 good gifts (the Holy Spirit. Lk.) to those who ask him!*

ii. He provides for His children's needs for love, acceptance and forgiveness.

- God loved the world so much that He gave us His Son to die for us on the cross. In this way we could be forgiven and accepted into His family. John 3:16 *"For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.*
- As we read the words in 1 John 3:1, we're reminded of the incredible nature of that love for us, *How great is the love (what manner of love) the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God!*

iii. He gives us His own Spirit to live in us.

- Jesus promised in John 14:26 *But the Counsellor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.*
- Peter saw this promise as fulfilled on the Day of Pentecost. Acts 2:33 *Exalted to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear.*
- Paul wrote of God as the Father adopting us to be His children, *God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, 5 in order to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as children. 6 And because you are children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!"7 So you are no longer a slave but a child, and if a child then also an heir, through God.*
- As we receive Christ into our lives, the Holy Spirit comes to indwell us, and to make God near and dear to us. It's the Holy Spirit within us who produces the desire to cry out *"Abba Father"*.
- Those words are intimate words and are the cry of a young dependent child who loves his father and who expresses that love and dependence in this simple cry.

iv. He is the Father Who longs to give us everything we need.

- Our Heavenly Father is motivated to give. He gave us His greatest gift, that of His Son to die for us. Paul reminds us of that very wonderful truth in Rom 8:31-32, *What then are we to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us? He who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us, will he not with him also give us everything else? God gives us "all things" in Him.*
- Paul wrote in Phil 4:19, *And my God will fully satisfy every need of yours (will meet all your needs) according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.*
- There is no need you have which Christ cannot satisfy.
- There is no blessing you need that He is not willing and able to bestow.

3. OUR EXPERIENCE OF THE FATHER'S LOVE

"Our Father in heaven". Does it come as easily to your lips as it should? Why not?

- I think most of us here tonight, want to know God as a loving Heavenly Father who delights to hear and answer the prayers of His children.
- Perhaps most of us would like to love the Lord more and to trust Him as the Heavenly Father He claims to be. We may not know why we can't.
- But God knows, and He can help us to be free to receive His love and to express it to others.
- The apostle John wrote *1 Jn 3:1 See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and that is what we are. The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. 2. Beloved, we are God's children now...*
- But what sort of children are we? Are we those basking in the Father's love, open to His power in our lives?
- Or are we rebellious children, not fully trusting Him, not fully loving Him, not really obeying Him?

Let me close by giving you one reason why I think some of us may find it difficult to relate to God as a loving Father. It may be a reason why we are missing out on His blessing and healing.

- I think it is because we may have a problem with some authority figure in our lives.
- It may have been an authority figure in the past who hurt us or disappointed us and we've never forgiven them. We have an attitude towards all authority figures.

- (My great hero, the wonderful Christian writer Professor CS Lewis carried unforgiveness towards a school teacher who had marred his life when he was young. It was only towards the end of his life that he was able to forgive the man and be free of the guilt of unforgiveness.
- Or it may be an authority figure at the present time. It could be a pastor, teacher, your employer. You feel they have hurt you in some way but you won't forgive them.
- Remember what John wrote in *1 Jn 4:19 We love because he first loved us. 20 If anyone says, "I love God," yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen. 21 And he has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother. 5:1 Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves the father loves his child as well.*
- If you are carrying hatred, bitterness, unforgiveness towards a fellow Christian especially an authority figure in your life then you are disobeying God's command to you to love them.
- It means that you are out of the Father's will. You are not loving your fellow believer. You are not loving your Father in heaven who commanded you to do so for your own sake.
- Healing comes as you forgive those who hurt you and determine to love them with the love that God can pour into your heart by His Spirit.
- In our time of quietness let's ask the Lord to show us whom we might need to forgive so that we do so and become open to the Lord's love and power in our lives.