

# An Audience of One

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Preacher: Andrew Reid

[ 0 : 0 0 ] start tonight I need to tell you that I'm not going to have time to deal with all the passage that we have in front of us tonight and part of that is due to the fact that I'm sort of stepping into the breach a little bit late so I have already done a lots of preparation on verses 5 to 13 and so we're going to look at verses 5 to 13 and that's where our focus is going to be. So let's start by praying. Father we thank you so much for your word and we pray today that you would teach us through it that you'd fill me with your spirit that I might speak your word boldly and Father I pray that you would be at work in all of us by your spirit that we might be convicted of the truth and that we might live rightly before you and Father we pray these things in Jesus name. Amen.

So friends what I'm going to do tonight is I want to start off by getting you to face reality with me that is urging you to be realistic about life and the specific reality that I want you to acknowledge is that our world is a world that is out of plumb really. It is a world where good does not always triumph and where people often suffer and where God is often mocked and where relationships are frequently fractured where I yearn for things to be other than they are with me and with others that is the reality of life isn't it that is where we are and if you are like me then you wonder how we should follow Jesus in a world like that. How should God's children in a fallen world live and more than that how and what should we pray for? As we face our world and as we face our place in it as we face the relationships that we all live in how should we come before God bearing all of those things speaking of all of those things what should we say to him and that is exactly how the disciples appear to have felt and today we're going to look at what Jesus taught them about prayer and at the center of what

Jesus says are verses 12 and 13 of the passage in front of us. However in order to understand verses 12 and 13 you need to understand them in their context and we also need to understand how the whole of the Lord's Prayer functions. This is a very important prayer and it's good that we can spend the time looking at it in detail. So let's start by looking at verses 5 to 6 to set the context. Jesus says and when you pray don't be like the hypocrites for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on street corners to be seen by others. Truly I tell you they have received their reward in full but when you pray go into your room close the door pray to your father who is unseen and then your father who sees what is done in secret will reward you. Now at its core what I think Jesus is saying here is this that when we pray to God we are to have our eye on him not on others and not on how others perceive us. Our main focus is to be on God himself. That's the sort of prayer that gives God his proper place. That's the sort of prayer that pleases God and is looked upon by him with favour. Not your eyes constantly on what others are thinking but your eyes on who God is and what he thinks. Now look at verses 7 to 8 and I did warn you we're just doing this briefly so that we can find a context for the Lord's Prayer.

And when you pray do not keep on babbling like pagans for they think they'll be heard because of their many words. Don't be like them for your father knows what you need before you ask him. And when you pray sorry and then within the Bible you actually have a very good example of pagans praying.

Pagans praying to a false god and believers in God praying to a real god. As the example I'll tell you the story rather than have you look it up. The story is found in 1 Kings chapter 18 and what it's about is Elijah a prophet of Israel a worshipper of the true god. He's engaged with prophets of a false god Baal and he sets up this context not an imaginary context a real contest where they will set up an altar and put a sacrificial animal on it. Then the prophets of Baal will pray asking their god to send down fire to ignite the sacrifice and Elijah will then set up an altar and put a sacrificial animal on it and then he will call down well he'll call upon his god to act.

[ 4 : 50 ] Anyway this context is this contest is agreed upon and the prophets of Baal start calling on their god and they go at it all day but there's no response and so as the day wears on they start dancing and really getting into it and Elijah starts mocking them and they start shouting louder and louder and they begin cutting themselves as was their way with swords and spears and so on they enter into a prophetic frenzy nothing happens. Their god does not answer with fire does not consume the sacrifice nothing happens. Now eventually it becomes Elijah's turn. He makes his altar then he digs this ditch around it and three times he pours water on the altar and it's so much so that the water is just soaking into everything and it flows off into the ditch beside it and then Elijah utters this short simple prayer asking the real god to act and immediately the fire of God falls and burns up the sacrifice the wood the stones the soil and even licks up the water out of the ditch. Friends that is the difference between a real god and false gods and Jesus when he when he talks here is talking about the confidence you can have when you have a real god that you are praying to. You see the real god is not the god of pagans. Pagans have no assurance that god is a god who loves them and hears them and so what they need to do is try and persuade god to do something. They need to pressure him into listening and to acting and therefore what do they do? Well they do everything they can think of. They dance, babble, repeat endlessly, perform religious exercises, say mantras, grit their teeth and will for something to happen. They've got a will because the god they believe in is not real but our god is real, he is living, he has ears and he listens. Therefore he doesn't need all of these other mechanisms to be persuaded. You just have to ask him and Jesus is clear. You don't need to babble away. Matthew 7 verses 7 to 17 says that God is a father who delights to give good gifts to his children so he does not need to be cajoled, persuaded or given particular persuasions and so on to give good gifts to his children. He loves his children and that brings us to the next point. Take a look at the first part of the Lord's Prayer.

