

The Sermon On The Mount

The Beautiful Tune We Love So Well And Play So Poorly

*“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”
(Matthew 5:3 ESV)*

*“Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock.”
(Matthew 7:24–25 ESV)*

The Lord’s Prayer

June 26th, 2022

Matthew 6:7-15

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Introduction:

Good morning everyone! If you have your Bible with you I would love for you to open it now to Matthew 6:7-15. Last week we looked at this section as a whole, beginning with verse 1 and carrying on through to verse 18 and we dealt with the instruction of Jesus concerning religious hypocrisy. But inside that teaching we have one of the most precious passages in all the Bible – this little paragraph we know as “The Lord’s Prayer”; so we’re coming back to that today. We are going to drill down on what I imagine would be the most well known text in all the Bible. I doubt there is a more commonly memorized passage in either the Old or the New Testament. If you are my age or older than you were taught this passage – or at least the prayer at the heart of this passage – in public school. We recited this Prayer every morning after singing O Canada – and then if you went to Beavers, Cub Scouts or Girl Guides in the evening as I did – well, not Girl Guides obviously – but if you went to Beavers and Cub Scouts, then you recited it again in the evening. So, as I said, I doubt very much whether there is any other passage in the entire Bible as well known to Canadians as this one. So this is familiar ground – this is BELOVED ground and it is a great privilege for us to linger here to mine its depths and to enjoy its riches together. So let’s do that. Hear now the Word of the Lord, beginning at verse 7:

“And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words. ⁸ Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

⁹ Pray then like this: “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 this day our daily bread,

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

¹³ And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

¹⁴ For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, ¹⁵ but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.” (Matthew 6:7–15 ESV)

This is the Word of the Lord – thanks be to God!

Now, if you are like me, it is almost hard to read that without slipping into the liturgical version we learned as children. If you were hearing that today and wondering why it is slightly different than the version we know so well here in Canada, the answer is that we all learned the liturgical version of the prayer as preserved in the Anglican Book of Common Prayer - and that's fine, by the way; Jesus meant for us to use this as a teaching tool, and that's what the liturgical version is. But today, we are going to look at it as given by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount using the words as we find them here in the ESV translation. We'll walk through the 6 major petitions in just a moment, but before we do that, I want to ZOOM OUT in order to make a few preliminary observations and comments.

A Few Preliminary Observations:

The first thing I think it is important for us to see is this:

1. The Lord's Prayer is a model not a mantra

Look carefully at what Jesus says by way of introduction here. He says:

“Pray then like this:” (Matthew 6:9 ESV)

Notice that he is telling them HOW to pray, not WHAT to pray. And notice that this teaching is given IN CONTRAST to the meaningless babble and repetitive nonsense that was characteristic of the pagans. Look again at verse 7:

“And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words.” (Matthew 6:7 ESV)

So Jesus intends for this SIMPLE MODEL to save us from the temptation toward hypocrisy and paganism – hypocrisy is about performance and paganism is about manipulation – and to protect us from both of those things, he gives us the Lord’s Prayer. So obviously the goal is not for you to just rattle this off – the goal is for you to use this as a model and a guide.

Nobody seemed to understand this better than Martin Luther. Luther’s barber one time asked him for some advice on prayer and Luther wrote him a wonderful little letter. In it he advocated for using the Lord’s Prayer as a model and guide – but then he went on to say:

“You should also know that I do not want you to recite all words in your prayer. That would make it nothing but idle chatter and prattle, read word for word out of a book as were the rosaries by the laity and the prayers of the priests and monks. Rather do I want your heart to be stirred and guided concerning the thoughts which ought to be comprehended in the Lord’s Prayer. These thoughts may be expressed, if your heart is rightly warmed and inclined toward prayer, in many different ways and with more words or fewer.”¹

Are you seeing that? Luther wanted him to memorize the Lord’s Prayer – in fact he recommended that everyone recite the Lord’s Prayer at least 3 times a day, in the morning, evening and at table² – BUT that was just so that you could internalize the general pattern and priorities – the GOAL was for you to PRAY through the categories in your own words, with your heart rightly stirred and directed.

¹ Martin Luther as cited by Joel R. Beeke and Brian G. Najapfour in *Taking Hold Of God* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2011), 15.

² As per Martin Luther, *Commentary On The Sermon On The Mount* in Lexham Classics, translated by Charles A. Hay (Bellingham: Lexham Press, 2017), 169.

