



JOHN WESLEY'S SERMON ON THE LORD'S PRAYER

Sermon 26: Upon our Lord's Sermon on the Mount, Discourse 6*

Matthew 6:9-15

"...therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen. For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses."

Part III.

Observations about the Lord's Prayer

2. We may observe, in general, concerning this divine prayer:

First, that it contains all we can reasonably or innocently pray for. There is nothing which we have need to ask of God, nothing which we can ask without offending him, which is not included, either directly or indirectly, in this comprehensive form.

Secondly, that it contains all we can reasonably or innocently desire; whatever is for the glory of God, whatever is needful or profitable, not only for ourselves, but for every creature in heaven and earth. And, indeed, our prayers are the proper test of our desires; nothing being fit to have a place in our desires which is not fit to have a place in our prayers: What we may not pray for, neither should we desire.

Thirdly, that it contains all our duty to God and man; whatsoever things are pure and holy, whatsoever God requires of the children of men, whatsoever is acceptable in his sight, whatsoever it is whereby we may profit our neighbour, being expressed or implied therein.

Three Parts

3. It consists of three parts, – **the preface, the petitions, and the doxology**, or conclusion. The preface, “our Father which art in heaven,” lays a general foundation for prayer; comprising what we must first know of God, before we can pray in confidence of being heard. It likewise points out to us all those tempers with which we are to approach to God, which are most essentially requisite, if we desire either our prayers or our lives should find acceptance with him.

The Preface

4. **“our Father:”** – If he is a Father, then he is good, then he is loving, to his children. And here is the first and great reason for prayer. God is willing to bless; let us ask for a blessing. “our Father;” – our Creator; the Author of our being; He who raised us from the dust of the earth; who breathed into us the breath of life, and we became living souls. But if he made us, let us ask, and he will not withhold any good thing from the work of his own hands. “our Father;” – our Preserver; who, day by day, sustains the life he has given; of whose continuing love we now and every moment receive life and breath and all things. So much the more boldly let us come to him, and we shall “obtain mercy, and grace to help in time of need.” Above all, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and of all that believe in him; who justifies us “freely by his grace, through the redemption that is in Jesus;” who hath “blotted out all our sins, and healed all our infirmities;” who hath received us for his own children, by adoption and grace; and, “because” we “are sons, hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into” our “hearts, crying, Abba, Father;” who “hath begotten us again of incorruptible seed”, and “created us anew in Christ Jesus.” Therefore we know that he heareth us always; therefore we pray to him without ceasing. We pray, because we love; and “we love him because he first loved us.”

5 . **“our Father:”** – Not mine only who now cry unto him, but ours in the most extensive sense. The God and “Father of the spirits of all flesh;” the Father of angels and men: So the very Heathens acknowledged him to be, Pater te theOn te. The Father of the universe, of all the families both in heaven and earth. Therefore with him there is no respect of persons. He loveth all that he hath made. “He is loving unto every man, and his mercy is over all his works.” And the Lords delight is in them that fear him, and put their trust in his mercy; in them that trust in him through the Son of his love, knowing they are “accepted in the Beloved.” But “if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another;” yea, all mankind; seeing “God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son”, even to die the death, that they “might not perish, but have everlasting life”

6. **“Which art in heaven:”** – High and lifted up; God over all, blessed for ever: Who, sitting on the circle of the heavens, beholdeth all things both in heaven and earth; whose eye pervades the whole sphere of created being; yea, and of uncreated night; unto whom “are known all his works”, and all the works of every creature, not only “from the beginning of the world,” (a poor, low, weak translation,) but ap aionos, from all eternity, from everlasting to everlasting; who constrains the host of heaven, as well as the children of men, to cry out with wonder and amazement, o the depth!

the depth of the riches, both of the wisdom and of the knowledge of God! Which art in heaven: The Lord and Ruler of all, superintending and disposing all things; who art the King of kings, and Lord of lords, the blessed and only Potentate; who art strong and girded about with power, doing whatsoever pleaseth thee; the Almighty; for whensoever thou wilt, to do is present with thee. In heaven: eminently there. heaven is thy throne, "the place where thine honour" particularly "dwelleth." But not there alone; for thou fillest heaven and earth, the whole expanse of space. "heaven and earth are full of thy glory. Glory be to thee, o Lord, most high!"

Therefore should we "serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice unto him with reverence." Therefore should we think, speak, and act, as continually under the eye, in the immediate presence, of the Lord, the King.

