

The Lord's Prayer

Matthew 6:9-13

Part 1

Scripture Reading

“Pray then like this:

Our Father in heaven, hallowed by your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.”

Introduction

The Gospel of Matthew presents the Christian with the primary text of the Lord's prayer. However, the Lord's prayer is also found (in an abbreviated version) in Luke 11:2-4. It is in the Luke text that we discover something very interesting about the Lord's Prayer – it was given in response to a question posed by the disciples.

If you will, look with me at Luke 11:1...

“Now Jesus was praying in a certain place, and when he finished, one of his disciples said to him, ‘Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples.’ And He said to them, ‘When you pray, say...’”

At first glance, this may seem to be a trivial point – but it is not. Put yourself in the shoes (or should I say sandals) of the disciples. You've witnessed Jesus walk on water, turn water into wine, calm raging storms, resurrect dead people, cast out demons, give sight to the blind, speech to the mute, hearing to the deaf, and strength to the lame.

If you were one of these original disciples and had witnessed such miraculous feats, what would you have asked Jesus to teach you? Would you have asked Jesus to teach you to pray?

If we answer this question honestly, the vast majority of us would have to say – “Probably not!” We prefer the miraculous, don’t we? I mean really, think about it...

⇒ Having the ability to walk on water would be awesome. Many of you would ask Jesus, *“Lord, teach me how to walk on water.”*

⇒ For those of you who enjoy a nice glass of wine in the evening, how cool would it be to have the power to turn water into wine? Some of you would ask Jesus, *“Lord, teach me how to turn water into wine.”*

⇒ How about healing people? Is there someone in your life who you long to see healed from a physical ailment, handicap, or disease? *“Lord, teach me how to heal and restore?”*

The disciples witnessed Jesus perform miraculous acts. Yet, it was prayer that they asked Jesus to teach them. Why?

Well, throughout their time with the Lord, the disciples continually witnessed Jesus praying. They witnessed Jesus awake early in the mornings and fellowship with His Father long before the sun ever rose. They also witnessed Jesus retreat from His ministry and pray for hours at a time.

By watching the life of Christ, the disciples recognized that it was prayer, that holy communion and fellowship with the heavenly Father, which empowered Jesus. For the disciples, they rightly perceived that prayer was the great catalyst that gave birth to everything Jesus taught and every miracle He performed.

Thus, we don’t find the disciples asking Jesus to teach them how to perform great visible miracles. No, we find the disciples asking Jesus to teach them how to enjoy communion and fellowship with God. What we find are the disciples asking Jesus to teach them how to access the power that produced His miracles and anointed His teaching and preaching.

Don't miss this!

Everything Jesus taught and every miracle He performed was fueled by intimate, leisurely, and submissive communion with God the Father. If we are to know God and experience His resurrection power and victory in our lives, we must become men and women who seek the presence of God in prayer. Why?

Prayer brings us into the holy presence of the Creator of our lives and the Justifier of our souls. Prayer brings into the presence of our merciful and gracious High Priest who sympathizes with our weaknesses. Prayer accesses the throne of God, where the Holy Spirit of Christ is found interceding on our behalf with groans and utterances. Prayer acknowledges the power and faithfulness of God to sustain us, equip us, and provide for our every need. Prayer empowers and deepens our faith as we surrender to the sovereignty of the Lord.

D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones writes...

“Prayer is beyond any question the highest activity of the human soul. Man is at his greatest and highest when, upon his knees, he comes face-to-face with God. When a man is speaking to God he is at his very acme. It is the highest activity of the human soul, and therefore it is at the same time the ultimate test of a man's true spiritual condition. There is nothing that tells the truth about us as Christian people so much as our prayer life.”

Jones goes on to write...

“More and more we miss the very greatest blessings in the Christian life because we do not know how to pray right.”

The Lord's Prayer is not simply Jesus showing us what to pray for – it is more than that. The Lord's Prayer is Jesus teaching us how to pray *right*.

How many of us are missing the blessings of this Christian life because we do not approach prayer with the right attitude, the right heart, or the right perspective? How many of us are praying the wrong way?

Exegesis

In the Lord's Prayer, Jesus is interested in teaching His disciples two principles about prayer. First, Jesus wants His disciples to pray the right way. Second, Jesus wants the disciples to pray for the right things.

First, let's make sure we have a strong grasp on praying the right way. If we look closely at the Lord's Prayer, we will clearly notice an obvious structure to the prayer – a structure most Christians neglect on a regular basis.

