

June 7, 2009

Matthew 13:31-35 / Luke 11:14-20 / Luke 11:1-4

Luke (#59) - Making the Lord's Prayer Our Own (#3) – Thy Kingdom Come

As we come to our third message on the Lord's Prayer, we're going to look at the next two phrases Jesus asks us to pray:

1<sup>st</sup>) The phrase "Thy kingdom come," which in Matthew's Gospel is followed by the additional phrase, "Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven."

And 2<sup>ndly</sup>) the phrase, "Give us each day our daily bread."

All of us have most likely prayed those petitions hundreds, if not thousands of times! But my question to you is this: "Do you know what each one means?" Do you know what you're praying for when you pray them?

For instance, what are we actually praying for when we pray, "Thy kingdom come?" And how does that relate to the phrase, "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven?"

And in reference to asking for "Our daily bread," what exactly are we praying for? Is it merely a request for our daily provision of food, or is there more to it than that?

You see, when we pray this prayer, we're not simply to recite it! Because if all we do is say the words, without consciously, earnestly and thoughtfully considering what we are saying, it would indeed constitute "vain repetition," and thus be contrary to what Jesus intended.

Therefore, the question that should have arisen in our hearts at one point or another in relation to this prayer is, "What does each petition mean?"

And it's important to know, because I believe that better understanding leads to more specific praying, and more specific praying helps us be more earnest in the things we pray for!

Not only that, understanding these petitions helps us to understand the heart of Jesus better — the things He considered important — and thus helps us reaffirm and recommit ourselves (each time we pray it) to the priorities Jesus wants us to set our hearts upon and plead for, in thoughtful, earnest, faith-filled supplication!

So, let's begin with the **FIRST** petition: "Thy kingdom come..." What are we praying for when we pray, "Thy kingdom come..."? / And what about that additional phrase that we find in Matthew — "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven"? Is that intended to be a totally separate petition, asking for something totally different, or is it simply a clarification or expansion upon the first petition?

In other words, when you pray these phrases of the Lord's Prayer are you asking for two totally different things, or is the additional phrase in Matthew simply Jesus way of telling His disciples (on a separate occasion and for the sake of clarification) that to pray for the kingdom to come, IS to pray that "God's will to be done on earth as it is in heaven."

I believe it is. They are not identical. There are slight nuances of difference between the two statements, but they are close enough that we can be sure that what we find in Matthew is NOT an additional petition He forgot to insert into the prayer when He gave it on this occasion in Luke, but rather, a clarification of the first petition, which helped the average person to have a better understanding of what they were praying for when they prayed, "***Thy kingdom come...***"

You see, the word "kingdom" (or "basileia" in the Greek) means "a rule" or "a reign." And thus the "kingdom of God" means the rule of God or the reign of God.

To pray "Thy kingdom come," is to pray that God's rule or reign over sin and evil and immorality and injustice and disease and crime and war and death — might come on earth as it is in heaven (the paradise of His immediate presence) where His reign and rule over those things is SO perfect and SO unchallenged that there is NO rebellion or sin or evil or pain or suffering or death! / It is to pray that "His perfect will" be done here on earth just as it is already done in heaven."

What then are we praying for when we pray it? We are praying that people (starting with ourselves) would repent and turn from their sin, and obey God from the heart, and do His will (just as the angels in heaven do His will without any hesitation or rebellion)!

We are praying that God would move mightily in history to complete His eternal work of redemption by bringing about the restoration of all things! That He would free the creation from its bondage to decay, and eradicate sin, and do away with evil, and bind Satan, and do away with all sickness, suffering, pain and death!

That, my friends, is what you pray for whenever you pray, *"Thy kingdom Come..."* You're praying (to use the words of the old hymn we just sung): *"That God's great kingdom would come on earth, the kingdom of love and light."*

In fact, it's just another way of praying for what John prays for in the closing verses of the Book of Revelation when in response to Jesus promise, "I am coming quickly," he responds, "Come, Lord Jesus!"

