

Luke 2:33 “And Joseph and His mother marveled at those things which were spoken of Him. 34 Then Simeon blessed them, and said to Mary His mother, "Behold, this Child is destined for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign which will be spoken against 35 (yes, a sword will pierce through your own soul also), that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed." 36 Now there was one, Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was of a great age, and had lived with a husband seven years from her virginity; 37 and this woman was a widow of about eighty-four years, who did not depart from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day. 38 And coming in that instant she gave thanks to the Lord, and spoke of Him to all those who looked for redemption in Jerusalem.”

'Faithful Anna'

Last week we considered one of my favorite characters in the Christmas accounts: Faithful Simeon.

This week I want to turn to the other faithful Saint that Luke mentions during this Temple visit: Anna.

- A faithful widow who had served the Lord with fastings and prayers for many years!
- Anna has much to teach us about patience and prayer!

I am going to mention her patience and focus on prayer because we all know the danger of praying for patience and I suspected studying it could be dangerous as well! ☺

Seriously the little we are told about the life of Anna does certainly challenge us who live in the hustle & bustle of the 21st Century where everything is faster and faster so we can have instant gratification on all fronts! Curling up with a real book in front of a real fire just seems so old fashioned!

At the risk of putting my applications right up front, I think it is clear that Anna shows us that doing God's will often requires a LOT of patience. Like those shepherds who were faithful in their vocations, we are told that this widow spent her time in service to the Lord through prayer and fasting for many, many years.

- And had she not been faithful in that ministry she would have missed her opportunity to see the baby Jesus!

I am sure there were times when she wondered how long her life would continue and even questioned the value of her prayers and yet in the end here we are studying her life some two thousand years later!

There are lessons here for so many areas of our lives:

When we have that particularly stubborn child that makes us think that we need to try something other than the nurture and discipline commanded in the Scriptures...

- We need to trust God and patiently continue in His ways.

When a young person wonders if they will ever find a spouse without going out in to the world to find one...

- They must patiently continue to serve God where He has placed them trusting Him for the right person at the right time.

Those who have unbelieving spouses know intellectually that they must wait upon the Lord and be faithful in what He is commanded them to do in their lives...

- But it is so easy to become anxious & want their conversion NOW!

They must patiently continue to serve trusting God and resting in His timing.

We can become anxious in our vocations, thinking we deserve that next raise or promotion NOW rather than later...

- But God calls on us to serve faithfully and patiently knowing that all we do is work done unto the Lord, no matter how tedious or underpaid it might seem.

I could go on and on, but I think you see the picture!

- Now of course I think we should make the connection that Anna was a patient person because she was faithful in her prayers!

And clearly this should remind us about the importance of our prayers:

- Both the lifting up of our prayers and the content of our prayers.
- Our prayers are vital in our lives and the advance of God's Kingdom.
- We can never learn enough about prayer and there is always more to pray about.

We must also remember our obligation to instruct the next generation:

- Our precious covenant children or new converts entrusted to our care need not only our instruction but they will learn to be faithful prayer warriors as they see us praying!

How do we learn more about prayer?

- First, we obviously have many examples of prayers in the Bible:

Last week for example we studied the prayer of Simeon but there are many other examples as well: The prayer life of Nehemiah, the great prayers of confession by King David in Psalm 51 or Daniel's great prayer in chapter nine. And of course, the Apostle Paul often prays for us in his Epistles and these can be examples of how to pray one for another.

- We can also learn much about prayer from the great creeds that have come down to us from the Reformation!

These creeds are important tools that enable us to better instruct our children about the nature of God, His creation, the nature of man and his redemption, the purpose of the law and the importance of prayer.

These creeds should be a regular part of the instruction of our children:

- They can be used as part of their academic instruction in school and for individual or family devotions!

If you have not been using them, please dust them off and put them to use!

- The bottom-line is that I hope and pray that this sermon will be the beginning and not the end of our study and practice of prayer!

