

Sermon Notes of Rev Dr Ivor J.W.Oakley (10-9-2000 Guisborough Evangelical Church)

Matthew 6 v 9-10

Additional Reading John 17 v 1-17

Introduction

The Lord's teaching about prayer in the Sermon on the Mount includes warnings about the dangers, and also positive teaching. Provides disciples with model prayer known as the Lord's Prayer or the disciples' prayer. This prayer occurs twice in the Gospels, once in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew, and secondly during instruction Jesus gives the disciples at their request in Luke's Gospel. Luke's version is shorter in the oldest manuscripts. But interestingly some manuscripts have phrase in Luke, not in any long version, after reference to kingdom in Luke 11:2 "May your Holy Spirit come and cleanse us". Probably Jesus taught the prayer often, hence the variations. Some people have speculated that in the early church, Matthew's version was used at Lord's Supper, and Luke's at baptism. Certainly only really ought to be said by disciples.

Churches are divided. Some never say it for fear of vain repetition, or because they say it is not for this age. Others say it during normal church services, when many unbelievers join in saying it. Some churches reserve its use for at the Lord's Table.

It is a wonderfully comprehensive prayer, a skeleton for all true prayers. There is nothing more exalting or elevating than to pray this prayer – as long as it is from the heart. Martin Luther and St Augustine both said the Lord's Prayer was the most wonderful thing in the Bible. Some Jewish scholars claim there is nothing special about this prayer because every clause can be found in Jewish sources. But why should Jesus not use earlier materials. A great artist does not manufacture paints but uses paints already existing to paint lovely picture.

The originality of Jesus is seen in the prayer's (1) brevity, (2) universality (all places and all times), and (3) order of material and clauses. Need to emphasise last point. Much to be learnt about prayer from the structure. Too often we rush in with a great long shopping list. All wrong and self-centred. True prayer begins with God, not us. God's name, his kingdom and his will in first place, then man's provision, pardon and protection. We are going to deal with God's side now, but before that look at this phrase "Our Father".

"Our Father in heaven"

Here is a great Christian word for God. Used in the Old Testament and by first century Jews. But Jesus took the word which was on the circumference and put it right in the centre. He put new depth and content into it. The title "Father" is used 150 times in the Gospels. He is the Almighty God, maker of heaven and earth, thrice holy God, consuming fire, purer eyes than to behold iniquity. Yet he is also our Father in heaven. Look at the best human father; he is a pale reflection of God's fatherhood. "In heaven" is not his postal address. It tells us he is in heaven and we are on earth; for he is different from us, separate from us. He has to be revered as well as loved.

In our very familiar age, we need to beware of cheap familiarity in talking to and addressing him. He is not “the man upstairs”, or “my best mate, mate”. He is our Father who is in heaven, Holy Father. To be approached with reverence and godly fear. But who is entitled to call him “father”? For the last 100-130 years it was assumed that anyone could say this prayer. It has been used indiscriminately in public gatherings. But the Bible does not teach universal fatherhood of God or universal brotherhood of men. There is no more deadly or fatal error. Completely undercuts the need for the new birth, and the need to become a new creature in Christ.

God is creator of all men, so in a vague sense he is “father”. But in special, intimate, spiritual sense, he is the Father only of some. **To all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God** (John 1:12). **Sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus** (Galatians 3:26). N.B. The context of the Lord’s teaching, when speaking of the fatherhood of God, he is always addressing his disciples. The Lord Jesus Christ was Son in unique and special sense, eternal son, and co-equal with the Father. Believers are children of God in derived sense, through faith in him.

Our Father in heaven is vitally interested and concerned about us, and everything to do with us. He loves us. Augustine said “He loves every one of us as though there was but one of us to love”. There is much we do not understand about our lives, but because we have a Father in heaven, all is bearable. As his children, we can be natural, open and direct before him. Nothing is too great or too small to bring before him. **He knows how we are formed; he remembers that we are dust** (Psalm 103:14). Because he is our father, we are brothers and sisters of all others who know him as father.

“Hallowed be your name”

Hallowed, sanctified, revered, adored, honoured be your name. God’s name means more than just G, O, D, the letters which form his name. His name has deeper meaning in the Bible, involving everything about him – character, nature and personality. His name should be revered and honoured and glorified in our lives. **Glorify the Lord with me; let us exalt his name together** (Psalm 34:3). **Ascribe to the Lord the glory due to his name** (Psalm 29:2). Whole purpose and tenor of the Lord’s life was **I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do** (John 17:4).