Now as you do I want you to consider what your view of God is like. Do you view God as a distant heavenly God who's somehow out to make life as hard as possible for you? That is do you in effect view God as a tyrant? Is your view of God different to that? That is is it like the view here? Yes the view here is that there is a God in heaven but he's not distant and he's not tyrannical. No he's a father, a loving father. So there are the first few first three points of our sermon and from here on we're going to look in detail at the Lord's Prayer. First three points are this, we should pray with our eye on God, not ourselves or others. Second point, we should pray with confidence knowing that God is keen to listen. We don't have to make him listen. Three, we should be aware that God is a loving father who seeks only good things for his children. Now you can see what's going on here can't you?

Jesus is painting a picture of God that is relationally full. We have a God that we can approach as a person and we can approach as children, as a father. We have this intimate relationship with God as that of a child with a father. That is a relationship of dependency.

It's a relationship where we are loved. Now I've started here because I think those thoughts are the things that are going on here. When Jesus teaches his disciples to pray, he is not concerned with posture or with method or with empty words. No, they are not the key to success in prayer to a living God. Jesus is far more concerned with our attitude as we come in prayer.

He is much more concerned with what we think about the God we come to. He is keen on how we approach God with our heart and our attitude. If this is how to pray, then what's the content of the prayers you might bring to God? Well, in the Lord's Prayer, Jesus gives us a model prayer. I want you to notice a few things about it. First, notice some things about the structure of the Lord's Prayer. Can you see it there? See if you can spot it. It has an introduction and it is divided into two sections.

[10:04] Prayers that are focused on your, that is therefore God and his kingdom. And those prayers have a conclusion on earth as it is in heaven. And then there are prayers that are focused on our interests, that is us and our needs. They are the our prayers. So there's the your and the our. Now let's ask what these prayers means. Let's look at the first three lines or the first three sections. The way to read the first three prayers is to read them in the light of their conclusion. Can you see what their conclusion is on earth as it is in heaven? And the point is this in heaven. What is the situation in heaven? The father's name is hallowed? That is his dominion is exercised. That is in heaven, God's will is done. But when we look at the world, that's not what we see now. Now we tend to think that heaven is up there. It's the place of God. It's a place where God is king, where God is recognized as God.

But down here, he's not recognized as God. Humanity is king or queen. Humans recognize no one but themselves as having rights. Can you see the thrust of these first three prayers? They represent a yearning for the reality that we know exists in heaven to be reflected here on earth. They are a cry for God to act to restore things the way that he intends them to be. Let's have a look at the detail.

First, the first prayer is, God act so that your name is holy. That's what you're asking God there.

You're saying, you know, hallowed be your name. May your name be holy. Let me just give you some background to this. In the Old Testament, God's name is tantamount to God's person. If you know God's name, you know who he is and what he's like. The Old Testament says though that through sin, God's name is profaned or rejected or shunned or abused. When people sin, they do not give God his place. They do not recognize him as who he is. They don't recognize him as being holy and there to be listened to and obeyed. In the Old Testament, the prophets looked forward to a time when such sin would end and when God's name would be hallowed, would be seen to be holy. They realized there would be a day when God would act and when God acted in the world, he would act to save his people and he would at the same time punish those who have profaned his name. That's what this prayer is about. Can you hear it? This prayer is saying, God, do it now. Act now. Act now to make your name no longer profaned but hallowed. Act now to do away with those who have profaned your name. Act now to bring glory to yourself. Act so that the world will recognize that you are rightfully God.

So what are you doing when you pray this prayer, you think? When you say, hallowed be thy name, what are you praying? You're saying, God, do something. Act now so that earth will reflect heaven. That earth will reflect that you are rightfully God.