So, this morning I am going to follow my own advice and use, as I have in the past, the part of the Heidelberg Catechism that covers the Lord's Prayer... [*the focus of wise men who went before*]

When the disciples came to Jesus asking Him to teach them how to pray, He simply said, pray thus and gave us the Lord's Prayer. We pray the Lord's Prayer each week to remind us that it is the model or framework that should inform and influence ALL of our prayers! Thus it is good to review what is being prayed in this prayer so it does not become just a sinful repetition.

It is important that we teach our children why we are praying this prayer [which they can easily learn] and that they begin at an early age to understand what is being prayed!

The Heidelberg Catechism begins the section on prayer with a simple question:

Why is prayer necessary for Christians?

Answer: Because it is the chief part of thankfulness which God requires of us: and also, because God will give His grace and Holy Spirit to those only, who with sincere desires continually ask them of Him, and are thankful for them.

- Prayer is required, and prayer is a blessing! [mention proof texts]

Question 117. What are the requisites of that prayer, which is acceptable to God, and which He will hear?

- As we hear this answer we must remember that it applies to ALL of our prayers, from the simple thanks before a meal to an extended time on our knees in our morning prayers and even here at worship as we confess our sins and lift up the Great Prayer each week!

Answer: First, that we from the heart pray to the one true God only, Who has manifested himself in his Word, for all things, He has commanded us to ask of Him; secondly, that we rightly and thoroughly know our need and misery, that so we may deeply humble ourselves in the presence of His divine majesty; thirdly, that we be fully persuaded that He, notwithstanding that we are unworthy of it, will, for the sake of Christ our Lord, certainly hear our prayer, as He has promised us in his word.

- Question 118 then reminds us why prayer is important:

What has God commanded us to ask of him?

Answer: All things necessary for soul and body; which Christ our Lord has comprised in that prayer He himself has taught us.

Question 119 then asks: What are the words of that prayer?

Answer: Our Father which art in heaven, 1 Hallowed be thy name. 2 Thy kingdom come. 3 Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven. 4 Give us this day our daily bread. 5 And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. 6 And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. For Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.

Question 120 begins to look at the details of this great prayer:

Why has Christ commanded us to address God thus: "Our Father"?

Answer: That immediately, in the very beginning of our prayer, He might excite in us a childlike reverence for, and confidence in God, which are the foundation of our prayer: namely, that God is become our Father in Christ, and will much less deny us what we ask of Him in true faith, than our parents will refuse us earthly things.

Question 121. Why is it here added, "Who art in heaven"?

Answer: Lest we should form any earthly conceptions of God's heavenly majesty, and that we may expect from His almighty power all things necessary for soul and body.

- The catechism then explains the seven petitions that we find in the Lord's Prayer.
- God's number of completion like the seven days of creation!

This should help us see the fullness that we have in what Jesus taught us to pray:

- This is why the Lord's Prayer informs and should structure all of our other prayers.

The Great Prayer reveals two important lessons:

- This portion of the Lord's Prayer opens and closes with petitions that focus on the majesty and centrality of God Himself.
- At the center we find the petition for our basic need: Daily bread.

When praying, we are often tempted to run right to our need and forget the great foundations upon which our hope of having that need answered is built.

- Our help can come only from God!
- And it can come only in the context of God's purposes which are shown in the other six petitions that surround our cry for help.

Again, from our simplest prayer before a meal or on the fly as we see Nehemiah do before the great King; to our longest and deepest prayers like those of Daniel or the Apostle Paul, this is the structure that they should follow.

With that structure in mind let us now review what some of the great men who have gone before in the Reformation that we just celebrated can teach us about this Great Prayer:

Question 122. Which is the first petition?

Answer: "Hallowed be Thy Name"; that is, grant us, first, rightly to know Thee, and to sanctify, glorify and praise Thee, in all thy works, in which Thy power, wisdom, goodness, justice, mercy and truth, are clearly displayed; and further also, that we may so order and direct our whole lives, our thoughts, words and actions, that Thy Name may never be blasphemed, but rather honored and praised on our account.

Question 123. Which is the second petition?

Answer: "Thy kingdom come"; that is, rule us so by Thy Word and Spirit, that we may submit ourselves more and more to Thee; preserve and increase Thy Church; destroy the works of the devil, and all violence which would exalt itself against Thee; and also all wicked counsels devised against Thy Holy Word; till the full perfection of Thy Kingdom take place, wherein Thou shalt be all in all.