7. **"hallowed be thy name."** – This is the first of the six petitions, whereof the prayer itself is composed. The name of God is God himself; the nature of God, so far as it can be discovered to man. It means, therefore, together with his existence, all his attributes or perfections; His eternity, particularly signified by his great and incommunicable name, JeHoVAH, as the Apostle John translates it: To A kai to o, arche kai telos, oon kai ho On kai ho en kai ho erchomenos, – "the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end; He which is, and which was, and which is to come;" – His Fullness of Being, denoted by his other great name, I AM THAT I AM! – His omnipresence; – His omnipotence; who is indeed the only Agent in the material world; all matter being essentially dull and inactive, and moving only as it is moved by the finger of God; and he is the spring of action in every creature, visible and invisible, which could neither act nor exist, without the continual influx and agency of his almighty power; – His wisdom, clearly deduced from the things that are seen, from the goodly order of the universe; – His Trinity in Unity, and Unity in Trinity, discovered to us in the very first line of his written word; bara elohim – literally, the Gods created, a plural noun joined with a verb of the singular number; as well as in every part of his subsequent revelations, given by the mouth of all his holy Prophets and Apostles; – His essential purity and holiness; – and, above all, his love, which is the very brightness of his glory.

In praying that God, or his name, may "be hallowed" or glorified, we pray that he may be known, such as he is, by all that are capable thereof, by all intelligent beings, and with affections suitable to that knowledge; that he may be duly honoured, and feared, and loved, by all in heaven above and in the earth beneath; by all angels and men, whom for that end he has made capable of knowing and loving him to eternity.

The Petitions

8. **“Thy kingdom come.”** – This has a close connexion with the preceding petition. In order that the name of God might be hallowed, we pray that his kingdom, the kingdom of Christ, may come. This kingdom then comes to a particular person, when he “repents and believes the gospel;” when he is taught of God, not only to know himself, but to know Jesus Christ and him crucified. As “this is life eternal, to know the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom he hath sent;” so it is the kingdom of God begun below, set up in the believers heart; “the Lord God Omnipotent” then “reigneth,” when he is known through Christ Jesus. He taketh unto himself his mighty power, that he may subdue all things unto himself. He goeth on in the soul conquering and to conquer, till he hath put all things under his feet, till “every thought is brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.”

When therefore God shall “give his Son the Heathen for his inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for his possession;” when “all kingdoms shall bow before him, and all nations shall do him service;” when “the mountain of the Lords house,” the Church of Christ, “shall be established in the top of the mountains;” when “the fullness of the Gentiles shall come in, and all Israel shall be saved;” then shall it be seen, that “the Lord is King, and hath put on glorious apparel,” appearing to every soul of man as King of kings, and Lord of lords. And it is meet for all those who love his appearing, to pray that he would hasten the time; that this his kingdom, the kingdom of grace, may come quickly, and swallow up all the kingdoms of the earth; that all mankind, receiving him for their King, truly believing in his name, may be filled with righteousness, and peace, and joy, with holiness and happiness, – till they are removed hence into his heavenly kingdom, there to reign with him for ever and ever.

For this also we pray in those words, “Thy kingdom come:” We pray for the coming of his everlasting kingdom, the kingdom of glory in heaven, which is the continuation and perfection of the kingdom of grace on earth. Consequently this, as well as the preceding petition, is offered up for the whole intelligent creation, who are all interested in this grand event, the final renovation of all things, by Gods putting an end to misery and sin, to infirmity and death, taking all things into his own hands, and setting up the kingdom which endureth throughout all ages.

exactly answerable to this are those awful words in the prayer at the burial of the dead: “Beseeching thee, that it may please thee of thy gracious goodness, shortly to accomplish the number of thine elect, and to hasten thy kingdom: That we, with all those that are departed in the true faith of thy holy name, may have our perfect consummation and bliss, both in body and soul, in thy everlasting glory.”

9. **“Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.”** – This is the necessary and immediate consequence wherever the kingdom of God is come; wherever God dwells in the soul by faith, and Christ reigns in the heart by love.

It is probable, many, perhaps the generality of men, at the first view of these words, are apt to imagine they are only an expression of, or petition for, resignation; for a readiness to suffer the will of God, whatsoever it be concerning us. And this is unquestionably a divine and excellent temper, a most precious gift of God. But this is

not what we pray for in this petition; at least, not in the chief and primary sense of it. We pray, not so much for a passive, as for an active, conformity to the will of God, in saying, "Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven."

