

The Lord's Prayer

Session I

Introduction

The Lord's Prayer is the Prayer that Jesus taught to his disciples and left as a heritage for all Christians. That's why it's called the Lord's Prayer. It has become perhaps the Prayer most cherished by Christians. Significant parts of the prayer we call the Lord's Prayer today are recorded in the gospels and so, uniquely amongst prayers we use regularly, it has canonical status. Actually the title we usually give to this Prayer – The Lord's Prayer – was first introduced by Cyprian of Carthage in the third century. It has been incorporated into the liturgies of the church – most Anglican churches say it every Sunday as part of their worship – and it continues to enrich the life of the church generally.

Some of you may have been surprised that we're devoting a whole five session series to one fairly short prayer, but as we look at the Lord's Prayer in detail you'll find that it is full of depth, richness and meaning which fully justifies our spending the time to study it in detail. Indeed we could easily spend another five sessions on this prayer.

There are two versions of the Lord's prayer in scripture, two places where it is recorded: Matthew 6:9-13 and Luke 11:2-4. It may be that the variations exist because the two gospels are referring to two different occasions. In Matthew the Prayer was taught by Jesus in the context of the Sermon on the Mount, whereas in Luke it's a more private setting where Jesus is teaching the disciples.

In Matthew's version we have:

“ ”Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.” (Matthew 6:9-13 NIV)

The version in Luke is a bit different, although there are some Greek manuscripts of Luke's gospel that are more similar to Matthew – the NIV version reads:

“..... ”Father, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread. Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us. And lead us not into temptation.”” (Luke 11:2-4 NIV)

Luke's version is a bit more compressed than Matthew's and it omits some key words and petitions found in Matthew. So God is simply addressed as “Father” rather than “Our Father in heaven”; the petition about “God's will” is missing in Luke and so is the phrase about deliverance from evil.

Because it's similar to Matthew's version, but rather briefer, the Lucan version has played a secondary role in the way the Prayer has been developed and used historically. However, some variations such as “each day” rather than “today” have provided material for debate and discussion.

However, we do have another text of the Prayer from the *Didache* (which means teaching) and which is sometimes called by its longer title *The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles*. This

text was quite widely used in the early church, although it was never seriously proposed for canonical status. It was probably written at the end of the first century or the beginning of the second century AD quite soon after John's gospel and letters and so well before the Gnostic texts, such as the apocryphal gospels which were written one or two hundred years later. The *Didache* is a very early text which deserves to be taken seriously, although of course it doesn't have the full authority of scripture.

The text in the *Didache* is similar to that in Matthew except that:

- It adds a closing doxology: "for yours is the power and the glory forever." This closing doxology is also present in some manuscripts of Matthew's gospel.
- It uses the singular "debt" rather than "debts" in the petition for forgiveness.

Perhaps because it is the longer version, the text in the *Didache* has shaped the versions that have come into Christian liturgy. The most widely accepted modern version is:

Our Father in heaven,
Hallowed be your name,
Your kingdom come,
Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours
now and forever. Amen.

The Lord's Prayer has a long history of use in the church. The early church used it in baptism. Chrysostom indicates how new believers recited the prayer just before baptism and this practice seems to have been continued even up to Thomas Cranmer's second Anglican Prayer Book of 1552.

Apart from its use in baptism, the Prayer was used in monastic daily offices and today, as I said at the beginning, it forms part of the weekly services of most Anglican churches.

Apart from its liturgical uses, the Lord's Prayer is a regular part of private devotions for many people. The Reformers tried to restrict its use, because in mediaeval times it was associated with the rosary, and used as part of penance. Nevertheless it continues to be of importance in private devotions. I think it brings us to focus on our relationship with God. Also Jesus is interceding for us in heaven. As Cyprian of Carthage said when we pray the Prayer the words our Lord has taught us will mingle perfectly with the words he is using in those intercessions.

We usually think of the Lord's Prayer as purely a Christian prayer, but Jesus didn't bring it out of nowhere – it has very strong Jewish roots. Thus, for example, the idea of God as Father derives from the Jewish *Amidah* (or eighteen benedictions). The idea of God in heaven derives from the Jewish morning service and the *avot* (a part of the Mishnah). The idea of hallowed be thy name derives from one of the oldest Jewish prayers the *qaddish*. We don't have time to look at this in detail this morning, but all the phrases of the Lord's Prayer have their origin in Jewish thought and literature.

Our Father

As we've already seen the Israelites called God "Father" and even "Our Father". Yet there is no doubt that the salvific death and resurrection of Christ brought mankind into a new intimacy with God. By his blood shed for us Christ justified us, made us sinless in God's sight, and redeemed us so that we were reconciled to God and brought into a new and intimate relationship with him as members of his family – God's children. We looked at that in more detail in our last series on the cross.

