

THE LORD'S PRAYER

It's Historical Place and Dispensational Purpose

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TEXT: Matthew 6:9-13; Luke 11:1-4

No portion of the Bible is as much mis-used as the so-called Lord's Prayer. It is repeated in many services week after week and year after year. If we will take a look at the context in Matthew 6:6 we will see that the Lord introduced this prayer with the words – “When thou prayest enter into thy closet and when thou hast shut the door pray to thy Father which is in secret”. We note from this that the Lord never intended it to be a public prayer, but a very private prayer. Later on in our study we will say why it must be a private prayer.

There is an important principle of Biblical interpretation which I learned as a student at Moody Bible Institute. It is – “interpretation is one; application is many”. In all of our Bible reading and interpretation we should remember and practice this principle. Too often we substitute application for interpretation or else ignore interpretation entirely.

As Bible students we must “rightly divide this Word of Truth”. Whatever may be the present application of this prayer it has a special reference to the time when it was spoken, before there was any church. And also to the future, after the Church is gone. Thus the interpretation of the Lord's Prayer belongs to the past and to the future; and its application to the present dispensation can be made only with certain reservations, so as to bring it into harmony with our standing in grace. We must never read into the present dispensation what God has given in the past and for the future.

This is a model Kingdom Prayer. Many who refrain from using the words of this prayer in constant repetition argue that Jesus never meant it should be repeated. However, following the request of the disciples, “Lord, teach us to pray” it says “and He said unto them, when ye pray, say our Father.....”

We have in the Gospels a two-fold record of this prayer. At the commencement of His ministry, in the Sermon on the Mount, Christ taught His disciples this prayer. Then towards the end of His ministry, when He had been praying, His disciples asked that He teach them to pray and He gives this model prayer.

It is interesting to note a prophecy of the Messiah in Psalm 109:4 in which He says, “I am Prayer”. The words “give myself unto” are not in the original language. The life of our Lord on earth was a constant communion with God; and now in glory He is ever interceding for us. He Himself is both the fountain or source of prayer and also the foundation or basis of answer to prayer. Truly He could say “I am Prayer”.

After reading Paul's prayers in the Epistles, one realizes immediately that the ground of this prayer is entirely different from those of Paul. This prayer is based upon the legal system; Paul's upon the Dispensation of Grace.

This prayer occurs in the first of four divisions of our Lord's ministry in which the Kingdom was proclaimed as being then "at hand". All that was spoken and done in the first period has reference to that proclamation; and the interpretation is thus limited to the Kingdom. Precepts were given in the first period which were afterwards abrogated for other truth. Notice in the following Scriptures how the Lord made definite changes at the end of His ministry (compare Matt. 10:5-6 with Matt. 28:19 and Luke 9:3 with Luke 22:35-36). Note the words "but now" in the later passage and the words "not yet" in Hebrews 2:8 which reveal a great principle underlying many similar Scriptures.

If the Kingdom is in abeyance then we must put everything that belongs to it in abeyance. If we read into today what belongs to another Dispensation, then we place ourselves in God's program for Israel and not in the Church which is His Body of today. If this is true, and we believe it is, then God can never hear and answer the Lord's Prayer in this Dispensation.

This Lord's Prayer is in three distinct parts. It begins with an invocation, then several petitions, and concludes with a proclamation. May we then study the prayer in the light of this interpretation.

THE INVOCATION

"OUR FATHER WHICH ART IN HEAVEN, HALLOWED BE THY NAME."

We note here first of all the absence of the name of Jesus Christ. He is not mentioned either at the beginning or at the end of this prayer. And there isn't the slightest reference to Him in the petitions. The reason for this is explained by the Lord in John 16:23-24. "Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name." This tells us that the Lord's Prayer refers to a past day – "hitherto". For the Lord goes on to contrast with the past time "hitherto," another time then future, in which He speaks of "that day" and says "Ye shall ask the Father in my name".

This prayer is in the Father's name, the Father's will, the Father's Kingdom, the Father's forgiveness, and His gifts, guidance, deliverance, and glory.

All our prayers today are to be prayed to God in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, (Ephesians 5:20; Colossians 3:17).

"OUR FATHER WHICH ART IN HEAVEN."

This expression suggests distance, as if we were not in His presence. As members of the Church we are a heavenly people, already seated with Christ at the Father's throne. We should, therefore, pray as those already in His presence. This prayer does not harmonize with the revelation given to Paul for us, "hath quickened us together with Christ, and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus." (Ephesians 2:5-6). When we pray, our prayer should be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and pray as those who are seated face to face with Christ and God. We have such an exalted position and are so near to God that nearer we cannot come. "We have boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus" (Hebrews 10:19).

"So nigh – so very nigh to God,
I cannot nearer be;
For in the Person of His Son,
I am as near as He."

THE PETITIONS

1. "THY KINGDOM COME. THY WILL BE DONE ON EARTH AS IT IS IN HEAVEN."

This prayer is definitely connected with the KINGDOM OF HEAVEN upon earth and belongs to that period of our Lord's ministry which was occupied by the proclamation of the Kingdom (Matthew 4:17; 7:28).

