

## THE LORD'S PRAYER - PRAISE

Two men were out walking one day. One guy challenged his buddy by saying, "If you're so religious, let me hear you quote the Lord's Prayer. I'll bet you \$10 you can't do it." The second guy responded, "Now I lay me down to sleep, I pray the Lord my soul to keep. And if I die before I wake, I pray the Lord my soul to take." The first guy pulled out his wallet, fished out a \$10 bill and muttered, "I didn't think you could do it!" It is a sad fact but many people, even Christians, fall short in prayer.

Years ago there was a program on British television about the state of religious experience among children. It told about a young boy whose parents suffered a very serious accident. The boy told the police, "I wanted to pray but didn't know any prayers."

Have you ever felt that way? You knew you needed to pray, but just weren't sure how. You didn't know the right words. You didn't know what was acceptable to God.

A father walked by his daughter's bedroom door which was cracked just enough so that he could see that she was kneeling beside her bed in prayer. Interested to find out what subjects a child would bring before God, he paused and listened. He was puzzled though to hear her reciting the alphabet: "A, B, C, D, E, F, G ..." She just kept repeating it. He didn't want to interrupt her, but soon curiosity got the best of him and he broke into her prayer. "Honey," he asked, "what are you doing?" "I'm praying, Daddy," she replied. "Well, why are you praying the alphabet?" he asked. She explained, "I started my prayers, but I wasn't sure what to pray. So I decided to just say all the letters of the alphabet and let God put them together however He thinks best."

It is with this in mind that, in the Luke account the disciples said to Jesus "Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples." Jesus responds by saying a simple prayer that was prayed and given as a model for us to follow.

Matt 6:9 This, then, is how you should pray: "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 today our daily bread. 12 Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. 13 And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. For yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen."

I'd rather be able to pray than to be a great preacher; Jesus Christ never taught his disciples how to preach, but only how to pray. -- D. L. Moody

Jesus is not saying here that he wanted his disciples to simply recite this prayer that he had prayed. The focus of prayer is not repetition. I grew up in a church that every Sunday we would sing the Lord's Prayer. The organist would hit that note and then it was like my mind would switch off and we would sing the words. That is not what Jesus was saying. Jesus gave us this prayer as a model or template to guide us in our own prayers. Jesus does say this is WHAT you should pray but HOW.

I thought the Lord's Prayer was a short prayer; but the longer I live the more I see of life, I believe there is no such thing as getting through it. If a man, in praying that prayer, were to be stopped by every word until he had thoroughly prayed it, it would take a lifetime. -- Henry Ward Beecher

What deep mysteries are contained in the Lord's Prayer. They are expressed in a few words, but they are rich in spiritual power so that nothing is left out; every petition and prayer we have to make is included. It is a compendium of heavenly doctrine. -- Saint Cyprian (200-258)

Over the next 3 weeks we are going to be looking at the Lord's Prayer. Today I want us to look at the first 2 verses. Within these few words we find the answers for life's three greatest questions. It answers for us the questions; who is God, who am I and what is the meaning or purpose of life:

## 1. WHO ARE WE? – Our Father

The first 2 words of the Lord's Prayer tell us our identity. Who are we? What were we created to be? We are the children of God. Jesus taught His disciples to address God as Father.

Isn't it amazing that of all the names and attributes for God that Jesus could have used, He chose the word Father. In the Bible Jesus refers to God as Father over 200 times. The first recorded words of Jesus show this relationship. "Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?" (Luke 2:49). The last words of Jesus on the cross also show this "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." Luke (23:46). The Lord's Prayer starts by reminding us of who we are. We are God's creation. We come to Him not as outcasts but as those who have been adopted into His kingdom. We come as children.

Isn't it great to know that we can come to God as "our father". It means that we have direct access into His presence. When I was growing up my dad worked for Imperial Oil. He was an executive with a big corner office and secretaries who took his calls. Most people had to go through the secretary, but I didn't. He had a private number that was a direct line. He always answered his phone "Sheane here". For us, that is where the executive ended and the father began.

A young boy happened upon an old man who was fishing in the mighty Mississippi River. Immediately the lad began to ply the aged fisherman with a myriad of questions as only young boys can do. With the patience of the ages, the old man answered each query. Suddenly their conversation was interrupted by the shrill whistle of the majestic River Queen paddling relentlessly down river. The sight of the ship gleaming and splashing spray in the sunlight caused the surprised spectators to stare in awe and appreciation. Then above the noise of the paddle wheel was heard a small boy's voice calling across the water; "Let me ride! Let me ride!" The old man turned to the boy and tried to calm him down explaining that the River Queen was too important a ship to stop and give rides to little boys. The young child cried all the more, "Let me ride!" Old eyes bulged in disbelief as that great ship pulled for shore and a gangplank was lowered. In a flash two young feet scampered up and onto the deck. The ship with its new cargo safely on board began to pull back into the main stream. The old man continued to stare after the ship. Then a shock of yellow hair appeared above the rail. It was quickly followed by two blue eyes, button nose, and cherub lips. "Mister, I knew this ship would stop for me. The captain is my father!"

When John F. Kennedy was President of the United States, Life magazine published photos of his children, John Jr. and Caroline, playing with their toys on the floor of the Oval Office. Those images captured the hearts of the American people because it bridged the gap between two thoughts: Kennedy was the President of the United States, but he was also a father. He held ultimate political power in the Free World, but playing at his feet were two little kids who called him Daddy. Your or my kids would have been allowed to do that. His kids were because he was their father. In the same way, God is both our Father and the Lord of glory. We can approach Him confidently in prayer because we are His dearly beloved children.

