

SERMON – 13/3/22
'Your Kingdom Come'

Psalm 5:1-12

"In the morning, LORD, you hear my voice; in the morning I lay my requests before you and wait expectantly." (Psalm 5:3)

Over these Lenten Sundays as we follow Jesus to the Cross our discipleship focus is taking us to the place of prayer. Using phrases from the Lord's Prayer as a framework we are looking at a variety of different types of psalm to see how we can develop our own personal and corporate prayer life as followers of Jesus today. Last week, under the heading 'Hallowed be Your Name' we thought about what it means to give God His place and today we turn to 'Your Kingdom come' which of course is paired with something of an explanation of that phrase in the words 'Your will be done on earth as in heaven.' So today I would like to reflect with you on how we are to know what to pray for when we draw near to God.

People have all kinds of hesitations about prayer and one of my hopes in the coming weeks is that more of us would be willing to begin to overcome those hesitations and to open up new avenues of experience with God and to get more serious about our praying because if church history teaches us anything it is that when God's people really begin to take hold of God in prayer, remarkable things begin to happen. The apostle James writes these disturbing words in his letter: "You do not have because you do not ask God. When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives." (James 4:2,3)

So turn with me to this morning's Psalm and let's see what we discover. The first thing to say is that, although most people tend to think about psalms as being songs of praise, and there are certainly a great many of those, giving us words to do what we were thinking about last week, honouring and exalting God, yet almost one in three of the psalms is a *lament*, this one included. By their very nature, laments deal with difficult subjects, which is why many people steer clear of them, but if you stop to think about it, it is precisely the difficult subjects of life that most drive us to prayer. We pray about difficult

decisions, we pray about things that go wrong in our lives, we pray about ill-health and about grief, we pray for those in the world and in our neighbourhood who are suffering. The psalmist begins: "Listen to my words, LORD, consider my lament. Hear my cry for help, my King and my God, for to you I pray." (vv.1,2) Doesn't that sound like just the kind of thing you might start to say as you turn to prayer? To paraphrase it: "I'm here Lord, listen to me because things are not going well and I really need your help."

And actually that takes us to what I think is one of the most powerful messages of this psalm. If you look closely at the words it's absolutely packed with 'I' and 'you' – David is in conversation with God, seeking to deepen their relationship and if you hear nothing else this morning hear this: prayer is simply talking things through with God and thereby growing closer.

Imagine a friendship where there was no communicating – it's not going to grow and develop; in fact it's not going to last is it? Or imagine the only time you spoke to someone was to bring them a list of things you needed them to do for you – that's not going to be a very fruitful relationship either. Just as our interaction with other people is dependent upon give and take, on honesty and openness, on listening and speaking, on I and you in equal measure, so it is as we seek to deepen and develop the relationship we have with God as disciples of Jesus. By contrast with those he goes on to pray about, David can say to God of himself: "But I, by your great love, can come into your house." (v.7) Isn't that a beautiful image! Just as you would go round to chat things through with a friend so we disciples (whom Jesus says are 'no longer servants but friends') can chap the door of heaven and have a chat with the One who is enthroned there but who is always available to talk.

But the next question is what are you going to talk about, and that's where we have to work out what Jesus means when He teaches us to pray: Your Kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as in heaven. This is where a lot of people begin to struggle with prayer. Going back to what the apostle James said, "When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives." Well how are we going to know what God's will is, in

order to pray for it to be done, and how are we going to work out whether we are praying with the right motives or not?

Well, if we go back to the idea of prayer as a conversation with a friend, then in some measure the listening we do in that conversation is achieved through opening and reading the Bible. If you are even occasionally reading the Scriptures as you pray, it will not be long before you find that what you read 'co-incidentally' feeds in to what you have been praying about. It is a conversation. God speaks through His Word, and the more you pray with your Bible open the more you will find the conversation developing

This morning I would like to suggest to you that as we pray God encourages us to take Him at His Word and take hold of His promises as we pray and because of that to trust Him to answer and to act as He has promised, in accordance with His will. Although we perhaps find some of what we read in this psalm quite jarring to our douce 21st century sensitivities, if we look at what it is that King David, the psalmist, is doing here we will begin to understand something important about discerning the will of God and praying with right motives ourselves.

David writes: "For you are not a God who is pleased with wickedness; with you, evil people are not welcome." He has read in the Law of God's character and His priorities and he is reminding God of these as he talks to him. "The arrogant cannot stand in your presence. You hate all who do wrong; you destroy those who tell lies. The bloodthirsty and deceitful you, LORD, detest." (vv.5-6) Now that kind of writing maybe leaves us feeling a bit on edge but here's the thing: what we are seeing being worked out in these days in Ukraine is nothing short of 'wickedness' and we *must* conclude that God is 'not pleased' with it. Anyone demanding to have their way no matter what the cost to others is the very definition of 'arrogant'. Wrong is being done, lies are being told and we *must* declare that the Lord 'detests the bloodthirsty and deceitful.' If we are to pray 'Your Kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as in heaven' then we *must* pray for those who are arrogantly and deceitfully seeking to thwart the coming of God's Kingdom to be toppled from their places. "Declare them guilty, O God!" David prays, and so must

we. "Let their intrigues be their downfall. Banish them for their many sins, for they have rebelled against you." If you don't know what to pray for Ukraine's aggressors, pray the psalms. Lament before God the unspeakable things that are happening and cry to Him to act according to what He Himself has said, so that His Kingdom may come.

And be just as passionate in praying for those who in the thick of the conflict and in ministering to refugees are seeking to honour God with their lives. Again, David gives us words to use here: "But let all who take refuge in you be glad; let them ever sing for joy. Spread your protection over them, that those who love your name may rejoice in you. Surely, LORD, you bless the righteous; you surround them with your favour as with a shield." (vv.11-12) Let us pray in these words for our sisters and brothers who this Lord's Day in the midst of a war zone will still be gathering faithfully with others in the name of Jesus, offering worship to our heavenly Father, albeit perhaps huddled in a bomb shelter rather than standing in a church, that they may have cause for rejoicing, that they may be blessed and protected as they are surrounded with God's favour like a shield. Your Kingdom come, Lord.

And how are you to pray for the other situations that are in your thoughts today? Deepen your conversation with God on the matter by simply *asking* 'Lord, what am I to pray?' Listen for God's prompting as you read His Word – perhaps what He will show you will not be what you are expecting, but go with it. If you are serious about praying for God's will to be done on earth as in heaven then when He begins to show you what His will is simply remind Him of what you have read in His Word and ask Him to fulfil it. Your Kingdom come, Lord.

In the verse with which I began this morning, David comes to pray in the confidence of a faithful relationship with the Lord and with a longing to see what God will do: "In the morning, LORD, you hear my voice; in the morning I lay my requests before you *and wait expectantly*." (v.3) Will you give that a go this week? Don't come to God just with a list of things to ask for. Start with a desire to deepen your fellowship, spend some time reading the Scriptures and seeking to discern the will of God, then go where that leads you in prayer. If there is something burning on your

heart then of course you must bring it to God; just don't presume to know what the answer is before you pray; rather, ask God to show you what to pray for and then you can pray with understanding and with confidence: Your Kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as in heaven.