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THE LORD'S PRAYER

Trinity Sermon, No. 2

LANCE R. SHILTON



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THE LORD'S PRAYER

5DN Broadcast Address

by the Reverend

LANCE R. SHILTON, B.A., B.D., Th.L.
Rector of Holy Trinity Church, Adelaide

Trinity Sermon No. 2

THE LORD'S PRAYER

"No other form of words has such a hold upon mankind as the few brief sentences of the Lord's Prayer. Probably never an hour passes without its use somewhere in the world. These were the first words most of us learned by heart as little children. They are the last to be forgotten by men who have lost all else of religion."

(Anthony C. Deane)

I well remember during the war years, although rather young in the Christian life, an older man came to me worried and distressed. Hundreds of miles separated him from his sick wife. He had applied for compassionate leave, and as he waited for approval, his mind tossed and turned in panic. He said, "What can I do?" I said, "If I were in your position there is one thing I would do - I would pray. We'll pray together now." And in that tent, we knelt beside the bunk. I prayed first, and then sincerely, falteringly and movingly, he began. "Our Father, which art in Heaven..." It was the first time he had prayed the Lord's Prayer since his childhood.

I wonder how long it is since you have really prayed that pattern prayer?

Its value is emphasised by the fact that we use it in almost every Service of the Church - Morning and Evening Prayer, Holy Communion, the Baptismal Service, the Marriage Service, and in the Burial Service. People who differ on a hundred points of doctrine are linked by their common use of the Lord's Prayer. But because it is used so widely and so often, it is very easy for us merely to repeat it, or to say it, or to listen to it, without really praying it or meaning it.

I cannot say "OUR" if I live in my own water-tight spiritual compartment; if I think there is a special place reserved for me only.

I cannot say "FATHER" if I do not demonstrate that relationship in my daily life.

I cannot say "WHICH ART IN HEAVEN" if I am so occupied with earthly things that my eyes never look up.

I cannot say "HALLOWED BE THY NAME" if I, who am called by His name, am not dependent upon Him for His holiness.

I cannot say "THY KINGDOM COME" if I

am content to do nothing about it myself.

I cannot say "THY WILL BE DONE" if I am questioning, resentful of, or disobedient to His will for me.

I cannot say "ON EARTH AS IT IS IN HEAVEN" if I am not prepared to devote my life here to His service.

I cannot say "GIVE US THIS DAY OUR DAILY BREAD" if I am living on past experience, or if I am an under-the-counter shopper.

I cannot say "FORGIVE US OUR TRESPASSES, AS WE FORGIVE THEM THAT TRESPASS AGAINST US", if I harbour a grudge against anyone.

I cannot say "LEAD US NOT INTO TEMPTATION" if I deliberately place myself or remain in a position where I am likely to be tempted.

I cannot say "DELIVER US FROM EVIL" if I am not prepared to fight it in the spiritual realm with the weapon of prayer.

I cannot say "THINE IS THE KINGDOM"

if I do not accord the King the disciplined obedience of a loyal subject.

I cannot say "THINE IS THE POWER" if I fear what men may do, or what my neighbours may think.

I cannot say "THINE IS THE GLORY" if I am seeking glory for myself.

I cannot say "FOR EVER AND EVER" if my horizon is bounded by the things of time.

I cannot say "AMEN" if I do not also add, "Cost what it may." For to say this prayer honestly will cost everything.

The simplicity of this prayer is such that parents can kneel beside their children and teach them its phrases. It is simple enough for that, and yet profound enough to lead the scholar and the saint to unfathomable depths. It begins with worship, "Our Father, which art in Heaven", and it ends with praise, "For thine is the Kingdom, the Power and the Glory for ever and ever". The first part contains three petitions concerning God -

- Hallowed be Thy Name
- Thy Kingdom come
- Thy will be done

Thy Name: Thy Kingdom: Thy will:

And the second part contains four petitions concerning ourselves -

Give us our daily bread
Forgive us our sins, our debts
Lead us not into temptation
Deliver us from evil

We pray concerning food, sins, temptation, evil.

Now let us look at these relationships more closely:

The first relationship is -

A CHILD COMING TO HIS FATHER ..

"Our Father which art in Heaven"

Notice that it is "our" Father. We never pray this prayer on our own - we are included in the great family of God. When Jesus first gave this pattern prayer, He said to His disciples, "You pray after this manner." Only His

disciples have the right to say "Our Father". John 1:12 puts it this way -

"As many as received Him (that is Jesus Christ) to them gave He power to become the sons of God - even to them that believe on His Name."

St. Paul put it this way -

"Because we are sons, we cry 'Abba, Father'."