Shorter catechism asks “What is man’s chief end? Man’s chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever”. This is the purpose of our creation, the reason why we were placed on this earth. Our supreme end in life. We are not here for our personal enjoyment and possession and knowledge, but for God’s glory and his pleasure. We are not here on earth for our sake but for his. He is not there for us; we are there for him.

So the concern of our prayers, private and public, should be God’s glory. Why do we pray for the conversion of a loved one? To make the home happier? To bring us closer together? To create a united family? Why do we pray for the church to grow? Because it is nice to see? To have a bigger offering? So that people will notice us? To belong

to a big crowd? How all these possible reasons betray fundamental self-centredness. What a long time it takes God to turn his people inside out, to make us God-centred in our thinking, for God's will to be our purpose, and God's glory our aim. How much we are there in the centre of our lives: what I want, what will honour and please me, what will satisfy me and get me noticed, how to achieve my plans. As if God is there to help us get what we want.

God has brought us and put us into Christ in order that we will live God-centred lives. His glory should be our passion and aim. If it isn't, see how little progress in the things of God we have made so far. Our greatest desire should be that this wonderful God who is our Father and who has saved us from eternal death should be everywhere and always honoured, worshipped and magnified. These things will become true only when the passion we have for ourselves is transferred to him, and he becomes all in all to us.

*“In my life, Lord, be glorified...today.
In your church, Lord, be glorified...today.”*

“Your kingdom come”

“Kingdom” is a key word in the synoptic Gospels. It does not mean a piece of territory. It means God's saving sovereign reign. His rule brings salvation. Not utopia man brings in. Despite many offertory prayers, we cannot build God's kingdom. It requires God to break into history in salvation and judgement. Sending Christ and delivering Satan's captives. So after his miracles of healing and forgiving and exorcising, we read: **Then the kingdom of God has come upon you** (Matthew 12:28). Supremely, Christ's accomplishing our salvation by death and resurrection.

Kingdom – saving rule experienced in men's hearts when men submit and yield to Christ. When we pray that his kingdom will come, we pray that more and more will submit to Christ, that the Gospel of God's salvation will triumph all over the world. This is basically a missionary prayer.

Then also forward look to second coming. Evil finally brought to an end. History to be wound up. And in the blessings of eternity, all tears to be wiped away from his children's eyes.

*“Jesus shall reign where'er the sun
Doth his successive journeys run”*

Final end – new heavens and new earth – home of righteousness. Saying with John in Revelation **Amen, Come, Lord Jesus** (Revelation 22:20).

“Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven”

God's will is done perfectly in heaven. It is the business of the angels to do the will of God. When we get to heaven it will not be one long holiday. The redeemed are before the throne of God and serving night and day in his temple. Heaven is a place where God's will is done perfectly. Now we have to pray that the same may happen on earth – where everybody is busy doing their own will.

One of the effects of God's saving rule in the life is concern to do God's will. As he asserts Lordship over our lives, so we do his will more and more. "Your will be done – and done first of all by me". Adoniram Judson said to a missionary meeting "Let your object be not so much to 'do your duty' or even to 'save souls' – though these should have their place – but to please the Lord Jesus. Let this be your ruling motive in all that you do".

Also this petition means we leave God to order all our affairs. Ruled by the God of love and wisdom. Hence in all that befalls us, we can say "your will be done", not in tone of defeated resignation or bitter resentment, but in perfect confidence that he loves us. Gladly and willingly accept whatsoever that might be. The covenanter Richard Cameron had his head and hands cut off, put into a bag, and taken to Edinburgh prison where his father lay. His enemies taunted him, and asked him if he knew them. He took and kissed them, and said "I know them. They are my son's, my own dear son's. It is the Lord. Good is the will of the Lord who cannot wrong me or mine, but has made goodness and mercy to follow us all our days". **God's will is good, pleasing and perfect** (Romans 12:2). Therefore it is folly to resist, and wisdom to desire and do.

Conclusion

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven (Matthew 6:9-10). A pity we know this prayer so well. Pity that in our world millions have parroted this prayer with no thought or conviction about what they are saying. To pray this prayer from the heart would create a revolution in every worshipper. It would give us the right priorities in life, and deliver us from the pressure of self-centredness of our secular culture.

Our little name, which is so important to us, our little empire we love to control, our little will which is so important because we want our way. These things must all take back seat. Instead, our passion should be for God, his glory, kingdom and will. This is what the Christian life is all about, and nothing else.