

“Be the Prayer: The Lord’s Prayer - Part II”
Deuteronomy 6:4-9; Matthew 6:5-13 (Page 5)

Growing up, my best friend Abe would come over to my house about an hour before every Raider game so that we could go outside and play catch. Actually, to say that we were simply playing catch doesn’t do what we did justice. We would go outside in the street and run patterns as if we were in the game: catching passes in-between, over, and in front of parked cars... making sure to always keep our feet in bounds... the sidewalk being the out of bounds... all this while avoiding the oncoming rush... the rush being people in cars with the nerve to actually drive on our field.

But we didn’t stop at playing catch. Five minutes before game time we would go into the house, get a drink and position ourselves strategically in our living room. Then one of us would hold the ball during the first offensive or defensive series. When that series was over, we would give it to the other person. If at some point things started going bad, there were certain things that we would do to try to change what was happening in the game such as twirling the ball in the air. But most importantly, at no time during the game could the ball touch the ground. If it did we would have to perform a series of spinning tosses back and forth changing the direction of the spin until we had reached a set number of throws. Once again, it is important to realize that this was not a game, we were performing an important task as fans and we know that when we did a good job, the Raiders played better.

When I left for college in 1988, it became clear that my Raiders would never be the same again.

As we talked about two weeks ago, prayer seems to be something that a lot of people struggle with for various reasons. And in people’s frustrations, I have even heard prayer referred to as a silly superstition. We pray because in our ignorance, we think that it makes a difference.

Philip Yancey once said, “Jesus valued prayer enough to spend many hours at the task. If I had to answer the question “Why pray?” in one sentence, it would be, “Because Jesus did. Jesus bridged the chasm between God and human beings. While on earth he became vulnerable, as we are vulnerable; rejected as we are rejected; and tested as we are tested, and in every case his response was prayer.”

Two weeks ago, we began to talk about the Lord’s Prayer focusing on one word “Father” and so today we are going to look at the remaining 99% of the prayer, but first to review.

When Jesus prayed, he almost always referred to God as Father, and since Jesus is God's only begotten Son, it makes sense that this is what he would call God, but when he tells the disciples to pray saying, 'Our Father', he invites us to share in this relationship... and in the process he forever changes our understanding of who God is. No longer should we fear that God, in his anger, will send some natural disaster or disease meant to wipe out an entire section of humanity thereby punishing sinners and sending a message to others or that God will inflict pain on us in some other way such as taking a loved one. We are God's children, so God as father... God as a loving parent is one who wants to comfort us in our time of need, but also to simply hold us and hear our story because God desires the presence of his children and our relationship with him.

And so today we pick up where we left off with, "Our Father... who art in heaven."

What does it mean when we add the words, "Who art in heaven"? According to William Barclay, these words remind us of two things. First, they remind us of the holiness of God. "We must never use the word Father in regard to God cheaply, easily, and sentimentally. God is not an easy-going parent who tolerantly shuts His eyes to all sins and faults and mistakes. This God, whom we can call Father, is the God whom we must still approach with reverence and adoration, [with] awe and wonder. God is our Father in heaven. The Love is there, but the holiness is there too." And as holy, God always does what is right and what is good, and he desires that we do the same.

But these words also remind us that God is a God of power. Where we as humans have limited power to do what we want or feel needs to be done, God's power is without limit.

There is a story about a Roman Emperor who returned home after a great victory. The streets were flooded with people who came out to see as troops marched through the streets. At one point there was a platform where the empress and her family watched. As the emperor came near, his youngest son jumped off the platform and ran through the crowd toward the chariot. All of a sudden a legionnaire grabbed a hold of him and pulled him away. The man said, "You can't do that. Don't you know who that is in the chariot? That's the Emperor." The little boy laughed and said, "He may be your Emperor, but he's my father."

As Christians we know that the might, the majesty, and the power are the might, the majesty, and the power of the one whom Jesus Christ taught us to call Our Father... the big difference being that the might, the majesty, and the power of Our Father in heaven are without limit.

Moving along, you've probably all heard the story of the boy who when his Sunday School teacher asked the class, "What is God's name?" he replied, "Harold." When she asked what made him so sure, he said, "We say it every Sunday in church, 'Our Father who art in heaven, Harold, be thy name.'"