Quiet simply, the Lord's Prayer can be divided into two primary sections.

The first section, which comprises verses 9-10, is squarely focused on the glory of God and His kingdom. Listen to it carefully...

“Our Father in heaven, hallowed by your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.”

The first half of the Lord's Prayer has nothing to do with us, and everything to do with the glory of God and His kingdom. This should not be overlooked! How are we to pray? Quite simply, before we ever petition God for our needs, we are commanded to exalt and celebrate the glory of God and His greatness.

We are commanded to exalt God to his rightful place of preeminence in our lives.

Is the glory of God and His greatness preeminent in our prayers?

The second section, which comprises verses 11-13, focuses squarely on man's needs. Listen carefully...

“Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.”

The second half of the Lord's Prayer deals with our daily needs as they pertain to sustenance, the forgiveness of sin, and deliverance from temptation.

In our prayer life, how often do we neglect exalting the glory of God and His greatness in order to petition God's throne with our needs?

How many times have we missed God's blessings because our prayers are man-centered rather than God-centered? Our prayers are not meant to change the mind and heart of God. Our prayers, as they focus on the glory of God and His greatness, are meant to transform our hearts and conform us into Christlikeness.

One thing is clear, our Lord Jesus Christ is teaching us to pray God-centered, God-glorifying, God-exalting prayers. Jesus is teaching His disciples that God's character, God's holiness, God's kingdom, and God's will are to reign preeminently in our prayers.

When it comes to the Christian's prayer life – God must reign supreme. According to Jesus, **God must be exalted before He is petitioned.**

Establishing the Preeminence of God

For the rest of our time this morning, I want us to focus on how Jesus teaches us to exalt the preeminence of God in our prayers. Specifically, Jesus instructs His disciples to exalt the fatherhood of God, the name of God, the kingdom of God, and the will of God.

The Fatherhood of God

First, it would be negligent to gloss over the title of God Jesus commands us to use in our prayers. Jesus said...

“Pray then like this: ‘Our Father in heaven...’”

This would have been stunning instruction to Jesus' Jewish audience. The Jews in the days of Christ preferred exalted titles for God, titles like “Sovereign Lord” and “King of the Universe.”

We are not unlike the Jews of Jesus' day. Many of us prefer the exalted titles of God – “King of kings,” “Almighty Creator,” “The Great I AM,” “Sovereign Ruler of the heavens and earth.”

Yet, Jesus instructs us to exalt God by calling Him “*Our Father in heaven...*” We exalt God when we call on Him with the most intimate and personal title He has – Father.

One of the most glorious doctrines of Christianity is that thru faith in Jesus Christ, we have been adopted by God and are forever known to Him as His beloved children.

Listen carefully to the words of the Apostle Paul found in Galatians 4:3-7.

“...when we were children, we were enslaved to the elementary principles of the world. But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, ‘Abba! Father!’ So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God.”

Why should we exalt God by calling on Him as Father?

Prior to God sending forth His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, to be a sacrificial substitution and propitiation for our sins, we were enslaved to sin, unrighteousness, and death. We were children of wrath. (Eph. 2:1-3) We were spiritual orphans doomed by our own sin to eternal death.

Yet God, in His enduring love and rich mercy, sacrificed Jesus on the cross, planted within us saving faith, and thru our faith in Christ for salvation, adopted us as His children. Thru Christ, we who were once orphaned and hopeless were predestined and chosen by God to become His royal children and heirs to His heavenly kingdom.

It is our spiritual adoption thru Christ that grants us the glorious privilege to call on the Sovereign God as Abba Father. This was accomplished solely thru the sovereign will and grace of God, not anything we did or deserved.

This is why when we pray, Jesus commands us to exalt God by calling Him Father. Without God's gracious adoption, we would have no access to the throne of God.

When we pray, "*Our Father in heaven,*" we acknowledge and celebrate our spiritual adoption into God's family. At the same time, we are reminded that there are countless souls on the face of this earth who are spiritual orphans and desperately need to be adopted by God's grace.

The Name of God

Jesus moves from the fatherhood of God to the name of God. Specifically, Jesus commands us to exalt God by remembering and celebrating the holiness of His name.

Jesus continues...

"Our Father in heaven, hallowed by your name."

Throughout the Scripture, we see God's great passion for His name – that His name be exalted in the lives of His people as well as throughout the earth.