It is therefore set in the context of the Sermon on the Mount, which sermon sets forth the righteous requirements of God for His Kingdom, showing that those laws will be far more spiritual and far reaching than those given at Mount Sinai.

It would seem utterly impossible for those who say that the Kingdom and the Church are one and the same, to pray this prayer intelligently. Suppose we substitute the word CHURCH for KINGDOM in this prayer and then pray, "Thy CHURCH come". We see at once how utterly nonsensical such a prayer becomes, for certainly the Church is already here and we don't have to pray for its coming.

If we then continue to put ourselves under the former conditions which no longer exist; if we bring in injunctions which have been abrogated; if we continue to pray in words which are no longer applicable to the changed circumstances, we necessarily produce untold confusion; we create immense difficulties for ourselves; we introduce contradictions into the Scripture; we set the Gospels in opposition to the Epistles; and we use one truth to upset another truth.

Jesus told these same disciples, to whom He gave the prayer, that they should preach "to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matthew 10:6). We are not preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom to the "lost sheep of the house of Israel" today; but the GOSPEL OF THE GRACE OF GOD to the whole world. If we are going to pray the prayer given for that period, do we not preach the Gospel to the Jew only which was given for that period?

The Gospel of the Kingdom was preached by John the Baptist, by Christ, and by Peter and will be preached again in the future (Matthew 24:14). Then the "GOSPEL OF THE GRACE OF GOD" shall have accomplished its purpose reconciling both Jew and Gentile "unto God in one body by the cross" (Ephesians 2:16).

When the Church which is His Body shall have been "received up in glory" then the Kingdom will again be proclaimed as at hand and the Gospel of the Kingdom will be preached according to Matthew 28:19-20. This proclamation will be for "a testimony to all nations and then shall the end come" (Matthew 24:14). In the Great Tribulation the elect Jewish earthly remnant and 144,000 sealed Israelites will find this prayer exactly suited to their needs.

In this present dispensation we are not to wait or pray for the King to return to His Kingdom on earth; but for the Lord to receive us up in glory (Colossians 3:4). We are not looking for Him as the Son of Abraham, or the Son of David, or the Son of Man; but as the Son of God, the Head of the Body which is His Church.

2. "GIVE US THIS DAY OUR DAILY BREAD."

All those sent forth to proclaim the Gospel of the Kingdom and to proclaim that it was "at hand" were miraculously supplied with all their needs and also had miraculous powers conferred on them (Matthew 10:6-15). In a coming day at the last great proclamation of the Kingdom those who will be sent forth as sheep among wolves will need similar miraculous gifts and powers.

In the days of “The Great Tribulation” the reign of the Beast or the Antichrist will be absolute in the earth. His kingdom will be on the earth and his will alone will be done (Matthew 10:17-22; 24:9-26; Revelation 13).

In the days of the tribulation no one will be able to buy or sell without the mark of the Beast or the number of his name (Revelation 13:7). Not a single loaf of bread will either be made or sold without the mark or brand of the beast and his approval for the sale.

In those days what will the servants of God do who have refused to take the mark of the Beast? They will be neither able to sell nor buy. It will be tribulation indeed! How necessary then that they go into their closets and in secret ask their Father in heaven to send them bread from heaven.

The word translated “daily” in our text is from the Greek word “epiousios”. It was coined by our Lord and occurs only here. It is made up of two Greek words “epi” meaning “upon” and “iousa” which means “to come”. Hence “epiousios” means “coming or descending upon” just as the manna descended from heaven (John 6:32-33). Therefore it denoted miraculous bread, as the manna was miraculous bread from heaven. It would include the idea of daily as the manna came down every morning from heaven. So again we say, what can the God-fearing Remnant in that hour of tribulation do but lift up their prayer to God, give us this day our heavenly miraculous bread (Revelation 12:14)?

As God fed the nation of Israel in the wilderness after they left Egypt (Exodus 16:14-22); and as He fed Elijah in the days of Ahab and Jezebel (1 Kings 17:1-7), so He will miraculously feed His people in the coming days of The Great Tribulation and this prayer will then be applicable.

3. “AND FORGIVE US OUR DEBTS AS WE FORGIVE OUR DEBTORS.”

In Luke 11:4 we read “Forgive us our sins; for we also forgive everyone that is indebted to us.” The ground of this petition is law pure and simple and certainly not of grace. This petition asks that God’s forgiveness of us be according to the measure of our forgiveness of others. Thus our forgiveness by God is conditioned upon our forgiveness of others. It says in Matthew 6:14-15 ...”For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you; but if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive yours.” This language can be true only for those whose standing is on legal ground; but not for those whose standing is on grace.

Our standing on the petition of forgiveness is seen in Ephesians 4:32. “And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you.” Here our forgiveness of others is based upon, or conditioned by the fact that God for Christ’s sake has already forgiven us.

We cannot be on these two grounds at the same time; for the one is the denial of the other. It cannot be works and grace. Paul says in Romans 11:6 “If by grace then it is no more works; otherwise grace is no more grace. But if of works, then it is no more grace; otherwise work is no more work.”