I can honestly tell you that NOTHING has been more transformative in my own prayer life than the discovery of this principle. When I first read this from Luther about 12 years ago I adopted this as my general practice – I began using the pattern and categories of the Lord’s Prayer to govern my own prayer life. So in the morning I begin my prayers: “Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed by thy name.” Then I pause and pray in my own words according to that general pattern: “Father, thank you for claiming me as a son! Father, I pray that you would be the centre, the focus and the grounding authority for my family, my church and for this country.”

Do you see?

The goal is not just to rattle off the prayer – the goal is to be stirred, guided and directed by the prayer.

That’s so important for us to understand! The Lord’s Prayer is a MODEL not a mantra.

The second thing we should be careful to take note of is that:

2. The Lord’s Prayer is directed to ‘Our Father in heaven’

Every word of that is important. First of all, Jesus is encouraging us to think CORPORATELY or COLLECTIVELY when we pray. We are to pray to OUR FATHER, not MY FATHER. D.A.

Carson says here:

“There is, no doubt, a place for praying as an individual to God; but the general pattern of our praying must be broader than that. Therefore, when I as one follower of Christ among many, address *our* Father, my concern is to embrace *our* daily bread, *our* sins, and *our* temptations – and not just *mine*.”³

Have you ever noticed that?

³ D.A. Carson, *The Sermon On The Mount: An Evangelical Exposition Of Matthew 5-7* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1978), 62.

We are so individualistic in this culture that I am guessing that our eyes just gloss over this important fact. We miss the impulse here in the Lord's Prayer to pray on behalf of the whole church. I want you to try that the next time you pray – I want you to widen out the circle of your concerns. Pray: “Lord, I need help paying for groceries – but I know that a number of people at our church do as well, so Lord, give US this day our daily bread.”

So that's the first thing I want you to notice there – the corporate mindset, but I want you to also see that we are praying to our FATHER – and not just our FATHER, but our FATHER IN HEAVEN, those words matter too.

I'm sure you've heard before that it was not common for the Jews of Jesus' day to address God in such familiar terms. They preferred to address God in exalted terms, as “God Almighty”, or “The Lord of Hosts”, or “God Most High” – and all of that is true, but Jesus here invites his disciples to enter into the same relationship of intimacy that he enjoys with God. He says: “God is my Father, and if you are my disciples, then he is your Father as well.”

Jesus said this sort of thing all the time. In John 16 he said to his disciples:

“the Father himself loves you, because you have loved me and have believed that I came from God.” (John 16:27 ESV)

Isn't that incredible? According to Jesus – if you LOVE JESUS – then God loves you and he invites you to address him as your Father. That's amazing! So there is INTIMACY there – but there is also reverence. He is our Father IN HEAVEN. He is still GOD MOST HIGH - so intimacy and reverence should go together in terms of our attitude and approach in prayer.

Alright lastly in terms of preliminary observations, I think it is important for us to notice that:

3. The Lord's Prayer suggests a certain hierarchy of concerns

You've probably noticed that of the 6 petitions in the Lord's Prayer, the first THREE are directed toward God's glory and the last THREE are directed toward our basic needs as human beings.

That is by no means accidental. John Calvin says here:

“As the law of God is divided into two tables, of which the former contains the duties of piety, and the latter the duties of charity, so in prayer Christ enjoins us to consider and seek the glory of God, and, at the same time, permits us to consult our own interests. Let us therefore know, that we shall be in a state of mind for praying in a right manner, if we not only are in earnest about ourselves and our own advantage, but assign the first place to the glory of God”⁴

That's great balance for us to aspire to in our prayers. Pray FIRST and FOREMOST for the glory of God – but then lets also embrace the permission we have to pray about our fundamental human needs. It is GOOD to do BOTH – but the order and the priority we assign to these things is important.

Alright – with those preliminary observations made let's dig in now to the basic structure and architecture of the Lord's Prayer. As we've mentioned a few times now, the Lord's Prayer is built around 6 main petitions.

The Six Main Petitions:

The first one of course is:

1. Hallowed be your name

Of all the petitions in the Lord's Prayer, this first one is probably the one we understand the least. “Hallowed” is not a word we used very often in English. It is a form of the word “holy” and it is used here in the passive imperative, meaning that we are praying that something would be done with respect to God – but what in the world could that mean? We're obviously not praying for

⁴ John Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries (Complete)*, trans. John King, Accordance electronic ed. (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1847), paragraph 68359.