What comes first to God is not religion but relationship. There are many titles and attributes which we could call God, but he asks us to call him father.

Rom 8:15 For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father." 16 The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children

Have you ever watched kids being picked up by their fathers from school? Never once have I heard "Father, it is most gracious of thee to drive thy car to my place of education and provide me with domestic transportation. Please know of my deep gratitude for your benevolence. For thou art splendid in thy attentive care and diligent in thy dedication." Aren't you glad we don't have to put on an act and can just come to God the Father as children. A happy child cannot mis-hug a father, nor can the sincere heart mis-pray. The emphasis is relationship.

Notice that Jesus prayed "OUR Father" and not "MY Father." Jesus recognizes that while we all long for closeness with our God, we do not always like closeness to each other. Every time we pray "OUR Father" we are forced to recognize the fact that we cannot pray alone. We can't be related to our earthly father without also being related to our brother and sister. They are part of the package. We can't have a close relationship with our father if we hate the rest of the family. The family stands or falls as a unit.

## 2. WHO IS GOD? – in heaven, hallowed be your name

The first verse goes on to remind us that God is not only our Father, but he is also the Almighty Creator of Eternity. The phrase "in heaven" does more than merely locate God. It helps to define Him. The word hallowed means holy. It comes from the same root word in the Greek. To proclaim "hallowed be your name" is to recognize and declare the holiness or "otherness" of God. God's nature and power is completely different than anything we have ever known or could imagine.

Consider the earth. It weighs 6 sextillion tons (a six with 21 zeros). It is precisely tilted at 23 degrees – any more or less and our seasons would be lost and life would be impossible. It travels through space at a rate of 1000 miles per hour or 9 million miles per year and yet never gets nearer or farther to the sun. It is one of countless planets in the galaxy. Think about the sun. Every square yard of it is constantly emitting 130,000 horse power. Yet it is but one minor star in the billions of stars that make up our Milky Way Galaxy. Hold a nickel at arm's length towards the sky and you will block out 15 million stars from your view.

Is 55: 8 "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the LORD. 9 "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts."

God's nature and thoughts are not like our own. He lives far beyond the bounds of time and humanity so He has a completely different perspective on reality than we do. God's infinite power and wisdom remind us that He is sovereign over everything and that He is in control of everything in our lives. There is no problem that God cannot handle. There is no burden that He cannot bear. Add to this the fact that one of His attributes is that God is GOOD. He knows and wants what is best for us. God is on our side.

Job learned this the hard way. He had lost his children and possessions. The council of his wife was "curse God and die". For 37 chapters his friends Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophath each gave their words of advice but then, in Chapter 38, from the storm God speaks and everything falls into place. No matter the storm we know that God is greater and that God is good.

This is the goal of prayer. In prayer we seek to silence the voices of men and turn our attention to the Holy God who sits in heaven. When you are in the middle of a storm you do not set your course by the waves or by things on the waves but by the shore. In battle it is important to listen to someone who is above the field of conflict – one who sees the overall picture. The same is true in life. In prayer we turn our attention to the Rock of Ages who can never be shaken.

When an observatory is about to be built, the site selected is always on some high mountain. The aim is to find a place where there is a clear, unobstructed view of the heavens. Similarly, coming to God in prayer requires a clear vision from the highlands of holiness and separation, the pure sky of a consecrated life.

### 3. WHAT IS OUR PURPOSE? – your kingdom come, your will be done

Once we have a clear vision of who we are and who God is then we understand that life is all about seeking to line up with God's will and purposes in our lives. When we see life from God's perspective our focus will be on His kingdom. Out of information comes transformation.

2 Cor 3:18 And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.

Prayer is not just about talking but also listening. Before we turn our attention to our needs and concerns, it is always wise to turn our attention to God's will. What does God want? What is His agenda for our time together?

Richard Baxter, a great Puritan thinker and writer, well understood the real truth. He used to write these words whenever he was asked to sign one of his books: "Lord, what Thou wilt, where Thou wilt, and when Thou wilt." In the old Puritan manner of speaking he was saying, "Lord, whatever you want, wherever you want it, and whenever you want it, that's what I want."

When we pray "your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven" we are saying that we are willing and ready to agents of change in the world around us. The kingdom of God comes as God's will is done on earth by his children.

Wherever God rules over the human heart as King, there is the kingdom of God established. -- Paul W. Harrison

Astronaut James Erwin is one of but a few men to walk on the moon. As he stood upon the lunar landscape and looked up at the earth, he prayed for the first time in his life. He thought about the strife among nations, poverty, hunger, and rampant evil; and he thought to himself: "What is more important than man walking on the moon is that God should walk on earth." This is the desire we express when we pray, "Thy Kingdom come."

Why were you born? What is the purpose of your existence? It is receiving God's love and loving Him in return. It is in understanding that you are a child of God and then giving your life in seeking to do God's will and extend His kingdom.

"The moment you wake up each morning, all your wishes and hopes for the day rush at you like wild animals. And the first job each morning consists in shoving it all back; in listening to that other voice, taking that other point of view, letting that other, larger, stronger, quieter life come flowing in." -- C. S. Lewis

Do you recognize who you are in Christ? Can you see your life and situation from God's higher perspective? Is your prayer that God's will be done? What role do you play in God's kingdom coming to earth?