

November 22, 2020
God in the Disciples' Prayer

INTRODUCTION.

We've already seen that Jesus speaks at length in Matthew 6 about prayer. He tells us how, when, where, and why to pray. He warns us about hypocritical prayer (prayer that seeks human approval). He warns us about pagan prayer (prayer that seeks to overwhelm "god" with words, as the prophets of Baal did in First Samuel 18).

TRANSITION. These warnings should not prevent us from praying; Jesus WANTS us to pray, that the Father would be glorified and we would be blessed. He taught His disciples, and therefore us, what we call the Lord's Prayer, but which could really be called the Disciples' Prayer. Let's dive in to the first part of the Disciples' prayer. We are going to see that Jesus did not merely give us a "now I lay me down to sleep" kind of childish prayer, but one that is theologically rich. It is as much catechism as prayer.

GOD IS FATHER: Our Father who is in heaven

We know that God is the Creator of all things and all people. We also know that He is only the spiritual Father of those who are in Jesus Christ by adoption. None of us are born as God's natural children.

This was prophesied in Hosea 1:10:

Hosea 1:10 – Yet the time will come when the children of Israel shall be like the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured or numbered. And in the place where it was said to them, "You are not my people," it shall be said to them, "Children of the living God."

This is fulfilled for us in Jesus, as Ephesians 1:4-5 says,

Ephesians 1:4-5 – In love he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved.

What's more, the Father was very deliberate about our adoption; Galatians 4:6 says,

Galatians 4:6 – And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!"

All of this is the work of our Father in heaven, who loved us, and sent His Son to redeem us. Isn't it wonderful that the Lord's prayer – the Disciples' prayer – begins with a joyful call to our Father in heaven, our Abba, rather than a fearful, trembling whisper? Our Father is with us; we have His comfort, His strength, His help, His support.

TRANSITION. But we must not forget that our Father is also our God.

GOD IS HOLY: Hallowed be Your name

Holiness speaks of God's perfect separation from Creation, and His absolute purity. He is untouched and unchanged by His Creation.

He exists in complete separation from Creation, even though He is everywhere at all times. Nothing that happens in Creation – or in our lives, for that matter – changes the slightest thing about Him.

Psalm 115:3 (ESV) – 3 Our God is in the heavens; he does all that he pleases.

Psalm 33:10-11 – The Lord brings the counsel of the nations to nothing; he frustrates the plans of the peoples. The counsel of the Lord stands forever, the plans of his heart to all generations.

God is also absolutely morally pure. How many ways can we say “good?” God is virtuous, kind, moral, benign, gracious, perfect, sinless, and all to the uttermost degree.

Leviticus 19:2 (ESV) – 2 “Speak to all the congregation of the people of Israel and say to them, You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy.

Job 34:10 (ESV) – 10 “Therefore, hear me, you men of understanding: far be it from God that he should do wickedness, and from the Almighty that he should do wrong.

Psalm 7:11 (NLT) 11 God is an honest judge. He is angry with the wicked every day.

Human Religion and God

Human religions inevitably focus on either the fearsomeness and unapproachability of God, or His love. Sometimes the other trait doesn't even exist in a meaningful way.

Islam calls upon a god who is completely transcendent and separate, who has nothing personal to do with creation, and who would never, under any circumstances, think about taking on human flesh.

Liberal Christianity talks about a god who is love and nothing else. Their god is not particularly wise, which is why they disregard what he says about sex and morality. Neither is their god particularly powerful, which is why they take it upon themselves to change the world. Their god is certainly not holy, and absolutely not a judge.

OUR FATHER-GOD

Our Father-God is imminent and close at hand. In fact, His Spirit resides within us, and the Father and Son also reside within us.

Our Father-God transcendent, above all, surpassing all, exceptional in His glory, unapproachable in His light – except by His adopted children. Every creature needs permission to come before Him. Jesus' sinless life, atoning death, and ongoing work as our Mediator gives us not only permission, but open access to the throne of God at all times.

