

November 1, 2015

THIS IS HOW YOU SHOULD PRAY

Part One

Matthew 6:9-15

Prayer is both an outward act of communication and an inner act of communion. It is an external act of encounter and an inner state of penetration. What prayer becomes is an outward expression of an inward state of being. E. Stanley Jones has said that, "Prayer is not so much an act as an attitude." I would say that prayer is the poetry of the soul.

Prayer, as an attitude bears a threefold relationship: toward self, with God, and with the world. But more than anything else, prayer is what makes us, as human beings, the image and likeness of God.

Sometimes, the moment of prayer doesn't come until we are really desperate. Like the man who called the fire department and said, "Hurry! My house is on fire!" And the dispatcher asked, "Where are you?" "I'm in the kitchen, why?" "No, no," said the dispatcher, "How do we get there?" "Don't you still have those big red trucks?"

Jesus, just before teaching this prayer, has taught his listeners how not to pray. Now, He says, "This is how you should pray." It's not certain that His intentions were that this was meant to be more than a model of how to pray, or, the prayer His followers were always to pray, but, it is a universal Christian prayer. We call it *The Lord's Prayer*. It is also called the *Our Father*. When we look at the whole prayer, we see six petitions, or requests, desires. The first three concern God: God's nature – *Hallowed be Thy Name*; God's Kingdom – *Thy Kingdom come*; and, God's will – *Thy will be done*. The other four petitions are concerned with *our* needs: *Our daily bread*; *our forgiveness*, our defense against *temptation*, and our *deliverance*. Then a doxology is tacked on to the end, but it is not included in the passage of Scriptures.

OUR FATHER

First – We are to address God as *our Father*. Jesus is the Son. He has a very special relationship with God, and yet, He includes *us* in this relationship. If God is *our* Father, we are *all* His children, and everyone else is our brothers and sisters, one family. And best of all, in saying, *Our Father*, not only do we claim to belong to God, but to each other! And... to Jesus Christ, who, claims God as Father with us, therefore, He is our Brother!

Also, saying *our* is significant. It should not be taken too lightly. It is important to know who *we* are when we pray these words... because sometimes we might not consider ourselves to be part of "us." And sometimes, we might not include others as part of *us* as well. Now, however, the word *us* is repeated throughout the prayer. And I don't think Jesus ever intended for anyone to change the words to "My Father...give *me* this day *my* daily bread." We are not alone! We are *us*!

WHO ART IN HEAVEN

Which way is divine? Which way is eternity? Which way is the spiritual dimension? It is not *up* – in the sky, but beyond. Eternity is not-time and not-space. Heaven is *beyond*, but not "out there." It is *within*, but not just "inside" of us. A lot of people have only a vague understanding of what heaven

might be, and it's easy to be confused. In Luke 17:21, Christ Himself tells us it is in our midst! Heaven is beyond, but it is *here*. It is divine, but it is something good we can experience right now. It is glorious, so what we think of it with our mortal minds will always be described with human, earthly impressions.

HALLOWED BE THY NAME

Luke 10:17 – The Name of God is used in healing people. The 70 sent out by Christ, returned and told Jesus that even the demons were subject to them in Christ's name.

John 12:13 – The name is used in praise. On Palm Sunday, people sang hosannas saying, "*Blessed is He who comes in the Name of the Lord!*"

John 14:13 – It is used in prayer. "*Whatever you ask in my Name, I will do it.*"

Matthew 28:19 – It is used in Baptism. We are to Baptize *in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit*.

The first petition of the Lord's Prayer invokes the hope to keep God's name holy, sacred; give it glory, praise. If only this was always on everyone's mind, no other prayers would ever have to be spoken.

You can tell a lot about how someone feels about us by the way they use our name. Many of us can remember the radio dialogue between the voices of a man and a woman who only spoke each other's names. I believe their names were John and Marcia.

What we must learn is that, when we say the Name, everything that name might mean, and everything that name reminds us to do and be, is included in that simple utterance. That's why we pray to hallow God's Name. Even the way God's name is used and described in the Revelation of John evokes a sense of power. "*On His robe and on His thigh, He has a Name inscribed...*" The shield and sword of the Christian soldier are the Name of Christ. Ephesians 6! We bear His Name. And we need nothing more. That's why we can sing, "Take the Name of Jesus with You." And that's also why we must "All Hail the power of Jesus' Name!"