How is it done by the angels of God in heaven, — those who now circle his throne rejoicing? They do it willingly; they love his commandments, and gladly hearken to his words. It is their meat and drink to do his will; it is their highest glory and joy. They do it continually; there is no interruption in their willing service. They rest not day nor night, but employ every hour (speaking after the manner of men; otherwise our measures of duration, days, and nights, and hours, have no place in eternity) in fulfilling his commands, in executing his designs, in performing the counsel of his will. And they do it perfectly. No sin, no defect belongs to angelic minds. It is true, "the stars are not pure in his sight," even the morning-stars that sing together before him. "In his sight," that is, in comparison of Him, the very angels are not pure. But this does not imply, that they are not pure in themselves. Doubtless they are; they are without spot and blameless. They are altogether devoted to his will, and perfectly obedient in all things.

If we view this in another light, we may observe, the angels of God in heaven do all the will of God. And they do nothing else, nothing but what they are absolutely assured is his will. Again they do all the will of God as he willeth; in the manner which pleases him, and no other. Yea, and they do this, only because it is his will; for this end, and no other reason.

10. When therefore we pray, that the will of God may "**be done in earth as it is in heaven,**" the meaning is, that all the inhabitants of the earth, even the whole race of mankind, may do the will of their Father which is in heaven, as willingly as the holy angels; that these may do it continually, even as they, without any interruption of their willing service; yea, and that they may do it perfectly, — that "the God of peace, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, may make them perfect in every good work to do his will, and work in them all "which is well-pleasing in his sight."

In other words, we pray that we and all mankind may do the whole will of God in all things; and nothing else, not the least thing but what is the holy and acceptable will of God. We pray that we may do the whole will of God as he willeth, in the manner that pleases him: And, lastly, that we may do it because it is his will; that this may be the sole reason and ground, the whole and only motive, of whatsoever we think, or whatsoever we speak or do.

11. "**Give us this day our daily bread.**" — In the three former petitions we have been praying for all mankind. We come now more particularly to desire a supply for our own wants. Not that we are directed, even here, to confine our prayer altogether to ourselves; but this, and each of the following petitions, may be used for the whole Church of Christ upon earth.

By "bread" we may understand all things needful, whether for our souls or bodies; ta pros zoen kai eusebeian, the things pertaining to life and godliness: We understand not barely the outward bread, what our Lord terms the meat which perisheth; but much more the spiritual bread, the grace of God, the food which endureth unto everlasting

life. It was the judgment of many of the ancient Fathers, that we are here to understand the sacramental bread also; daily received in the beginning by the whole Church of Christ, and highly esteemed, till the love of many waxed cold, as the grand channel whereby the grace of his Spirit was conveyed to the souls of all the children of God.

our daily bread. The word we render daily has been differently explained by different commentators. But the most plain and natural sense of it seems to be this, which is retained in almost all translations, as well ancient as modern; – what is sufficient for this day; and so for each day as it succeeds.

12. **“Give us:”** – For we claim nothing of right, but only of free mercy. We deserve not the air we breathe, the earth that bears, or the sun that shines upon, us. All our desert, we own, is hell: But God loves us freely; therefore, we ask him to give, what we can no more procure for ourselves, than we can merit it at his hands.

Not that either the goodness or the power of God is a reason for us to stand idle. It is his will that we should use all diligence in all things, that we should employ our utmost endeavours, as much as if our success were the natural effect of our own wisdom and strength: And then, as though we had done nothing, we are to depend on him, the giver of every good and perfect gift.

“This day:” – For we are to take no thought for the morrow. For this very end has our wise Creator divided life into these little portions of time, so clearly separated from each other, that we might look on every day as a fresh gift of God, another life, which we may devote to his glory; and that every evening may be as the close of life, beyond which we are to see nothing but eternity.

13. **“And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us.”** – As nothing but sin can hinder the bounty of God from flowing forth upon every creature, so this petition naturally follows the former; that, all hinderances being removed, we may the more clearly trust in the God of love for every manner of thing which is good.

“our trespasses:” – The word properly signifies our debts. Thus our sins are frequently represented in Scripture; every sin laying us under a fresh debt to God, to whom we already owe, as it were, ten thousand talents. What then can we answer when he shall say, “Pay me that thou owest?” We are utterly insolvent; we have nothing to pay; we have wasted all our substance. Therefore, if he deal with us according to the rigour of his law, if he exact what he justly may, he must command us to be “bound hand and foot, and delivered over to the tormentors.”

Indeed we are already bound hand and foot by the chains of our own sins. These, considered with regard to ourselves, are chains of iron and fetters of brass. They are wounds wherewith the world, the flesh, and the devil, have gashed and mangled us all over. They are diseases that drink up our blood and spirits, that I bring us down to the chambers of the grave. But considered, as they are here, with regard to God, they are debts, immense and numberless. Well, therefore, seeing we have nothing to pay, may we cry unto him that he would “frankly forgive’ us all!