God to become more holy or for his name to become more holy – so what exactly are we asking for here? Leon Morris is incredibly helpful on this, he says:

“This prayer is not so much a petition that God will do some great act that will show everyone who and what he is, as a prayer that he will bring people to a proper attitude toward him. It expresses an aspiration that he who is holy will be seen to be holy and treated throughout his creation as holy”.⁵

So when we pray “Our Father who art in heaven, HALLOWED by thy name...” we are asking for God to so work in the world that more and more people would make him the centre and foundation of their lives. We are saying that we want to see more and more people acknowledging God as their ultimate authority and their highest priority. We are asking for idols to be cast down and for God to take his seat on the throne of evil human heart. We are asking for all of Creation to return to its original orbit and posture before its Creator. So we’re praying:

“Father, be the centre today. Be the centre in my life and be the centre in every life. Remind people that they are creatures. Cast down every idol and every obstacle raised up against the knowledge and love of God. Heal our rebel hearts Lord, and bring us home.”

That’s what it means to pray: “Hallowed by thy name”.

Alright, let’s do the second one. What does it mean to pray:

2. Your kingdom come

The Kingdom of God of course refers to the DOMAIN of God – or the RULE of God and there are three ways in which the Bible tends to speak about that. First of all, there is a UNIVERSAL sense. God rules right now over all things, the Bible says:

⁵Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, Pillar New Testament Commentary. Accordance electronic ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 145.

“The earth is the LORD’S and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein” (Psalm 24:1 ESV)

The whole world is God’s Domain – the natural elements, the human elements - there is nothing outside his rule and authority.

That’s the universal sense.

And yet, there is also a sense in which the Kingdom of God GROWS in so far as it is recognized and embraced by more and more people. Jesus said:

“The kingdom of God is not coming in ways that can be observed,²¹ nor will they say, ‘Look, here it is!’ or ‘There!’ for behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you.” (Luke 17:20–21 ESV)

There Jesus is talking about the Kingdom COMING in terms of its growth within the hearts of human beings – so there is a PERSONAL sense in which we can talk about the Kingdom of God and then lastly, there is a CONSUMMATED sense as well. The Apostle Paul talks about this in 1 Corinthians 15:24-26; he says:

“Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power.²⁵ For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet.²⁶ The last enemy to be destroyed is death.” (1 Corinthians 15:24–26 ESV)

So that is the Kingdom in its final, consummated sense. When every enemy has been destroyed – when all sin and all causes of sin have been rooted out and cast into the eternal fire – THEN shall the righteous shine like the sun in the Kingdom of their Father, forever, thanks be to God!

So we’ve got three senses in which we can speak about the Kingdom: the universal, the personal and the consummated. The question then is: in what sense are we praying about the kingdom
HERE?

Well, obviously we aren't praying about the first sense. God is the Sovereign Creator over all things ALREADY – that reality can never increase or decrease – so we're not praying about that. That leaves the last two and most commentators believe that while both senses are present, the emphasis is on the second sense – the sense of God's REIGN expanding in human hearts. So John Calvin for example says here:

“The substance of this prayer is, that God would enlighten the world by the light of his Word, — would form the hearts of men, by the influences of his Spirit, to obey his justice, and would restore to order, by the gracious exercise of his power, all the disorder that exists in the world.”⁶

So when we pray “thy Kingdom come” we are praying for knees to bend, for eyes to open, for ears to be unstopped and for tongues to be loosened to praise and delight in the wisdom, the goodness and the power of Almighty God.

Lord make it so! Thy kingdom come! Amen!

The third petition is closely related to that. In the third petition Jesus tells us to pray:

3. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven

The Bible tends to talk about the WILL OF GOD in three different ways as well. There is the DECRETIVE will of God, the PRECEPTIVE will of God and the DISPOSITIONAL WILL of God. The DECRETIVE WILL of God refers to his Sovereign DECREES which cannot be resisted or changed – so we're probably not praying about that.

The PRECEPTIVE will of God has to do with what God commands in his revealed Word. For example, God commands us to honour our parents – it is his WILL that we do so – whether we do it or not.

⁶John Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries (Complete)*, trans. John King, Accordance electronic ed. (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1847), n.p.

And then the DISPOSITIONAL WILL of God refers to that which God finds pleasing. 2 Peter 3:9 for example says:

“The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, **not wishing** that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. (2 Peter 3:9 ESV)

It doesn't PLEASE God when people reject his offer of salvation and perish – it isn't his WILL in that sense.

It is in these last TWO SENSES that we are praying when we pray “thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven”. When we pray that we are asking for God to help us do what we SHOULD DO and to do that which would be PLEASING TO HIM. Here we are acknowledging that we need God's HELP to do God's WILL. As St. Augustine prayed famously:

"O Lord, command what you will and give what you command".

That's exactly what we are praying for in this third petition.

