

**Psalm 103:19-22; Matthew 6:9-13;
Hebrews 13:20-21; Romans 6:8-13**

March 5, 2023

The Lord's Prayer: On Earth As In Heaven

During this season of Lent, as we prepare for and reflect on Jesus' passion on the cross, then His resurrection at Easter ... during this season, we focus our attention on a prayer that came from Jesus himself. When we regularly, in public and in private, pray this complete prayer we are planting seeds of faith and spiritual maturity. And **as we continue to pray with true hearts, the wisdom and spirit of Jesus Christ seeps into our souls** ...bringing forth good spiritual fruit in its time. This isn't microwave faith – you may not see immediate results when you pray, but as you pray an earnest and genuine heart is being transformed.

As I have prepared these messages on The Lord's Prayer, I am indebted to Rev. Elmer Towns in his book *Praying the Lord's Prayer For Spiritual Breakthrough*,ⁱ and John Wesley in his sermon "Upon Our Lord's Sermon On The Mount, Discourse VI," (1748),ⁱⁱ for their wisdom.

Most every one here probably knows the Lord's Prayer – many know it by heart. For nearly 2,000 years it has been central to Christian worship – as familiar as holy communion. It is not the only prayer that Christians can and should pray, but in this prayer we say all we need to say to God.

Last week I spoke about the second and third petitions in our Lord's Prayer: "Your kingdom come" ... "Your will be done." **We are asking for God's rule and God's will to be done in and through our lives, now.** Scottish theologian William Barclay put it this way: "Prayer is not a way of making use of God; prayer is a way of offering ourselves to God in order that He should be able to make use of us." So we ask for God's kingdom and will to be done. And where is it to be done? In our lives. And how is it to be done? "On earth as it is in heaven."

Ask For The Best

What does it mean to pray, "on earth as it is in heaven?" Jesus told us to ask for three things to be done "on earth as they are done in heaven." 1) to ask for God to be glorified on sinful earth as He is worshiped in the perfection of heaven: "hallowed be thy name." 2) to ask for God's principles to rule the stubborn earth as they do under His reign in heaven: "thy kingdom come." 3) to also ask for God's perfect will to be done on this imperfect earth as it is done in heaven: "thy will be done."

Look around you and you will see that God is not always glorified on this earth. Isn't there a great need for God's kingdom and will to be done? This semi-conclusion challenges us to **pray that things on earth will be as they are in heaven.** It is like Jesus saying, "Don't ask for earthly crumbs, ask for a heavenly banquet." ***Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him... For the death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God...*** Rom. 6:8,10. Don't be satisfied with the ordinary, ask for the extra-ordinary; not just the mediocre, but the excellent. Ask for the very best from God. Ask for heavenly principles to operate here.

God's Will in Heaven

So, we're asking for God's will to be done on earth as in heaven; but just how is it done in heaven? We must assume that heaven – unlike earth - is the perfect place where there is no sin. That means there is no corruption, no sickness, no death, and no tears. **There are no selfish agendas in heaven, no power struggles,** no other pretenders to God's throne, **only glad obedience to God's will.** A stark contrast to life as we know it on earth.

Recall, that last week I said that the angels in heaven don't pray to do God's will, they just do it. The angels in heaven do God's will completely, continually, and perfectly. But, since we are not angels, or in heaven yet, we must ask for God's help to do His will. Paul wrote to the Christians in ancient Colossae and to us, ... ***we have not ceased praying for you and asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of God's will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so that you may lead lives worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, as you bear fruit in every good work and as you grow in the knowledge of God, Col. 1:9-10.***

So then, if in heaven God's will is done immediately, completely, purposefully, continuously, gladly, eagerly, and wholeheartedly ... how can we ever learn to do that? Let's consider this...

Sovereignty of God

Notice that the first half of the Lord's Prayer is focused on God. When we begin to talk to God we must begin by focusing on Him: "hallowed be Thy name...thy kingdom come...thy will be done." Because God is holy, we want His name glorified on earth, as He is worshipped in heaven. **Because God rules, we tell Him we want His kingdom principles done on earth, just as He reigns in heaven.** Because God is sovereign, we tell God we submit to His plan and purpose, as everything in heaven submits to His will. Beginning with these petitions guide us into talking to God rather than just rushing into God's presence, asking or begging for what we need or want.

