

The Priorities of God-Centred Prayer

We come to our final look at God-centred prayer, having examined the purpose, the power and the practice of God-centred prayer. We now conclude by looking at the priorities of God-centred prayer. What is on the heart of a God-centred person? What do they pray for? J.I. Packer was right when he said that prayer is the measure of a man spiritually. How we pray reveals the desires of our hearts, which in turn reveal what we truly love and treasure and value. So, the priorities of a God-centred person will be quite different from a self-centred person, and this will be shown in his requests.

So, what are the priorities of a God-centred person? Well, the answer to that question is to answer another question – what are the priorities of God? If we see the desires of the heart of God, it is safe to assume that a God-centred person will share those desires and pray for them. And the most God-centred man that ever lived was of course, God in the flesh – the Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, to know the priorities of God-centred prayer, we ought to eavesdrop on His prayer to the Father. The things we hear Him desiring and longing for will be pure, 100% God-centred in their nature. From there, we can compare those priorities to what is commonly known as the Lord's Prayer, and see how they are remarkably parallel. Soon, we will see that the many different prayers and requests and praise and thanksgiving all come back to the same God-centred theme that the Lord Jesus had in His prayers.

One thing which we must remember is that prayer needn't be split into stages. There are different types of prayer – thanksgiving – where we put out our gratitude; confession, where we admit and forsake our sins before God; supplication, where we request things; intercession, where we pray for others; praise where we simply adore God. Some use the acronym A-C-T-S to help them pray each type of prayer – adoration, confession, thanksgiving and supplication. I think that can be helpful. I think, though, you can run the risk of becoming mechanical in approaching prayer like a set of types of communication which must be rattled off to be complete. I would not be impressed if my wife began every conversation with a word of praise, then moved onto confess some wrong she had done, then thanked me for something, and then asked me for something. As we study our Lord's Prayer in John 17, we find that He did not spend one paragraph in praise, then stop and move onto to thanksgiving, then stop and move onto intercession. They all mingle together. Jesus praises His Father as He intercedes for His disciples, He asks for personal things alongside asking for other things for His disciples. That is not to say that we must not have structure in our prayers. We saw last week there is a balance to be kept in this regard. What we are saying is that prayer is communion with God.

When our priorities in prayer are the same as Christ's, we will find that our prayers mingle all the elements continually, without rather emotionlessly going through the motions of making sure we have included each type of prayer, as if it is a recipe. There are other types of prayers in the Bible as well – prayers of rededication, prayers of submission, prayers of blessing, even the prayers for the punishment of enemies as we find in the Psalms. Our goal is not to try and make sure we have covered each type in our prayers. The goal is to be God-centred in our priorities, and the various kinds of prayer will fall into place.

So, we come now to examine the priorities of Jesus as He prayed in John 17, which is the ultimate example of God-Centred priorities. He begins His prayer like this: “Father, the hour is come; glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee:”

We could call this the desire that...

God’s Reputation be magnified

Jesus begins His prayer that God would glorify Him as the Son, because that would in turn glorify the Father. His first words express the over-arching priority of God-centred prayer – that God be glorified. God’s Reputation stands for His character – who He is. So the first and ultimate prayer request is that God’s reputation – His name, His glory would be seen and admired and praised and prized. This first priority harmonises with the first line of the Disciples’ Prayer:

“Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name.” (Mat 6:9)

Hallowed means venerated, consecrated – set apart as unique and supreme. May God be seen to be the unique Person He is. May His surpassing value be known and treasured. May He be displayed as the all-satisfying One – the most valuable One, the Supreme and First One.

God’s desires revolve around this one thing – to enjoy and display His own glory. All prayer will ultimately come back to this theme, like gravity attracts objects to its centre. Every kind of prayer, be it praise, thanksgiving, intercession, supplication – they will all come back to glorifying God – they will magnify God’s value – they will be requests to know more and see more of His glory.