[13:54] You're asking God to so order the world that God's name is no longer profaned but hallowed. So let's have a look at the second request. Second, the prayer says, God, really, in effect, act to bring in your kingdom. What is the background to this one? Well, Jews yearned for the kingdom to come. They expected that the kingdom that came would be a political kingdom. They expected its coming to herald the end of the world and the coming of a new age. And Jesus took a slightly different view. He saw it as something like this. Jesus is saying that we should pray for the coming of the kingdom. And he's saying we should pray not for human kingdoms, but for the kingdom of God.

And ultimately, what does that mean? What would the world look like in a place where God is rightly honoured as king and where his kingdom has come? I think in essence, you are praying again for the end of the world. That is, you're praying for God to act so that the earth will reflect heaven.

To so order the world that God's kingdom and not human kingdoms are dominant. And the third prayer, you're praying for God to act and bring about his will. Background, God's will in history is that human beings live under the rule of God. It is that human beings live in right relationship with God and with each other. And the gospel declares that that process has begun. With Jesus, that is possible.

But its full accomplishment will only come with the doing away of sin and of Satan. So again, I think to pray this prayer, this third one in the Lord's prayer is to pray for the end. It is to pray for God to act, to act so that the earth will reflect heaven. To so order the world that God's will is recognized and done. Friends, let's make this clear. To pray these first three prayers of the Lord's prayer is to ultimately, I think, pray for the end of the world. It is to pray for an end to a world where humanity rules, where evil is dominant, where injustice is prevalent, where sorrow is endemic, where tears are a necessary part of life, where suffering is par for the course. To pray these three prayers is, I think, to pray for a world where God will throw out Satan, judge sinners, vindicate his children, save his people and abolish sin.

Can you see what's going on then in this very first half of the prayer? It is a thoroughly Christian prayer. For to be Christians is to wait for God's son from heaven, Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath to come. To be Christian is to say, Maranatha, O Lord, come. To be Christian is to wait for that blessed hope, the glorious appearing of our great God and saviour, Jesus Christ. To be Christian is to cry out, how long, sovereign Lord, until this ends and everything is in its right place, as you intend.

[ 17:12 ] It is to echo the final words of the New Testament itself. Amen. Come, Lord Jesus. But let's move on to the next section and see what it's about. Next section concentrates on praying for ourselves and our needs. And this section is much more straightforward, you'll be glad to hear.

These prayers are easier to understand. However, the first thing I want you to notice is there's a profound difference in focus. The first three requests, I think, had their focus on the future.

The second three requests have their focus on the present. And that's very important to notice. What is being said is that it's only when your focus is on God and his purposes that you can think rightly about the present. And we could make this our fourth point, if you like. Points one to three, we should pray with our eye on God, not ourselves or others. We should pray with confidence, knowing that God is keen to listen. We should be aware that God is a loving father who seeks only the good of his children. And number four, if we get our focus on God right and his purposes, then we'll see our own needs in proper perspective. And that's exactly what's going on in the second half of the Lord's prayer. Jesus goes on to tell us what sorts of things we should pray for.

If our focus is on God and his kingdom. First, you pray for bread for today. That is a request that God would supply what you need to keep alive. That's, I think, what that prayer is all about.

It's not for luxury foods. It's for daily bread. It's for the necessities of life. Can you see the point in mind? If you have God's kingdom in your mind, if you see the end of the world is around the corner and you're praying for it, then you won't be praying for wealth and luxury and a great job and a terrific career and money, will you? Because in that new world to come, those things will be somewhat redundant because you'll have real wealth and not this other wealth. No, you'll live praying and asking God to give you what you need. So with Paul in the later New Testament, he says this, if we have food and clothing with those, we shall be content. Why? Because the reality of our world is in a future world, if you like, the reality of our existence. That's the prayer of the kingdom person. Give me food and clothing. If I have these, I'll be content. Give me enough to survive.

[ 19 : 53 ] Give me the necessities of life. The writer of Proverbs elsewhere says, you know, don't give me too much because then I'll forget you. Don't give me too little because then, you know, I won't treat you rightly either. I can't remember the exact things that he's saying there. But you see what your primary prayer is for? You pray for what you need, not for the luxuries in life. Second, there's the prayer for forgiveness. Jesus urges us to pray that God would forgive us. You see, Jesus knows that our real need is to be right with God. Our prayer ought to be that God will make this a reality.

Can you see again the point? If you have the kingdom in mind, if you see that the end of the world is round the corner, then you won't focus your prayers on sicknesses and coughs and colds, will you?

