

Matthew 6:13
September 13, 2009

Hampton Baptist
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Sermon Series on *The Lord's Prayer*

"Stop the Charade"

In response to the school prayer debate, someone in California penned the following prayer in jest to try to *appeal* to the masses and to be *offensive* to none: "Our whatever which is someplace, unknown be your name; your something come, it will be as fun, on earth as it is in New Haven. Give us today some whole wheat bread, and pass us our math classes, as we would pass all our other classes. Lead us not into starvation, and deliver us fresh pizza. Amen." (Cartoonist Conrad for the *Los Angeles Times, Current Thoughts & Trends*, February 1995, p. 28.) While few can appeal to the masses and be offensive to none, I think we all have much to learn about the Model Prayer and about how prayer works as a whole.

One of my goals in the sermon series on the Lord's Prayer over the past few weeks has been for all of us to gain a better understanding of something which we recite every week. The familiar often fades into insignificance; we rely on rote memory and forget the meaning. The Model Prayer has surface meanings which require little thought, but also one can delve deeper to find spiritual consciousness that most of us rarely fathom. We have examined the different elements of the Model Prayer, and today we conclude the series, hopefully tying all the parts into one whole.

The final phrase is "For thine is the Kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen." Bible scholars accept the fact that Jesus probably did not include this phrase as part of his teaching on prayer. Some of your Bibles may not even include this last phrase as part of verse 13, and some versions have this phrase enclosed in parentheses. The King James Version has the phrase as we recite it; the New American Standard Version and the New International Version place the phrase in brackets. The Contemporary English Version and New Revised Standard Version (which is found in our pew racks) delete the phrase altogether.

As many of you know, the different books of the Bible were written individually over a period of a few decades. Late in the fourth century A.D., a group of scholars came together and decided what would be placed in the New Testament. Led by the Holy Spirit, these men decided which writings would be included and *excluded* and also in which order the writings would be placed. Each book had been copied and recopied since its original writing or manuscript for use in the many churches across Asia Minor.

The earliest and most reliable manuscripts of the Bible do not include the phrase "For thine is the Kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen." The Gospel of Luke includes the Lord's Prayer yet does not include our focal phrase for today. So why is it included in some versions and not in others? Why do we continue to recite it week after week if Jesus did not actually include it in his original teaching during the Sermon on the Mount?

The phrase is as old as some New Testament writings, since it first appeared in the *Didache*, a teaching manual published near the beginning of the second century. It does not make sense that we should *not* say these words simply because Jesus did *not* say them, because we freely quote Peter, James and John. This final phrase of the Model Prayer is an important piece of Christian heritage from the earliest days of the faith, but also the early church's strong "Amen!" to all that Jesus was teaching through the prayer. We do not know who actually added these words to later manuscripts produced after the second century, yet the church through the ages has included the phrase in its corporate worship.

For thine is the Kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen. The phrase serves to end the prayer as it began, in the thought and the sovereignty of God.

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The phrase may have its origin with a reference to I Chronicles 29:11. In that verse David says, "Thine, O LORD, is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty; for all that is in the heavens and in the earth is thine; thine is the kingdom, O LORD, and thou art exalted as head above all." With David being a central figure of the Jewish nation, some early Christians, with probable Jewish roots, may have included, "For thine is the Kingdom and the power and the glory forever." It certainly is fitting.

As I have stated in an earlier sermon, Jesus divided the prayer into two sections. The first half of the prayer focuses on the might of God and the significance and place of God in our lives. Without God as number one, the rest of the prayer is quoted in vain. God deserves and demands to be in the driver's seat. Our chief allegiance and commitment need to be to God. It actually is futile to ask a second place deity for the needs as listed in the second half of the prayer. If our needs are great enough to petition someone, then we need to petition the One to whom we give our primary allegiance. If we are not interested in giving God supreme authority, then do we have a right to ask for daily bread, forgiveness, and help with temptation? We owe God; we are indebted to God.

Having our daily needs met depends upon rightly understanding our relationship to God. First, we must acknowledge who God *is*, then offer petitions. First, we must give glory to God, *then* we can seek to have our needs met.