The more God-centred we are, the more we will desire this one thing – that God’s reputation be magnified. Jesus understood the connection between God’s glory and our joy. Later on in John 17, He prays the following:

“And now come I to thee; and these things I speak in the world, that they might have my joy fulfilled in themselves....” And further, *“Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world. O righteous Father, the world hath not known thee: but I have known thee, and these have known that thou hast sent me. And I have declared unto them thy name, and will declare it: that the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them.”*

Jesus specifically asks that God’s people would increasingly know and eventually see personally His glory, so that the love that the Father has for His Son may become the same love they have for the Son. The delight and pleasure that God has over His Son’s glory, will become the delight and pleasure of those who are His. God’s Reputation being magnified is not a distant, cold-hearted giving of compliments to God. It is both the desire and delight of God’s people. Seeing His glory is to a God-centred person the ultimate treasure, the most fulfilling thing, the greatest value obtainable, the highest purpose, the greatest joy, the loveliest pleasure, the most satisfying thing of all. So, a God-centred Person prays: “God, be magnified, be glorified”, and He does so from a thirsty heart, knowing that as this happens, the void in his own heart is filled.

This priority would include all praises, all words of adoration, all thanksgiving, and encompass all requests for more of His loveliness and greatness to be seen. When it comes to God, desire and delight mingle into one. You delight in Him and praise Him, and desire Him more and ask for more of Him.

The next priority we see coming out of Christ's prayer is found in the following words:

"As thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him. And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent. I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do. And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was."

We could call this the prayer that...

God's Rule on Earth Be Maximised

Jesus says that God has given Him all authority to give eternal life. To that end, He looks forward to His resurrection and ascension back to heaven, when the victory is won. He is praying that God's rule, God's authority would increase. This is parallel to the request in the Disciple's prayer: *"Thy Kingdom Come"*. It means: "Lord, may your Kingship and Authority and Sovereignty be received. May your Lordship and Majesty be acknowledged. How does this happen? As Jesus put it – when they know God through Jesus Christ. When a person is saved, when they are born again – they come under the authority and rule of God. They enter His kingdom. And while the ultimate manifestation of God's kingdom is yet future, His kingdom grows every time someone is saved. Every time someone repents and receives Christ, another person leaves the kingdom of darkness and comes under the rulership of Christ. God's kingdom is enlarged. His rule is increased. As we pray for this, we are God-centred. We are saying we passionately want to see the Lordship of Jesus rule people's lives; we want to see God's righteousness entering every area of life through the salvation of souls. That's why later on Jesus prays in verse 20:

"Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word;"

Praying for God's Rule to be increased means we will pray for the lost to be saved - individual people we know, unsaved relatives, colleagues, friends, acquaintances. We can also pray for rulers to be saved, as well as for prominent people. We can pray for entire nations, people-groups. Paul said in Romans 10:1:

"Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved."

Desiring God's rule means praying for missionaries. Jesus told us in Matthew 9:36-38 to pray God would send more labourers into the harvest.. As we do this we should pray they will have open doors as Colossians 4:3-4 asks, that they would have boldness to speak, as Paul asked for in Ephesians 6:19, and the disciples asked for in Acts 4. 2 Thessalonians 3:1-2 is a classic prayer for missions:

“Finally, brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may have free course, and be glorified, even as it is with you: And that we may be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men: for all men have not faith.”

Likewise praying for other ministries, for churches, for pastors includes this idea of God’s rule to be extended. Paul’s request in I Timothy 2:1-2 that we pray for those in authority goes to this same end: “... *that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty.*” We pray for those in authority so that we may live out our faith and spread it for God’s glory.

Again, desire will mingle with delight when we praise and thank God for His work all over the world, saving souls, planting churches, changing lives. If we desire to see His rule increase, we will be delighted as we see and hear how this is happening.