No. Instead, you'll pray for the very thing that you need most of all. Forgiveness. That's the prayer of the kingdom person. God, please forgive me. Help me to forgive others just as you forgive me.

Third prayer here in this section is lead us not into temptation. That's a prayer for God's deliverance and protection. It's a prayer that God will deliver and protect us from the things that would keep us away from him and keep us out of his kingdom. It's a prayer that God would deliver us from the things that would drag us away from relationship with him. Again, can you see the point? If you have the kingdom in mind, if you see the end of the world is around the corner and you're praying that way, you won't so much be praying for deliverance from poverty. You won't be primarily praying for protection from the difficulties in life, though those are good things to be praying for and right.

No, your primary focus will be what you need to stay in relationship with God. That's where your focus will be. You'll be praying for protection from the evil one. That's the prayer of the kingdom person. God, deliver me from the one who's constantly trying to separate me from you. Keep me from the evil one and his wiles. So that could be our fifth point. Our fifth point is when you pray for your own needs or when we pray for our own needs, we should not lose our focus that our most desperate need is for relationship with God. When we pray for our own needs, we should not lose the focus that our most desperate need is good relationship with God. So there's a quick summary of the Lord's Prayer.

[ 22 : 34 ] Now the question is, what are we going to do about it? What is the right reaction to the teaching of Jesus? How does this teaching change our thinking? How are we going to modify our actions in the light of these words of Jesus, this teaching from Jesus? Well, first thing to do is to put ourselves personally under the spotlight of this prayer. Now let me explain what I mean. You see, the first thing I want you to notice is that this is not the sort of prayer you'd want to pray if you're out of relationship with God or other people, is it? Think about it. Do you want to pray this prayer if you're out of relationship with God? This is not a prayer for, this is a prayer for those who are Christians. It is a prayer for people who have God as their loving father. And in this case, if you do have God as your loving father, this is a prayer that God will continue his work in history, that he'll continue to bring about his kingdom in the present and in the future, and that God will make things on earth as they are in heaven, and that he will bring about the end of the earth with all its suffering and decay. It is a prayer that God will replace this corrupt and evil world with a new heaven and earth in which God is king, where God is king and where tears and suffering are banished forever.

At the same time, this prayer is a prayer for God's children as they wait for the fullness of the kingdom. It is a prayer for Christians as they wait for God to send his Jesus from heaven.

It is a prayer that God will supply their needs, that he'd forgive them, that he'd help them forgive others, that he'd keep them from the hour of testing, that he'd keep them from the forces of evil that would drag them away from God, their father. Please understand what I'm saying. This is not a prayer for you if you are not a Christian. If God is not your father, then you wouldn't want to be praying this prayer. If you're not a child of God, then this prayer is not for you. Have you noticed in the movies what happens when, you know, these people that really don't confess God, they find themselves with someone who's died and they want to do something religious?

And they're usually, in the older movies, they don't do it anymore, but in the older movies, they're usually one of two things that they feel they must recite. Do you know what they are? The Lord's Prayer or Psalm 23? Lord is my shepherd. You've seen those movies? They're all the same. They do it.

But the very last thing they should be praying if they're not Christian is the Lord's Prayer. Because think about it for a moment. If you prayed it, what are you asking? You're saying, God, judge me. I have not believed in you all my life. Bring in your kingdom. What does that kingdom mean?

[ 25 : 25 ] That'll be a kingdom where people who don't believe in God are not there. You're saying, God, act, be at work in history to hallow your name with doing away with all who profane it.

If you're not Christian, it's a very risky prayer to be praying, isn't it? Make things on earth as they are in heaven where you're king and I'm not. Bring an end to this world.

Replace this corrupt and evil world that is full of corrupt. It's not an evil world in itself, but full of corrupt people who are unrighteous.

So, friends, I need to ask at this point, where are you? Are you a person who can pray this prayer without fear? Are you a person who longs for God's kingdom to be fulfilled in the world and in your life?

Because that's what this prayer is about. That's it at its core. God, your kingdom come. Subtext, not mine. Your will be done.

[ 26 : 37 ] Subtext, not mine. Your name be hallowed, not the profaning of your name. Can you see what it's about? It's a very profound prayer.

Second thing I want you to do is to think about how the principles of this prayer should filter down into your daily lives, into my daily life. How should the teaching of Jesus change our pattern of prayer?