Or Paul, who prays in I Cor. 16:22: *"Maranatha!"* (or as it is translated in English, *"Come, O Lord!"*). It is to pray for the speedy return of Jesus, for only when Jesus returns at the second coming, will He usher in the kingdom in all its glorious fullness and perfection.

R. Kent Hughes puts it beautifully when he says: *"Your Kingdom come" is a prayer for the final kingdom, when, under Christ's rule, our evil hearts will be pure, our deceit, distrust, and shame banished, our asylums and penitentiaries gone, and all conversation and behavior done to the glory of God."*

But you know what? We can't pray that request without placing ourselves under an obligation in regard to its answer! There is a sense in which praying for the kingdom to come obligates us to do certain things in regard to bringing about the answer to the prayer we pray!

And hear me well, lest I be misunderstood! We cannot USHER IN or ESTABLISH the kingdom of God on earth! To even suggest such a thing reveals a profound misunderstanding of human weakness, in regard to the power of sin and evil which will continue to permeate this world throughout this present age!

Only GOD can do that! The petition is asking HE would to establish His kingdom on earth, for only HE has the omnipotent power to do it! That goes without saying! I'm NOT a Postmillennialist!

Yet having said that, there is a very real sense in which we DO play a PART in bringing about the answer to that prayer! And that part is FIRST to regularly and earnestly pray this prayer for it to come! / It is SECONDLY to make it our highest priority in life to, *"Seek FIRST (above and beyond all else) the Kingdom of God (His rule and reign) and His righteousness."* That much Jesus plainly tells us to do!

But there's MORE. By praying it I also obligate myself to spreading the Gospel! In reference to the coming of the kingdom, what does Jesus say in Matthew 24:13-14? He says (speaking of His second coming): *"Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved. And this Gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world, as a testimony to all nations (all "ethnos" as it says in the Greek - not political nation states, but ethnic groups or people groups) and then the end will come."*

What does that mean? Well, at least in part it implies that Jesus will not return a second time to consummate the kingdom of God on earth, until the Good News of the kingdom has been preached everywhere as a testimony to every people group on earth.

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Which means what?

If we're praying for the "kingdom to come," there's a sense in which we've got something to do in relation to that request be answered! We're actually obligating ourselves to being actively involved in getting the Gospel message out to as many people as possible, in as many places as possible (and not just overseas)!

We can't simply pray for His kingdom to come and then sit around and do nothing and simply expect it to happen! That's not the way God has decreed that it work!

Jesus specifically tells us: His return is somehow contingent upon the proclamation of the Gospel to all people groups "as a testimony to them." And thus the kingdom we are praying will come, will not come (according to Jesus), in all its glorious fullness and perfection until the Gospel has been preached to every tribe and people group on the face of this earth!

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And even that isn't all. I can't pray that His kingdom would come (His rule and reign over sin and evil and suffering), if I'm stubbornly clinging to things that are sinful, evil and cause others to suffer!

I can't honestly pray: *"Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven,"* if I'm rebelliously doing or clinging to things that I know are contrary to His will for me and what He wants for this world! If I have no intention whatsoever of turning from them, or letting go of them or giving them up! I should not go through the motions of asking that His will be done!

If I'm consciously committing unjust acts or harboring hatred or nurturing prejudice in my heart against other people, I can't with integrity pray, "Thy kingdom come," for I'd be thwarting, by my attitudes and behaviors, the very thing I'm asking God to bring about!

If I'm stealing from my employer, or lying to my wife, or abusing my children, or encouraging others to use drugs or view pornography or harbor unforgiveness in their hearts, I can't pray, "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven"! I'd be working against the very thing I'm praying for!

So what are you really doing every time to pray this petition? You're asking God to move upon your own heart and soften it to His will for you. You're asking Him to make you more pliable, and teachable, and godly. You're re-committing yourself to His kingdom priorities and His agenda for this world, rather than your own!

You're pledging yourself to actively share the Gospel with others and to work for a more just and fair society and assist the poor and underprivileged, and rid your heart of the idols that make you crave things you shouldn't have or want and the sinful attitudes that make you treat people in ways you shouldn't treat them!