Now, this is really a revolutionary thing when you think about it. We are not asking for God's kingdom to be imposed by government, or by our social dominance, or by coercion, or anything of the sort. We're not asking for God's will to be done by everybody else. We are first of all asking that His kingdom come and His will be done with each of us. We are asking God to be sovereign in our lives; not for our own sinful nature that is prone to selfishness to be sovereign; and not for some elite leader or group whose sinful nature is prone to tyranny to rule us. **We are asking for God to be king and ruler over our own hearts.** That's where it must start. God's kingdom cannot grow and His will cannot be followed without our willingness. Remember how I explained last week that the original language of the Bible (Greek) for "Thy will be done" was in a verb form that means immediate action; like "thy will be done, right now, right here"? Right now, right here means in myself at this moment.

We may be ridiculed for seeking to genuinely live out the Lord's Prayer - many Christians before us have been. Christians have even been persecuted for insisting that God is sovereign over their lives. Here's Paul's words of encouragement for just such an occasion: ***Do not allow what you consider good to be spoken of as evil. For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace, and***

joy in the Holy Spirit, because anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and approved by men, Romans 14:16-18.

Speaking of eating and drinking here's a little preview of next week's message: the fourth petition in the Lord's Prayer - **"Give us today our daily bread"** - is like a hinge, that holds together the "Thy" petitions and those that follow. The reason is this: **we cannot worship God, ask for His kingdom and His will, on earth as in heaven, unless our bodies are nourished.** "Bread" is symbolic of all the physical needs we have in this life and which are necessary for our spiritual walk with God. I mention it here to remind us that this petition for "daily bread" helps us to live on earth by heavenly standards. Together with the first three petitions it reminds us that we depend on God for life and for our living.

Dependence on God

Because we have physical needs we ask God for bread. Because we sin we ask God to forgive us what we owe. Because we stray we ask God to not allow us to enter into temptation. Because we need to stand against sin we ask God to deliver us from the evil one. The "Us" petitions of our Lord's Prayer acknowledge our total dependence on God, and they are linked to the "Thy" petitions. This petition "...on earth as it is in heaven," sums up the first three petitions: "Hallowed be thy name...thy kingdom come...thy will be done."

When we are forgiven and forgive, when we are victorious over sin and protected from evil, we do magnify God's name. When we are forgiven and forgive, and when we are victorious over sin and protected from evil, God's kingdom does come on earth. And when we properly deal with past sins, and we are not led into future sins and are protected daily from the evil one, we are doing God's will.

When we pray "on earth as in heaven," we must pray as though it all depends on God. Then we must live as though it all depends on us. We have help for this: *May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever, [Amen] Heb. 13:20-21.*

Praying This Week

There are seven positive and valuable results that come from praying the Lord's Prayer daily. 1) We magnify God's name, 2) we begin to live by better principles, and 3) God will guide us each day. Now, this fourth petition focuses our minds and hearts on living the meaning and purpose of the Lord's Prayer in our own lives, right here on earth, aiming for the perfection that is in heaven. It gives us pause to review how we are doing.

Have you accepted God as your loving Father? When we say "Our Father" we enter into prayer with Jesus. (He said, *Father, the hour is come; glorify Your Son, that Your Son also may glorify You the only true God...* John 17:1).

Has God's name been hallowed in your life? Have you been praying for this? (Jesus said, *Father, glorify Your name. Then came there a voice from heaven, saying, "I have glorified it and will glorify it again"* John 12:28).

Have you asked for and seen God's kingdom come into your life? Are you allowing kingdom principles to rule in your life? (Scripture reminds us, ...the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit Rom. 14:17. And Jesus said, Seek first the kingdom of God... Luke 12:31).

Have you asked for God's will to be done in your life and agreed to it? (From Scripture, Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness, Rom. 6:13).

Do you worship God who rules in heaven? (The Lord has established his throne in heaven, and his kingdom rules over all, Psalm 103:19. And again, Praise the Lord, all his heavenly hosts, you his servants who do his will, Psalm 103:21).

I am counting on each one of you to pray the Lord's Prayer every day; not just reciting the words, but lingering over the words so that you really pray it and it seeps into your soul. This week as you pray the Lord's Prayer, asking for God's will to be done on earth as it is in heaven, be encouraged; ask for the best, here on earth, even as it is in heaven. **Your daily routine shapes your character and your future.**

Let us pray ... "Our Father..."

ⁱ Elmer Towns, *Praying the Lord's Prayer For Spiritual Breakthrough* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1997).

ⁱⁱ John Wesley, "Upon Our Lord's Sermon On The Mount, Discourse VI," (1748); Outler & Heitzenrater, *Wesley's Sermons, An Anthology*, (Nashville, Abingdon, 1991), 228.