

Sunday 11<sup>th</sup>. March 2018  
The Lord's Prayer  
Part 2

Last week in the introduction to the Lord's Prayer, I said how this short but profound prayer is not presented in a vacuum, but in a long reported narrative, known as the Sermon on the Mount. It cannot be taken separately from the larger body of teaching without doing it violence.

The Sermon on the Mount begins with a description of the character of a perfect person. (Compare Psalm 1) Principally it is a description of the character of Christ, and therefore, the Christian character. God wills to form and works to form this character in those who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.

It is people of such character and growing character who are, 'salt and light.' There is significance in using salt and light as a description for godly character. Salt is used to give flavour and to prevent corruption. So it is with Christians in the world. Our presence in the world is to give it a flavour that pleases God and by the presence of this Christian character, holiness, to prevent the world becoming completely rotten.

Do you remember the story of Sodom and Gomorrah? Gen. 18 and 19. Abraham prays for the people in the city and God says that if He finds 10 righteous people there, He will not destroy the cities. Ten salty people could have averted the destruction, but only four could be found and so, the cities were destroyed! It only takes a little salt to give savor to food and to preserve it. In the same way, it only takes a little group of sincere Christians to secure grace for a large number of others! A community is blessed to have a congregation of sincere Christians, but people do not understand this. We don't need Marvel's Guardians of the Galaxy, Christians hallowing God's Name do this work! (Marvel ie comic books being made into films today)

Light illuminates the way, and by its presence exposes darkness. That is a subject in itself!

The good news is that God has now found a righteous Man, and He is Christ. Because of Christ, we can pray with confidence for peoples and cities and nations that God will have mercy and spare them. Why? For Jesus sake.

After the Beatitudes, comes a section of application, and I mentioned the high demands of the beatitudes. When it speaks about adultery and murder, it is not only speaking about the outward acts, but now the attitude of the heart is exposed. God requires and demands and is due, our purity, not only in our actions, but in our thinking, feeling and imaginations. God requires purity in our inner beings, our hearts as well as our heads. Without this inward purity and holiness being nurtured and grown, we are not salt nor light, no matter what we say or do.

Let me expand on this a little bit. God is not interested in what we can do. God is much more interested in where the actions come from. Do they come from our personal ambition and natural gifts, or do they come from hearts who love Him and who depend on the Holy Spirit regardless of natural skills and gifts.

Let me ask you this. Why is it that Billy Graham preached and thousands responded? Why is it that others could learn what he said off by heart and say what he said, but with no effect? It is because Billy Graham, at those times, preached with the anointing of the Holy Spirit, in obedience to the Holy Spirit. We cannot reproduce from our natural abilities what the Holy Spirit does when He works through a man!

If you turn to Exodus 31, you will read there that God chose a couple of men who were skilled in craft work to make the furnishings for the Tabernacle and to lead a group of other craftsmen. The emphasis in this passage is not just that they had natural ability, but to do God's work, in God's way, required that they be filled with the Holy Spirit. Natural ability is not enough, in fact natural ability is often deadly. Think of Paul before he was saved. By his intellect and gifts, he was convinced that persecuting the Church to defend Judaism was a service pleasing to God, and a duty to be pursued! How wrong he was even though utterly sincere and zealous! We need to ponder this. Paul later boasted of his weakness where before he thought he was a pillar of strength. It was as he learned to walk in the Holy Spirit that he came to cast off any reliance on his colossal intellect. His intellect did of course come into play in his Christian service and writing, but Paul knew that the work was done in the power of the Holy Spirit, not his natural talents. Today we tend to boast in our strengths, and see where that has taken us! Sadly we have grown to expect nothing of God and do so much in our own puny strength!

The Church today has separated Christian character from Christian service. As a result of this, we are busy doing stuff for God which He has never asked us to do, and ignore lots of things that He does require of us. The test of a Christian is character, not busyness. Look again at the Sermon on the Mount, the first subject spoken of is character. Without Christian character, there is no salt nor light.

Here is the test. If we are serious about the Beatitudes, if we are serious in doing what God wants of us, if we see the high demands of the Beatitudes and want to be the real deal, salt and light, we will see the absolute and crucial need to pray in an effective and acceptable way. We will be serious about personal prayer, prayer groups, Church prayer meetings, because we need them. Read the case studies Jesus picks to explain the very deep reaching requirements of the Beatitudes in Matt.5.17-48. If we even begin to understand God's desires for us, and requirements of us, if we see even a little of the state of our own hearts as these expositions are read, then we will be driven to pray. To face any of these should cause us to see our utter inability to do them and our absolute need of the Holy Spirit working and willing and directing our inner lives, and we will pray often, much, long, short, with fervor and passion.

