

November 19, 2023

“Praying the Father’s Concerns”

Matthew 6:9b-10

FCF: An underdeveloped relationship with God

PROPOSITION: (anchor) Jesus tells us to pray to our heavenly Father.
(magnet) That changes the focus of our prayers.

SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION:

It’s not easy being in a relationship with someone when the relationship is really all about them. I’m sure no few of us can think of some sad examples. The subject of most conversations is about their concerns. Whenever we try to share what’s on our hearts, they interrupt in order to interject their experience. To make matters worse, they rarely initiate contact unless they need something of us. It’s all one way. All of which tends to make you feel used and unloved.

I wonder at times if God could say that about us and our relationship with Him.

SCRIPTURE READING: [Matthew 6:9-13](#)

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

SERMON INTRODUCTION:

Let’s consider the Jerusalem Temple. King Herod began its expansion in 19 B.C. Of all his many building projects, this could be called his masterpiece. Some 10,000 skilled craftsmen were used. The main part of the work was finished in 6 B.C. but it wasn’t actually completed until 63 A.D. – just seven years before the Roman army put down a rebellion and destroyed it.

To the south of the Temple complex were “the Stairs of Ascent”. It was for pilgrims as they came with their sacrifices. These steps were 200’ wide and can still be seen today. What’s interesting is the irregular depth of the steps. One step might be a foot. The next might be two. And there’s no clear pattern. So you literally have to watch your step. Guides will tell you that the idea may well have been to encourage you to pause and reflect as you made your way up.

That’s a principle we would do well to apply to prayer. Who we pray to changes how and what we pray. So who are we to pray to? Jesus tells us that we are to pray to our Father in heaven. And that changes the focus of our prayers. How so? We see it in the six requests that follow – six requests that are in many ways shaped by the initial address. We’re going to look at the first three today – prayers for God’s name, God’s rule, and God’s will. And not our own.

I. THE NAME OF GOD

So let’s look at this first request ([READ Matthew 6:9](#)). What does this mean?

A) Clarifiers

There are some terms here that can be puzzling so we need to start with some clarifiers.

1. The name of God

For starters, what is “the name of God”? It’s not a reference to a word spoken or written but to God’s character as He has revealed Himself. His name signifies and stands for His person.

2. To hallow

To hallow is the verb form of “holy”. It means to treat something as holy, to honor and revere.

B) Explanation

So then, the prayer is that God Himself would be honored and revered.

1. Already holy

But isn't God already holy? Isn't His name already separate from and exalted over all others?

2. But not hallowed

Yes. But He is not hallowed. He is not revered and honored as He should and deserves to be.

This prayer is that He would be. "Hallowed be your name" – meaning "may you be fully and finally given what you are truly and rightly due." That is the first request in the prayer.

Illustration:

Think of the labor that goes into the building of a monument - the approval by politicians, the raising of funds, the design and construction. Think of the work involved in preparing for a ceremony honoring another's accomplishments - arranging the venue, sending the invitations, securing the entertainment. Why all this effort? You want this person to be known and admired as you are sure they are due. God's people should feel the same - a deep longing for Him to be hallowed, honored and revered, trusted and obeyed, worshipped and served as He alone is due.

Application:

But why do we need to pray for this? Because He is not. And we are never more sane, never more in line with reality than when we hallow His name. So what would it mean to pray this way? "In this world, among Your people, starting with me, may You be hallowed. May You be hallowed in all my thoughts, words, and deeds. May You be hallowed in all areas of my life and in every moment of my life. Now and forever." There is such a comprehensiveness to this.

Jesus tells us to pray to our Father in heaven. That changes the focus of our prayers.

II. THE RULE OF GOD

That's the first request. What of the second? ([READ Matthew 6:9-10a](#))

A) Clarifiers

Now, again, there are some terms and concepts here that are worth clarifying.

1. Definition of the kingdom

What is this kingdom? ([READ Matthew 4:23](#)) Jesus' message is the good news of the kingdom - the restoration of the rule and reign of God, the return to the way things are meant to be.

Illustration:

C. S. Lewis describes it this way in his book, *Mere Christianity* ([READ](#)):

Enemy-occupied territory – that is what this world is. Christianity is the story of how the rightful king has landed, you might say landed in disguise, and is calling us to take part in a great campaign of sabotage.

2. Prior mention of the kingdom

Jesus has mentioned this already ([READ Matthew 5:3, 10](#)). Those who know their need, those who see through the facades of this world's value system, are counted citizens of the kingdom.

B) Explanation

So then, the prayer is that the sure and good rule and reign of God would be felt on earth.

1. Already come

But wait. Hasn't it already come? Isn't Jesus already the king? Isn't He already on His throne?

2. But not in full

Yes, the kingdom has come. But not in full. We live between the times of the first and second comings of the king. He is the king. But He is not rightly recognized and known as the king.