The next priority of a God-Centred prayer we find in Jesus’ words in verses 9,11, 16-20:

“I pray for them: I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me; for they are thine. ... Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one, as we are. ... They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth. As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world. And for their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth”

Here Jesus prays for His disciples. He wants them to be a particular way toward each other – in unity, and he wants them to be a particular way toward the world – separate, holy, or sanctified. His requests are now moving from God’s Reputation and His Rule – to the very way He wants His children to be. This moves from the salvation of souls, to the sanctification, the spiritual growth of the saints. You could call this the priority that...

God’s Requirements Be Met

This sounds very much like the next line in the Disciples’ prayer:

“Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.”

God’s Rule on earth necessarily then means He would want things done according to His orders, His laws, His requirements. When someone rules, then increasingly those under Him must subject themselves to His rule, and meet His requirements. Jesus says we are to pray this happens on earth the way it happens in heaven. Well, how does it happen in heaven? The angels do the will of God perfectly, cheerfully, zealously. Now, if we are praying that people do the will of God perfectly, cheerfully and zealously, we are really praying for the spiritual growth of believers. The unsaved cannot obey the will of God till they are saved. We pray for them when praying for His rule to increase. But now we pray that those who are His, grow increasingly into His image, so that they will do His will more and more, like it is done in heaven. Different prayer requests in the New Testament carry this theme, and they should be our prayers too. Paul prays in Ephesians 1:16-19 for the **illumination** of his readers – that God would open their spiritual eyes to perceive God’s glory. We need to pray

people would see Christ in the Word, and so come to treasure Him and serve Him more

. Later, In Ephesians 3:16-19, Paul prays for the **maturity** of the believers, with a series of statements detailing how this happens – controlled by the Spirit, surrendered to Christ so that we come to absolutely know and live in the love of Christ for us. We need to pray for ourselves and other that this will happen – so that we can glorify God by meeting His requirements. He commands us to love Him with all of our being - that is only possible as we increasingly grow spiritually.

Similarly, Paul prays for the Colossians in 1:9-10 that they would grow into a greater **knowledge** of His person and will. James instructs us to pray for God's wisdom in 1:5-8. All this comes back to wanting to know and do God's will.

Growing in Christlikeness is often painful, difficult and filled with opposition. So Colossian 1:10-12 is a prayer for **spiritual strength**. 2 Thessalonians 2:16-17 prays for comfort and encouragement in the work of serving God and becoming like Him. Likewise Jesus prayed for the **faith** of the disciples not to fail. Any request that calls on God to make His people more like Himself or provide some resource to do that is a prayer for God's Requirements to be met. And as His righteousness shines forth from His people, His reputation is further magnified. One of the manifestations of this maturity, this spiritual growth, will be unity amongst the brethren, particularly in a local church setting. So praying for unity is praying for the maturity of the saints, that they will put off the old, which causes conflict, and put on the new, which causes harmony. Paul prayed for this in Rom 15:5-6, as did Jesus repeatedly in John 17. So we must desire for God's Requirements to be met so that we can enjoy the beauty of His holiness, and see the wisdom of His laws, and magnify His righteous rulership of the universe.

Now in the Disciples' prayer, Jesus prays instructs us to pray for something which He obviously would not ask for Himself in His prayer in John 17. It is when He tells us to pray: "Give us this day our daily bread." Now we might think that now we have moved from being God-centred, to being self-centred. Far from it, this is a prayer for...

God's Resources to be magnified

This embraces all of our daily needs to live and survive in this world. It is looking to the abundant, all-sufficient resources of our Father to provide for our needs in the ways He has appointed. Certainly we must still work, and be wise – but we remain God-centred in stating God is our absolute and ultimate provider, not only for our immediate needs, but the things necessary for life and godliness. PS 37:5 also says:

"Delight thyself also in the LORD; and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart." (Psa 37:4)

That's not a blank cheque – it means that as we make God our desire, we will increasingly desire things in life that move toward Him, and the final end of knowing and enjoying Him. God will not allow idols or competitors. But as we ask for things that harmonise with enjoying God, we magnify His resources.