So now to the Lord's Prayer itself.

Please take note of the introduction. When you pray, not if you pray. Pray like this, not pray this. It is not the show of prayer, but the praying in secret to Father, whether it is in private or in public.

When you pray. Jesus expects His people to pray. Breathing is to life, what prayer is to spiritual life. How long can we hold our breath without getting red in the face and distressed? That's probably how long we can go without prayer! Prayer gives the believer momentum, and that momentum will carry an individual or a denomination along for quite a long time. However if the pace is not kept up in prayer, eventually things will start to slow down and the ship will begin to sink – does this remind you of any denominations?

Pray like this. The Lord's Prayer is not a set of words to be muttered and so do our duty. It does not mean that we never are to pray these words, but the prayer is given by Jesus, the master of prayer, to instruct us regarding the priorities of prayer, and the motivations for prayer.

Do not be like the hypocrites. This is not a condemnation of long praying, but of praying to show off, to flaunt knowledge, or to put on a religious face. It does not automatically discredit liturgical prayers, but if that is as far as we get, we are missing the point.

The prayer begins with an address – Our Father. We are kin with Christ by being adopted by New Birth into God's family. Hebrews says that Christ is not ashamed to be called our brother. This also means that prayer is based on relationship. Salvation makes us children of God, and so, He is our Father. Prayer is relational. We must have this kinship relationship with God before we can pray like this. The unbeliever is dependent on general providences, rain and sunshine, that God gives to all in His goodness. All the unbeliever can pray for with any hope is for mercy!

The Lord's Prayer is composed of six petitions in two sets of three. The first three relate to God, the second three relate to our needs. This prayer teaches us what things are important to pray for and in what priority. It also gives us confidence to pray, because God here tells us the things He most desires to do. By implication, these are the things to pray for that are in our best interests and for our good and pleasure, and the way to pray which is acceptable to God. This being so, can we not anticipate great results from praying in this way, can we not have great hope of being heard? So, don't fail to pray, or to come with others to pray because it is new, strange, or you are older and have not really prayed much before. Don't think that starting to pray late in the day is not worth it, or it is too late to start.

Look at Matt. 20.1-16. Have you ever thought how unfair this parable appears? Perhaps so, but as I get older, it fills me with more and more hope. If I had known when I was 20, what I know now, perhaps I would have made more progress in Christ-likeness than I feel I have. However the point of this parable is that in one sense, it does not matter

when we begin the Christian life in seriousness, the reward, the pay is the same whether we began early or late. It doesn't matter, in a sense, when we begin to pray 'like this,' start, and the pay is the same. So don't despair, don't say it is too late, don't say this prayer thing is not for me – it is, it's not too late, and we pray to Father, not to each other, so it doesn't really matter if the words come out in incomplete order, and all jumbled up hardly knowing what we are saying, but expressing something beyond expression that comes from our hearts.

If you look at Romans 8.26 it will be seen that there are prayers which are beyond our ability to put into words. Sometimes a little child cannot say to a parent what they feel, but just come and throw themselves into mum or dads arms. Perhaps it is a crisis and they are crying so hard words come in meaningless sequence. Sometimes it is gladness and no words are needed, only hugs. Sometimes the child is full of words, great long enthusiastic stories. All are good, all are parts of life. It is not always pretty or eloquent, or mature, but for parent and child it is perfect! That is how prayer can be.

The first petition, and the most important one is this, 'Hallowed be thy Name.'

What this means is this. Let your Name be seen as high and holy, let all people reverence you and offer thanks and praise to You. Let my life show that You are Holy and God of God's. Easy? No! Demanding? Yes! But look, it is a requirement of us, but it is also an invitation, a declaration from Christ that we can become like this, imperfectly on earth, but perfectly in heaven!

We are praying that God will reveal Himself to us and to the world directly and through Christians to be glorious in His perfections of holiness, might, majesty and glory. We are praying that God would be acknowledged and given the place due Him on earth. Given the state of the world, that is a big ask. It has always been so, and will continue to be so, until the new heaven and earth is formed.

Today, even church-goers, have used the Name of Christ as an expletive. This is but a symptom of a deeper disease. The comedians often make jokes about Christ and the Church and Christian people. Rulers and governments pass laws which are contrary to God's declared will, and ascribe powers to themselves which they should not grasp. The will of man and the wisdom of man are placed like idols in the place of God. The Church and Christians are mocked and spoken against. Sadly often the condemnation cast in our direction is true. The crimes of organized religion are not new to our generation, whether abuse or violence. Not all of it is because the people involved were not Christians. Sadly, we are not yet perfected, and we all make many mistakes, and yield to temptations and corruptions. This is not to excuse ourselves, but to stir us to seek God to grow more Christ-like.

