



Lord's Prayer- Part 1

As you know I have retired from IT and working with new computers. Although as I use my computer constantly to write sermon & letters and do many other tasks I still find that from time to time I am fighting it! But here is what I should have read out as a prayer before God. It is if you like the computer person's Psalm 23:

The Lord is my programmer, I shall not crash. He installed His software on the hard disk of my heart; all of His commands are user-friendly. His directory guides me to the right choices for His name's sake. Even though I scroll through the problems of life, I will fear no bugs, for He is my backup. His password protects me. He prepares a menu before me in the presence of my enemies. His help is only a keystroke away. Surely goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life, and my file will be merged with His and saved forever. Amen.

Although this is not primarily a prayer it sounds very like one at time. When thinking about prayer it interesting virtually everybody prays at one time or other even atheists. In the introduction to a book on the Lord's Prayer the author writes:

Have you noticed that practically everyone prays at one time or another? Some complain about there being no prayer in schools. But there's plenty of prayer in schools right before every exam! We all pray at one time or another. Even atheists pray in foxholes, and also in doctor's offices when they hear the dreaded cancer word. "What can it hurt?" they say to themselves with a lump in their throats. Prayer is something you do when you're in trouble, and sooner or later we all get into trouble. Just about the time you think things are going along beautifully, something happens to cure that feeling. Before you know it you're back on your knees and back in church looking for some help, because you finally realize you've exhausted all your human resources and there's nowhere else to turn. Some people offer prayers the way sailors use pumps-only when the ship leaks. But the point is, whether out of desperation or frustration, sooner or later we all find ourselves talking to God.¹

As Jean has invited me and Sue to come here 4 times this year, I thought I would try something that I have never done before and that is to do a series of sermons. And as you may guess from that quotation, I have decided to look at the Lord's Prayer over the 4 Sundays. I am going to use the version of the Lord's Prayer that most people know from the King James Version of the Bible.

¹ The Lord's Prayer for Today – William J Carl III



1. Our Father which are in Heaven

The prayer starts with the words Our Father. We say these so easily and yet fail to see how startling they were when Jesus said them. We always need to remember that Jesus was a Jew and lived in a Jewish society. The Jews had different names for God.

The name for God is represented in English by the letters YHWH and is referred to by the technical description as the 'tetragrammaton'. This name was so holy that the Jews would not pronounce it in case they committed blasphemy against God. We now would represent this by the word Yahweh. (Though sometimes we get the word Jehovah. But this word is so sacred to the Jews that in their word 'donay' My Lord was substituted. And the vowels for this word and 4 letters give us the word Yahweh.

It is difficult for us here today so many centuries later in a very different culture to try and appreciate how awesome the Jews thought the name of God was. Even as Christians hopefully we appreciate how great God is. If he unleashed all his power we would be overwhelmed.

Yet Jesus says we are to start this prayer Our Father. In effect he says we can call the awesome creator of the universe 'daddy'. For the Aramaic word was undoubtedly, 'abba'. This is the sort of word that a baby would use when it says it's first word, and is probably better translated 'dada'. Paul writing to the Christians in Rome says:

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." Romans 8:15 (NIV)

Jesus as the son of God says it is ok to call the creator God Daddy or as we more conventionally use today the word Father. This would have made the Jews listening totally surprised at this approach.

Some people may not like being over familiar with God. It is true that we must never lose sight of the fact that God is the creator of whole of the universe and which also means he is our creator. He is far above us in power and wisdom. But it is he through his son that says we can use the familiar word Father to address him. There is no problem on his side about this; far from it he longs for such intimacy where we snuggle up close to him and say effectively 'daddy'.

Of course there are a few people who object to the use of the word Father saying that it is sexist when referring to God. I am sure that we all realise that God is neither male nor female. He is a spirit and is therefore in a true sense without any sex, or one could say he is both male and female. But we can hardly call him it. And to start calling him by female names can sound very much like the pagan use of referring to mother earth. So personally I prefer to stick to the use of Father. It chiefly reminds me not of any sexual issues but rather it makes me feel that he is my perfect heavenly parent who has my closest interests at heart.



Notice that he is our father. The use of that word our at the beginning reminds us that we have a living relationship with God. He is not some distant creator who has wound up the universe and stepped away. Nor is he disinterested in us. No he is our personal daddy who cares deeply about us and invites us to talk to him in that capacity.

2. Who art in heaven.

But Jesus goes on to remind us that he is no normal Father, for he is our Father who art in heaven. What did Jesus mean by heaven. For Jesus rarely spoke of heaven in itself. He did talk many times about the kingdom of heaven. The problem is that most of us have a picture of heaven as a place, may be up there above the sky. That is understandable because we as human beings live in time and space. But God is outside of time and space and hence we need to just remind ourselves from time to time that heaven is not a physical place. Of course the Bible does use picture language to describe heaven. And from these we get poetic pictures of a celestial city paved with streets of gold.