Let's take a few moments to look again at that reconciliation with God. Reconciliation with God is the beginning, it well expresses the at-one-ment of the atonement, in which God and human beings come back together after having been alienated for so long. Although the Israelites called God "Father" they had become alienated from him by apostasy, sin and rebellion. That relationship was restored through Christ's blood. Christ's atoning death also extended this intimate relationship beyond the boundaries of the Israelite nation to the whole of mankind.

In fact, the word reconciliation only occurs four times in the NIV translation of the Bible. It is significant that in Romans 5:9-11, which is one of the great passages on reconciliation in the NT, to be reconciled and to be justified are parallels:

"Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life! Not only is this so, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation." (Romans 5:9-11).

When we are justified we have peace with God which is reconciliation.

Two other NT terms also confirm the fact that we are at peace with God, namely 'adoption' and 'access'. As regards adoption, Jesus himself gave us permission to approach God as Abba, Father and Paul takes this up emphasising the privileges we have in being sons instead of slaves, and therefore God's heirs as well (e.g. Romans 8:14-17; Galatians 3:26-29; 4:1-7). Access gives us active communion with God, especially in prayer. Twice Paul brings together 'access to God' and 'peace with God' (Romans 5:1-2; Ephesians 2:17-18). The writer to the Hebrews borrows from the Day of Atonement ritual in order to convey the closeness we can now have to God:

"Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water." (Hebrews 10:19-22).

Thus reconciliation, peace with God, adoption into His family and access into His presence all bear witness to the same new relationship with him into which God has brought us. Reconciliation also has a horizontal as well as a vertical aspect, for God has reconciled us to one another as well as to him. This is made clear by Ephesians 2:11-22 that focuses particularly on the healing of the breach between Jews and Gentiles. He reminds his Gentile Christian leaders that formerly they were both excluded from citizenship in Israel and alienated from God – but that they have now been brought near to God and near to Israel.

Let's now look at how reconciliation has taken place and the respective roles played in it by God, Christ and ourselves. The passage that particularly informs us about these issues is 2 Corinthians 5:18-21:

“All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men’s sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ’s behalf: Be reconciled to God. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” (2 Corinthians 5:18-21).

This is probably the most important passage on reconciliation in the whole of the NT. The first truth it makes clear is that God was the author of the reconciliation with mankind. In this passage, everything flows from God – God reconciling, God giving, God appealing, and God making Christ to be sin for us. In William Temple’s memorable words “all is of God; the only thing of my very own which I contribute to my redemption is the sin from which I need to be redeemed.” Nor should we give the initiative to Christ. He went willingly to the cross, but he was doing the Father’s will as he confessed in his prayer in the garden of Gethsemane (Matthew 26:39). The reconciliation was entirely born out of the love of God – for He so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son.

I’ve only got time to touch on the subject of our reconciliation to God this morning. If you want to know more about it download the notes on the Atonement from my website – that has quite a long section dealing with reconciliation.

We must also remember that reconciliation has a horizontal dimension to it. Jesus taught that:

“if you are offering your gift at the altar’ he said ‘and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave the gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift” (Matthew 5:23-24).

It is impossible to enter into the reconciliation that Christ died to accomplish and at the same time to nourish grudges against our fellow human beings. That is why we offer one another a sign of peace just before the beginning of the Eucharistic prayer in the service of Holy Communion. That’s why a later phrase of the Lord’s Prayer asks for forgiveness of our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.

This new relationship with God was signalled by Jesus in his encounter with Mary just after his resurrection:

“Jesus said, “Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet returned to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, ‘I am returning to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’”” (John 20:17 NIV)

Jesus said “*my Father and your Father .. my God and your God.*” because he had now reconciled us to the Father through his death and resurrection.

This is why we can now call the Father “Abba”, “Daddy” a new level of intimacy. He’s our Father our loving Father. “Our Father” is a wonderful Trinitarian statement; it only makes sense in the context of the Triune God. We watch Jesus relating to Abba Father and are assisted by the Holy Spirit. Every time we say the Prayer we are introduced and re-introduced into a special relationship with God as Father – but what exactly does that mean?

Firstly, I think we can see our relationship with God as tripartite – God, parent and friend – mirroring the tripartite nature of God. The fact that we are made in God’s image is neatly

reflected in the tripartite nature of our relationship with our Trinitarian God and also in our own tripartite nature – body, soul and spirit.

Secondly, I think we can see our relationship with God from four aspects, Identity, Authority, Intimacy and Community. As regards identity our relationship with God as our Father is the only relationship which truly matters. The Lord's Prayer helps us to remember and claim this identity. As regards authority, to address God as Father reminds us that we are subject to his authority. We need to submit to this authority and do His will. To call God Father is to approach him with humility and a deep sense of obedience. Peter told persecuted Christians to submit to God even in the midst of their suffering:

“Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time.” (1 Peter 5:6 NIV).