The second half of the prayer refers to life in the Kingdom of God, to our everyday routines. If we have given God all of ourselves, then we should not have any qualms about asking for God to assist us in the daily grinds.

So, the Lord's Prayer takes greater meaning when the petitioner has an on-going, personal relationship with God. Having a relationship with Christ allows the person praying to ask God boldly for help. If I have a good relationship with someone, I don't mind asking them for assistance; I am a bit more reticent to request aid from an acquaintance.

The Model Prayer evidences no conflict between concern for daily needs and believing in the immanence of the kingdom. We should live like Jesus is coming *tomorrow*, but that does not mean we should quit living *today*. We are required to be citizens of *two* kingdoms; we are to live on earth knowing that we are *not* of this world.

Prayer's purpose is not to *inform* God or to *change* God's will but to lay hold of God's *willingness*. It is not that God needs to be asked, but that *we* need to ask. Prayer is communion with God in which we are brought into new relationships and new attitudes, thus opening the way for blessings which God already purposed to impart. Prayer should be more than just asking; it is more like opening oneself to God in trust and praise, that we may freely receive God's gifts and yield to God's demands.

The context of the Model Prayer as set in the Sermon on the Mount was that Jesus was sharing with his disciples *how* that Kingdom people should pray. Vain repetitions are unnecessary; folks should not pray so that others can hear them but realize that genuine prayer is one-on-one communication with God.

I find prayers of new converts to be refreshing. They haven't learned all of the jargon. A story is told of a new Christian who decided to show up for a prayer meeting and Bible study at his new church. After the Bible Study, individuals broke into small groups for prayer.

"Hey, Howie. Where are we going?" the new convert asked his friend as they headed down the hall.

"We're going down here to pray," said Howie, the seasoned Christian.

"Good night, I've got a problem," he exclaimed.

"What's your problem?"

"I can't pray. I mean, I can't say it the way you guys say it."

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Howie said, "Friend, that's no problem. Thank God for that."

So they began praying. Howie knew his friend wanted to participate, but he was a little hesitant. Finally, he reached over and prompted the new Christian to go ahead.

He said, "Lord, this is Jim. I'm the one that met You last Thursday, remember? I'm sorry I can't say it the way the rest of these guys say it, but I really love You. Honestly, I do. And hopefully, after I know You a while, I'll be able to say it a lot better. Thanks a lot. I'll see you later."

The rest of the group were saying their prayers and as usual, they were reviewing their theology, taking a tour of the mission field, scraping the Milky Way. But this new guy was praying, just talking to God, because he had a relationship. Without realizing it, he was way ahead of the rest of the group, because he was honest in his communication directly to God. (Howard G. Hendricks, William D. Hendricks, Living By the Book Chicago: Moody Press, 1991, p. 98.)

Hopefully over the past few weeks, all of us have learned more about the Lord's Prayer and about prayer in general. But *head* knowledge is worthless if it just remains there. If we do not place our knowledge into practice, if we do not think about the meaning of the Lord's Prayer when we recite it, if we don't exercise our individual right and responsibility to pray, then your time listening to these sermons will have been in vain.

There is more to the Christian life than listening to sermons or surrounding yourself with Christian culture. God never called anyone just to listen to Christian preachers, or Christian music, or just read Christian books. All of God's followers have been called to *action*. Everyone can and should pray.

How about you? Do you sometimes go through the motions on Sunday morning and sleepily recite the Lord's Prayer at the appropriate time? Have you pondered the significance of what you say every time you recite it before God? You are making promises to God of the way you will live your life. In a sense, you are rededicating your life to God every time you recite the Lord's Prayer. Many of us have been saying this prayer all our lives, yet have failed to live up to its standard.

Today is the day to stop the charade. Today is the day to begin meaning what you say when you admit that we should hallow God's name. Today is the day to begin doing your part in following God's will by helping further the Kingdom of God. Today is the day to recognize that our sustenance ultimately comes from God, and that we should depend upon God *daily* for filling our needs. Today is the day not only to ask God for forgiveness for those closet sins that we have, but also to forgive that person or persons for whom you hold a grudge. Today is the day to recognize your weak spot where temptation attacks you. Then and only then can we truthfully say before God, "For thine is the Kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen and Amen."