

SERMON

The Lord's prayer: Our Father (Mathew 6:9-10)

To whom do you pray? Seems a strange question, because of course the answer is God. Or is it. We have here in the Sermon on the Mount, a prayer which we are told Jesus prefaced by saying in Matthew 6:9

“This, then, is how you should pray:...” (Matthew 6:9 NIV)

This, then, is how you should pray. Over the centuries people have taken the prayer that follows, which we call the Lord's Prayer as something to say. As a young Christian, I went to an Anglican church and of course in every service, at some point, the Lord's Prayer was said by the congregation. If it wasn't at every service then it seemed like it. But this is not purely the domain of the Church of England. When I began my ministry in Nottingham, I was approached by a family who told me that as a church we should be saying the Lord's Prayer at every communion service. You may have guessed from their comment that I did not.

However there are some who take this prayer as a guideline and not as a formulaic prayer. They say that this is the way you are supposed to pray along these lines and not this is what you are actually to pray. Using it as a formulaic prayer – something we recite, caused our children problems when they were in Primary School. The head of the school was a Methodist and they use to say the Lord's Prayer quite often in school. So what was the problem? The school used a modern form of the Lord's Prayer, as used by the Anglican Church, so when the girls came to say it in our non-conformist church, they did not know it because we were still using the old-fashion form!

Whether we use it though as a something to say or as a guide to the manner in which we pray – the jury is out, and I am not sure if it matters as long as the words of Jesus are heeded in Matthew 6:7

“And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.” (Matthew 6:7-8 NIV)

If said often enough it can become a mindless babble.

So back to the question posed earlier, “To whom do you pray?” Seems a strange question but let us look at the Lord's prayer

“...”“Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.” (Matthew 6:9-13 NIV)

Let us break it down another way

Our Father in heaven,

1. **hallowed be your name,**
2. **your kingdom come,**
3. **your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.**

4. **Give us today our daily bread.**
5. **Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.**

6. **And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.”** (Matthew 6:9-13 NIV)

It begins with a title followed by six or seven petitions. It is unclear whether the last one: **lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one** is really one or two petitions. However that is really unimportant in some respects but the important thing is that half of the prayer is concerned with God the person to whom we are praying. How often do we rush into what we want, what we have to ask, rather than remember to whom we are speaking?

This similar to the Ten Commandments. The first part of call with them is God. At times though we are too rushed into getting in our petitions, our needs, our wants and we do not spend time revelling in who God is, in him.

So the first half of the Lord's Prayer is to do with God

**Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.**

And it is in debate among scholars whether it could read

**Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name, on earth as it is in heaven
your kingdom come, on earth as it is in heaven
your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.**

Or

**Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come, on earth as it is in heaven
your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.**

Or as we normally say it

**Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.**

Personally I like to think that the phrase **on earth as it is in heaven** refers to all three.

The first thing to notice is that it is addressed to Our Father, not My Father. Jesus used the plural pronoun 'our', not the singular pronoun 'my'. This is just after he has said in Matthew 6:5-6

“And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.” (Matthew 6:5-6 NIV)

The King James Version had

“But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly.” (Matthew 6:6 KJV)

Enter thy closet and I have known people who have literally prayed in the toilet. I have seen church prayer sheets in toilets, pinned to the door! But here Jesus is talking about praying alone, being on one's own with God, but then he begins the prayer with 'Our Father'. There is the place for private prayer, but there is also the place for praying with other people, of being together to pray.

So the prayer begins '**Our Father in heaven,**' which here shows that we pray to a living person who is in intimate relationship with us but also is transcendent is different to us. God is the one who is Immanent and transcendent in the same person.

God is intimately connected to us as Father. If we think of a good father, then God is that times infinity, as I read. Jesus later in the Sermon on the Mount says

"Which of you, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!" (Matthew 7:9-11 NIV)

God is such a good Father that he wants the best for us, but at the same time he is different to us, he is transcendent, he is not like us. This means that he does not have our weaknesses, our foibles and so is faithful and constant and loving. So many children wake up each morning not knowing what sort of mood their parents are in that day. For some children it may mean the difference between a beating or being spoiled. With God that does not occur – he is the constant, ever-loving God, even when he has to discipline his children, discipline us. God is different to us and should be treated as such.

