

Week 13 – The Lord’s Prayer Pt. 1 – Matthew 6:9-10

Scripture Reading: Luke 11:1-4

Introduction

This morning, we come to one of the most familiar, most loved, and most often recited passages of Scripture – what is commonly known as The Lord’s Prayer

The prayer found in Matthew 6:9-15 can rightly be called the greatest prayer in the Bible and it has been the subject of an unknowable number of scholarly studies and sermons throughout the years since it was first delivered by Jesus

Many of us likely memorized the prayer at an early age and most likely did so using the King James Version of the Bible

Many congregations recite it in unison from memory as a part of their weekly worship services and the language of the prayer is especially beautiful in the Old English of the King James Bible which was meant to be read aloud

And so we are forced to recognize the irony of this much-recited prayer being found alongside Jesus forbidding meaningless repetition in prayer

Because, sadly, our familiarity with the prayer has led to it being something people say far more often than something people pray as the words are often repeated without a true understanding of their meaning

Bill Stevens’ brother and sister-in-law live in Colorado Springs in the shadow of Pike’s Peak and when you stand in their front yard the mountain looks like you could quickly walk over and climb it although it’s about 9.5 miles to the west

They also live very close to the Garden of the Gods and Midwesterners like us are willing to travel many miles just to see what they see every day – it’s simply a gorgeous area of the country

And the first time I visited them I asked Mike if he ever stopped to consider just how beautiful his surroundings are – if he truly appreciated where he lived or if he had become accustomed to it

And he admitted that he had to regularly remind himself to appreciate the beauty or else it would be easy to take it for granted

I see passages like the Lord’s Prayer being something like that

We need to take the time to really look at them from time-to-time; not necessarily to learn something new – although that may well happen – but to see them once again for what they truly have to say to us

And it’s my hope that our look at the Lord’s Prayer this week and next week will help us to pray in such a way that our prayers will be more powerful and effective

We’re going to take two weeks to look at the prayer because it divides very neatly into two halves

It contains six petitions with the first three directed toward God’s glory and the second three being requests having to do with our well-being

Just like we see with the Ten Commandments where the first four commandments concern our relationship to God and the second six our relationship with each other, the pattern is God first and man second

This tells us what the primary focus of our prayers should be and, once again, we see it’s not about us and our needs and wants but God’s glory

And if that were the only thing we were to come out of this study understanding and implementing in our prayer life we would be miles ahead

But this is a very rich passage that we could spend a great deal of time exploring and I will be attempting to strike a balance during the two sermons of this Sermon on the Mount series

So, if you haven’t done so already, please join me in your Bible at Matthew 6 where we will start by looking at the first half of verse 9 and consider the way we should approach prayer

I. How to Pray

The first thing we need to understand is that Jesus here tells his followers **how** to pray and not necessarily **what** to pray
So it's less a prayer to be used for rote recitation than it is a pattern for our prayers

After all, Jesus begins this lesson by saying "Pray then *like this*" and not "Pray these specific words"

And the first thing Jesus addresses is how we should address our prayers saying [Matthew 6:9a]: *Pray then like this: "Our Father in heaven..."*

This form of address reveals two very important truths about what our attitude during prayer and a limitation on prayer

The first thing we see is that Jesus encourages intimacy with God that had up to this point been unheard of

A. With Intimacy

We see this in the address that Jesus teaches his hearers by which they can and should approach God and that title is "Father"

Now, personally addressing God as "Father" doesn't seem odd to those of us who go to church regularly

But it was an absolutely revolutionary idea in Jesus' day

It's not that the fatherhood of God was in question; without a doubt the Old Testament attests to it but not in the same sense that Jesus now presents

In fact, God is referred to as "Father" only fourteen times in the Old Testament and the title was always used in reference to the nation of Israel – never to individuals

While God had always been seen as supreme and rather removed from mankind due to his "otherness" in Jesus' day the people had so focused on those aspects of God that they refrained from even speaking his name – Yahweh

