

The Disciple's Prayer

Luke chapter 11 (which is the New Testament portion of our readings for the day), brings to our notice what is popularly styled “The Lord’s Prayer”. In fact, it was not a prayer that the Lord offered himself, but was instead a prayer for the disciples to use – hence it could be more accurately described as “The Disciple’s Prayer”. It was given in response to the disciples request “Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples” (Lu. 11:1), and is therefore beneficial for us to be taught from, that we also might know how to pray. By way of exhortation, and to guide our minds to consider the emblems of Messiah’s sacrifice we propose to consider this prayer each clause at a time. The record in Matthew 6 provides a fuller account of the prayer, and so it is to this record that we shall go for our learning.

“Our Father ...”

This is the correct mode of address for those who are begotten by the Word, and who are children indeed. Sometimes it is claimed that Fatherhood is a New Testament idea, which presents God as a Father of Love as distinct from the Old Testament depiction of God as a Lord of vengeance. Of course, no such distinction exists as the careful reader of both Testaments will notice. In fact, there seems to be an Old Testament background to this aspect of the Disciple’s Prayer. Note these words of David in 1 Chronicles chapter 29:

“Blessed be thou Yahweh Elohim of Israel *our Father*, for ever and ever. Thine O Yahweh, is the greatness and the *power, and the glory*, and the victory, and the majesty: for all that is in the heaven and in the earth is thine; *thine is the kingdom*, O Yahweh, and thou art exalted as head above all” (1 Chron. 29:10-11)

Notice the allusions picked up by Jesus: “thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory” (Mat. 6:13). Part of the exhortation therefore is that we might approach the Father with all the honour and respect that David did. Indeed, it will surely come to pass that Israel as a nation will recognise Yahweh as their Father, for in their prayer for deliverance when the Gogian confederacy of Ezekiel chapter 38 come upon them, they say: “Doubtless thou art *our Father*, though Abraham be ignorant of us, and Israel acknowledge us not: thou, O Yahweh art *our Father*, our redeemer; thy name is from everlasting” (Isa. 63:16). Truly, we behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God (1 Jno. 3:1) – a wonderful theme that is not restricted to the New Testament, but is like silver thread running throughout Scripture.

“... which art in Heaven ...”

There is a very real and practical lesson that comes from this. Ecclesiastes instructs us:

“Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter anything before God *for God is in heaven, and thou upon earth*: therefore let thy words be few” (Eccl. 5:2).

This citation fits the context in Matthew 6, for here the master speaks of the “vain repetitions” that the heathen utter, and that “they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking” (Mat. 6:7). Notice that the Disciple’s Prayer is actually very short, using “few” words. Though it contains many principles and allusions, it is a short prayer. This is the Scriptural model: short and often. But what a

remarkable irony that the so-called “Lord’s prayer” has itself become a vain repetition! Being recited time and time again, as if their utterance of the words has some sort of magical benefit, or makes the speaker holy, folk use who are not entitled to. The prayer is only relevant to those who are Yahweh’s children (i.e. he being their Father as above), and to no other, whether they be priests, bishops, or any other dignitaries.

“... *Hallowed be thy name ...*”

The fact of the Father’s name being holy (the idea behind the word “Hallowed”), is one of the first principles referred to in this prayer. The prayers of Christ’s disciples ought not be “shopping list” prayers, being a list of things we want, and thanks for things we receive. Of course, both are necessary – but we refer to a matter of emphasis. Before asking for anything, we must recognise Yahweh’s exalted position of holiness, and the holiness of his Name. That is what comes first in this prayer, and it is a consistent theme in Scripture. Consider the following testimonies:

“Yahweh is great in Zion; and he is high above all the people. *Let them praise thy Great and Terrible Name; for it is holy*” (Psa. 99:3)

“He sent redemption unto his people: he hath commanded his covenant for ever: *holy and reverend is his Name*” (Psa. 111:9)

“Thus saith the High and Lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, *whose name is holy*; I dwell in the High and Holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit ...” (Isa. 57:15).

It is a characteristic of the faithful that they consider the Name of Yahweh, with the book of remembrance being written “for them that feared Yahweh, and that thought upon his Name” (Mal. 3:16). And it is a characteristic of false teachers that they seek to suppress the use of the Name: “which think to cause my people to forget my name ...” (Jer. 23:27).

“... *Thy Kingdom Come ...*”

This is the first thing to pray for. Before anything else, before any of the other matters that we might pray to our Father for, we must pray for the kingdom to come. Whatever problems and difficulties we might suffer in life, the ultimate answer to all these things is the coming kingdom. It is only by fixing our spiritual sight firmly upon a vision of the age to come, that we can endure. We therefore pray for the kingdom to come first, before all else

“... *Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.*”

Again, the primary characteristic of the coming Kingdom is that only then will the world do the Will of Yahweh. Interestingly, reference is made to Yahweh’s will being done in heaven as a point of comparison. The heavenly messengers (Angels) perform His Will, and in the Kingdom, in a similar fashion, the Divine Will shall be accomplished upon the earth. That is the reason why the Kingdom of God is often also described in Scripture as the “kingdom of Heaven” – i.e. heavenly principles will be upon the earth. Divine Laws shall go forth from Zion for the instruction of nations, and those laws reflect Heavenly Wisdom. James styles it “the wisdom that is from above” imparting virtues to be manifested in the faithful.

Another interesting reference in this regard is Deuteronomy 11:21, speaking of the blessings to come upon Israel:

“ ... that your days may be multiplied, and the days of your children, in the land which Yahweh swore unto your fathers to give them, as the days of heaven upon the earth” (Deut. 11:21).

