

True colours

The freedom of prayer.

23/03/14

The kingdom of heaven is not for the super spiritual.

It is not for muscular Christians who have made John Wayne, and not Jesus, their hero.

It is not for academics who would imprison Jesus in the ivory tower of exegesis.

It is not for noisy, feel-good folks who manipulate Christianity into a naked appeal to emotion.

It is not for hooded mystics who want magic in their religion.

It is not for Alleluia Christians who live only on the mountaintop and have never visited the valley of desolation. It is not for the fearless and tearless.

It is not for red-hot zealots who boast with the rich young ruler of the Gospels, "All these commandments I have kept from my youth."

It is not for the complacent who hoist over their shoulders a tote bag of honours, diplomas, and good works, actually believing they have it made.

It is not for legalists who would rather surrender control of their souls to rules than run the risk of living in union with Jesus.

The kingdom of heaven is for the bedraggled, beat-up, and burnt-out.

It is for the sorely burdened who are still shifting the heavy suitcase from one hand to the other.

It is for the wobbly and weak-kneed who know they don't have it all together and are too proud to accept the hand out of amazing grace.

It is for inconsistent, unsteady disciples whose cheese is falling off their cracker.

It is for poor, weak, sinful men and women with hereditary faults and limited talents.

It is for earthen vessels who shuffle along on feet of clay. It is for the bent and the bruised who feel that their lives are a grave disappointment to God.

It is for smart people who know they are stupid and honest disciples who admit they are scallywags.

The kingdom of heaven is for everyone.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Manning, Brennan (2008-08-19). *The Ragamuffin Gospel: Good News for the Bedraggled, Beat-Up, and Burnt Out* (Kindle Locations 84-102). The Doubleday Religious Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

This week we are going to look at the freedom we have in prayer.

Over the past few weeks we have been encouraged to have integrity and to look at our motives and to look at our own hearts.

To live in a way that shines a light to those around us.

And this week is no different.

Let us read what Jesus says in Matt 6:7-15

Do not keep babbling like the pagans, when Jesus' listeners heard this they may have been reminded of the time the Baalite priests entered into a competition with Elijah. From morning till noon the priests kept up their repetition, shouting out their appeal 'oh Baal answer us' when the skies stayed silent, they took to shouting even louder and then began to slash themselves with swords and spears, while their blood flowed they worked themselves into a frenzy, everything they had they threw at getting a response from Baal.

They had no success. In 1 Kings 18:29 concludes their work with this. 'But there was no response, no-one answered, no-one paid attention.

This illustration shows two problems with this kind of praying, the first misconception is that there is a right way to pray, if you get the right technique you will have your prayers answered. The second is the more effort you put into prayer the more you are able to affect the outcome of the prayer.

Even today the way we pray can be picked apart. Some take on a completely different vocabulary whether it is extremely archaic or perhaps the "in street" language. As individuals we have the freedom to pray in the vocabulary we wish but we have to be careful we don't make it look like we must pray like that as a whole church. Piling up and using vocab we rarely use, can only confuse those around us and how can we be a light to those around us if they cannot understand what we indeed are saying. We don't want to pray like this and make our prayers into big power plays.

We need to examine the way we pray in order to ask the question why we pray the way we do. And if we pray out loud, do we worry about what others may think, do we worry we have not said it right, do we fear we might be laughed at.

We can have the freedom to pray whether in silent or aloud, why because God knows what we need before we ask him.

Our challenge then this morning in just 53 words could you write a prayer or say a prayer that expresses all that you need, asks for all you need and praises the one living God

Well Jesus did.

Our father in heaven- that's 4

The kingdom of heaven is closer than we think, we are able to have a direct line to God who is our Father. He is a relational God he wants to be a God who you can depend on like no other earthly Father, he wants you to know him and to seek him.

Hallowed be your name- another 4

God's name is Holy, Holy, Holy, and we should wish to treat it like that. May we honour him as he ought to be honoured.

Your kingdom come- taking us to 11

We want to enter into the kingdom that Jesus has been speaking about where we all are blessed, where we want to live in the way that shows his kingdom here on earth.

Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven- twenty two words down

May God's rule be in our lives here on earth as his rule is in Heaven, in order that we may continue to build upon his kingdom?

Give us today our daily bread

God knows what we need and what we desire by praying this we are asking for us to continue to depend on him for all we need. Our motives here are to express what we know God can provide and what we need him for. We need to trust in him, so we continue by asking.

And forgive us our debts as we have forgiven our debtors.

The new righteousness we have been focusing on since Matt 5:7 onwards is to focus our hearts on our motives and to be right with others. In order to help us to come before God in a pure way. But also to be the light of the world. We want to examine ourselves further and to remove all that will stop others around us from falling into temptation. Which brings us to;

And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from the evil one

Help us to lead life the right way up. Fifty three words later and we have praised God, expressed our trust in him and asked that he may help us be the light in this world.

Many theologians over the years have used this prayer to help build new prayers or as a template. And John Bunyan went as far as to say we should not use these words as a prayer but only a a template. Which would seem to remove that Jesus wanted to remove long babbling prayers with this simple prayer.

This I believe is because the kingdom of heaven is for everyone. And when as many of we were taught this prayer at a young age, in first school. We are able to pray this prayer that fulfils all that we need to do in a prayer and if we are stuck for words and have no idea how to pray we can freely pray these 53 words. Amen