How should it model our prayers? How can we work on letting this word of God do what God intends it to do? That is, change the way we think and the way we pray?

Because that's what the disciples wanted, wasn't it? They wanted to know how they should pray. Well, let's think practically about how we might let it change the way we pray. Let me suggest a way in which it has changed the way that I pray.

I've been doing this since a few years after I was a Christian. I've had in my mind two sorts of categories of prayer, two or three. Sometimes I think about how I, when I think about how I pray, I think about it in terms of three columns.

[ 27 : 45 ] When I first started this, I drew the three columns. Okay? Three columns. First column should be headed, God's glory. And I learnt this part of this from someone else and I slightly modified it.

So first heading, God's glory. These prayers are like the prayers of the first half of the Lord's Prayer. These prayers are the bread and butter of our prayer life.

That first column, bread and butter of prayer life. Second column could be headed, my eternal needs. Those prayers are prayers for the things that I need and my friends need and my family need in order that they might be able to stand before God on the last day.

They're the sorts of things that Jesus prays for in the second half of the Lord's Prayer. So that's the second. Third column. Third column, my desires.

Okay? Let's go through the three columns again. So they are God's glory, column number one. Column number two, my eternal needs. Column number three, my desires.

[ 28 : 54 ] Those are the things that have to do with day-to-day living. They are the things that have to do with life and health and safety. With jobs. With relationships and so on.

They are the things that, some of them, are things that are not essential for us to have. Nevertheless, they are things that God wants us to bring to him and he may indeed want them for us.

We don't know whether he wants these things or not for us, but we do know what he does want. And we can talk to him about these things. And he wants us to talk to him about those things we want as well.

Now the last point I want to make today is that my order of priority in these prayers is column one to column three. Does that make sense? Move from column one to column three.

God's glory to my desires. Columns one and two are the most important ones. Column three contains the items I could pray for if I run out of time.

[ 29 : 58 ] However, my own view is that column three is the focus of most of our daily prayers. Isn't it? Column three is the focus of most of our daily prayers.

Then we perhaps haven't learnt yet as much from the Lord's prayer as we might. And think about your Bible study groups. Which items get the most focus in our Bible study groups?

It's column three. They're not ungodly things to be praying for, friends. But there are other things that are more important to be praying for. I want to urge you to follow the model of Jesus.

I want to urge you to do some restructuring of your prayer life. And that will require some hard work. Instead of thinking about, what are the things I want today for myself and even for my family?

And they're good and godly things. For instance, it's quite right to pray for good health. It's quite right to pray for an end to illness. But what's far more important is the glory of God.

[ 31 : 09 ] And the eternal needs of those who are living around you. Many of whom will perish. Quite right to be praying for good health.

This third category of things. I'm just urging us to put the weight back where Jesus puts it. On God's glory and the things that will keep us away from deep, bright relationship with God.

Those things may involve our daily bread. But they may not as well. So friends, I hope that's helpful. Just giving a big perspective on the Lord's Prayer and on what is going on here.

And I do urge you to think about the ways that you pray. My prayer life is not nearly what it could be. And some of it has to do with, I get so focused on column three.

And not enough focused on columns one and two. Let's see if we can change that. Let's see if we can focus on God's glory. Our eternal needs. As well as those very daily things that we need.

[ 32 : 15 ] Let's pray. Father, we pray to you. Our loving, generous Father.

Who loves giving good things to his children. Father, we thank you that you have given us the greatest good thing. You have given us your Son.

And you allowed him to go to the cross for us. That we might not fear having to face you on the last day. Father, we thank you that you have met our greatest need.

And Father, we pray that you would be hallowed in your world. That your will will be done.

That your kingdom will come. And Father, we pray that you would keep us from the things that would drag us away from you. Whether they be the pressures of daily life.

[ 33 : 24 ] And of daily needs. Or the evil ones assault on us. Or our unforgiving hearts. Please keep us from these things.

That our relationship with you would deepen and strengthen. And Father, each one of us here today also has particular daily needs.

Things that we long for. And we also bring those to you. Knowing that they are not the core of our needs. But we bring them to you.

Praying that you'd grant us these things. As is best for us. We know those other things we've talked about are best for us. We pray for these other things with all the uncertainty that we have as to whether they are best or not.

And we commit them to you. And we ask that you'd grant them according to your will. And we pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Please stand as we sing our next song.

[ 34 : 37 ] Amen.