And they actually invented the title Jehovah to ensure that they would maintain a proper, deferential distance from God

But along came Jesus and he never addressed God in any way except to call him Father

And it is widely thought that Jesus would have used the Aramaic title *Abba*, which is a term of particular intimacy, for his Father

It's popular in evangelical circles to equate *Abba* with the English term "Daddy" but that is only somewhat correct as there really is no word-for-word equivalence in English for the Aramaic term

And we err when we think of *Abba* in the context of the name only an immature child would use because it really refers to a title of intimacy that would be used by a child of any age

My girls always called me "Dad" while they were growing up and now most often refer to me as "Pa" and other families have different traditions but there is usually a name that conveys intimacy and that, I believe, would correlate to *Abba*

Of course, Jesus is uniquely the Son of God and God is Father to Jesus in a unique sense that no one else shares so his address of God the Father would be expected to be unique as well

And as surprising as Jesus' use of Father when speaking of God would have been it was a part of his larger claim to be uniquely one with God

But the truly shocking thing about the passage before us is that Jesus is teaching his followers to address God in the same way – to come before God and to converse with him in the personal intimacy of a Father/child relationship

It's been said that this understanding of God's fatherhood is one of the hallmarks of Christianity and one of the major doctrines that separates Christianity from Judaism

And we have passages in the New Testament that tell us that our understanding of our relationship to God is a crucial indicator of our spiritual health but also a mark that determines the authenticity of our faith

Look with me at **Romans 8:15-16** –

For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, “Abba! Father!” The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God...

And **Galatians 4:6** –

And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!”

The instinct to approach God with intimacy and to speak to him as your loving Father is a sign that you have received God’s Spirit and are in fact a true child of God – imparting that impulse is one of the primary works of the Holy Spirit

And if you don’t think of God as your Father in the close, familial sense then it would be wise to discover why

Because, as we see in **John 1:12** – becoming a child of God is the result of receiving Jesus and believing in his name

That brings us to the limitation I spoke of earlier and that is that this teaching is only for believers

B. Prayer is for God’s Children

Without a doubt, there is a sense in which God is the Father of all mankind because he is the Creator – we see that in **Acts 17:29**

But that’s not the relationship that Jesus is speaking of here

Jesus is referring to the special relationship between God and one of his followers

John makes this distinction very clear in **1John 3:1** which says –

See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him.

There is a difference between the “children of God” who can call God *Abba* and the “world” and he states that the reason the world doesn’t know the children of God is because they don’t know him

And Jesus says we should address God as “our Father” because if we are his then he is ours and that’s an exclusive arrangement

It would be unseemly for an unbeliever to approach God with the intimacy that Jesus is describing here

That special relationship is reserved for those who are God’s children through faith in and obedience to his Son

The last aspect of the name of God that we need to address is one of balance in that, while we can and should approach God as his intimates we must also do so with reverence

C. With Reverence

When Jesus gave these instructions he was speaking to people who were already fully convinced of God’s transcendence, his supreme otherness

In fact, they had overbalanced to the point where they could not relate to God as God wanted them to as we have seen

But the problem with many Christians today is that they have allowed the pendulum to swing too far in the other direction and have sentimentalized God’s fatherhood to the point where they neglect his holiness

There is a sort of flippancy of over-the-top intimacy today that reveals a defective understanding of who God is

In fact, the imagery of “snuggling up to God” is preached in some Christian circles and there is a tendency to turn God into a kind of cosmic cuddle buddy – it’s rather unseemly

But that has proven to be our propensity as we are prone to swing from one extreme to the other in all sorts of areas

And the address that Jesus teaches is meant to serve as a corrective for that tendency as it delineates and balances the two aspects of our relationship with God

Addressing God as Jesus teaches is a privilege that can only be exercised by those who truly know him as “Our Father, in heaven”

In the first four words of the pattern prayer Jesus spells out a foundational awareness that we must have when approaching God in prayer

But once again we need to understand that Jesus wasn't laying out a formula or set of specific words that we are to use every time we pray