In our culture today we are very informal. When you went into hospital, at one time, you would be called Mr Owen if that was your name, if it wasn't it would be very confusing. But now you go into hospital and you are called by your first name, which can still be confusing if your first name happens to not be what people call you. On the phone, if someone is trying to sell you something they use your first name as if they are a great friend of yours. It gets even more confusing for them as some think that Reverend is a first name, so I get a conversation with the person at the other end saying, "Reverend, we have this special offer. Reverend, would you like this of that?"

We live in a very matey society and this has spilled over into church and into our relationship with God. We like the all-mateyness of God but not the All-mightiness of God. And the Lord's Prayer says, **hallowed be your name.** May your name be revered, be treated as holy and this is not just his name, but God himself because knowing a name tells you about the person. This is why Moses asked God for his name when God met Moses in the burning bush. During their conversation together we read that

"Moses said to God, "Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' Then what shall I tell them?" God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: 'I AM has sent me to you.'" God also said to Moses, "Say to the Israelites, 'The LORD, the God of your fathers—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob—has sent me to you.' This is my name for ever, the name by which I am to be remembered from generation to generation." (Exodus 3:13-15 NIV)

The name told all. We are to treat God as holy, to revere him. This prayer, these petitions would have not been unusually for the listeners that day, for the disciples to have heard, because a Jewish prayer called the Qaddish goes like this

Heightened and ***hallowed be his*** great ***name*** in the world he created ***according to his will***. And may he ***establish his kingdom*** in your life and in your days and in the life of all the house of Israel, very soon and in the coming season.

And you say: *Amen!*

Blessed, praised and glorified, raised, lifted up and revered, exalted and lauded be the name of him who is Holy, blessed be He! Although he is high above all blessings, hymns, praised and solace uttered in (this) world.

And you say: *Amen!*

May our prayers and the supplications of all Israel be accepted by ***our Father, who is in heaven***

And you say: *Amen!*

May there be abundant peace from Heaven and life for us and all Israel.

And you say: *Amen!*

May he who makes peace in the heights make peace for us and all Israel!

And you say: *Amen!*

What Jesus was saying was not new, but a reiteration of what was already known. We are to keep the name of God hallowed, we are to pray for God's kingdom to come. **Your kingdom come** in the future when we know that Jesus will return again, but also in the here and now. As Jesus said at the start of his ministry

““The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!"” (Mark 1:15 NIV)

And that mantel has been passed on to us

“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you..." (Matthew 28:19-20 NIV)

And we know that if the world was to carry out the will of God now then it would be bliss because his will is **good, pleasing and perfect** (Romans 12:2). Yes, we know that one day every knee shall bow and do his will, but we are called upon to spread the word and help people readily

- agree to his will, on earth as it occurs already in heaven;
 - to acknowledge him as king over a kingdom, on earth as it occurs already in heaven;
 - to hallow him as the Almighty God, on earth as it occurs already in heaven,
- knowing him as the majestic Father.

However some use the phrase **on earth as it is in heaven** as a cry of resignation. It will never happen on earth until Jesus comes again, so why bother trying to bring anything around. William Temple said about this phrase

We have turned what was meant to be a battle-cry into a wailing litany
(William Temple)

Hopefully the Lord's Prayer spurs us on into action, not into despair. To whom do you pray? Hopefully when you pray you will remember that it is God almighty that we pray to, but an Almighty God who is also our intimate Father.

May we go out into the world with the authority, goodness and love of God with us as we, as his ambassadors and his children do our part to keep his name holy, but asking people we know to curb their language if they are using the Lord's name in vain as an expletive. By telling our friends about this kingdom and that Jesus died on the cross to defeat Satan and so usher in the Kingdom of God where the best life is had by doing his will.

"Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven...." (Matthew 6:9-11 NIV)

PRAYER

Our Father in heaven

May Your great name be heightened and hallowed in the world You created according to Your will. And may You establish Your kingdom in our life and in our days and in the life of all those at ADBC, very soon and in the coming season.

And you say: *Amen!*

May the name of him who is Holy, be blessed, praised and glorified, raised, lifted up and revered, exalted and lauded. Although he is high above all blessings, hymns, praised and solace uttered in this world.

And you say: *Amen!*

May our prayers and requests be accepted by you, our Father, who is in heaven

And you say: *Amen!*

May there be abundant peace from Heaven and life for us.

And you say: *Amen!*

May he who makes peace in the heights make peace for us also

And you say: *Amen!*