

DUELING ALLEGIANCES

Lord's Prayer (Matt. 6:9b-13)

By Jerry Truex; May 16, 2010

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- ⁹ οὕτως οὖν προσεύχεσθε ὑμεῖς· Πάτερ ἡμῶν ὁ ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς· ἁγιασθήτω τὸ ὄνομά σου·
¹⁰ ἐλθέτω ἡ βασιλεία σου· γενηθήτω τὸ θέλημά σου, ὡς ἐν οὐρανῷ καὶ ἐπὶ γῆς·
¹¹ τὸν ἄρτον ἡμῶν τὸν ἐπιούσιον δὸς ἡμῖν σήμερον·
¹² καὶ ἄφες ἡμῖν τὰ ὀφειλήματα ἡμῶν, ὡς καὶ ἡμεῖς ἀφήκαμεν τοῖς ὀφειλέταις ἡμῶν·
¹³ καὶ μὴ εἰσενεγκεῖς ἡμᾶς εἰς πειρασμόν, ἀλλὰ ῥύσαι ἡμᾶς ἀπὸ τοῦ πονηροῦ.

A. Introduction

Today we conclude our five-part series entitled, "Dueling Pledges." First, I will give a brief teaching on the Lord's Prayer. Then we will have a Reader's Theater by our very own, not-ready-for-prime-time players. Finally, we will have an open discussion.

Let me begin with a story.¹ After the Soviet Union fell in 1990, a famous Bible scholar, Kenneth Bailey, went to Riga, Latvia to teach at a Bible Conference. All of the participants were between the ages of 25-35. That meant their education had been in the communist state system, which indoctrinated them in atheism. At one point, Bailey asked a young woman how she came to faith.

"Was there a church in our village?" he asked.

"No, the communists closed all of them," she replied.

"Did some saintly grandmother instruct you in the ways of God?" Bailey asked.

"No. All the members of my family were atheists."

"Did you have secret home Bible studies, or go to an underground church?"

"No, none of that," came the answer.

"So what happened?"

The young woman told the following story:

At funerals we were allowed to recite the Lord's Prayer. As a young child I heard those strange words. I had no idea who we were talking, what the words meant, where they came from or why we were reciting them. When freedom came at last, I

¹ Kenneth E. Bailey, *Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes: Cultural Studies in the Gospels* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2008) 91.

had the opportunity to search for their meaning. When you are in total darkness, the tiniest point of light is very bright. For me the Lord's Prayer was that point of light. By the time I found its meaning I was a Christian.

The Lord's Prayer is powerful. It changes lives.

B. Address: "Our Father"

Jesus invites us to talk with God *as if* God were our Parent. Jesus called God, *Abba*, which is the Aramaic word for father.² In the ancient Jewish world, it was rare for someone to speak of God this way, but it was common for Jesus. He wants us to address God as *Abba*.

When we call God, *Abba*, we do four things.

1. We imitate Jesus.
2. We identify ourselves as God's children.
3. We affirm our communal status as children of God's family.
4. We claim that God has personal interest in us, like a father.

To think of God as father, doesn't mean we cannot think of God in motherly images as well. The Bible uses famine images for God frequently; for example:

Gen. 1:27. The image of God is "male and female."

Deut. 32:18. You were unmindful of the Rock that bore you; you forgot the God who gave you birth.

Isa. 66:13. "As a mother comforts her child, so I will comfort you".

Isa. 49:15. "Can a woman forget her nursing child, or show no compassion for the child of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you."

1 Jn. 3:9. Those who have been born of God do not sin, because God's seed abides in them; they cannot sin, because they have been born of God.

Jesus' Prayer can be divided into two parts.

C. First three petitions: God's lordship

In the first part, Jesus gives three petitions focusing on God—*thy* name, *thy* kingdom, *thy* will.

1. First petition: "Hallowed by thy name"

In the first petition, we pray, "hallowed be thy name." It is in the passive tense. We are asking God to do something, not us. To hallow something means to make it sacred or holy. To speak of "the Name" (*ha-Shem*) is a way to talk about God's very character or essence.

² Mk 14:36; Rom 8:15; Gal 4:6.

On the one hand, when we say, “hallowed be thy name,” we are **explicitly** praying that God will sanctify his Name, that God will vindicate his name, reputation, character—so that everyone may see who God is.

On the other hand, when we say, “hallowed by thy name,” we are **implicitly** making a commitment. We are committing ourselves to glorify God. We commit ourselves to honor God:

1. In how we talk about and pray to God—with “right intent” or *kavanah*
2. In how we talk about and treat other human beings, who are made in the image of God.

Hallowed be thy Name!

2. Second petition: “Thy kingdom come”

In the second petition, we call for **God’s kingdom to come**. What is the kingdom of God? It refers to the rule or reign of God; it is God’s action in human history. There are seven characteristics of God’s reign or kingdom:³

1. God’s presence as Spirit and light (Isa. 60:1-2, 19)
2. Righteousness or justice (Isa. 42:1-7)
 - v. 3 “he will faithfully bring forth justice (מִשְׁפָּט; *mishpat*):
 - v. 6 “I am the LORD, I have called you in righteousness (צְדָקָה; *tsedeg*) I have taken you by the hand and kept you; I have given you as a covenant to the people, a light to the nations.”
3. Peace (Isa. 11:6-13; 60:17-19)
4. Joy (35:8-10)
5. Deliverance or salvation (Isa. 43:1-4)
6. Healing (Isa. 35:5-6)
7. Israel’s return from exile (35:8-10)

When we pray “Your kingdom come,” we ask God to be present as life and light, to establish righteousness, peace, and genuine happiness.