You see, to be a Christian means both loving God and living before Him with reverent fear. True love for the Father is never disrespectful or casual. True reverent fear our God never disintegrates into terror or alarm. We have to be taught how to truly love God; it is not natural knowledge. And we have to be taught reverent fear for our God; that isn't natural knowledge, either. That teaching takes place as we learn the Word of God, and then the Spirit of God works it out through our actual lives.

THE KINGDOM OF OUR FATHER: Your Kingdom come

The Kingdom of God is known by several titles: the Kingdom of God is the Kingdom of Heaven, the Kingdom of the Father, the Kingdom of Christ and God, and the Kingdom of God's Beloved Son. The word kingdom involves authority, geography, and citizenry.

The authority of God's Kingdom is His own inherent authority; it is not an elected authority – God does NOT govern by the consent of the people, but by His own sovereign right – or an obtained authority – God did not earn the right to rule, but had it all along.

The geography of God's Kingdom is the entirety of creation, or, putting it differently, everything that is NOT God.

The citizenry of God's Kingdom are the holy angels and redeemed sinners. Colossians 1:13 makes it clear that there is a domain of darkness to which all the wicked belong. That domain is certainly under the authority of God, and clearly within the bounds of creation, but those in it are not citizens of His Kingdom. We see this in our own world. In the first century an estimated 45 million people lived in the Roman Empire, but only about 5 million were citizens. There are about 328 million people in the United States right now; about 45 million of those are not citizens either by birth or naturalization.

The Supremacy of God's Kingdom

We read about the Kingdom of God in Daniel 2:31-45. Nebuchadnezzar had a terrifying nightmare. He saw a massive statute with a head of gold, chest and arms of silver, torso and thighs of bronze, legs of iron, and feet of iron mixed with clay. Then he saw a stone cut out by no human hand, and it struck the statute, so that it was broken into pieces, and ground so fine that it became like chaff on a threshing floor. The wind came up and carried the chaff away, so that not a trace of them could be found. The stone that struck the statute became a great mountain, and filled the whole earth.

Daniel explained to Nebuchadnezzar that the statute represented the great kingdoms of the world, beginning with his own: Babylon was the head of gold. A series of inferior kingdoms would arise after Nebuchadnezzar's. And once all those kingdoms had had their time, Daniel 2:44-45 (ESV) — 44 And in the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a Kingdom that shall never be destroyed, nor shall the Kingdom be left to another people. It shall break in pieces all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, and it shall stand forever, 45 just as you saw that a stone was cut from a mountain by no human hand, and that it broke in pieces the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver, and the gold. A great God has made known to the king what shall be after this. The dream is certain, and its interpretation sure.”

When we pray for God's Kingdom to come, we are praying that the Father would destroy every earthly kingdom – not figuratively, but literally – and establish His Kingdom on earth. His Kingdom will never be destroyed; that is, it is eternal. And His Kingdom will never be left to another people; that is, it is our home forever.

Is God YOUR God? Then you ought to long for His Kingdom to be fully and completely established. You ought to long for the two rebellions against Him – the angelic rebellion of Satan and the human rebellion of the family of Adam – to be brought to an end.

THE WILL OF OUR FATHER: Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

God's will is absolute.

Psalm 33:10–11 (NLT) — The Lord frustrates the plans of the nations and thwarts all their schemes. But the Lord’s plans stand firm forever; his intentions can NEVER be shaken.

Proverbs 21:30 (NLT) — NO human wisdom or understanding or plan can stand against the Lord.

Isaiah 43:13 (NLT) 13 From eternity to eternity I am God. No one can snatch anyone out of my hand. No one can undo what I have done.

Isaiah 45:7 (ESV) — 7 I form light and create darkness; I make well-being and create calamity; I am the Lord, who does all these things.

Ephesians 1:11 (ESV) — 11 In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works ALL THINGS according to the counsel of his will.

God does what He wishes, with anybody, at any time. We know that God has decreed all things for His own eternal glory. Evil has never gotten the upper hand with Him. Wickedness has never caused Him a moment’s concern. Why is there sin and evil and wickedness? Because He has permitted it according to His own decree, which was not simply to CREATE a people for His name, but to REDEEM a people for His name, demonstrating His justice as He condemns the wicked, and His mercy as He saves whom He wills.

