

A PENULTIMATE ON PRAYER

Luke 11:1-13

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Babcock Presbyterian Church

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This is almost the last in a series of sermons on prayer and today we'll look at the opening affirmations found in the Lord's Prayer and next week its foundation petitions and closing hymn ascribing all glory to God.

You remember from last Sunday, Jesus taught the Lord's Prayer to his disciples in response to the request, "Lord, teach us to pray!" Obviously at least one disciple was impressed by Jesus' prayer life and wanted what he had. So Jesus said, "Pray then in this way..."

The Lord's Prayer has been memorized by countless believers over the centuries, but it's important to point out the Lord's Prayer is really meant to be a template or prototype for all our prayers. Remember, prayer at its best is essentially spontaneous and heartfelt conversation with God. So the Lord's Prayer isn't like a poem you'd memorize and recite from time to time, instead it's a general outline for effective prayer complete with requests for our daily needs, the desire to be within God's will and mindful of our basic responsibilities as God's children and Christ's disciples. What's more, the Lord's Prayer invites us to accept God's provision, spiritual and material, as well as God's protection from danger and evil. So even though the Lord's Prayer is short and to the point, its content is expansive yet comprehensive in other words, Jesus' prayer covers everything we should be praying for in as few words as possible.

Briefly, the Lord's Prayer can be divided into distinct sections addressing:

- 1) God's Holiness
- 2) The link between God's Kingdom and God's will
- 3) Our requests for daily bread, forgiveness, empowerment to resist temptation and protection from evil
- 4) Our acknowledgment of God's never-ending Kingdom, power and glory.

Last week we began our study of this prayer by focusing on its opening salutation, "Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name..." In ten simple but profound words Jesus encourages us to address the omnipotent King of the Universe simply as "Our Father" but simultaneously reminds us despite God's invitation into intimacy we are cautioned against becoming overly familiar with God.

Does that sound like a contradiction? It really isn't. When I was entering my teen years I remember my father said something that impresses me to this day. "I'm your Father, not your pal. I've seen too many fathers try too hard to be their sons' best friend,

just another one of the boys, and too often these fathers aren't doing their sons any favors."

Even then I knew what my father was saying and it applies to our relationship with God. Yes, our Father loves us, but our Father is still God. He's not our equal, in fact he's far beyond us, the ultimate authority over everyone and everything we are expected to trust and obey.

After clearly identifying God as loving and nurturing yet at the same time absolute and holy, the opening of Jesus' prayer acknowledges the synchronization between God's will and the coming of his kingdom on earth.

"Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven."

The usual misconception is that God's Kingdom and the place called Heaven are one in the same. Not so. Heaven is part of God's Kingdom but not all of it. Cosmically speaking, God's Kingdom is the Universe and beyond. Everything and everyone in all the creation lives and has its being under God's authority and grace.

But for our purposes, let's just view God's Kingdom in the context of the world we live in. I've said before many times, the "world" from the biblical perspective, is human society organizing itself outside of and often in opposition to God's will. Any economic or political system, societal behavior not patterned after Jesus' Sermon on the Mount is not of the Kingdom.

On the other hand the Kingdom of God is patterned after Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, or maybe I should say, the Sermon on the Mount is patterned after God's Kingdom. As you read the Sermon on the Mount you quickly realize Jesus is turning the world on its head. In Jesus' own words, "the last shall be first and the first shall be last." Greatness is determined by not how many serve you, but how many you serve. Wealth is measured not by how much you've gathered up but by how much you give away. Social status isn't achieved by how far up the ladder of success you can climb but by how far down the ladder you're willing to go, because you let others get ahead of you. You get the point, God's Kingdom is the polar opposite of goals and values of this world.

Then why would anyone pray, "Thy kingdom come," if it means accepting values and goals that are contrary to what has been engrained in our thinking since childhood?

Probably because in our saner moments we know it isn't "the one who dies with the most toys wins." Power, wealth and status are all temporary blips that can't stand the test of eternity. Besides that personal experience shows power, wealth and status doesn't necessarily bring inner peace and outward happiness. Just glance at the headlines of the tabloids on the checkout line of the super market and you know this is true.

On the other hand, those who seek first the Kingdom of God and all its righteousness are the real winners, maybe not in the short term but certainly in the long

term. They've learned the secret for the full abundant life: it isn't the pursuit of happiness that satisfies the soul, it's the pursuit of joy.

Happiness and Joy aren't necessarily synonyms. You're happy when everything's going your way as you enjoy good health, the good life and good relationships with family and friends. Who wouldn't be happy?

Joy, however, isn't dependant on outward circumstances tilting in your favor. You can still experience joy even if your health fails, you file for bankruptcy and your friends desert you. Even when you're down and out and lost everything there's still one thing no one can take from you unless you give it up, the deepening assurance God is with you, giving whatever you need to keep faith and integrity. Joy comes from knowing, as Rick Warren put it, when God is all you got, God is all you need.

So the Kingdom of God isn't just a place, it's really a state of being, by your own free will, under the authority and grace of God. Jesus began his ministry, not preaching about himself, but the coming of God's Kingdom. He said, "...the Kingdom of God is at hand...the Kingdom of God is near...the Kingdom of God is in the midst of you...the Kingdom of God is within you."

Notice Jesus didn't claim "God's Kingdom is already completely here!" Instead Jesus warns us to keep awake and alert...don't be caught off guard...be prepared and ready for when the Kingdom comes "like a thief in the night."

So when and how does the Kingdom come? We're promised the world system we've devised will finally implode when Christ returns in glory to restore his Kingdom and judge the world. But until that terrible and glorious day, God's Kingdom will continue to reveal itself at certain times. We get a clue for when the Kingdom suddenly breaks through and manifest itself in that phrase in the Lord's Prayer linking God's Kingdom to God's will, "Thy Kingdom come thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven."

So, whenever God's will is done on earth the Kingdom suddenly appears. Whenever someone heals the sick, touches the untouchables, raises the dead or kicks out demons, the Kingdom comes and reveals a foretaste of what it will be like when, in God's own time, the Kingdom is permanently restored. Until then, it will only be heaven on earth when someone loves and serves the least of these, Christ's brothers and sisters.

One of the creeds or confessions of our Reformed Christian Faith is found in the Westminster Shorter Catechism, written in the mid 1600's. Listen to what it says about the prayer, "Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven."

"...we pray that Satan's Kingdom may be destroyed and that the Kingdom of grace may be advanced, ourselves and others brought into it and kept in it and the Kingdom of glory be hastened."

Jesus wants us to pray for the hastening of God's Kingdom even when it seems slow in coming. "Come Lord Jesus, quickly come" is the last verse in the New Testament. Maybe that should tell us something. We need to pray for God's Kingdom to come and God's will to be done as much as we pray for our daily bread.

Next Sunday the rest of the petitions in the Lord's Prayer will be the subject of the sermon. In the meantime, keep on praying, especially the Lord's Prayer, meditating on each word and phrase so you will learn better how to pray.