

2CH Sunday at 7.30

Talks from the NSW Council of Churches

The Lord's Prayer

Presented by Harry Goodhew

INTRODUCTION

Good morning and thank you for listening again. A simple question once asked of Jesus by one of his disciples resulted in an answer that, in all probability, has been repeated around the world more than any other words.

Jesus' disciples had observed him at prayer, and one said, "Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples". The answer to that request has been echoed down the centuries in what we know as The Lord's Prayer.

Luke, in his account of this incident in Chapter 11 of his Gospel, not only gives us the words that Jesus gave either as an actual prayer, or as an outline for prayer, but also includes a story Jesus told to encourage us in our praying. Let's think a little more about both the prayer and the story.

SEGMENT 1

Luke's account of the prayer is really a little shorter than Matthew's but here is how the old King James Authorised Version renders Luke 11:1-4,

Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, as in heaven, so in earth. ³ Give us day by day our daily bread. ⁴ And forgive us our sins; for we also forgive every one that is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil.

And then the story that follows in a more modern version:

Suppose one of you has a friend, and you go to him at midnight and say to him, 'Friend, lend me three loaves of bread; ⁶ for a friend of mine has arrived, and I have nothing to set before him.' ⁷ And he answers from within, 'Do not bother me; the door has already been locked, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot get up and give you anything.' ⁸ I tell you, even though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, at least because of his persistence he will get up and give him whatever he needs.

⁹ "So I say to you, Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. ¹⁰ For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. ¹¹ Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for a fish, will give a snake instead of a fish? ¹² Or if the child asks for an egg, will give a scorpion? ¹³ If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him! (NRSV)

The foundation on which this prayer and the story that follows are based is the sovereignty and all controlling influence of God and of the grace and mercy by which our heavenly Father's sovereignty is exercised. Prayer, in the Bible, is prayer addressed to the Creator and Sustainer of all that exists, who through the Lord Jesus Christ is Father to all who call upon him. Without that solid conviction that God is sovereign and able to accomplish whatsoever he purposes to do, our praying will always be tentative and uncertain.

SEGMENT 2

There are two further elements to be kept in mind beyond knowing that God is sovereign and gracious as we come to pray. The first is that there is nothing that we can say to him in prayer that he does not know about or does not fully understand already. He knows all and every situation perfectly. We cannot bring him up-to-date about anything.

The other element is that he loves us and always wills the very best and highest for each of his children. In Christ he has bestowed upon us eternal life, the gift of his Spirit, and the promise that he will finally present us faultless before the presence of his glory blameless and with extreme and super abounding joy.

So knowing our heavenly Father's power and authority, his knowledge, and his abounding love for us, what did Jesus teach us to pray about?

First, he taught us to pray for the hallowing, sanctifying, or revering of the Name of God. It is a request that God be recognised and honoured as God in all his glory. It could be a prayer that God will act to do this – perhaps calling on God to usher in finally his ultimate kingdom, eliminating all that spoils God's first creation and producing his new heaven and earth. Or it may be a prayer that more and more people will recognise God for who he is and that we, his people, may more appropriately honour him in our daily lives - living the life of heaven now, in this present time, in a world that seeks to live by its own values and goals. Whatever the emphasis, we have been taught that our first concern in prayer is to be God, his honour and his purposes. We know of course, that when that prayer is answered we will experience our deepest joy and fulfilment.

This order of concern in prayer is the order that marked the life and ministry of our Lord. He came to fulfil the purpose of his heavenly Father and lived and died for that end. He sought to glorify the Name of his heavenly Father and to finish the work that he had been sent into the world to do. As John records in the twelfth chapter of his Gospel Jesus said: "Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? No, for this purpose I have come to this hour. Father, glorify thy name." Then a voice came from heaven, "I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again."

If we follow the logic of these words then our prayer that God will honour or glorify his Name is a prayer that we will be committed in the same way to doing the will of our heavenly Father in whatever sphere of life God has ordained that we occupy – living our ordinary daily lives with kingdom values, kingdom goals, and kingdom joy, wherever we are.

SEGMENT 3

The second half of this famous prayer, or prayer outline, is concerned with three of our great needs: "Give us day by day our daily bread ... forgive us our sins; for we also forgive every one that is indebted to us ... And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil." Again, it is not that we are telling God something he does not know, or about which he is lacking in concern for us. These three petitions are the things about which we, as his children, are to consult with him our loving, generous, and listening Father, in the daily course of our lives: provision, pardon, and protection.

First we have daily needs that relate to our living in the world that our Father has created and sustains: food, drink, clothing, peace and stability, and the mutual service that we as human beings are to offer to each other to make life liveable. This request expresses our dependence upon him and our gratitude to Him for all he provides, and our commitment to function in this, his creation, in the manner that he has commanded and that honours him as our caring Father. We are called in this prayer to function, with respect to our needs as human beings, without anxiety, laziness, or covetousness, and ourselves to be generous and caring for others, recognising and respecting the web of relationships that bind us to one another.

The second prayer request in this section focuses on an area of our greatest need and our greatest test of character. Our heavenly Father has been, and is, gracious and pardoning to us to a degree that we cannot finally fathom. To send the Son to bear our sins is an expression of love that lies beyond computation. His is a love that invites us to bring our worst aspects to him and to seek his forgiveness. We are invited to be open, to hide nothing, (which of course cannot be done) and to seek both pardon and the strength to walk daily in a manner more worthy of our calling as his children. It is a request that God will pardon everything; deeds, thoughts, attitudes and dispositions and enable us to do better each day. As a request it is intensive, reaching down to our depths, and extensive, running to the very limits of our life. It becomes a test of our character when we turn from God to those around us and seek to act towards them as we have asked God to act towards us. So it is a prayer for a heart of compassion like the heart of our heavenly Father.

The focus of the third intercession is our preservation and protection again all evil bodily and spiritual: as the old prayer went, “Almighty God, who seest that we have no power to help ourselves; keep us both outwardly in our bodies, and inwardly in our souls; that we may be defended from all adversities which may happen to the body, and from all evil thoughts which may assault and hurt the soul ...”

CONCLUSION

Jesus, the Son of God, was a man of prayer. It was his habit of prayer that prompted his disciples to ask that they too might be taught how to pray, and thus we have the Lord’s Prayer.

The structure and priorities of this prayer offer us a healthy corrective to our almost irresistible propensity towards self-occupation in our prayers; while Luke’s accompanying story of the reluctant “friend”, serving as a contrast to our heavenly Father’s willingness to hear and respond, offers us a warm and generous encouragement expectantly to ask, seek, and knock. It is the Divine Lover of our souls who invites us to seek his face. Ask God to teach you to pray, and give time to the discipline of learning how to do it.

Have a great day.