Question 124. Which is the third petition?

Answer: "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven"; that is, grant that we and all men may renounce our own will, and without murmuring obey Thy will, which is only good; that every one may attend to, and perform the duties of his station and calling, as willingly and faithfully as the angels do in heaven.

[remember that the Kingdom advances with each faithful action taken by one of God's Saints!]

Question 125. Which is the fourth petition? [the one at the center of the seven petitions]

Answer: "Give us this day our daily bread"; that is, be pleased to provide us with all things necessary for the body, that we may thereby acknowledge Thee to be the only fountain of all good, and that neither our care nor industry, nor even Thy gifts, can profit us without thy blessing; and therefore that we may withdraw our trust from all creatures, and place it alone in Thee.

- This petition is so critical in our age of creature comforts and the worship of mother nature!
- Remember that the proof texts given for all of these are given for our encouragement and further study!
- And again, we must remember that this appeal for our basic needs can only rightly come before God in the context of the other petitions.

Question 126. Which is the fifth petition?

Answer: "And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors"; that is, be pleased for the sake of Christ's blood, not to impute to us poor sinners, our transgressions, nor that depravity, which always cleaves to us; even as we feel this evidence of Thy Grace in us, that it is our firm resolution from the heart to forgive our neighbor.

Question 127. Which is the sixth petition?

Answer: "And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one"; that is, since we are so weak in ourselves, that we cannot stand a moment; and besides this, since our mortal enemies, the devil, the world, and our own flesh, cease not to assault us, do thou therefore preserve and strengthen us by the power of Thy Holy Spirit, that we may not be overcome in this spiritual warfare, but constantly and strenuously may resist our foes, till at last we obtain a complete victory.

Question 128. How dost thou conclude thy prayer?

Answer: "For Thine is the Kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever"; that is, all these we ask of Thee, because Thou, being our King and Almighty, art willing and able to give us all good; and all this we pray for, that thereby not we, but Thy Holy Name, may be glorified for ever.

The prayer begins with a petition to hallow the name of God and ends with a petition to remember His glory! We have spent a great deal of time during this Advent season talking about the Kingdom of Jesus. It should NOT surprise us to see the Kingdom of God mentioned so often and so strongly in the Lord's Prayer...

- **Our challenge is to more fully believe and to really mean what we are praying!**

Question 129. What does the word "Amen" signify?

Answer: "Amen" signifies, it shall truly and certainly be: for my prayer is more assuredly heard of God, than I feel in my heart that I desire these things of him.

- **This is why we like to have a lot of hearty AMENs in our services here at Church of the King!**

Each week we have one of the men in our congregation lead us in what we call the Great Prayer: A time where we lift up our hearts in prayer bringing our needs before the Throne of Grace.

To conclude those prayers we pray together the Lord's Prayer that we have studied here this morning.

- **May we always make this a time of hearty and honest prayer to our Lord and Savior!**

May our young children learn to pray the Lord's Prayer and grow in their understanding of this prayer all the days of their lives.

- **May we learn to be a praying people who lift up timeless prayers like that of Simeon AND**

- **May we learn to be a praying people who never tire of prayer like Anna**

- **May we learn to be a praying people who rightly magnify the Name of our God following the many examples we see in the Scriptures!**

Jesus gave us the Lord's prayer and He also gave us a great example of what it meant to be a man of prayer which we see as we study the Gospel accounts.

We are blessed to have His prayer on the night He was betrayed recorded for us in John 17 and I will close this morning with how Jesus prayed for us:

John 17: “20 “I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; 21 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. 22 And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: 23 I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me. 24 “Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which You have given Me; for You loved Me before the foundation of the world.

25 O righteous Father! The world has not known You, but I have known You; and these have known that You sent Me. 26 And I have declared to them Your name, and will declare it, that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them.””

Communion Meditation: Psalm 23

“ The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. 2 He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters. 3 He restores my soul; He leads me in the paths of righteousness For His name's sake. 4 Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; For You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me. 5 You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You anoint my head with oil; My cup runs over. 6 Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me All the days of my life; And I will dwell in the house of the Lord Forever.”