This is what we acknowledge each time we pray Our Father.

Prayer needs to be founded in an open and authentic relationship with God, it should be a real meeting between real persons, conducted in total openness and honesty. Like Jesus we show our love for the Father when we listen to him and do what he says. By that we show that God is truly our Abba. When we address God as Abba Father, we must look at Jesus and see how he related to his Father and how he nourished a profoundly rich and intimate relationship with his Father. Jesus has shared his Father with us and invites us into the relationship he has with the Father and to live in its amazing reality.

When we approach God the Father and truly learn to make him our Abba, when we open our hearts to him without any pretence, when we look upon him and learn to lose ourselves in his presence, then we become freed from the prisons of ourselves. In moments of intimacy with God we find the greatest freedom – paradoxically, as we loose what we think of as ourselves we find our true selves as God sees us.

The word “Our” before “Father” is important it speaks to us of community. Although we need to experience Abba individually his Fatherhood also has implications of community. There is no such a thing as a solitary Christian. We are all part of the family of Father God and his Fatherhood means that we are called to the brotherhood of humankind. God is not just transforming us each individually; he is also making a new divine family, a divine community.

The Lord's Prayer helps us to break free from self-centeredness and to learn selflessness, first by turning to God the Father and then by turning to the brothers and sisters who join us in calling him Abba Father.

In Heaven

We are introduced to heaven right at the beginning of scripture in the book of Genesis – “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth”. The word “heavens” is in the plural suggesting more than one heaven, there is no singular word for heaven in Hebrew. Paul certainly speaks of many layers of heaven. For example he says he was “caught up to the third heaven” (2 Corinthians 12:2). There is mention of both the “heavens” and the “highest heavens” in the OT – although to be fair Hebrew has no expression for heaven in the singular, it's always the plural *shamayim*.

Part of this mystery is solved when we see that Genesis refers to the atmosphere between the sea and the clouds as *shamayim* and also refers to outer space as *shamayim*. To distinguish

those regions from the place where God abides the phrase *shamyi h'shamayim* (the “heaven of heavens” or “highest heaven” in the NIV) is used, for example in Deuteronomy 10:14: “To the LORD your God belong the heavens, even the highest heavens, the earth and everything in it.” (Deuteronomy 10:14 NIV)

The same term is used in 1 Kings 8:27 and Genesis 28:12.

So when Paul talked about the place where he visited as the third heaven I think he was talking about the place where God resides, a spiritual realm completely different from the atmosphere or outer space. Indeed I believe it's a place entirely outside our universe.

But what heaven was Jesus talking about when he taught his disciples the Prayer? The original Greek in Matthew's gospel actually uses the plural form of the Greek for heaven, even though Greek does have a singular form for heaven. The answer lies in the fact that Jesus was probably teaching the disciples in Aramaic and must have used the plural form for heaven as was the practice amongst the Jews – so I believe he was referring to the spiritual realm in which the Father dwells. In my view this heavenly realm is entirely outside the space-time framework of our universe, although the book of Revelation teaches that at the end of this age, following the second coming of Christ, there will be an intersection of the heavenly and earthly realms (Revelation 21:1-2).

Heaven is God's abode; he dwells there and rules creation from there. Isaiah says: “Heaven is my throne and the earth is my footstool” (Isaiah 66:1). For me this says that God is far bigger than anything visible or invisible. Jesus knew heaven well and yet he came down to earth, emptying himself and humbling himself to become a man and a servant. Jesus declared:

“For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me.” (John 6:38 NIV)

The Holy Spirit also came down from heaven:

“Then John gave this testimony: “I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him.” (John 1:32 NIV)

Jesus urged his listeners to seek the kingdom of heaven above everything else (Matthew 6:33). It is in heaven that we must lay up treasures for there they do not rot or rust (Matthew 6:19-21). Our true treasures and rewards are to be found in heaven. Jesus, the divine mediator between God and man, saw himself as the essential connection between earth and heaven and he kept pointing people's attention to heaven. Heaven was always Paul's goal, he was called heavenward in Christ and encouraged others to embark on the same journey (Philippians 3:14, 20). According to Paul all our spiritual blessings have to do with the heavenly realms, even though we are presently living on earth (Ephesians 1:3-14). At the end of his earthly existence Jesus returned to heaven (Acts 1:11) and one day he will return to earth from heaven to judge the world and truly bring in his kingdom.

