

Since Labor Day we have studied the classic lines of the Lord’s Prayer. This prayer has been recognized in both literature and in music. Across the lines of culture and language, the Lord’s Prayer has served as the model for Christians to approach God. No prayer can surpass the scope of meaning contained in its simplicity. Placed at the center of Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount, it is a focus of faith. It is a liberating expression before God. It is faith in action, focused on the future rather than on the past. His kingdom is to come now, his will is to be done now, not by our works but by God working in and through us.

Many scholars hold the belief that the doxology (the final line) was added in the early part of the second century. But each time we pray the prayer in worship we pray it as recorded in Matthew’s gospel, including the doxology.

Dr. Myron Augsburger was a visiting fellow at Princeton Seminary during one of my years as a student. He has written that there are three sections of emphasis in the Lord’s Prayer*. I’d like to quickly review the Lord’s Prayer using his outline this morning: (1) The *honor* that worship accords to God; (2) The *humility* that recognizes our dependence upon God; and (3) The *hope* which the rule of God creates. As a model prayer, it calls for more points in the outline than these three thoughts, but it is a helpful way to review the content of the whole prayer.

First, the *honor*. The use of “Our” Father means that we are members of a wider community. “Father” witnesses to God’s personal concern. When the phrase “in heaven” is added it becomes a title for our Father-God, a Jewish expression found twenty times in the gospel of Matthew. To reverence his name is to worship him. For his kingdom to come means to experience the full reign of God now, a desire for the fulfillment of God’s purpose. For his will to be done, Jesus expects our active response that it will be done in us.

Then comes the *humility*—our humility, that is. The request for bread focuses on that which will sustain us for the coming day. The confession of debts is in relation to our sins or debts owed to God. To forgive, as we forgive, is to recognize that God cannot renew those who stubbornly cling to grudges, thus defying his extension of grace. The prayer to be delivered from the evil one is a recognition that we will not totally escape temptation, nor delight in temptation, but we will ask God to deliver us when we are being tempted.

And last of all comes the *hope*. The kingdom is his, the power is his, and the glory is his, forever; and this is the ultimate purpose of God in creating us all in his image and placing us on this earth. Hope has the final word.

One of the most beautiful aspects of the concluding line of the Lord’s Prayer, in my opinion, is that it returns the focus of the prayer to God. The prayer opens with a strong Godward slant, “*Hallowed be your name,*” “*Your kingdom come,*” “*Your will be done.*” Jesus taught his disciples that their prayers should be centered on the glory of God, but only then move to asking God for our daily bread, our forgiveness, and our trust and strength to deal with temptations from the evil one. But at the very end of the prayer, Jesus brings it full circle, and the focal point shifts away from us and our concerns back to God once again.

Notice the heavy duty words that Jesus associates with our heavenly Father. Words like kingdom, power, and glory are weighty and risky words. The world loves them. Kings, Prime Ministers and Presidents build *kingdoms* and defend them with murderous intensity. *Power* is often used for self-interest and for controlling others. And *glory* is what comes to those who wield more power than others do.

"Yours is the kingdom." Our Scripture reading today is the story of what is commonly called the Triumphal Entry that occurred on the Sunday before Christ's Passion. Jesus enters Jerusalem not on a white charger, but on a lowly beast of burden, not on a horse, a symbol of power, but sitting on a donkey, a symbol of humility. The fulfillment of the prophecy of Zechariah is noted by Matthew: *"See, your king comes to you, gentle and riding on a donkey, and on a colt, the foal of a donkey."* The people greet him with *"Hosanna to the Son of David,"* a shout of praise with a messianic expectation. This is the inauguration of the Prince of Peace as the King of kings. With his coming, Jesus has ushered in the kingdom of God. The kingdom is not only coming; it is here now.

