

## The Lord's Prayer

Personal prayer – v's leading in public prayer

Recap on 2 weeks ago: 'how to pray' in terms of attitude: humility = key (Ps 131)

This week: what to pray

Acknowledge the challenge – Rom 8.26: In the face of

- The whole creation groaning
- We ourselves groaning

“in our weakness we do not know how to pray as we ought”

Our helps:

1. Jesus' example (Mike next week)
2. The Holy Spirit – 1 Cor 14.2, 13-19 – more for private than public, unless interpreted. Possibly Rom 8.26f.
3. The prayers in the Bible, esp. the psalms (Elisha last week)
4. Jesus' teaching, esp. the Lord's Prayer (today's focus).

BUT First, some great encouragements:

- Not how articulate or clever you are; don't have to use lots of words  
AND

You'll never impress God with your prayers, only endear yourself to him or repel him

Eccles 5.1-2:

Keep your mouth from being rash, and let not your throat be quick to bring forth speech before God. For God is in heaven and you are on earth; that is why your words should be few. Just as dreams come with much brooding, so does foolish utterance come with much speech.

- God knows what we need before we ask
- those who wait upon the LORD renew their strength (Isa 40.31)
- “And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.” (2 Cor 3.12-18)
- God is the living God, the perfect Father who gives only perfect things to his children

Personal prayer is about

- Relationship-building, communion, building love
- Transformation, becoming more and more like Jesus - the son/daughter made and called to be

Much more than bringing requests.

Cf. analogy of child-> adult, young love -> mature love:

move from demands to cultivating relationship and presence

Begin with practical:

- Draw aside – switch off other things
- Find peace, quiet, space/time
- Aids to prayer – Bible, prayer books, poems, pictures, prayer letters/diaries
- Humble self and focus on God
- The Lord’s prayer as a framework

### **The Lord’s Prayer: Matthew 6.9-13**

Intro remarks:

1. Distillation of all Jesus’ teaching in Sermon on Mount
2. Model of succinctness

Q. A model prayer to be prayed or a framework?

Probably primarily the former, but don’t dismiss the latter:

- Kenneth Bailey story of Lutherans in Riga in 1990s
- Ian McCormack

### ***Our Father***

Concept of God as Father NOT novel. First appearance in Bible = Exod 4.21-23:

**21** And the Lord said to Moses, “When you go back to Egypt, see that you perform before Pharaoh all the wonders that I have put in your power; but I will harden his heart, so that he will not let the people go. **22** Then you shall say to Pharaoh, ‘Thus says the Lord: Israel is my firstborn son. **23** I said to you, “Let my son go that he may worship me.”

BUT, Jesus isn’t just talking *about* God as Father. His *Abba*, which may legitimately be translated “our Father” or just “Father” is significant for three reasons:

1. *Abba* is an Aramaic, not a Hebrew word. Even though Aramaic = the language Jews of Jesus' day spoke in daily life, prayer and worship and the scriptures were all voiced in Hebrew, i.e Hebrew remained the 'religious language', as is Arabic for Muslims today. Jesus broke with that custom in teaching the disciples to pray in Aramaic. He was saying "there is no 'language of God'", no sacred language. You pray in your own (heart) language. NB. The importance of praying in Te reo Maori.
2. He didn't use the word to talk *about* God, i.e. analogously - as the OT often does, but as an address *to* God. It is this intimate, personal usage which is significant, and would have been awkward for Jews of Jesus' day.  
NB. Muslims reject any reference to God as father, seeing it as too dangerous as too likely to reduce God to human concepts of father. They address God by using adjectives: God the merciful, God the just, God the all powerful...
3. It spoke of the intimacy of the relationship Jesus had with his Father (see his use of *Abba* in prayer in Mark 14.36) and that Paul demonstrates/illustrates when he uses the word in Rom 8.15 and Gal 4.6.

It is the heartfelt cry of the child of God to his/her heavenly Father.

"This great Aramaic word affirms both respect in addressing a superior and a profound personal relationship between the one who uses it and the one addressed." (KB).

Keener: In 1<sup>st</sup> C Jewish Palestine, children were powerless social dependents and fathers were viewed as strong providers and examples on whom their children could depend... Jesus summons his disciples to pray not like pagans (6.7) but with dependence on God as their father who watches over them (Deut 8.3-5)... effective prayer is not a complex ritual but a simple cry of faith predicated on an assured relationship. The earnest brevity and simplicity of this prayer contradict human pride (6.7); this is the prayer of those who know they must depend on God for their daily provision, who need their debts to be forgiven, who need his protection from all around them. This is not the prayer of the complacent and the self-satisfied, but of the humble, the lowly, the broken, the desperate. This is the prayer of those who have nowhere to turn but to God – the 'meek' who will 'inherit the earth' (5.5).

## ***In Heaven***

A radical pairing. "Our Father" is near and yet far away – in the heavens. Recall Eccles 5.1: Keep your mouth from being rash, and let not your throat be quick to bring forth speech before God. For God is in heaven and you are on earth; that is why your words should be few."

See too Ps 115.16 "The heavens are the LORD's heavens, but the earth he has given to the children of man."

Reminder of need for respect and awe to temper intimacy.