When you pray “Thy kingdom come,” envision two things:

(1) On a personal level, envision God removing our fearful, narcissistic egos that harm ourselves and others, and replacing it with the Spirit of Christ.

(2) On a social level, envision God dethroning the violent, self-serving, and unjust human institutions and governments that currently dominate human existence, and replacing them with the Spirit of Christ.

³ Glen H. Stassen, *Living the Sermon on the Mount* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2006) 24-37. Seventeen passages in Isaiah the proclaim the good news of the deliverance of God (9:1-7, 11; 24:14-25:12; 26; 31:1-33:20; 33; 35; 40:1-11; 42:1-44:8; 49; 51:1-51; 52:13-53:12; 54; 56; 60; 61; 62). From these passages, seven themes can be discerned, which ring throughout Matthew’s Gospel.

When we pray, “Thy kingdom come,” we envision God on the throne, not Caesar. We want God—not Republicans, Democrats, Independents, or socialists—but God himself.

Thy kingdom come!

3. Third petition: “Thy will be done”

In the third petition, we pray for “Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” We envision God bringing heaven to earth. And we envision ourselves cooperating with God in bring heaven to earth.

When we pray for God’s will be done, envision conflicts being resolved, marriages and families healed, truth told, people made whole, needs met, and joy without measure.

Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven!

D. Second three petitions: Human need

The second three petitions focus on us—give *us*, forgive *us*, lead *us* not, deliver *us*:

1. Fourth petition: Provide for us

In the fourth petition, we ask God **to give us daily bread**.

Daily bread symbolizes our daily needs. This is important! We have needs that God has built into our very beings. Whatever our needs are—food water, clothes, jobs, car repairs, money, love, children, friends, justice—whatever we need, we ask God.

And God, who gives us life, also provides ways for us to meet our legitimate needs. But we must be patient and disciplined and not try to meet our needs in illegitimate ways (outside the will of God).

Give us this day our daily bread!

2. Fifth petition: Forgive us

In the fifth petition, we ask God **to forgive us** of our “debts” (*opheilēma*) as we forgive our debtors. (Luke’s version has “sins” or *hamartias*.)

Literally, this refers to what we owe financially. But figuratively it refers to anything we owe to God. It implies we owe God something. We owe our Creator our lives, which means we are called to live up the image of God we were intended to reflect. And, failing to do that, we need God's forgiveness.

Notice that divine forgiveness and human forgiveness are linked. They are concomitant.⁴ The logic moves from lesser to greater. As we (who are lesser) have forgiven others, then surely we can ask God (who is greater) forgives us.

God's forgiveness of us is not dependent on our forgiveness of others.⁵ God's forgiveness cannot be merited. God's forgiveness is unconditional. However, God's forgiveness must be received. In order for us *to psychologically receive* God forgiveness, we must learn to forgive others.

Forgive us of our debts as we forgive our debtors!

3. Sixth petition: Guide us and deliver us

In the sixth petition, we ask God not to allow us "**to be tempted or tested**" (Greek *peirasmos*) beyond what we are able. God allows us to be tested. That's how we build character. Jesus invites us to ask God not to let us fall victim to "temptation" or "testing".

John Cassian says that this does not mean, "Don't allow us EVER to be tempted," but rather, "Don't allow us to be OVERCOME when we are tempted."⁶

In effect, we are asking God not to test our faith beyond our endurance (1 Cor 10:13).

1 Cor. 10:13 No testing has overtaken you that is not common to everyone. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tested beyond your strength, but with the testing he will also provide the way out so that you may be able to endure it. (NRSV)

Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil!

Last line: For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever.⁷

Jesus gave his disciples this prayer—not to be followed slavishly or mindlessly—but as a model or representative sample. If we follow it with "right intent" or *kavanah*

⁴ Robert A. Guelich, *The Sermon on the Mount* (Waco: Word, 1982) 294.

⁵ Dale C. Allison, *Sermon on the Mount* (New York: Crossroad, 1999) 128.

⁶ Allison, *Sermon on the Mount*, 130.

⁷ The last line on the Lord's Prayer is *in italics*—"for thine in the kingdom and the power and the glory for ever and ever"—indicating it was probably not in the original prayer. The earliest manuscript that includes that line dates from the fifth century (the Washington Codex).

then, like the young women from Latvia, I believe we will discover its transformative light.

E. Readers' Theater

F. Discussion

1. In the choral reading, one reader mentioned that in the early days of the church, the Lord's Prayer was so politically subversive that it was prayed in secret. Think of a phrase in the Lord's Prayer that conflict with your specific, local culture neighborhood, acquaintances, or congregation). What is the phrase and how does it conflict with a local value, belief, attitudes, action, etc.?
2. What specific decision(s) have you made in the past two weeks that relate to this conflict?
3. Which phrase in the Lord's Prayer feels like "good news" to you? Which phrase gives you comfort or strength?
4. What phrase in the Lord's Prayer is difficult for you to pray with integrity? Why is it difficult? What could people in your congregation do to help you be able to pray this phrase with more integrity?