In Hebrew someone's name was more than just something that you called them. If you knew someone's name then it was believed that you knew their character or their nature because within their name was the very essence of who they were.

Hallowed be thy name... When something or someone is said to be hallowed it means that they are holy or sacred, but the deeper meaning of the Hebrew word, which is translated Hallowed, means to be separate, unique, or different from all others, and so Jesus tells us that God's character, God's nature, God's being is unlike all others, and when we pray, "Hallowed be thy name," we are saying that we realize that God deserves our respect and honor.

Putting all this together, 'Our Father, who art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name,' tells us that the one to whom we are praying is like no other. God is Holy, God is all powerful, God will always do what is right, and so God deserves our reverence, but God also loves us as a parent loves her child with a love that is unconditional, unwavering, and unlimited, and so when we prepare ourselves to come into God's presence, we find that God is already waiting with open arms for us.

Now that we know to whom we are praying, what is it that we ask of him?

Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Throughout the New Testament we hear the Kingdom spoken of often by Jesus, John the Baptist, the disciples, and Paul who speak of it or preach sermons trying to tell people what it is and why it is so important.

I want to begin by focusing on how William Barclay describes it. He says, "To be in the Kingdom is to obey the will of God. The Kingdom is not something which primarily has to do with nations and peoples and countries. It is something which has to do with each one of us. The Kingdom is in fact the most personal thing in the world. The Kingdom demands the submission of my will, my heart, my life."

And so with this as the backdrop when we speak of the Kingdom coming, Rob Bell says, "The Kingdom of God is wherever God's rule and reign are expanding... It's everything from the right words spoken at the right time to a glass of water brought to somebody who doesn't have water. The Kingdom of God is ANYWHERE things are the way that God intends them to be."

When we give ourselves over to God asking to be used by God, we are helping to bring the Kingdom of God to our world.

As you can see, this first half of the Lord's Prayer is focused on God, God's Glory, and God's hope for the world. The second half, which is where we now turn, is focused on our needs: our daily provisions, the pardon of our sins, and our protection.

When we say, "Give us this day our daily bread..." we are asking for that which is necessary for the maintenance of life. Thereby bringing our present needs before God.

When we say, "Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors..." we are bringing our past into the presence of God and asking for God's forgiving grace.

When we say, "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil..." we are putting our future into the hands of God asking for his help."

When we look at these three petitions together we find that we are offering our present, our past, and our future to God.

Taking this a step further Barclay says, "When we ask for bread to maintain our earthly lives, that request immediately directs our thoughts to God the Father, the Creator, and the Sustainer of life. When we ask for forgiveness, that request immediately directs our thoughts to God the Son, Jesus Christ our Savior and Redeemer. When we ask for help for future temptations, that request immediately directs our thoughts to God the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, the Strengtheners, the Illuminator, the Guide and Guardian of our way.

In the most amazing way this brief second part of the Lord's Prayer takes the present, the past, and the future, the whole of the life of a human, and presents them to God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, to God in all His Fullness. In the Lord's Prayer Jesus teaches us to bring the whole of life to the whole of God, and to bring the whole of God to the whole of life."

And so with William Barclay's help, we have a basic understanding of what Jesus was saying when he taught his disciples to pray. So where to do go from here?

One night as a woman passed by her daughter's bedroom, she heard her little girl repeating the alphabet in an oddly reverent fashion. "What on earth are you doing?" she asked. "I'm saying my prayers," explained the little girl. "But I can't think of the right words tonight, so I'm just saying all the letters. God will put them together in the right order for me."

When Jesus gives us the Lord's Prayer, he gives us the framework by which to use to guide, not only our own prayers, but also our lives.

When we take all that we have just talked about beginning with the first part of the prayer, "Our Father who art in heaven hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven," we realize as Scot McKnight points out in his book The Jesus Creed that "[the] earth is the Father's frontier; heaven is already his," and

so what God yearns for is the day when our earth... when our world will be as it is in heaven... but that day will only come when each of us learns to give ourselves completely over to God.

Too often when I come to God in prayer, I come with the hope that I can change God's mind or God's will to what I desire. We should never attempt to try to change God's will, but instead we need to come into God's presence with an open heart, mind, and soul ready to be changed by God.