Students of American history will recognize the words of Lincoln's Gettysburg Address which is often used as a thumbnail definition of democracy: Ours is a country "of the people, by the people, and for the people." British philosopher John Locke wrote a theory of government based on social order which informed our Founding Fathers. It says that legitimate governmental authority stems from the consent of the governed. But God's kingdom functions quite differently. The kingdom of God is not "of the people, by the people, and for the people." It is a kingdom ruled by its King, and God does not rule by the consent of his subjects, but by his sovereign authority. Fact is, God's reign extends over me whether I choose to vote for him or not.

"Yours is the kingdom" and *"Yours is the power."* This phrase of the Lord's Prayer reminds us that God possesses all power in heaven and on earth—power to create, power to save, power to enable us to live lives of faith.

The falling and rising of the water in the ocean is called the tide**. Have you ever seen the tide go out or come in, watched it ebb or flow? When the tide comes in you can hear it swish-swish and then break on the shore covering the rocks and bushes. When the tide goes out it seems as if the huge ocean was vanishing, drawing back farther and farther until the boats are resting on the sand and the shore line is bare. Sometimes the water rises a few feet; sometimes it rises fifty feet as it does in the Bay of Fundy in Nova Scotia. There is nothing in this world as powerful as the tide.

Years ago when they were building a large bridge over the East River in New York City they found an old sunken ship in the bed of the river where they planned on placing one of the central piers for the bridge. It was buried in mud and wouldn't budge. The strongest tugboat was chained to it but it would not move. One of the engineers took a flat bottom scow to the middle of the river and tightly chained it to the sunken ship at low tide. They waited and slowly the water rose, inch by inch, and the chains groaned until with the rising of the tide the sunken ship was raised. The tide could do what no human power could do.

"Yours is the power."

"Yours is the glory." Third, Jesus instructs us to pray a sort of profession of our faith that all the glory rightfully belongs to the One to whom we pray. Paul the Apostle recognizes God's glory with these soaring words that come at the end of Romans chapter 11: *"O the depth of the riches and wisdom and*

knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! 'For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor?' 'Or who has given a gift to him, to receive a gift in return?' For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever. Amen."

It was the habit of Johanne Sebastian Bach to write at the bottom of his musical compositions the letters "S.D.G." S.D.G. stands for the Latin phrase, *Soli Deo Gloria*, or "Glory to God alone." That's precisely what we affirm at the end of the Lord's Prayer. We are acknowledging that there is no glory to be found in us, but God is glorious beyond our ability to express.

The meaning of the kingdom, the power, and the glory, of course, is captured and summarized best in the life of Jesus. Ideas of power and glory that are divorced from his life and ministry are either false or incomplete. He wields neither the power of the sword nor of the popular vote, but the power of obedience to the law of unending love, the power of forgiven sin, the power of relinquishment. The power of embrace; and the subversive power of powerlessness.

His glory is not that of military might and marching bands but of scars that speak of sacrificial love. His glory is, of all things, a cross. "In the cross of Christ I glory, towering o'er the wrecks of time." He is nothing like what the people expected then or expect even today. Remember how he entered the city of Jerusalem on Palm Sunday? He is a countercultural king, a contrasting power, a contrary glory. And he bids us to follow him. I have to wonder what the world might be like if we actually did follow him.

More importantly, what might I be like if I did?

I invite all of you to concentrate on and to seriously contemplate the prayer that Jesus taught his followers when he said, "*This then is how you should pray...*"

Every time we pray this prayer we should speak each phrase thoughtfully, each word carefully, not as a robotic mantra for calming our troubled nerves, but as a way to open our eyes to the world as God sees it. Only in the power of Jesus risen from the dead can we pray and live the Lord's Prayer.

Go out into the world knowing that the kingdom, the power, and the glory are God's, forever! Amen.

*The Communicators Commentary, Vol. 1: Matthew, by Myron Augsburger © 1982 Word Inc.

**Children's Nature Story-Sermons, by Hugh T. Kerr © 1923 Fleming H. Revell Company