The restored kingdom therefore, shall be “as the days of heaven upon earth” – it shall be the kingdom of heaven, with God’s will being performed even as it is in heaven. Again, there is very practical implication behind these words – if we wish to be part of that coming Kingdom, we must seek to show heavenly principles in our lives now!

“... *Give us this day our daily bread ...*”

Notice here, that the thing prayed for does not include the luxurious surroundings that those who live in an affluent society are privileged to enjoy. The exhortation of the Apostle is: “... we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain that we can carry nothing out. ***And having food and raiment let us be therewith content***” (1 Tim. 6:8)

The modern ethos – at least in the western world – is not to be satisfied with food and clothes, but to have nice, fashionable designer labels for clothes, and an abundance of exotic delicacies for food! We must be prepared for a more basic lifestyle, particularly in these days of a global economic recession. The current financial situation may well cause men and women to sit back and reassess their priorities: are they satisfied with less, or has the love for Mammon grown too much within them to go back? Ecclesiastes 4:6 reads: “Better is an handful with quietness, than both the hands full with travail and vexation of spirit”. We should be satisfied with basic food and raiment only, and be willing to thank God for it.

The Master exhorts us to pray for “our daily bread”. The principle is exemplified in the Proverb:

“remove far from me vanity and lies: give me neither poverty nor riches; ***feed me with food convenient (Marg. of my allowance) for me***: lest I be full, and deny thee, and say, Who is Yahweh? Or lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God in vain” (Prov. 30:8-9).

We must heed this spirit, and pray for our allotted allowance for each day, not taking thought for the morrow, but living each day as it if were our last – for one day, it will be!

“... *and forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors*”

The account in Luke 11 reads: “and forgive us our sins; for we also forgive everyone that is indebted to us” (Lu. 11:4). The principle is plainly that the Father will forgive us in like measure as how we forgive others. After the prayer, the Master speaks of this plainly: “For if ye forgive not men for their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses” (Mat. 6:15). And again, the Apostle exhorts: “... be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you” (Eph. 4:32)

There is a saying in the world, that “I will forgive, but I can never forget”. A personal slight – however minor, can be the cause of a great deal of resentment that builds up over the passage of time. But bearing grudges is not the Way of Christ, and Scriptural forgiveness involves forgetting the offence, and moving on. Consider these words concerning Yahweh’s forgiveness:

“I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and **will not remember thy sins**” (Isa. 43:25).

If the Father, who never forgets, is depicted as not remembering our sins against us, how much more should we forget and forgive personal trespasses against us?

“... and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil...”

It is sometimes thought that those who are in Christ are under some special protection, so that we will not suffer, as men in the world do. There is a sense that the difficult circumstances we might have to endure are what Bro Robert Roberts called a “divinely regulated evil”, but there is certainly no promise that evil will not come. The principle comes out in Psalm 34:

“The Angel of Yahweh encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them” (Psa. 34:7).

Here is the assurance that is misunderstood. If the Angel is there, why do we suffer? But notice, the promise is not that no evil will come, but that when it comes, there will be a deliverance. The same Psalm states: “Many are the afflictions of the righteous: but Yahweh delivereth him out of them all” (Psa. 34:19). We do, however, have the assurance that we will not be alone in our tribulation:

“there hath no trial taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tried above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it” (1 Cor. 10:13).

For some, the way of escape has been death itself (see Isa. 57:1), for others, ways are opened up to escape the distresses of difficult circumstances. Here is the real promise: not that evil will not come, but that when they come, we might be delivered from them. Of Messiah is it written “... when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able **to save him from death**, and was heard in that he feared” (Heb. 5:7). We are told that the Greek has it, “able to save **out of death**”. The difference is this: if Christ was saved from death, he would not have died. But he did: he entered into death, and was raised up out of the grave. So it is that Christ who suffered for many, himself shows the ultimate example of deliverance – and elevation to sit at his Father’s Right hand.

“for thine is the Kingdom, the Power and the Glory for ever. Amen”

The vision shown to king Nebuchadnezzar the Babylonian king carried with it the interpretation that:

“in the days of these kings shall the God of Heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever” (Dan. 2:44)

The Kingdom is Yahweh's. Indeed, later, Nebuchadnezzar recognised this, saying after his restoration to the throne: "... I blessed the Most High and I praised and honoured him that liveth for ever, whose dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom is from generation to generation" (Dan. 4:34).

This is something that shall soon be recognised in all the earth. Psalm 22 speaks of how "all the ends of the world shall remember and turn unto Yahweh, and all the kindreds of the nations shall worship before thee. ***For the kingdom is Yahweh's:*** and He is the governor of the nations" (Psa. 22:22).

Notice again, that the prayer begins and ends with reference to the coming Kingdom. We would do well to ask ourselves: Do we pray for the Kingdom to come? Do we pray *daily* for the Kingdom to come? Only we can know ourselves, and take whatever remedial action is needed.

In this brief consideration, we have but scratched the surface, so to speak. This model prayer contains many principles, including glory to Yahweh, the desire for his Kingdom to come, the need for forgiveness, and to forgive others, prayer for daily bread to sustain our mortal existence, and many more. Rather than to use this prayer as a vain repetition like the heathen do, we can use it as a kind of template, to base our own prayers upon. We close with some words by our brother HP Mansfield:

"Prayer should not be indulged in lightly. Thought and care should be taken in our approach to the Father. The disciples recognised this when they approached Christ with their request: "Teach us how to pray." They felt the inadequacy of their prayers and desired to make them powerful. If we feel that our prayers are inadequate or ineffectual, and desire to make them more powerful, we must seek the means of doing so from the instruction from the Word. All the principles that go to make Prayer powerful are set forth and reiterated in Scripture. They are there for our seeking." (Making Prayer Powerful)

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