

“Seeking God’s Kingdom”

The Lord’s Prayer

Matthew 6:5-15

July 27, 2008

I have a picture burned in my mind of my son Scott when he was about 2. I had walked across the street from the parsonage to the church. As I came walking back toward home, he met me at the corner. The picture is of Scott and Daddy walking down the sidewalk together, hand in hand. I like to think of that as being an image of God and you or I walking together through life. Walking together, side by side, hand in hand.

“Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name. Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”

I had a boy in a church who had an uncle named Howard, and he thought we always prayed to Howard. Howard be thy name.

I ask you, when we join in the prayer time each Sunday in repeating this prayer, do you really mean it when you pray for God’s Kingdom to come and God’s will to be done? It is so easy for this to become a habit. Said with no feeling, no meaning, no sense that this is what we are really asking for.

Is there any sense of expectancy when you ask for God’s will to be done? Any anticipation that a door will swing open, something new will be before you, and you will recognize that this is what you prayed for, without even knowing it? Are you willing to sacrifice your own will? In order that God’s will might be done?

For some reason for me one of the most meaningful moments in worship is this reciting of the Lord’s Prayer. That quiet moment when as a community of faith, we all join together in asking for God to allow us to join Him in bringing His Kingdom into being, and when we submit ourselves to His will – whatever that might mean, whatever the implications are and whatever the results might be.

It’s another “altar call” moment in our worship. That moment when we are supposed to decide to let God be in control of our lives. I don’t know how you can get through the Lord’s Prayer, and say this prayer with any sense of integrity and sincerity, without being confronted by several huge decisions. This part calls us to:

- recognize God as Father
- recognize God as Holy
- decide whether we want God’s kingdom to reign, or a kingdom of our own choosing
- decide whether we are ready to submit to God’s will for our lives, or to cling to our own frail attempts to run our lives.

I’ve always heard people talk about how they wish they knew how to pray. Or they will say things like, “so and so can really pray.” (note that there is nothing fancy or elaborate about this prayer. No one shouted amen as he went along here. There was no organ playing softly in the background. No fancy big words.)

What prayer really is, is two friends talking. So what we have here is Jesus teaching His disciples about God and about the Kingdom of God. About the relationship you can have with God, and the relationship God wants to have with you. He's teaching them who God is.

They had all the formal prayers, the written prayers, the times to pray, the places to pray, the rules for praying. He is teaching the Disciples about "being" with god. "Don't use meaningless words" He tells them. And He teaches them about words that have meaning, if the heart is full.

Glimpsing over this prayer, note that there are 6 petitions. The first 3 are about god and the glory of God. The 2nd 3 petitions have to do with our needs and our necessities. First is to give God supreme place. Then, and only then, do we turn to ourselves and our needs and our desires. It is only when God is given His proper place that all things fall into their proper place.

This is crucial: Prayer must never be an attempt to bend the will of God to our desires. Prayer is always an attempt to submit our will to the will of God. So first we hear about the holiness of God, the Kingdom of God, and the will of God. Then we can talk about our past, our present, our future. The prayer asks for bread, which is our present need. It asks for forgiveness, which brings our past into the presence of God, and into the presence of God's forgiving grace. And it asks for help in temptation, which is giving our future into the hands of God. So we are instructed by Jesus to commit our past, our present, and our future to God.

Think about it for a minute. How are you doing on those things? We may think we are doing pretty good on giving the present to God. We can dump the present-day circumstances on God all day long. Maybe seeking our own will more than His – but we can at least mention the present day with little difficulty.

Have you given your past to God? Or are you still dragging around the demons of the past. It's funny how we think God just wants to bully us around and take away all the fun of life. But catch this – God wants to set us free by taking away the past that we don't know how to deal with. I remember times when I have had someone say something like this to me: "Well, I don't know if I can get so and so to come talk to a preacher or not." Used to be when I would hear that it would make me chuckle and say something like, "Well, I understand that, there aren't too many preachers I want to talk to either." But we know the problem is deeper. There is a deep hesitation to open up ourselves to God who might challenge where we have been. We don't know how to deal with it. God wants to take it away. What a neat God we have!

How are you doing on giving your future to God? There's a big one. A person say sot me, I know what it means to be a Christian, and there are just things I'm not ready to give up yet. Hey, if you haven't given your future to God, you're sure missing out on a good night's sleep. You can face the future unafraid, filled with hope! Never worrying about what tomorrow will bring because you know who holds tomorrow. You have nothing to worry about or fear anymore, when you have given Him your future.

Remember that Jesus taught people things about God that they never knew before.

To call God Father is to:

-settle our relationship with the unseen world

People used to believe in hordes of gods (in every stream and rock and tree and plant and in every natural force. These gods had to be appeased. The last thing they would do is help people. Jesus showed us a God who gave Himself for us

-settle our relationship with the seen world

Is the world, the universe in which we live, hostile or friendly? We still Betray a lingering doubt about that. When things happen that we call “bad,” we wonder why God is doing this to us. When our Father is the God of all creation, a creation of order and structure and dependability, we can live in peace in the world.

-settle our relationship with other people

God is father of us all. Not my father. Our father. Me, mine, I never Appear in this prayer. Because God is Father, we are all his children.

A chaplain in World War One came across a dying soldier. “May I pray for you?” he asked. The soldier, seeing the chaplain’s crucifix said, “But Father, I do not belong to your church.” The chaplain replied, “but you do belong to my God.” And he prayed for him.

-settle our relationship with ourselves.

I like that line that says – God doesn’t make junk. We are all pretty good at demeaning ourselves. Even if it were true that we did not matter to anyone else, we still matter to God.

-settle our relationship with God.

Father. Abba, Jesus called Him – “daddy.” A very intimate term in the original language. It does not make God any less mighty or powerful or majestic – to bring Him down to our level, as they say. We didn’t bring God down to our level. He CAME DOWN TO OUR LEVEL. His power and might are approachable, personal, close to us. Have you allowed yourself to become so close to God that you can run to Him and call out – Daddy?

I read of an old Roman story. The Emperor’s armies had won a great victory. So there was a great parade through the streets of Rome. The Emperor was in the parade, with all the loot and prisoners on display. The streets were lined with people. Soldiers lined the streets first in order that the people could not get to the Emperor. When the parade came past the stand upon which were the wives and children of the Emperor, the youngest son jumped from the stand, ran through the crowd and between the legs of one of the mighty soldiers.

The soldier quickly grabbed the small boy and yelled at him that he was not allowed out there. “Don’t you know who that is in that chariot? That’s the Emperor” screamed the

soldier. The little boy turned to the soldier and said, "He may be your Emperor, but he's my father."

That's exactly the way the believer feels toward God. He may be the great creator of all the universe, mighty, majestic, eternal, far above us - but Jesus taught us to call him Father, and approach him like we would a loving Father.

To be in the Kingdom of God is to obey the will of God. The Kingdom of God isn't only about nations and peoples and countries. It is something which has to do with each one of us. The Kingdom of God is in fact the most personal thing we can know - for it is entering into a relationship with God. Being part of God's Kingdom is giving my heart and will and life to God.

It is giving to God my past, my present, and my future. It is trusting the God who cares deeply about me with all of my existence. Trusting in His goodness and grace. Finding a whole new life in Him.