And yes, you're praying for His swift return! You're praying He'd come back soon and establish His kingdom on this earth, so that *"His glory,"* as it says in Habakkuk, *"would fill the earth as the waters cover the sea."*

In fact, by praying it you're literally asking God to bring about an END to this world as we know it, and usher in the Day of the Lord when Satan will be bound, and sin will be no more, and there will be no more crying or pain or suffering or death, *"for the old order of things will have passed away,"* as John tells us in Rev. 21:4, and *"all things will be made new!"*

And until that actually comes to pass, you're essentially (by praying this prayer) offering your body as a living sacrifice to God, to do His bidding throughout your life, remembering as Paul tells us, that *"We were bought with a price, and do not belong to ourselves."*

Pray for it, my friends! Pray for it with all your hearts! Pray for it earnestly even though you now know (if you didn't before) the things you need to do in order to help bring about the answer to your own prayer!

Then **SECOND** and **LAST**, we come to the phrase *"Give us each day our daily bread."* In terms of the whole content of the prayer, this is really the only "me" centered part. The first part is

about how we are to envision God in light of what He's done for us in Jesus, and the second part is about setting His name apart as holy, and the third part (as we just saw) is about praying for His kingdom to come and His will to be done. They're all very God-centered in their orientation. They're all about Him and His purposes and His will. But this one is about us – "Give us this day our daily bread."

If we're trying to find a biblical connection or background for the statement, the best possible alternatives are the Exodus account of God providing Manna from heaven, and Proverbs 30:7-9 where Agur (the writer of that section of Proverbs) asks God: ***"give me neither poverty nor riches, but only my daily bread,"*** for if I have too much, he says, ***"I might disown or forget my need for God and say, "Who is the Lord?" and "if I become poor, I might steal and thus dishonor the name of my God."***

In other words, he's praying not to have more than he needs to get through the next day, and not to have too little to get through the next day, but just enough to get through the next day!

Why? Because he always wants to be conscious of his need for God and dependence upon God. And if he got rich, and had enough for many days or years, he might be under less stress, but he also may forget his need for God, and put more of his trust in money than in God. And he didn't want that! Nor did he want to have so little he'd have to steal to get enough for him and his family to survive, and thus dishonor His God.

That may be the verse and the way in which Jesus intends us to pray this petition: ***"Give us this day (or each day) only the bread we need for that day. Not enough to keep us going for weeks, or months or years, lest we forget our need for you and our dependence upon you."***

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And interestingly that goes right along with the only other passage Jesus may be thinking of -- Exodus 16:4: ***"The Lord said to Moses, 'I will rain down bread from heaven for you to eat. The people are to go out each day and gather just enough for that day and only that day.'"*** On the sixth day they gathered enough for two days since God did not provide manna on the Sabbath.

So what do we have? We have God instructing the Israelites that each day they are to go out and gather only enough "bread from heaven" to eat for that particular day, with the additional warning that if they gathered more than they needed for that day (which many did, since its

human nature to want more than we need!), that which was left over till the next day would stink and be full of maggots (except on the sixth day of the week, when they could gather enough for two days and thus not have to gather or prepare food on the Sabbath).

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So, what do both passages emphasize? Praying for, or gathering only what we need for each day!

Why? Because having too much can lead to spiritual apathy! That's why wealth is always (without exception) spoken of as a danger in the New Testament! Not as evil, but as a danger, because it has the very real potential (over time) to supplant or become the thing we trust in for our daily needs, instead of God.

I believe it's the wealth of Europe, and Canada and the United States that is a major reason why the church in all those countries has fallen into a state of such spiritual apathy. We've had it so good for so long that few of us have ever really had to earnestly pray just to have enough bread to make it through today or tomorrow.

We've had what we need without ever needing to pray, and thus over time we've gradually shifted our trust from God to our wealth (which is why this dip in the economy may not be all bad). For many the economy or the government or their stocks or their retirement portfolios are the source of their peace and rest of soul in regard to the future. Which means they've become an idol that has made us forget our need for God and say, "Who is the Lord?"