The fourth petition is of course:

4. Give us this day our daily bread

With this petition we transition from prayers about God's glory to prayers about our basic, fundamental needs as human beings. Martin Luther says here:

“Therefore we pray, in the first place, that he may give us our daily bread, that is, everything that is needful for the preservation of this life: food, a healthy body, good weather, house, home, wife, child, good government, peace, and that he may preserve us from all manner of calamity, sickness, pestilence, dear times, war, insurrection, etc.”⁷

⁷ Martin Luther, *Commentary On The Sermon On The Mount* in Lexham Classics, translated by Charles A. Hay (Bellingham: Lexham Press, 2017), 170.

So if you are using this prayer as a model this is where you would pray for the things that you need. NEED being the operative word. You are praying here for DAILY BREAD – which is a pretty obvious metaphor for the NECESSITIES OF LIFE. This is not an invitation to ask God for a new Porsche or a nice cottage by the lake. This is about FOOD, HEALTH, RAIN, MARRIAGE, CHILDREN, PEACE and SAFETY.

The things that we NEED to survive and thrive as human beings.

And remember – you are praying in a COMMUNAL SPIRIT here, so you are praying for your whole church family to have these things. You are saying: “Lord, give US the money to buy groceries and gas.” I hope you are doing that right now. This is where you pray for the health of your kids – and the health of my kids – and the health of all our kids. This is where you pray for the women in the church who are struggling to conceive. This is where you pray for the people in the church who have lost their jobs. This is when you pray for those folks who have been diagnosed with cancer.

That’s what it means to pray: “Give US this day OUR DAILY BREAD.”

The fifth petition is just as needful – I think we would say even MORE NEEDFUL. In the fifth petition we are taught to pray:

5. Forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors

One of the first things we learn as Bible readers is that SIN separates us from God and APART from God we are falling apart. We are like FISH out of WATER, plants ripped out of the soil, planets knocked out of their natural orbit – CHOOSE whatever metaphor you like, human beings apart from GOD are DISINTEGRATING, DIMINISHING and DYING.

So sin is a serious problem. We need to get rid of it so that we can be reconciled and returned to God. And that’s what Jesus came to do - the Apostle Paul in Colossians 2:13-14 says:

“And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, ¹⁴ by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross.” (Colossians 2:13–14 ESV)

So when you pray: “Forgive us our DEBTS” you are asking for God to TRANSFER your debts to the account of Jesus on the cross. He can pay for them THERE or you can pay for them in eternity.

That’s the deal.

BUT if he forgives your sins THEN he expects you to forgive others the sins they commit against you – that is literally WOVEN into the words of this petition:

“forgive us our debts, **as we** also have forgiven our debtors. (Matthew 6:12 ESV)

Don’t pray these words without understanding what they require of you. Remember, Jesus has just said that we are not to pray like the Gentiles who just heap up empty words. Don’t pray like that. If you are going to pray something you better make sure you understand it and you better make sure you mean it. And you can’t separate what God has joined together – so you pray for all of this or you pray for none of this – that’s what Jesus is saying here.

The 6th and final petition then is:

6. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil

This is a tricky one in English. In Greek the word for TESTING is the same as the word for TEMPTATION. Every temptation of course is a TEST but not every TEST is a temptation. There are other tests too, aren’t there? Sickness can be a test. Wealth can be a test. Loneliness can be a test. The sense here then seems to be that we are to ask God not to overwhelm us in terms of the

tests he ordains and to be ever mindful of our weaknesses and frailty. Charles Spurgeon says here:

“In the course of providence, the Lord tests our graces and the sincerity of our profession; and for this purpose he does ‘*lead us into temptation*’. We entreat him not to try us too severely.”⁸

I pray this all the time. “Lord, I know I need to grow and I know I need my faith to be tested, but I don’t ever want to do anything that would bring shame upon the name of Jesus, so be mindful of my limits, be mindful of my frailty and do not test me beyond what I can bear and with every temptation provide a way of escape and speed my feet toward it I ask, in Jesus’ amen.”

That’s a good prayer – for pastors and for everybody.

Well, they say that preaching is the fine art of reading the text, explaining the text and applying the text – and I imagine we’d all agree that the correct application for this text we’ve been reading and explaining for the last 40 minutes is pretty obvious. This is a passage about how to PRAY so how about we stand together and pray as the Lord taught us to do. We’ll recite the Lord’s Prayer and then we’ll use it as a model and a guide for our time of CORPORATE PRAYER. Let’s do that now. Let’s stand and pray together: *Our Father...*

⁸ C.H. Spurgeon, *Commentary On Matthew: The Gospel of the Kingdom* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2013), 60.