What he describes and actually prescribes is an awareness of who God is and the attitude we should have as we come into God's presence

And the same is true with the six petitions that Jesus turns to next – they describe the spirit and intention of our prayers not specifically what we should be praying in all cases

With that in mind, let's turn our attention to the first three petitions Jesus makes – what I call the priority petitions because they are foundational to all other petitions we might put before God

II. The Priority Petitions

And they rightly all have something to do with God himself putting the priority where it belongs

First, Jesus prays for the name of God

A. God's Name

And what he prays specifically is that God's name would be hallowed

It would be easy for us to miss the significance of this particular petition because names don't mean as much to us as they did back then

Most of the time we name our children to honor a relative or dear friend and we usually try to come up with a name that sounds pleasant while being careful to ensure that it won't lead to teasing on the playground later on

But we seldom really consider the meaning of the name – at least beyond the generally positive descriptions found in most baby name books available today

However, in the Bible we see that a name was chosen with care because names were thought to describe character so that a name wasn't just used to identify who someone was but what they were

And that is no more true than it is in God's case as his names all describe some aspect of his character and working in the world

So when we read in **Psalm 20:7** –

Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the Lord our God.

We know that what the psalmist is saying is that we trust who God is

And to hallow means “to set something apart as holy” – to sanctify or consecrate a thing

So what Jesus is saying first and foremost should be on our hearts and minds as we pray is that the name of God will be revered, respected, and esteemed

Just think of what that means

It means that the highest goal of our prayers should be that God would be honored

That removes us from the center of our prayer life and gives that central position to God alone

Theologians almost 600 years ago formulated the Westminster Shorter Catechism which tell us that the chief end of man, our very reason for being, is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever

That's what Jesus is saying must motivate his followers – that our desire must be God's glory before anything else

And that means we must commit to living lives that truly reverence God and cause him to be honored

We could spend many hours just uncovering all that this petition means – and the same is true of the second one concerning God's kingdom

B. God's Kingdom

The petition "Your kingdom come" flows smoothly and naturally from the first petition and actually serves to amplify it. We know that in the largest sense God is sovereign – he always has been and always will be – his "kingdom" has always existed.

So, obviously, this is a petition for some greater manifestation of God's kingdom in the future.

The Bible tells us that there will come a time when the kingdom will come for everyone and that there will be a time when God's kingdom is ultimately perfected.

And we know that will happen when Christ returns to judge the world and set up his eternal kingdom.

Certainly, we yearn for that day but "your kingdom come" isn't just aimed at that future day – it also has implications for the present and especially in the lives of believers.

Having this attitude means not only that I long for that future day when Christ sets up his eternal kingdom but that I want the kingdom to be present in my life right now.

That I am willing to give up control completely and submit to the reign of Christ in my life right now.

That I want God's rule to come to others through my life right now.

It's a big prayer that requires a big commitment.

And if we're perfectly honest, that is a tough attitude to have and a difficult prayer to make and be sincere about.

Most of us would be perfectly happy to have God's kingdom come at some future date after we've done all the things we really want to do.

And that's where the third petition comes in because it sort of sets the boundaries of the second – your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

C. God's Will

This petition leads me to the conclusion that the Lord's Prayer is undoubtedly one of the most abused passages in the Bible because it is uttered so often without the slightest bit of irony by people who have no intention of doing God's will.

When one stops to consider what this phrase means we see that Martin **Luther** was accurate when he called this a "fearful prayer."

This is a very serious petition so it behooves us to understand exactly what we are praying so that we can pray it with the proper amount of solemnity and sincerity.

I truly believe that most of us are willing to do God's will – as long as we agree with it.

But submitting our wills to God is one of the most difficult things for us to actually do.

And even though we likely desire for God's will to be done in some universal sense and we know that will ultimately be accomplished at the end of the age, we fail to concede that it must also be done here and now in a personal sense – that each individual must submit to God's will.