So the prayer is that He would be. "Your kingdom come" – meaning "May your rule break in upon this dreary world like the dawning of the sun scattering the darkness of night."

Application:

What then does it mean to pray this way? We pray that the gospel would go forth, the good news of the king and our standing in His kingdom secured by grace alone, through faith alone, in Him alone. It is to see all disease, emptiness, brokenness, poverty, injustice, and racism as not the way things are supposed to be. And to commit ourselves to pray and work against it.

It is a prayer that this message and all its revolutionary life-changing implications would go forth and take root in this world, among His people, starting with me. And, again, there is this sweeping comprehensiveness here. "Your kingdom come" – now and, one day, forever.

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III. THE WILL OF GOD

So, the first request has to do with the name of God. The second request has to do with the rule of God. And the third request has to do with the will of God ([READ Matthew 6:9-10](#)).

A) Clarifiers

What does this mean? Once more, let me start with some clarifiers that should help.

1. His sovereign will

To speak of God's will is a reference to His sovereign will, His will of decree, His eternal plans and purposes. How do we know what that is? Read a history book. That's His unfolding will.

2. His revealed will

But there is another way to speak of God's will and that is His revealed will. That is, His moral will, what He has commanded of us. How do we know what that is? Read the Scriptures.

Okay, but which is it? Is Jesus praying for God's sovereign will or His revealed will to be done? I will tell you that commentators are split on this. But the fact is that it could be both.

B) Explanation

How then would that play out? What would it mean to pray somehow for both?

1. The shape of our response

Well, it has to do with the shape of our response. Regarding God's sovereign will being done, it would mean that we would desire and not resist it. No matter the circumstances. how pleasant or painful, we would gladly trust in His wisdom and His care, willing to bear it and wait.

Regarding His revealed will, it would mean, again, we would desire and not resist it. Loving our Father, wanting to walk in His ways, we would be reading and submitting our lives to His Word.

2. Pattern for our response

Either way, or really with both, it has to do with the shape of our response. All based on this pattern – “on earth as it is in heaven”. That is, freely, openly, gladly, spontaneously. Think of how the angels respond to the unfolding of God’s plan or the giving of His commands. Without any resistance. So our desire is that earth would look more like heaven and less like hell.

It’s a prayer that what God wants would come about. “Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven” – meaning that His decrees will be carried out and His desires known and embraced.

Application:

What does it mean to pray this way? Whether we’re talking about God’s sovereign will or His revealed will, trust is imperative. Think about it. Without it, when times are hard, we will attempt to seize the wheel, to take control, to do things our way according to our timetable, trying to manage and manipulate people and circumstances in a way that suits us. Our default is to assert ourselves and say, “My will be done.” Jesus is giving us a deep corrective to that.

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CONCLUSION:

Our view of God shapes our prayers to God. If we see Him as distant and uninvolved, we will pray little if at all. If we see Him as but a dispenser at our disposal, we will pray with a focus on ourselves and will be frustrated or embittered if we don’t get what we want. But if we see Him as our Father in heaven, then something changes. Yes, we’ll come with our needs. But those will be framed by His concerns. For who we pray to shapes what and how we pray.

John Paton was a 19th century missionary to cannibals in the New Hebrides in the South Pacific. Here is the account of the day his father saw him off on his internship ([READ](#)):

My dear father walked with me the first six miles of the way. His counsels and tears and heavenly conversations on that parting journey are as fresh in my heart as if it had been but yesterday. Tears are on my cheeks as freely now as then whenever memory steals me away to the scene. For the last half mile or so we walked on together in almost unbroken silence ...His lips kept moving in silent prayers for me and his tears fell fast when our eyes met each other with looks for which all speech was vain. We halted reaching the appointed parting place. He grasped my hand firmly for a minute in silence and then solemnly and affectionately said, “God bless you my son. Your father’s God prosper you and keep you from all evil.” Unable to say more, his lips kept moving in silent prayer. In tears we embraced and parted...

I watched through blinding tears till his form faded from my gaze and then hastening on my way, vowed deeply and oft by the help of God to live and act so as to never grieve or dishonor such a father and mother as He had given me. The appearance of my father when we parted, his advice, prayers and tears, the road, the dike, the climbing up on it and walking away head uncovered, have often, often, all through life risen vividly before my mind.

My friends, if you are a follower of Jesus, you have such a father. And more. God is our Father in heaven. Think then of His knowledge of you, His strength toward you, and His love for you. “What’s your father do?” My Father sits upon the throne over all. And He calls me His own.

How then are we to approach such a Father? With what confidence do we come? And what should be our first concerns? Jesus tells us to pray to our heavenly Father. That changes the focus of our prayers. It moves, shifts, lifts our prayers to His name, His rule, and His will.

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