Which leads to the second half of the prayer... give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors and lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.

Shortly after Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem, Jesus is being questioned by some Pharisees and teachers of the law who are trying to trap him. When they are unable to do so, one of the teachers of the law asks him, "Which is the greatest commandment?" Jesus replies, "The most important one is this, 'Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; ³⁰you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.' The second most important is this, 'Love your neighbor as yourself. There is no other commandment more important than these two.'"

The first commandment that Jesus speaks of is part of the Shema which is found in Deuteronomy 6, and as one of the most important prayers for the Jewish people, it would have been said at least twice daily, and I have been told that it is supposed to be the last words on a Jewish person's lips as he or she dies. Jesus, being Jewish, would have grown up saying these words at least twice a day as would have his disciples, the Pharisees, and the teachers of the law, but Jesus takes the Shema and he makes it his own by adding one line from Leviticus which focuses on our neighbor, "And love your neighbor as yourself."

When the teacher of the law hears Jesus' answer he tells Jesus that he is right and then he goes onto to say that these things are more important than making animal sacrifices to God. To which Jesus replies, "You are not far from the Kingdom of God." Meaning this man understands what God wants and expects of him... what God wants and expects of us all... God wants us to live the Jesus Creed as Scot McKnight calls it, "Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; ³⁰you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength. And love your neighbor as yourself." He knows it, now he must live it.

The Lord's Prayer, like the Jesus Creed, begins with God and God's glory, but then it turns our attention to our neighbor.

Nowhere in the Lord's Prayer does it say, "me" or "my", but the focus is on "we" and "our", and so when we hang our prayers on the framework of the Lord's Prayer, we begin to think about the needs of others, and in time, that we actually begin to yearn for their needs to be met.

Give **us** this day our daily bread and forgive **us** our debts as we forgive our debtors and lead **us** not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. When we refer back to William Barclay, we remember that in the Lord's Prayer Jesus teaches us to bring the whole of life to the whole of God, and to bring the whole of God to the whole of life. This is not just my life and it is not just your life... it is all of our lives that we bring before God in prayer... we are praying for all of humanity's needs to be met.

So what now? Do we simply sit back and trust that God will take care of us all... that God will take care of all our needs both physically and spiritually?

Frank Laubach says, "The Lord's Prayer is the most used and least understood. People think they are asking God for something. They are not—they are offering God something. The Lord's Prayer is not a prayer to God to do something we want done. It is more nearly God's prayer to us, to help Him do what He wants done... God wanted that entire prayer answered before we prayed it... the Lord's Prayer is not [about God's] intercession. It is [about our] enlistment."

As Philip Yancey puts it, "God does very little on earth without the likes of you and me. As partners in God's work on earth, we insist that God's will be done while at the same time committing ourselves to whatever that may require of us. 'Your Kingdom come, your will be done,' Jesus asks us to pray. These are not placid invocations but demands... Set the world aright! God has called out partners on earth to serve as heralds of a world on the way to healing and redemption... we have different roles to play, we and God. It is our role... to follow in Jesus' steps by doing the work of the kingdom."

Don't tell Abe, but I know that we had no affect on whether or not the Raiders won or lost. How could we? We were playing catch on a street while dodging cars, while the Raiders were playing the real game a thousand miles away on a football field. For us to really affect the game, we would have had to actually be in the game.

Prayer is not about telling God what we want and then sitting back and waiting for God to deliver. Prayer is about approaching our Father in heaven, who wants to listen to us, and sharing with him our hopes and our dreams, but also asking him to open hearts, minds, and souls that we might see the world through his eyes and that he would strengthen us that we might take part in bringing about the Kingdom of God on earth as it is in heaven.

And so this prayer which we say together each Sunday morning is first and foremost a chance for us to come into our Father's presence offering our entire being over to him asking that he might help us to live our lives according to his will, but it is also a time for us to look around at the needs of our neighbor focused not on what we want for them, but on what God's wants for them, and then at the amen, we rise up to our feet, and make it happen.

Let us pray... Our Heavenly Father, this morning we ask that you would guide and lead our lives that together we might help bring about the Kingdom. Amen.

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