Jesus knows how much we struggle with this and so he teaches us in this prayer to ask God to do whatever is necessary in our lives to make his will prevail in us – that is, to make us obedient.

And Jesus sets the example for us by his life of obedience.

In **John 5:30** – Jesus proclaims "*I seek not my own will but the will of him who sent me*"

And a little further on in **John 6:38**, Jesus told the crowd following him "*For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me.*"

One of the accounts that I find most encouraging to me regarding following God's will is found in Matthew 26 and Mark 14 and very briefly in Luke 22 which tells us of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane.

Turn with me to Matthew 26 where we will begin by looking at verse 39 [**Matthew 26:39**] where we see Jesus pray –
“My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will.”

And then look down a few verses to verse 42 [**Matthew 26:42**] where Jesus prayed a second time saying –
“My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done.”

And then in verse 44 [**Matthew 26:44**] we see it recorded that Jesus went and prayed a third time *saying the same words again*

I see many things in this passage that comfort and encourage me but I want to simply look at a couple this morning
First, it's okay to try to determine and influence God's will as long as you do so with a heart of pre-submission once his will is made clear

Second, God's will is not always pleasant and it's not always safe – in fact it may hurt us a great deal to do it

But God's will is always *“good and acceptable and perfect”* as we read in **Romans 12:2**

And how we look at God's will tells us a great deal about how we truly think of God

If we think that God is uncaring or malevolent we will be unlikely to submit whereas when we view God as our loving, caring Father who always does what is best we will find ourselves more ready to submit to his will

And when we pray *“your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven”* we have to consider how God's will is done in heaven

We know all too well that it's possible to submit to someone else's will in anger with clenched teeth or in a state of resigned defeat

But in heaven, God's will is done gladly, immediately, and without reservation

So, when we pray this prayer we must understand that we are committing ourselves to two important responsibilities

First, we are committing to knowing God's will and that means we are committing to learning what God's will is though studying the Bible because that's where God's will is revealed

We must know not just facts about the Bible but must think through how we would apply those truths to various situations that we might face in our lives

We must always ask the questions, *“So what?”* and *“Now what?”* with every truth we find in Scripture as we seek to understand how God would have them apply to us in the here and now

Second, we are committing, in advance, to doing God's will to the extent that we know it

We must ask ourselves why we would expect God to reveal his will to us if we are only seeking to know it to weigh it against our own will to see if we will do it

As painful as it will likely be, allowing God to break our bondage to ourselves gives us the freedom to experience the life of the kingdom as God wants us to

Because kingdom living is so opposed to our natural selves that it requires replacing our will with God's will

Conclusion

We often hear the phrase “a mile wide and an inch deep” used to illustrate the lack of substance of an idea or a thing

But the Lord’s Prayer is just the opposite of that

This first half of the prayer contains just 22 words in English but we have barely started to plumb its depth this morning

Still, I hope that what we have seen will serve to give you a larger appreciation for the prayer

It’s beautiful and it’s poetic but it’s also packed with significance and it really is a fearful prayer that will irrevocably alter the life of the person who truly understands and applies it

It’s important that we remember that what Jesus gave to that audience on the mountainside and to us was not a rote prayer to be offered over and over again through the ages but a pattern of prayer

A way of thinking of prayer that should control and guide us as we pray

There are always going to be times when our conversation with God is going to be “in the moment” and sometimes brusque as when Peter cried out to the Lord for salvation as he was sinking beneath the waves

But our attitude should always be to approach God as a child approaches a loving Father all the while remembering that he is indeed Almighty God and our deepest and foremost desires should focus on God’s name, his kingdom, and his will

The intention of the petitions that we’ve looked at this morning should guide all of our prayers and regardless of whether we actually say the words “hallowed be your name”, “your kingdom come”, “your will be done” those desires should be the foundation of all our prayers

I urge you to consider how these truths that we have seen today should affect your prayer life and what changes you might need to make as you pray

Next week we will consider the second half of the prayer as we find it in verses 11-15

Let’s pray