For one today to put himself deliberately under law is to deny his standing in grace; and for all such the warning is clearly given: “Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by law, ye are fallen from (your standing in) grace (Galatians 5:4).

To go back therefore and ask for that which God has already given us is to deny the efficacy of Christ’s death on the cross and His advocacy in heaven for us now.

So our forgiveness today is conditioned on the finished work of Christ, not upon ourselves and our forgiveness of others. If we are in Christ and then use this petition it is equivalent to admitting that our standing before God depends not on our relation to Christ, but our relation to our fellow men. If we then fail in our relation to men, it will affect our standing before God.

4. "AND LEAD US NOT INTO TEMPTATION."

The word translated "temptation" in our text is the Greek word "peirasmos" and has the general meaning "trying or proving" either of God by men or of men by God. This word is used of the plagues of Egypt and "The great temptations which thine eyes saw" (Deuteronomy 7:19; 29:3). In our New Testament this meaning is seen in Luke 8:13; Acts 20:19; Hebrews 2:18; 1 Peter 1:6. In Revelation 3:10 it is definitely used of The Great Tribulation which is coming upon the whole world. This is the tribulation which is prophesied in Jeremiah 30:7 and called: "THE DAY OF JACOB'S TROUBLE". (See also Daniel 12:1; Matthew 24:21). This prayer has therefore the idea: "Bring us not into tribulation".

5. "BUT DELIVER US FROM EVIL."

A better translation of this would be deliver us from "The Evil One". This is "The Wicked One" of 2 Thessalonians 2 and "The Beast" of Revelation 13, energized by Satan's power. This petition will have its place in the Great Tribulation when the Evil One reigns over the earth.

This petition will be made by those who say:

"Lord, thou hast heard the desire of the meek;
"Thou wilt establish their hearts,"
"Thou wilt cause thine ear to hear,"
"To judge the fatherless and oppressed,"
"That the man of the earth may be terrible no more."

Psalm 10:17-18

This prayer will be made in the time when the Lord alone shall be their refuge (Psalm 9:9). He will then have "prepared His throne for judgment" (Psalm 9:7). He will then be "known by the judgment which He executeth" (Psalm 9:16).

Such is the interpretation of the petitions of this prayer, in which almost every phase is thoroughly Jewish and relates to the coming Tribulation and Kingdom.

THE PROCLAMATION

"FOR THINE IS THE KINGDOM, AND THE POWER, AND THE GLORY, FOREVER.
AMEN."

How stupendous is this claim! In all the history of the world no potentate has been able to establish his title to a dominion so vast. From time immemorial conquerors have dreamed of it, but only to awaken to the consciousness of its unreality. Kingdom has been added to kingdom, nation to nation, province to province until a mighty empire has been built, but before long the mighty structure has suddenly fallen into ruins.

To God alone and to His Christ is the indisputable right to His claim. He alone possesses the attributes and perfections, the physical, moral, and spiritual powers to make Him ruler over all. He alone can provide for the needs of His manifold creatures and insure the peace, power, and prosperity of all His subjects.

He has the right to this kingdom, power, and glory:

1. AS CREATOR OF ALL.

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (Genesis 1:1).

“All things were made by Him and without Him was not anything made that was made” (John 1:3).

By the word of His power He caused all of the universe to come into being. He marshaled the stars into their unvarying courses. He determined the drift of winds and put the sea in its place. He sent forth the rain and the sunshine and the earth brought forth its vegetation. He created the fish and the fowl, the four-footed beasts and creeping things. His finale was man as the crown of it all. Thus He could say: “The silver and gold is mine and the cattle on a thousand hills” (Haggai 2:8; Psalms 50:10).

2. AS SUSTAINER OF ALL.

This ruler has not only power and wisdom for creation, but also the means to make ample provision for all. The bread we break, the cup we drink, the clothes we wear, the homes in which we live have all come from His omnipotent hand. Plenteous are the harvests from the ground, unexhaustless the wells of oil, mines of metal, and quarries of stone. All of these blessings have come from His gracious hand.

3. AS SAVIOUR OF ALL.

“Thou shalt call His name Jesus, for He shall save His people from their sins” (Matthew 1:21).

Here we have the manifestation of His greatest power and glory. He is truly the CREATOR and the SUSTAINER but thank God He is also the SAVIOUR. His salvation is for all people and it is being preached around the world for all to partake. This Saviour has come with His power and glory into the drunkard’s hovel as well as the rich man’s palace. It has penetrated the cells of the criminal and into all the sordid dens of vice and crime.

Such then is the interpretation of this Lord’s Prayer. If we then make application to us today it must be in harmony with our standing in grace and with the revelation given to the Apostle Paul in the Church Epistles.

How very un-appropriate it is for anyone to repeat this prayer today, giving no thought to its proper place in the past and for the future. Whoever offers this prayer as a prayer, should go into his closet, shut the door and pray to the Father in secret. Christ meant exactly what He said about going into the closet and shutting the door. He knew the absolute necessity for it. Their safety depends upon it. The Tribulation will be most terrible.