We all rejoiced when we heard the news of the birth of the baby Prince - here was another member of the Royal Family. We could never have that honour - we could not pay for it, we could not earn it, we could not demand it - the only way it would be possible for us to be members of the Royal Family would be for us to be born into it. There is no other way by which we can be a member of the Royal Family of God, except by being born into it. That is what Jesus meant when He said to Nicodemus, "Ye must be born again". That is what Jesus meant when He said, "Except ye become as little children, ye shall not enter the Kingdom of Heaven".

Has that been your experience? If

it has, then you may address God not as a great invisible power, not as a despot, not even as our Creator, but as "our Father". The relationship is that of a child coming to the Father whom he knows personally.

The second relationship is -

A WORSHIPPER COMING TO HIS GOD ..

"Hallowed be Thy Name"

This follows immediately after we have addressed God as "Our Father" so that we may not sentimentalise away the righteousness and Majesty of God. It is so easy for us to speak vaguely concerning the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man, all of which may mean nothing if we lose sight of the true character of God.

In the Bible the name of God is always an expression of His character.

He was known to His people in the Old Testament as -

Jehovah - "I am that I am"

Jehovah-Jireh - "The Lord will provide"

Jehovah-Nissi - "The Lord our banner"

Jehovah-Shalom - "The Lord our peace"

Jehovah-tsidkena - "the Lord our righteousness".

The name of God was supremely and finally revealed in Jesus Christ. As I gaze upon a Cross 'outside a city wall', I understand something of the character of God. "I have manifested thy name ..." said Jesus. And He did this convincingly when He hung between two thieves, bearing our guilt and shame.

When we pray "Hallowed be Thy Name", do we realise that that Name is hallowed not only by the revelation He has given of Himself in Christ, but also by our relationship to Him? Do I really desire my life to be so closely related to Him that through it He may reveal the name of Jesus and the character of God to others? As a servant of God, as a worker for the Church, as a member of some Church organisation, is my first thought "Is this for God's glory", or for my own? Can I write "Hallowed be Thy Name" into everything I do? If so, then the

relationship is that of a worshipper coming to His God.

The third relationship is -

A SUBJECT COMING TO HIS KING ..

"Thy Kingdom come"

This petition ushered in the 20th Century with a strong human optimism, but it now lies buried in the rubble of two World Wars, and in the feverish preparation for a third, which promises to make the first and second look like mere 'skirmishes'.

What do we mean when we pray "Thy Kingdom come"? We may mean the improvement in social conditions in our community.

We may mean the stimulation of missionary endeavour in heathen countries.

We may mean the recognition of the Church of Jesus Christ in this world.

But primarily we mean the coming of Christ as King - firstly He needs to be recognised as such by every individual believer so that God's purposes might

be fulfilled through him; but for many of us God is merely a puppet being whom we try to move around to suit our own whims and desires. God is supposed to work for us whenever we pull the right strings.

Secondly, when we pray "Thy Kingdom come" we affirm the belief that God in the Person of Jesus Christ will come again to reign forever. Jesus said, "When the Son of Man shall come in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then shall He sit upon the thrones of His glory." (Matt. 25:31) Then truly the subject shall recognise his King.

The fourth relationship is -

A SERVANT COMING TO HIS SOVEREIGN ..

"Thy will be done on earth as it is
in Heaven"

This petition can easily be misunderstood. Some people say the words with the pious hope that God will work out His purposes while mankind gratefully or submissively looks on. There is nothing they need to do about it. Others think it means that we must accept everything which comes - good or

bad, health or sickness, joy or sadness - it must be the will of God, and so they resign themselves to their fate, whatever it is. Such an attitude leads to passive indifference and cold fatalism.

Recall again the words of Jesus when on the night of His betrayal He prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane as great drops of blood perspired from His brow -

"O, my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as Thou wilt."

And so He faced His accusers with silence; He picked up the shameful cross with dignity; He bore the penalty of your sin and mine with joy. He was willing to do the will of God. Even on the Cross there were murderers to be prayed for, a penitent to be pardoned, a mother to be sheltered, and a world to be redeemed.

The only possibility of God's will being done in me is that the Holy Spirit gets hold of my heart, my mind, my will, and breaks me from all my opposition so that His Omnipotence may be fulfilled in this human, earthen vessel. I can-

not do it, neither can you, but if I yield to the will of God, I discover I am utterly captured by the God in whose will is my peace. That is when we come as a servant to our Sovereign.

The fifth relationship is -

A DEPENDANT COMING TO HIS BENEFACTOR..