I think the best concept of heaven to say is that it is to be in the presence of God himself. Where God is then that is where heaven is.

One of my friends in the USA that I asked via email about this expression 'who art in heaven' wrote to me the following:

Not all that long ago, Graham, I asked the Lord what should be my understanding of heaven, as in "Our Father who art in heaven..." It turned out to be one of those rare times of receiving an almost instantaneous answer. I heard from my spirit, the Lord say, "I dwell in the transcendence of My own glory."²

So in a sense heaven is not remote from us for if we are in the presence of God we are therefore in a way in heaven. And we will look about bringing heaven down to earth in a later part of the prayer.

3. Hallowed by they name

William Carl in his book on this prayer writes:

Hallowed is not a word we use very often in normal conversation. It's not a word we hear much on TV or the radio, either, or anywhere except in church. Perhaps that's the reason for the story about a boy asking his Sunday school teacher one morning why God's name was Harold. "What do you mean?" "Well," said the boy, "every time we pray the Lord's Prayer we say, 'Harold be thy name!'"³

² John Gavazzoni – via email

³ The Lord's Prayer for Today – William J Carl III



This old fashioned word is a straight translation of the NT Greek word, *hagiozo*, which means holy. I think most of us get a sense of what the word Holy means, but it is one of those words that is difficult to define instantly and clearly. In fact one of the main meanings of the word holy in the Bible is set apart. If something is holy it is set apart for some special duty or service. So God is very much set apart from us. He is different to us and certainly set apart as he is perfect and has no sin or imperfection in his nature at all.

But it is interesting that that the Greek is written in a passive tense in this sentence. This implies that this hallowing of his name is not something that we do towards God. Rather it is something that he does in and through us. So one could perhaps translate it along the lines:

*May you name be hallowed, O God, in the way we live our lives.*⁴

This is brought out in the parts of the prayer, about your kingdom come and your will be done that we will look at next. So we hallow or make God's name holy by the way we live out our lives. Some see the Christian life as things that we do. Many feel that being good is the main thing that makes us Christians. People would feel that we should keep the 10 commandments. Though many aspire to do this, not many would succeed, particularly the commandment not to covet other things.

But as the prayer seems to imply we make God's name holy by allowing his life to flow into our lives, through our lives and out from our lives to those around us.

Jeremiah writes the following:

"This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time," declares the LORD. "I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people." Jeremiah 31:33 [NIV]

If one reads Paul's letter to the Roman Christians at the start of chapter 8 he talks about

You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. Romans 8:9 [NIV]

We in our church have recently been studying the 10 commandments. These form part of what is called the law. But it seems to me from what Jeremiah is saying is that God puts the law within us now. And Paul seems to imply that the Spirit of God living in us should help us to live out this law on our hearts. So we are not called now to slavishly try to keep an external set of rules, but rather to allow the Holy Spirit to live through us lives that are pleasing to God. In doing this we as this prayer says are hallowing or making holy God's wonderful name.

⁴ The Lord's Prayer for Today – William J Carl III



4. Thy kingdom come.

Right at the start we see that we pray Thy kingdom come. We do not pray my kingdom come, my will be done. This seems to me to be the complete opposite to our society and the attitude and ethos of our society. Life for many seems to revolve around them and is very self centred. It seems to be very much concerned about our needs or should I say perceived needs. Why does everybody want the latest device? They are now bringing out High Definition TV and no doubt people are clamouring for these sets. But there is very little actually available to watch on them in this format at the moment.

In the magazine Christianity, Mark Greene wrote an article entitled, 'Will UK Christianity be consumed?'. He sees consumerism as quite a threat to Christianity. In the article he writes:

Islam has a direction too. And so does Hinduism. But none of these 'isms' are the biggest challenge to the way of Christ in Britain today. The biggest challenge is consumerism.⁵

He goes on to say slightly later:

Consumerism is of course more than materialism in new clothes, more than shopping till we drop, and so on. Yes, consumerism is looking for one's identity and purpose and esteem in the things and products and services we buy:

And then says:

More than that, consumerism is a way of thinking about what makes life significant, what makes - me significant, what makes others significant.

But this part of the prayer is a direct challenge to the attitude of our society with its rampant consumerism. For when we say, 'Thy kingdom come', it should make us realise that we are not number one. In fact we never have been number one. Right from the beginning, God was Lord of all, and it is he that is number one. It was the devil's desire to be number one and usurp God's position that led to his fall from heaven. So often we try to put ourselves in the number one position. In many of our churches our committees or leaders of whatever format they take, tend to organise the church. It is true we must organise and lead our churches. But how much do we let God be in charge? How well are we listening to his voice and being obedient to what he tells us to do? When we say 'Thy kingdom come' we are saying that we will make God number one in all areas of our life, including what our churches do. Jesus commanded us to:

But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Matthew 6:33 (NIV)

⁵ Magazine 'Christianity' - January 2007






One of the difficulties we have is that we really don't understand the idea of kingdom very well. It is true that we live in the United Kingdom that has a king or at present a queen at its head. But our queen has very little actual power. Also the emphasis on the united aspect tends to throw our focus on the place or country that is being ruled.