The word translated forgive implies either to forgive a debt, or to unloose a chain. And if we attain the former, the latter follows of course: if our debts are forgiven, the chains fall off our hands. As soon as ever, through the free grace of God in Christ, we "receive forgiveness of sins," we receive likewise "a lot among those which are sanctified, by faith which is in him." Sin has lost its power; it has no dominion over those who "are under grace," that is, in favour with God. As "there is now no condemnation for them that are in Christ Jesus," so they are freed from sin as well as from guilt. "The righteousness of the law is fulfilled in" them, and they "walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit."

14. **"As we forgive them that trespass against us."** – In these words our Lord clearly declares both on what condition, and in what degree or manner, we may look to be forgiven of God. All our trespasses and sins are forgiven us, if we forgive, and as we forgive, others. [First, God forgives us if we forgive others.] This is a point of the utmost importance. And our blessed Lord is so jealous lest at any time we should let it slip out of our thoughts, that he not only inserts it in the body of his prayer, but presently after repeats it twice over. "If," saith he, "ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses." (Matt. 6:14, 15.) Secondly, God forgives us as we forgive others. So that if any malice or bitterness, if any taint of unkindness or anger remains, if we do not clearly, fully, and from the heart, forgive all men their trespasses, we far cut short the forgiveness of our own: God cannot clearly and fully forgive us: he may show us some degree of mercy; but we will not suffer him to blot out all our sins, and forgive all our iniquities.

In the mean time, while we do not from our hearts forgive our neighbour his trespasses, what manner of prayer are we offering to God whenever we utter these words? We are indeed setting God at open defiance: we are daring him to do his worst. "Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us!" That is, in plain terms, "Do not thou forgive us at all; we desire no favour at thy hands. We pray that thou wilt keep our sins in remembrance, and that thy wrath may abide upon us." But can you seriously offer such a prayer to God? And hath he not yet cast you quick into hell? O tempt him no longer! Now, even now, by his grace, forgive as you would be forgiven! Now have compassion on thy fellow-servant, as God hath had and will have pity on thee!

15. **"And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil."** – "[And] lead us not into temptation." The word translated temptation means trial of any kind. And so the english word temptation was formerly taken in an indifferent sense, although now it is usually understood of solicitation to sin. St. James uses the word in both these senses; first, in its general, then in its restrained, acceptation. he takes it in the former sense when he saith, "Blessed is the man that endureth temptation; For when he is tried," or approved of God, "he shall receive the crown of life." (James 1:12, 13.) He immediately adds, taking the word in the latter sense, "Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God; for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man. But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust," or desire, exelkomenos, drawn out of God, in whom alone he is safe, – "and enticed;" caught as a fish with a bait. Then it is, when he is thus drawn away and

enticed, that he properly "enters into temptation." Then temptation covers him as a cloud; it overspreads his whole soul. Then how hardly shall he escape out of the snare!

Therefore, we beseech God "not to lead us into temptation," that is, (seeing God tempteth no man,) not to suffer us to be led into it. "But deliver us from evil:" Rather "from the evil one,"; apo tou ponerou. ho Poneros is unquestionably the wicked one, emphatically so called, the prince and god of this world, who works with mighty power in the children of disobedience. But all those who are the children of God by faith are delivered out of his hands. He may fight against them; and so he will. But he cannot conquer, unless they betray their own souls. He may torment for a time, but he cannot destroy; for God is on their side, who will not fail, in the end, to "avenge his own elect, that cry unto him day and night." Lord, when we are tempted, suffer us not to enter into temptation! Do thou make a way for us to escape, that the wicked one touch us not!

Conclusion/Doxology

16. The conclusion of this divine prayer, commonly called the Doxology, is a solemn thanksgiving, a compendious acknowledgement of the attributes and works of God. "For thine is the kingdom" – the sovereign right of all things that are or ever were created; yea, thy kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and thy dominion endureth throughout all ages. "The power" – the executive power whereby thou governest all things in thy everlasting kingdom, whereby thou dost whatsoever pleaseth thee, in all places of thy dominion. "And the glory" – the praise due from every creature, for thy power, and the mightiness of thy kingdom, and for all thy wondrous works which thou workest from everlasting, and shalt do, world without end, "for ever and ever! Amen!" So be it!

[*http://www.ccel.org/ccel/wesley/sermons.v.xxvi.html](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/wesley/sermons.v.xxvi.html)