The third great commandment God gave Moses dealt with the holiness and sacredness of God's great name – "*You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, for the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain.*" (Ex. 20:7)

Thru the prophet Ezekiel, God said...

"It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for the sake of my holy name, which you have profaned among the nations to which you came. And I will vindicate the holiness of my great name, which has profaned among the nations, and which you have profaned among them. And the nations will know that I am the Lord, declares the Lord God, when I vindicate my holiness before their eyes." (Ez. 36:22-23)

Our Father is fiercely passionate for His name. God's desire is that His holy name is exalted, not profaned, thru our lives. Not only that, but God longs for His name to be exalted and worshipped among all the nations of the earth.

When we pray *"hallowed by your name"* we are expressing our desire to exalt the holy name of God thru our lives. We are confessing that the desire of our hearts is that the holiness of God and His great name would reign preeminently in our lives. We are also, when praying this way, convicted of our own sinful proclivity to exalt our own name instead of God's. This should lead to brokenness, confession, and repentance in our personal lives.

At the same time, we are forced to remember that there are people, governments, and nations who are profaning the holy name of God and by doing so are invoking the wrath of God and His righteous vindication against them. This should lead every Christian to earnestly pray that God's holy name would reign victoriously throughout the earth.

The Kingdom of God

After exhorting us to exalt the fatherhood of God and the name of God, Jesus commands us to exalt the kingdom of God. Jesus says...

"Our Father in heaven, hallowed by your name. Your kingdom come..."

D.A. Carson writes...

"To pray, 'Your kingdom come,' is to pray that God's saving reign will be expanded even now, and, much more, that God will usher in the consummated kingdom."

In a way, we as Christians are living in the kingdom of God. Yet, as Carson says, God's Kingdom has not been fully consummated. One day, at the sound of heavenly trumpets, Jesus Christ will come again and when He does, He will bring God's heavenly kingdom with Him in the form of a new heaven and new earth.

The Bible tells us that it is this heavenly kingdom that we are to hunger for and seek – not the fallen, fleeting kingdom of this broken earth.

By praying “*Your Kingdom come...*” we acknowledge that our calling as Christians is to long for heaven’s kingdom rather than this earthly kingdom. By making such a confession, we express our desire to submit to God’s Kingdom and His way, rather than living for ourselves and our own personal and selfish kingdoms. By making such a confession, we remind ourselves that our calling and privilege is to exalt and advance God’s kingdom – not our own.

Was it not Jesus who said later in this chapter, “*Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness...*” (Matt. 6:33)

At the same time, we also acknowledge that God’s kingdom is a redemptive kingdom. We join our hearts with God in desiring that His redemptive reign would expand, continuing to save countless souls for His glory and fame.

The Will of God

Finally, Jesus commands us to exalt God by surrendering to His will. Jesus says...

“Our Father in heaven, hallowed by your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.”

Have you ever wondered what God’s will is for your life? We all have!

In Romans 12:1-2, the Apostle Paul writes...

“I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to the world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.”

What is God’s will for every Christian?

Is it conformity to this world? No!

God's will for every Christian is that we would be transformed into the likeness of Jesus Christ our Lord. This transformation is known as the lifelong process of sanctification.

God's will for our lives is holiness. How God transforms us into His holiness and Christlikeness is a process based on His sovereign plan for our lives. Severing our conformity to the world will be painful – for some it will be more painful than others. For you see, in the Bible, we are promised that our transformation into holiness will involve trials, tests, suffering, and ultimately even death.

By praying *“Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven”* we are exalting God by surrendering to His will of holy sanctification in our lives. We are acknowledging our desire to be transformed rather than conformed. We are acknowledging our desire to be made holy, regardless of the temporary pain and suffering it may bring on this earth. We are acknowledging that God's sanctifying will is perfect and good.

By praying *“Your will be done...”* we are crucifying our selfishness, along with our pursuit of comfortability, while embracing God's refining crucible of holiness – knowing that the end result is our God-glorifying glorification and perfection.

Closing

In his book *The Prayer of the Lord*, Dr. R.C. Sproul reminds us to keep the right perspective when we approach our Father in prayer.

“The first thing you are to remember in prayer is who it is you're talking to, because nothing will condition your prayer life more deeply than remembering that you're in conversation with God, the sovereign Creator and Ruler of the universe.

Second, you are to remember who you are. You are not God. You are a creature. So prayer is not a conversation between peers; it is not a fireside chat among equals. This is the creature speaking to his sovereign Creator.” (p.15)