

John 12:27-28 12/22/13 (Red Letters #17) **Letters of prayer**

Have you ever heard the expression: “He hasn’t got a prayer” or “You haven’t got a prayer!”? It’s meant to say of course, that the odds against you are so high that it isn’t even worth praying about. Like say, when you have to kick a 61 yard field goal with seconds left to win the game...

**Slide:** pic of field goal

Folks, never let anyone tell you that you haven’t got a prayer. You absolutely always have a prayer. It’s a gift that God has given you to talk to Him. In fact, He has commanded us to talk to Him. And He has given us some very specific advice about how to do that. In the first **Red Letter** reading, Jesus basically says that there are some good ways to pray and some bad ways to pray. And He starts with the bad, saying:

**Slide:** “And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men...” (Matthew 6:5 NIV)

Basically, to show people what holy schmoes they were. Again, He says:

**Slide:** “And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words.” (Matthew 6:7 NIV)

Folks, I have to tell you, that guidance is particularly comforting to me. ‘Cause I feel like I don’t always have ability to put things in just the right way with just the right words in a very religious sounding prayer to God. And it sounds to me that Jesus is saying, “That’s o.k. I don’t really need that. In fact, I don’t really want that. I don’t want fancy. I want your heart. I want you to speak simply and directly to Me.” Now, as I prepared this message, I thought I’d give you an example of a prayer like that, so I picked one out, before any of the Duck Dynasty controversy – and I don’t really want to take the time to get into all that today. We’ve spoken on those subjects before. But the illustration stands on it’s own and I still want to use it, so here goes:

**Slide:** Duck Dynasty dinner prayer

Father, thanks for the fish and the family. Short and sweet. I think an example of the kind of prayer Jesus wants. By the way, why does Jesus say we don’t have to pray by using “many words”?

**Slide:** “...for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him.” (Matthew 6:8 NIV)

That’s one of many fascinating statements – **coming from Jesus**, isn’t it? Because His very presence on earth was proof that your Father knows what you need before you ask Him. He knew that there were would be brokenness in your life that you can’t fix, but God can.

Certainly by the sin in our lives, we’ve broken all our promises and broken our relationship with God, and we’ve ruined every chance to earn a place with Him. But Jesus in His love, did what we couldn’t do. He lived a perfect, unbroken life, and He took that life to the cross for us. And it wasn’t nails that held Him to the cross, it was His unbelievable love for you that kept Him there to die in your place, to bear your sin and be your Savior. And to be Someone worth talking to.

Of course in that reading, Jesus goes on to give us a sample prayer that is also short and sweet and that His disciples have been praying together ever since. We call it “The Lord’s Prayer”. Seven simple petitions or requests that, if prayed and obeyed by everyone, would bring true peace and harmony throughout the world. That if prayed and obeyed by couples, would

connect them together inseparably. That if prayed and obeyed by families, would stop all dissension and bickering; that if prayed and obeyed by a church would tie it together in perfect harmony and instantly attract the unchurched to come and get what we have. By prayed **and obeyed**, I mean that we truly and humbly ask God to bring these things into our lives and then we also truly **submit** to God when He turns around and wants to bring them about through us.

Just look briefly at what we're asking God in this prayer:

**Slide:** 9 “This, then, is how you should pray: “ ‘Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, 10 your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

11 Give us today our daily bread.

12 Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.

13 And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.’” (Matthew 6:9–13 NIV)

First of all, we pray to “**OUR** Father”, instead of “My father.” He doesn't want us to be lone rangers in faith, but to be joined together and pray together.

And we ask as our first request that we would take as our most important possession, the name of God and of Jesus Christ, and make it sacred and holy among us.

And we pray for our **Father's** kingdom to come, not our own. We pray for His will to be done, because we know that His will is always going to be better than our own.

The fourth petition is our Christmas prayer to have God's protection against all advertising today. “God, don't let me get hung up on all my greeds, just take care of my needs - today.”

Then we pray for our chief need with a prayer and a promise. We come broken to the only source who can fix us and forgive us, Our Heavenly Father. And we formally pray, “Oh, God, as we receive your forgiveness and we remember what it cost you and we know what forgiveness means, we **WILL** offer that forgiveness to our brothers and sisters. And folks, I don't really like what Jesus has to say after that, but He says it, and we need to deal with it:

**Slide:** “14 For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. 15 But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.” (Matthew 6:14–15 NIV)

It's very plain. It requires no explanation, only obedience, for those who would be the true disciples of Jesus Christ.

The final two petitions we could pray every minute of every day of our lives. That's how often we have to battle temptation and the evil one. He is always after us, but we know the end of the story: “Greater is He that is in you, than He that is in the world,”

A short and sweet prayer. A profound prayer! Full of petitions that God is eager to grant, if we really want what it is we are asking.

The next reading simply hammers that message home. Jesus uses a simple example to say that if a cranky friend will get up and help you, how much more your loving heavenly Father? If your earthly fathers know how to give good gifts to their children, how much more your loving heavenly Father? And what does He want to give you? **The Holy Spirit.**

**Slide:** “If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!” (Luke 11:13 NIV)

But how many of your prayers to God have asked for the Holy Spirit to be present and active in your life... To help you understand the Red Letters and all of God's Word and to do what it says, not what you want?

Of course the last Red Letter reading this morning models that kind of prayer...Jesus before the cross...

**Slide:** 27 “Now my heart is troubled, and what shall I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour’? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. 28 Father, glorify your name!” (John 12:27–28 NIV)

In this last Sunday in the Advent season, we celebrate the coming of Christ into this world and the purpose of that coming. Again, Jesus put it very simply:

**Slide:** “For my Father’s will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.” (John 6:40 NIV)

It is the will of God that you be forgiven and freed from the power of sin and Satan in your life. It is the will of God that you spend eternity with Him. But because a just God cannot allow sin to go unpunished, it became the will of God to punish the sins of the world in His own Son. Isaiah prophesied about Christ, “It was the will of the Lord to crush Him and cause Him to suffer (as an offering for our sin).” And the will of God was done, the sacrifice was made, His Son was killed, the blood was shed, our sins were washed away. And as Jesus was lifted up on the third day, so those of us who believe in Him will be lifted up at the last day to be with Him forever. That’s why Jesus came. That’s why we celebrate His coming.

Our Father, we your children come to you and we thank you that we are privileged to know you and to love you in that way, as an awesome loving Father. Holy and sacred is your very name. Lord, bless our prayers - our communication with You and our walk with you. May your name truly be holy among us as we live for You. Be with us and assure us of your presence and power. For Jesus' sake. Amen.