

Session 1

October 14, 2018

THE OBJECT OF OUR PRAYER

Matthew 6:9a; Psalm 103:1-5, 11-13, 19-22

We all understand the importance of prayer. The Bible suggests that we pray (1 Tim. 2:8), encourages us to pray (James 5:13), and commands us to pray (1 Thess. 5:17). Yet prayer—and how it works—has always been a bit of a mystery. Even the disciples of Jesus were unsure of how to pray, and what to pray. The Lord’s Prayer was then given, not as a chant of some sort to be memorized and ceremonially repeated, but as a model to help His followers commune with the Heavenly Father. The next set of lessons uses the Lord’s Prayer as a foundation for deeper study into the discipline of prayer.

I always tell our children at church that prayer is “talking with God.” But like any communication, the effectiveness of prayer (as well as our comfort level in praying) depends on a lot of different factors, not the least of which is familiarity with the God with whom we speak. Who is this God, and what is He like? Jesus taught His disciples to address Him with equal amounts of familiarity (Our Father) and respect (Hallowed be Thy name). David, in Psalm 103, helps us to do that.

The God with whom we speak is GOOD (vv. 1-5). Three times at the beginning of this psalm, and four times at the end, David *blesses* the Lord. In its most basic sense, to *bless* means “to speak well of.” But when applied to God, it always means a deep and exuberant praise. David’s “all that is within me” praise to God is based first on God’s goodness. The idea of “benefits” in verse 2 is more than just something good that we receive. It also draws attention to the good deeds that God has done on our behalf; and David mentions five of those good deeds specifically. First, He *forgives sin*; not just the transgressions that we commit, but our “crookedness” (iniquity), which speaks to our sinful nature. Second, He *heals our diseases* (see Is. 53:5). Third, He *redeems us* (buys us back) from our sinful life of misery. Next, He *honors us* with His goodness and mercy. Finally, He *strengthens and invigorates* us (v. 5; see also Is. 40:31). Our prayers are *enriched* when we understand that the God we pray to is good.

The God with whom we speak is MERCIFUL (vv. 6-12). While grace is receiving that which we do not deserve, mercy is the withholding of that which we *do* deserve. The psalmist again gives multiple examples of just how God has shown His mercy. He provides justice when we are oppressed (v. 6); He is patient when He should be angry (v. 8-9); He holds back the judgment that we deserve because of our sin (v. 10); He removes our sin, even though we are guilty of it (v. 12). Our prayers are *easier* when we understand that the God we pray to is merciful.

The God with whom we speak is like a FATHER (vv. 13-14). One of the great ironies of our God is that while He is God Almighty, He presents Himself to us as a loving Father. While I cringe every time a student refers to God flippantly (phrases like “Daddy God” are never appropriate!), the relationship depicted between us is clearly familial. John expressed his wonder at this when he said, “Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God, and so we are!” (1 John 3:1). David gives two specific reasons that we benefit from His fatherly affection. First, as a father, God has *pity* on us. This is not an act of sorrow, per se, but rather of loving compassion toward us. Second, God acknowledges our

weaknesses, remembering both our physical frailty and our mortal destiny. Our prayers are *intimate* when we understand that the God we pray to is our heavenly Father.

The God with whom we speak is SOVEREIGN (vv. 19-22). David winds up his psalm by calling all of God's domain to bless Him. Verse 19 says it all: His throne is in heaven...and He rules over all! The remaining verses spell it out: the angels, His host (more angels), His works (all of creation), and "all places of His dominion" (that means everywhere), owe the Lord unfettered praise. Our prayers are *confident* when we understand that the God we pray too rules over all.