"Oh yeah, He's the One people used to trust in way back before government bailouts and wall street gurus like Alan Greenspan, and others. I remember Him. I even think it says something about Him on our money, doesn't it?" It's true! The motto printed on our money, has for many (maybe even most) gone from "In God we Trust" to "In this God we trust."

That's what often happens when a people have too much. Agur was right! What he feared has come true for so many in Europe and America. It's hard to convince people of their need for God (or their need to pray for something as insignificant as their daily bread) when they've always had everything they've ever needed without ever having needed to get on their knees and offer up an earnest prayer for Him to provide it lest they go hungry or die of starvation.

Yet, there is one **LAST** possibility. The literal translation of this phrase in Luke's version of the Lord's Prayer is: "The bread of us, belonging to tomorrow, give us this day, or each day." It's an odd way of putting it, which has raised much speculation as to exactly what it can mean! What exactly is "the bread of us belonging to tomorrow"?

And here Jeremias helps us out when he points out that Jerome (one of the early church fathers), found the an antiquated Aramaic version of the Lord's Prayer and writes: *"I found mahar, which means "for tomorrow" so that the sense is, "Our bread for tomorrow — that is, our future bread — give us today."*

He then points out that in ancient Judaism, the word "mahar," meant not only the next day, but also the great Tomorrow; the coming and final consummation of God's Kingdom. "Accordingly," says Jeremias, "Jerome is saying, the 'bread for tomorrow' was not meant as earthly bread but the bread of life... the bread of the age of to come, or heavenly manna."

This petition, therefore, probably includes the thought, *"Give us today, a taste of the blessings of the age to come."* *"Sustain our spirits today (and each day) with the spiritual food you will shower upon us in the "mahar," or the Great Tomorrow."*

He may be right. Christ the bread of us, belonging to Tomorrow, that we receive each day!

As Jeremias so beautifully sums it up,

*"In a world enslaved under Satan; in a world where God (seems) remote; in a world of hunger and thirst; the disciples of Jesus dare to utter this word 'today'— even now, even here, already on this day, "give us the bread of life." Jesus grants to them, as the children of God, the privilege of stretching forth their hands to grasp the glory of the (future) consummation, to fetch it down, to 'believe it down' to pray it down — right into their poor lives, even now, even here, today."*

Thus I would encourage you to do two things in regard to this petition:

- 1.) See it not only as a call to pray earnestly for your daily portion of bread to sustain your body, but even more importantly, a call to pray earnestly for your daily portion of the Bread of Life, or the Heavenly Manna, which you need to sustain your heart, mind, soul and spirit.

**Last)** Whether it be earthly needs or spiritual needs, guard against asking for too much all at once. Just as the Israelites were to gather only enough food each day, or on the sixth day, for the next two days at most, and just as Agur prayed that God would give him neither riches nor poverty (because of the attending dangers) so also we need to remember that Jesus asks us to pray daily, only for our portion for that day. The prayer is: "Give us this day our bread for today," or "Our bread belonging to tomorrow, give us each day."

And thus we need to be careful not to ask for more than we need for the day, be it physical bread or spiritual bread. There's something about having too much or trying to stockpile that is not good. Which means I should never think I can feast on God's Word, or spend hours in prayer on one day, and then go for days or weeks or months without needing to do so again!

I'm not to feast once every few months and then say "That should do me until November!" Spiritual food is like manna! You need to collect it daily! Were not snakes who can eat once every few months and get by just fine!! We're people who need to eat every day!

D. L. Moody used to pray every day to be filled anew with the Holy Spirit. It's not a bad idea! Pray to be filled anew with the Holy Spirit every day. Feast on Jesus every day. Dwell in God's presence in prayer every day! Get into the God's Word every day! It's not good for us to pray for more than we need for each day, because then we might forget our God, and cease coming back to our heavenly Father, every day of our lives!