It is crucial that we see that the first and greatest concern of a believer should be that God be given the glory due to Him. There is an old hymn that says this,

'My goal is God Himself, not joy, nor peace,  
Nor even blessing, but Himself my God:  
'Tis His to lead me there, not mine, but His-  
At any cost, dear Lord, by any road.'

F. Brook. Redemption Hymnal no 70.

Gerhart Ter Steegen said something similar in his 'Pilgrim Song'

'Across the will of nature,  
Leads on the path of God.  
Not where the flesh delighted,  
The feet of Jesus trod.'

We are not free to put ourselves first. If we are believers, God will lead us into smooth and the rough places. We will have times where God's will suits us and other times when it cuts across what we want and what we think is right!

This is not an issue of God's ego, but our greatest good depends upon the glory of God, The first catechism asks, 'What is the chief and highest end of man?' Answer, 'To glorify God and fully enjoy Him forever.'

God is not like us. We are small, finite, creatures, God is 'The Being,' the 'I am.' He is not a creature, He give existence to everything else. He is perfection, beauty, holiness, purity, joy, God enjoys being who He is! How many of us would like to be different? God cannot be different because there is no lack in Him, incompleteness or inability. He cannot be better because He is best. He cannot be improved for He is perfection, He cannot be added to because He is all. To glorify God is to be caught up in His life which is joy. Read some of the hymns about God's being.

The New Testament speaks of this in many places. Ephesians 1v6. We are to live in such a way that reflects well on God, to the praise of His glory. Romans 4.20 Abraham grew strong in faith as he gave glory to God. As Abraham gave glory to God – by believing in God's greatness and ability to do the impossible, he grew in faith that what God had promised would happen. The process began with a contemplation of the nature, the glory of God. 1Corinthians 10v31 we are do everything for the glory of God, not for our glory or convenience.

To glorify God, to hallow His Name, means that we need to learn what He is like. When the Bible speaks about the Name of God, it is not referring to a name like Jack or Jill, but the essence of the person. The Name of God stands for who He is. It means the attributes He has revealed about Himself, His words and works. The goal of hallowing God's Name is to live in a way that is appropriate to God's greatness. As I said before, we will never attain to this in this life, but still we are required to be on this pilgrimage of growing in our relational knowledge and suitable response to who God is.

A sad note now. It is a sadness and grief that most of the church in the west is heading more along a course which would say hallowed be our names. This is living on the momentum of previous generations. Many people today are more interested in what God can do for them, and care little that God Himself is not their first goal, joy and desire. Read the older books and you will see clearly the way the emphasis has changed, and this is serious.

Exodus 20v5 tells us that God is a jealous God. He will not play second fiddle to His creation. We are made for God, and God does not exist for our sakes! Recognize this and we have begun to hallow His Name.

There are some important implications from this.

God is to come first in everything. If the Queen summoned us, or the boss summoned us, or the head teacher summoned us to come at once to see them, would we linger over a text message, have a cup of coffee, or say we were too busy? I hope not, yet we put God off, we make excuses, we ignore His commands.

What about church? Church is God's idea. He has laid down in Scripture what constitutes church. It is thanks and praise rendered to God, the sacraments, the Word declared and discipline, or discipleship. It does not matter exactly how these are performed, but if we come only for what we get out of it, then the pressure is on leaderships to present a performance to please us, and we will be frequently disappointed. The church service is our audience with the King. It is not firstly where we come to sing and play music of whatever type we most enjoy. If our motive is not the hallowing of God's name, any form of service is a failed offering!

All this may sound heavy to those who have not often enjoyed the manifest presence of God. The way to think of all these things is that this petition combines what pleases God most, and what will give us true pleasure. Hallowing God's Name is not a burden, but a delight to believers.

One final parable to think about. Look at Luke 17v7-10. The parable is of the master and servant. Does the master make the servants tea before the servant serves the master dinner? No. The servant is the servant and the master is the master. The servant attends the masters pleasure before he himself eats. That is the way we are to be, to hallow God's Name, to put Him before all else, even our needs. However, note, even in this severe parable, the servant eats. In the Family of God, when we hallow God's Name, God and His family all sit down together and enjoy a feast!

The first subject of our praying is to be God's glory, how it can be displayed in the earth, in us, and that every creature and aspect of creation would exist and live to the praise of His glory.