"Give us this day our daily bread"

This is the first of the four petitions concerning ourselves. No other sentence of the Lord's Prayer has been the subject of so much debate among scholars. The whole difficulty is centred around one word, the adjective which is prefixed to the word 'bread'. Should it be the word 'daily' or not? It does not occur anywhere else in the New Testament, and a careful search in other Greek literature has not revealed its use there. The great scholar, Origen, in A.D. 185 used the same sort of Greek which is used in the New Testament, but he did not know what it meant, and when Jerome made his Latin translation of the Bible in A.D. 400, he thought that it must mean 'daily'. It was difficult for anyone to be sure about this because there was no other

usage of the word with which to compare it. Then recently some ancient papyri were recovered from the sands of Egypt. They included copies of large parts of the New Testament, as well as many thousands of domestic and business writings such as letters, contracts, household lists and all manner of things; these were written in the same kind of Greek as the New Testament books, and in one piece of papyrus the adjective that we are concerned about was used. This helps us to be more certain about the meaning of the word, and our modern translator has put the petition this way, "Give us today our bread for the morrow".

So then the reason we pray this sentence is that we might be freed from anxiety - "Give us not accumulated wealth - not heaped up stores for all the days to come - we do not ask for that, but give us sufficient that our lives may not be spoilt by over anxiety about the morrow. Give us today tomorrow's bread.

But more important still, we can rejoice in this glorious fact that if we trust Christ now, He gives us the bread of life which is eternal - He gives us

tomorrow's bread now - we may have eternal life right now, and knowing we have it brings peace and joy. That is how dependent we are upon our Benefactor.

The sixth relationship is -

A SINNER COMING TO HIS SAVIOUR ..

"Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive them that trespass against us."

Everybody knows the Prayer Book version of the Lord's Prayer, and so we are used to the word 'trespass', but that word is not used in the Authorised or Revised Version of the Prayer. These have it translated 'sins' or 'debts'. The word 'trespass' conveys the idea of "doing something which is wrong - or overstepping the mark". The 'debt' means not paying back what is due - in other words, a sin of omission.

Some people are quite content to think that they have in their lifetime, for the most part, avoided the grosser sins - they have not done anything very wrong. But rather the question should be, "Have I done everything that is

right?" Our Lord emphasised these sins of omission -

In the story of the Good Samaritan - the priest and the Levite were condemned because they walked by on the other side and omitted to help their fellow-countryman in need.

In the story of the ten maidens, five were foolish because they omitted to prepare for the coming of the bridegroom.

In the story of the talents, the man with one talent was condemned because he omitted to use it.

In all these instances, sins of omission are emphasised. There was something that they did not do. They refused to pay what they owed. They were left with debts.

But when we come as a sinner to the Saviour, we realise that He has paid our debts:

"There was no other good enough
To pay the price of sin,
He only could unlock the gate
Of Heaven and let us in."

He gave His life a ransom for many so that He might buy us back - redeem us from our sins. If you claim for yourself that unmerited, loving forgiveness from Christ then you must extend it to others - you cannot know the forgiveness of God if you are withholding forgiveness from anyone else.

The seventh relationship is -

A PILGRIM COMING TO HIS GUIDE ..

"Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil."

In this petition we realise our weakness; that we have no strength of ourselves to help ourselves. We realise that sin is powerful, that evil is greater than we can meet with our strength; but God permits temptation in our lives to prove the profession of our faith in Jesus Christ, and to discipline our Christian character by teaching us to rely completely upon His power. And so we pray that we may not be led into places of temptation which are too severe for us. Jesus has told us that His power and His protection is available to us.

The Word of God reminds us constantly that there is no temptation stronger than we are able to bear when we are in the centre of His will and the place of His appointment. But James reminds us that -

"every man is tempted when he is drawn away by his own lust and enticed. Then, when lust has conceived, it brings forth sin, and sin, when it is finished, brings forth death".

And so we must pray this prayer in all sincerity, "Deliver us from evil", because we know the power of evil all around us. We come as a pilgrim to our Guide, asking Him to shepherd us through the rough places, to direct us in the paths we do not know, and to provide us with His victorious power that we might resist the temptations which come from the world, the flesh and the devil.

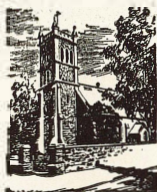
If you come as
a child to your Father
a worshipper to your God
a subject to your King
a servant to your Sovereign
a dependant to your Benefactor
a sinner to your Saviour
a pilgrim to your Guide

then with humble awe and overflowing
thankfulness, you will be able to say -

"For Thine is the Kingdom
The Power and The Glory
For ever and ever.

Amen."

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