The Name of God is *Yahweh!* Literally: *I Am!*

When we pray, we present ourselves to the presence of God. We enter God's throne room, we enter into His grace. And so we pray, "Thy Kingdom come."

THY KINGDOM COME

In many respects, the first three petitions of Our Lord's Prayer seem to grow out of one another. God's Name (God's Nature) cannot be honored until the Kingdom comes; and God's Kingdom cannot come until His creation does His will. In Romans 14:7, it says, "*The Kingdom of God is not food and drink, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.*" And remember how, when Christ was before Pilate, and Pilate asked Him about His Kingdom, Jesus said, "*My kingship is not from the world... for this I was born, and for this I have come into the world: to bear witness to the truth.*" So the Kingdom is a kingdom of Truth!

THY WILL BE DONE

The will of God – Micah says, “What does the Lord require of you but to do justice and to love kindness and to walk humbly with your God?” (6:8) In the story of Zacchaeus, Jesus concludes that “*The Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.*” Consider also Isaiah 58:6-10 and 2 Peter 1:4. The more we know of the will of God, the more we can understand how to pray.

ON EARTH AS IT IS IN HEAVEN

Knowing God’s will, then, we need to begin to see that it must be done “*on earth.*” And not done in bits and pieces, but “*as it is in heaven.*” The same way heavenly beings do it... But how do we build that bridge? Too often the emphasis is on the will and *knowing* the will of God. But, God’s Kingdom doesn’t come, and God’s Name is never hallowed just because people *know* His will. His will must be *done*. Consider the conclusion to the Sermon on the Mount: “*Everyone who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man...*” (7:24) Doing God’s will gives us the building blocks for that bridge.

GIVE US THIS DAY

A man once told me that he didn’t need to pray because he never did anything wrong. When I asked him if he had ever prayed just to thank God for His good guidance and blessings, he said no, so I knew he didn’t really know much about prayer and I shared with him a little bit of what I understood about prayer, because I believe prayer is more than something we do just for ourselves. We can pray for the needs of others, which means not only that we have certain hopes for them, but that we want guidance as to how to fulfill those needs.

God’s Kingdom comes when basic needs can be fulfilled. It comes in the act, the doing, the fulfilling of those needs. Not just hoping for them to be fulfilled. We pray for our needs, *and*, for the needs of others. Remember: it says *us!* And one of our basic daily needs is for bread, food, nourishment, something to sustain us. In Isaiah 58:6-7, true religion is described, and true worship includes sharing bread. In the Great Judgment of Matthew’s 25th Chapter, those who are able to inherit the Kingdom of God had served Christ by “*doing unto the least of these...*” and responding to a real need: “*I was hungry, and you gave me food*”

Asking God to continually supply the daily need of just bread includes the hope for every part of a miraculous chain of events to be constantly active. This chain includes good soil, seeds, rain, good weather, farmers, mills, flour, other ingredients, ovens, bakers... what else? Without every link in that chain, there would be no food. So, when we ask God to give us our daily bread, we ask God to give us all these wonderful miracles!

THIS DAY

The Lord’s Prayer is petitioning not for an abundance of supplies, but only enough for “*this day.*” We can only live one day at a time. That’s a fact. There is no way for us to fulfill tomorrow’s needs today. Although, we *can* be prepared. Matthew 6:25-34 – “*Do not be anxious about tomorrow, tomorrow will be anxious for itself.*” “*Seek first God’s Kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well.*”

GIVE US BREAD

Us – Our. It does not say *my* daily bread; and *us* doesn't mean *my* country, or *my* race, or *my* class. It includes whoever can call God Father. To me that means every single human being, we are all God's children, even though some of us may have run away from home and become orphans. Give us.... We are asking God to provide, to share. We ask God to share, then then we do not!? "*Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life.*" (John 6:27) Christ is telling us that we need to have an appetite for spiritual things. "*Labor for the food which endures.*" Jesus is the Bread of Life! "*They who come to me shall not hunger, and they who believe in me shall never thirst.*" (John 6:35) Labor to receive Christ! Share Christ with others. And always realize that, "*You shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.*" (Matthew 4:4)