So too, with asking for healing. James 5:14-16 shows the New Testament and appropriate form for praying for healing. When God sovereignly chooses to heal, we again magnify His resources as the Great Physician. His limitless and available power shows that His resources are all-sufficient to meet our every need. We do not and can never exhaust them when we ask. Filling bottles of water from a fountain does not insult the fountain – it glorifies it as full and overflowing. So as we humbly request God to meet our daily needs and sanctified desires, He is glorified.

Another priority that a God-centred person will have is that...

God's Righteousness Be Magnified

We see this is the command to pray:

"And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors."

Of course, Jesus could not pray this in His prayer in John 17, since He could not sin. But He knew we would, and told us to pray prayers of confession. Now, God's forgiveness of our sins is accomplished at Calvary, and is applied to us at our day of salvation. But there is to be a daily confession and forsaking of sin in our lives. As we do this, it is not that God returns to us after having forsaken us – because He never does that. It means the fellowship we broke is restored. I simply enter back into honesty, and relate to God again as I should, with transparency, openness and honesty. I John 1:9 tells us that God continually cleanses and sanctifies us as we do this; confessing to God shows that we are responding to His sanctifying work in our lives. It shows we are walking in the light, as we claim ownership for our sins, call them what they are and desire to forsake them. When we admit we are wrong and God is right – we magnify and honour His righteousness. We say that we would prefer to be like Him. We admit our falling short of Him, missing the mark, and further exalt Him as the goal, as the Perfect standard. You see beautiful prayers of confession by David in Psalm 51, by Nehemiah in Nehemiah 1, and by Daniel 9. Significantly, Nehemiah and Daniel also confessed the sins of their people. When we confess our sins and pray for holiness in our lives and that of others – we further magnify God's righteousness as good and right – as the standard all should keep.

Finally, Jesus prayed in John 17:15: 'I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil.' And this sounds just like His command that we pray:

"And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil:"

Here is the priority that...

God's Retaining & Restraining Power Be marvelled At

The prayer here is that God would deliver His people. This deliverance can be from physical harm. David often prayed for this. Hezekiah and Jehoshaphat prayed prayers for deliverance – and appealed to the reputation of God as a deliverer. Paul prayed for this in Romans 15:30-31, and in 2 Thessalonians 3:2 They wanted His power to restrain the enemies of God's people to be known. We can likewise pray that God's retaining power – His power to keep us safe be known in our lives. All prayers of protection are prayers that God would be magnified as our Rock, our Fortress, our High Tower, our Shepherd. But it goes further to embrace other dangers. It encompasses protection against the threat of the evil One himself - above all, the

threat of sin and unbelief. We are to pray that we will stand, and remain firm to the end, never denying Christ. We are to pray that we and others will not fall to the flesh, to the Devil's subtle deceitfulness, so that God's keeping power will be marvelled at. We are to pray that the enemies of the Gospel be held back, so that God's restraining power will be praised. We are to pray that other Christians, and especially Christian in the public eye and Christians in leadership will not fall. God has made promises that He will keep His people and present them faultless before Him, but we must pray to that end – that God's Power to keep us safe from harm, and from Satan and sin will be known.

These six priorities are the priorities of a God-centred person. You can tell that they will embrace all different types of prayer – intercession, thanksgiving, praise, submission, rededication, confession and so on. But their form will not be as important as their focus. They are unswervingly God-centred. Each request is really a way of saying: *“As the deer pants after the water brooks, so my soul pants after Thee, O God”* Show me more of you!

We started by saying the purpose of God-centred prayer is to glorify God by abandoning self-satisfaction and self-sufficiency and embracing His sufficiency and His satisfying nature. Now you can see how each of the priorities of God-centred prayer matches up with its purposes. God Centred prayer prays that God's Reputation be Magnified. It prays that God's Rule on earth to Increase. It prays that God's Requirements be met. It prays for God's Resources and God's Righteousness to be magnified. And it prays that God's retaining and restraining power be marvelled at.

God-centred prayer is for the glory of God and the good of man. May we understand its purpose, its power, its practice and its priorities so that, like the old catechism said – we may enjoy God and glorify Him forever.