But kingdom is more to do with the people who come under the will and authority of the king. If we know our English history we may have a jaundiced view of this. For in earlier times when kings thought they ruled by divine appointment, their use of power could be very selfish and very oppressive.

But with a good king ruling a kingdom, that is the people who are his subjects, there are so many positive things. And as we read in the Old Testament:

Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his love endures forever. Psalm 107:1 (NIV)

With such a Lord in charge of the kingdom, it will be a good kingdom with love at its heart. So we as his subjects, when we pray your kingdom come:

-  **We will come under his provision**
-  **We will come under his protection**
-  **We will come under his purpose & plans**





5. Thy will be done

So when we pray thy will be done we are aligning ourselves with the purpose and plans of his kingdom. It again reinforces that we are not pursuing our selfish agenda's for our lives but asking that his will is done. And this has to start with us in our own lives before anywhere else. But aligning ourselves with God's plans is certainly not fatalistic. As Christians we do not ascribe to 'Que sera sera', that means what will be will be.

The God we worship is as we started the prayer our loving heavenly father. So he is not a dictatorial father, but rather one that works with us. He tells us what he wants us to do and then trusts that in a loving response of obedience we will do it. There are 2 parts to praying Thy Will be done, which are:

- **Discerning what God wants us to do.**
- **Doing what he has told us to do.**

It is not always easy to discern what God wants us to do. But we have many things that can help us in determining what God's will is for us or for say our church. These are:

-  **The Bible as the Word of God**
-  **Other Christians, (fellow church members)**
-  **Conscience, (remember that it is not always perfect).**
-  **Holy Spirit speaking directly to us.**



We were discussing in our house group recently about hearing what God tells us to do when we may not see clearly the way ahead. I do get the sense that some Christians think that God will tell us to do things that we don't like, that don't suite us and will be very difficult. This is not the impression or attitude I have. God as this prayer states at the beginning is my Father. He loves me, cares for me and has my best interests at heart. Paul writing to the Ephesians talks about the works that God has for us to do and the Amplified version it reads:

For we are God's [own] handiwork (His workmanship), [d]recreated in Christ Jesus, [born anew] that we may do those good works which God predestined (planned beforehand) for us [taking paths which He prepared ahead of time], that we should walk in them [living the good life which He prearranged and made ready for us to live].

Ephesians 2:10 (Amplified)

Notice that we are God's own handiwork or workmanship. So would he ask us to do things we are not suited for. They are good works, not bad works. The Gospel is good news so why when the works we do are good, should they not be as good as the good news of the Gospel. The whole tenor to me is that most of the time God asks me to do those things which help in building his kingdom, but they are things that I can do and which will generally be things I enjoy. (Though sometimes we don't enjoy what God asks us to do, because our heart attitude is not right, rather than they don't suite us).

6. On Earth as it is in heaven.

In the original Greek it reads 'as in heaven so also on earth'. It starts with heaven rather than earth. We have already looked at heaven earlier, saying that basically heaven is being in God's presence, particularly his presence of his glory. But some of the aspects of heaven are:

- **It is perfect**
- **It is peaceful, (Shalom and all that this word means)**
- **It is awesome presence of our Holy, (set apart), God**

Some Christians seem to work and pray as if they are trying to reach heaven. Heaven is the place they are striving for. Often when I hear talk of eternal life and going to heaven, it seems very much as if people are looking ahead and that is the perspective. May be as I seem to remember one Christian saying we should be trying to bring heaven down to earth. And we should be trying to bring heaven down to earth right now where we are. Jesus didn't as far as I can see use the word heaven on it's own. But he constantly used the expression, kingdom of heaven, (or kingdom of God – same thing), all the time. And he said:

- 📖 **The kingdom of heaven is near you.⁶**
- 📖 **The kingdom of heaven has come to you.⁷**
- 📖 **The kingdom of heaven is with in you.⁸**

⁶ Matthew 3:2

⁷ Luke 11:20

⁸ Luke 17:21



So we pray that they will be done as in heaven so also here on earth. So that we are building God's kingdom of love here on earth. Some in the past have seen the building of his kingdom as a political thing and tried to build structures into the society around them. But I believe God first builds his kingdom in people's hearts. Then as they live this out society will be changed and we may see his kingdom beginning to be reflected in society we live in.

So we have seen the first part of this prayer focuses on God. But very much as our loving heavenly Father. But remarkably it is not so much a prayer that we make to him. But rather a prayer that through us he will work and build his kingdom here on earth. If we do that we are indeed hallowing his name.

Amen