So, when we pray to “Our Father in heaven” we are praying to God the Father in a realm that is very different from the one we inhabit. The Father is at the heart of the Trinity; he transcends space and time and yet has redemptively entered our space-time. In his grace he offers to lift us out of the darkness of this world and our sins and to bring us into the heavenly places. Jesus was raised from death and is now seated at God's right hand in the heavenly realms (Ephesians 1:20). All of us who believe in Christ can identify with this because God

has also raised us and seated us with Christ in the heavenly realms (Ephesians 2:6). We are lifted to a new sphere of existence in our redeemed lives.

When we address our Father in heaven we are expressing the fact that our citizenship is in heaven and that we are on a journey home there:

“Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.” (Colossians 3:1-4 NIV)

Life on earth will come to nothing if not lived in the light of heaven. That is why we need to pray to Our Father in heaven, always being reminded of that which is unseen and eternal, recognizing his reality and the reality of his spiritual realm. This will comfort us, as Thomas Moore’s hymn reminds us

Earth has no sorrow
That heaven cannot heal

As we pray to Our Father in heaven we are connected with the heart of reality, our creator and redeemer who loves us.

Hallowed be Your Name

Hallowed means holy or sacred, and of course God’s name *is* holy and sacred even if we don’t acknowledge that fact. However, God wants us to praise, honour and exalt him, so it’s fitting that we should honour his name in the Prayer.

God considers his name and his word to be of the utmost importance:

“I will bow down towards your holy temple and will praise your name for your love and your faithfulness, for you have exalted above all things your name and your word.” (Psalm 138:2 NIV)

that’s why we were commanded to respect God’s name in the Ten Commandments:

““You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God, for the LORD will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name.” (Exodus 20:7 NIV)

An alternative translation of the original Hebrew would be:

Do not carry the Name of the Lord your God disrespectfully. If you do, you will be guilty of the grave offence of desecrating God’s Holy Name.

As Christians we are each called to carry God’s divine name. This is expressed in baptism when we are baptized into the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit and also in our calling for service:

“But the Lord said to Ananias, “Go! This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel.” (Acts 9:15 NIV)

So when we talk about the name of God we are dealing with something holy and we should treat it with respect. The Israelites held the name of God in such awe that they wouldn’t even pronounce God’s name “YHWH”, the Tetragrammaton, but instead used Adonai (Lord) and YHWH was only allowed to be written in sacred writings. Christians have no prohibition over YHWH, but have continued Jewish practice by writing “LORD” in small capitals (to distinguish it from other uses of Lord) as we see it in our Bibles today. When the Jewish scribes wrote the name of God *elohim* they would wipe their pens and when they wrote God’s

personal name YHWH, they had to wash their whole bodies. Just imagine how much washing that involved because the name YHWH appears 6,961 times in the Hebrew OT.

If writing God's name came with such deep reverence, then uttering his name was even more serious. The use of God's name was reserved solely for the benediction in the temple. At other times the word "Adonai" was used as a substitute. After the destruction of the temple in 70 AD the Tetragrammaton was no longer used in speech and its original pronunciation has been lost.

So what is commanded in the third commandment of the Decalogue is put into practice in the Lord's prayer in "Hallowed be your name".

Names were important in OT times, it was believed that a person's name represented his character. That's why the name of God is to be revered, because it represents the character of God. God's name tells us who and what he is. So if we misuse his name we are guilty of distorting his character, an offence against God's name is an offence against his person. The various names used for God in the Bible represent different aspects of his character, together they tell us about all the aspects of God's character.

God's name originally resided in the Jerusalem temple (1 Kings 5:3-5), but that was destroyed. So God did a new thing. Through Jesus God built a new temple comprising his redeemed people – us and all believers in Christ. Thus, God has placed his holy name in the church, expecting that name to be revered and honoured. Every time we pray "Hallowed be your name" we are reminded that as a church we carry the name of Jesus, the name that has been lifted above every other name (Philippians 2:9).

We must worship God wholeheartedly and conduct our lives in such a way that we demonstrate that we do really hallow God's name both in our lives and in our church. We must worship God in spirit and in truth, giving ourselves wholeheartedly to him, with no hidden idols lodged in the dark recesses our hearts. To hallow God's name is to recognise the holiness, uniqueness and nature of God and to live in the light of that knowledge.

The Greek word *hagiazō* translated 'hallowed' is very rare in the NT and unknown in ordinary secular Greek. This shows that God is to be treated in a unique way reserved just for him. The place we give God cannot be shared with anything else.

To hallow God's name is also to learn to pray so that we are totally dependant on God, relying not on our own strength but upon God's mercy. To hallow God's name is not only to say that the name of Jesus is raised above all other names as an objective fact, but to raise that name above all other names in our hearts.

When we pray "Hallowed be your name" all the implications of that phrase, some of which we've been examining give glorious weight to our prayers; a weight that comes from God's unique, incomparable and awesome name.