### **Six requests:**

The first 3 emphasise the seeking of God's kingdom first – 6.33.

#### **1. *Hallowed be your name***

As Ezek 36.16-23 makes clear, God's name is profaned when his people rebel against him and dishonour/cause dishonour to his name. See too Rom 2.24, "For as it is written, 'The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you.'"

But it is also clear, there and elsewhere, that only God can make his name holy, man cannot. He is holy, and he alone can make us holy (Isa 6 – Isaiah is cleansed by God; Jesus' work).

Make holy your name => means demonstrate again the holiness of your name: exalt/lift up your name – by showing your righteousness, justice, mighty power etc. and doing mighty acts to save.

Implicit in this petition is that, for God's name to be made holy, his people must be made holy too. Jesus' atoning work on the cross does that, making them and God's name holy.

Implicit too is the eschatological hope expressed elsewhere, such as in Phil 2.9-11.

This is a petition for Christ's return in glory as judge and ruler.

## **2. *Thy kingdom come***

History has direction and meaning. It is heading to a climax. We cannot know the timing or details, but God does. History is in his hands.

- God's kingdom will one day be consummated.

But in two other senses it is already here:

- begun, in the hearts and minds and lives of believers, and
- in God's body present on earth (the church).

Keener: This is a prayer for the desperate, who recognise that this world is not as it should be and that only God can set things straight

## **3. *Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven***

This goes with the former: God's will and God's kingdom = inseparable.

Again though, there an implicit responsibility on us: we need to obey God's commands if his will is to be done on earth.

Bailey: "In heaven, the will of God flows like a great river that has no barriers to halt its progress. On earth, however, sin interrupts the flow of God's desire for good for all people. Such a desire is his perfect will. We pray, asking that here on earth we might enjoy the perfect will of God as it is enjoyed in heaven."

Too often we spiritualise God's kingdom, quoting Jesus' words in Jn 18.36 "My kingdom is not *of* this world" better translated "My kingdom is not *from* this world" – but Jesus was not rejecting this world as God created it, only as man had corrupted it. This world remains the arena for God's kingdom to be consummated in. It is our prayer, and responsibility, to ensure that it is ruled in accordance with God's kingly will *now*, incl. the stewardship of resources.

The goal of this life I not simply to prepare people/souls for heaven, but the whole earth for heaven.

#### **4. Give us this day our daily bread**

Enough bread for today/tomorrow (cf. manna in wilderness, which was for the next day), but not more than needed (i.e. to store up).

KB notes:

1. that the petition is for bread, not cake, i.e. for that which sustains life, not that which makes us fat!
2. that Jesus directs to pray “give us... our daily bread”, not “me... my daily bread”. It is our Father and our bread. We ask not just for ourselves, but for all.

He records the story Mother Theresa tells in her book *The Joy of Living*, making the point

3. that bread is a gift from God, like everything we have in this life.

#### **5. Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors**

Cf. parable in Matt 18.23-34.

Debts = unfulfilled obligations.

Jesus is talking about sins of omission and commission – unfulfilled responsibilities and wrongdoing.

As with the petition for daily bread, this is about community – me and them = our, not just me/my.

Forgiveness and reconciliation, the two go together – as in the parable – are the only way forward to peace. NB. Lincoln’s 2<sup>nd</sup> inaugural speech when civil war all but over: “With malice towards none; with charity for all;... let us ... do all which may achieve and cherish a just, and lasting peace” – that meant the end of slavery too, not just forgiveness for it!

KB (pp.127-8) quotes Lorens van der Post’s *Venture to the Interior* in which he observes that those who have suffered greatly find it easier to forgive than those who observe suffering/injustice. See too *Unbroken* by Laura Hillenbrand. Story of Louie Zamperini

NB. Forgiveness must be offered even when not requested, as Jesus demonstrated on the cross, and the parable of the unforgiving servant shows.

**6. Do not bring us to the time of trial but deliver us from the evil one**

Cf. Luke 22.31-32 “Satan wants to sift you like wheat, but I have prayed for you that your faith might not fail.”

See too 1 Cor 10.13; Matt 26.39, 41 and Rev 3.10.

Some ancient texts end with an outpouring of praise: “For thine is the kingdom...” – an abridgement of 1 Chr 29.11-13.

## **Conclusion**

1. Private Prayer not difficult: a conversation with loving heavenly Father
2. Make time and space: give yourself wholly and humbly
3. Use Lord’s prayer as framework, supplementing with own words and resources

### Suggested Discussion Questions

1. What do you find most difficult/challenging about private prayer?
2. What have you learnt from your experience or from others which has helped you?
3. Have you ever used the Lord’s Prayer as a framework? If not, would you consider trying it?
4. Have you ever gone on a retreat or taken time out to go away on your own to pray and simply wait on the Lord? If so, what was it like, and how was it helpful? If not, have you ever considered doing so?
5. How would you describe your relationship with God? Do you feel close to him when you pray? Do you hear him speak?
6. What is your experience of the Holy Spirit’s work, especially in helping you to pray?

You might like to pray for one another in relation to answers to any of the above. Or you could try praying using the Lord’s Prayer as a framework, either praying out loud together, or silently on your own, and then sharing about the experience.