For now, and until His plan is fulfilled, there is opposition and conflict and evil in the universe, and especially on the earth.

We want everything to be simple and childlike. Cancer is bad. Healing is good. But because of my cancer the Lord has done marvelous things in my life and our family and in others as well. And when Hezekiah, the king of Israel, was healed of his deadly illness, it eventually resulted in the Babylonian captivity.

The problem is that we can’t understand whether something is good or bad, beneficial or harmful, solely on the basis of our experience. The Bible gives us full disclosure on this:

Hebrews 12:5-6, 11

“My child, don’t make light of the Lord’s discipline, and don’t give up when he corrects you. For the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes each one he accepts as his child.” ... No discipline is enjoyable while it is happening—it’s painful! But afterward there will be a peaceful harvest of right living for those who are trained in this way. (NLT)

Children howl when they get shots at the doctor, but vaccines save lives. When was the last time you heard of someone, much less knew someone, who had polio (which killed up to 30% of adults who contracted it), or smallpox (which killed 30% of those who contracted it), or German measles (which in some places has a 10% mortality rate)?

Praying that the will of God would be done on earth as it is done in heaven – that is, without opposition, without complaint, with joy and gladness – means praying as an adult, not for our comfort, but our good, and not for pleasant things, but for God's glory.

BRINGING IT HOME

Listen, we all fail in these prayers; we don't understand these truths very well, and certainly don't live according to them very well. I want you to understand two things this morning. God is OUR Holy Father

First, God is OUR Holy Father. He loves us with love that we can't begin to comprehend, and perhaps never will. We are so used to mixed feelings – I love you, but sometimes I don't like you; we get along great, except sometimes you're kind of a jerk – that we easily assume that our Father's love for us is the same. But God is not like us. His love doesn't ebb and flow like ours does. His love is not dependent upon His mood.

God showed His great love for us by sending Christ to die for while we were still sinners (Romans 5:8, NLT).

His holiness is as absolute as His love. His love for you will never change, never be altered. And His holiness is just as unchanging and unalterable. Just as children grow up and learn obedience, and Jesus Himself learned obedience through His sufferings, our Holy Father in heaven teaches us and corrects us and disciplines us for His eternal glory and our eternal good. Can I put it this way? He wants there to be more in you than a passing resemblance to His own natural Son.

All of this can make us feel uneasy at times; we don't want to be wrong, we don't want to be disciplined, we don't want to suffer, at all. Listen: God is love. He is certainly more than love, but He is never less than love. Everything that He does for His children is rooted in His glory and His love, and there is never a conflict between those two. God's Kingdom and Will should be OURS

And second, God's Kingdom and Will should be OUR Kingdom and Will. Every human being is born in a nation, with a government and culture and values that are unique to their people. We get that. Linda and I had the opportunity to be in China 8 years ago. Their way of doing things didn't always make sense to us, but it made sense to them. For instance, cars have only been widely owned in China for a couple of decades, and as result, they tend to drive like they walk. We saw one driver make a right turn from the far left lane. No big deal? This was an EIGHT lane road. If a Chinese family moved here they would have to learn a whole new way of doing things. And if they became naturalized citizens, we would – rightly – expect them to learn our language and values and culture. That's going to take some time, right?

Well, when the Father transfers us from the kingdom of darkness to the Kingdom of His beloved Son, we experience a lot of culture shock. We have to learn a whole new language, don't we, the language of love and submission to our God. We have to learn a new culture of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Of course, everyone around us has to learn the same lessons. There are only redeemed sinners in the church, and every single one of us has to learn to love our new home, the Kingdom of God. We do that by learning to trust the WILL of God, which He has revealed to us in Scripture. God the Father is loving and patient and gentle. Jesus the Savior is mediating for us all thing – we are literally being prayed into heaven by Him. And the Holy Spirit walks every step of the journey with us, teaching us, guiding us, strengthening us when we are weak, weakening us when we are proud, giving us hope when we are hopeless, and filling our hearts with love for our God.