

Sunday 15th April 2018
The Lord's Prayer
Thy Kingdom come - conflict

Texts.

Ephesians 6.10-20. Luke 4.1-13

Recap.

It has been a couple of Sundays of Easter material, and we are picking up our examination of the Lord's Prayer once again. I think that there is nothing more important than this prayer given the days we live in. There is a looming cold war brewing, which we hope will not become a shooting war! This could happen with men of such egos in Russia and the USA. There is murder in our British streets at a level not seen in a decade and a half. There is also, the ever decreasing presence of Christians in the country. It is this latter feature that gives rise to the decline in the morality and safety of our nation. If the salt and light is absent or has lost its taste, then corruption will increase.

The world may call for dialogue and debate, for cool heads and action to be taken, but none of these have ever dealt with the real cause of all strife, the evil heart of mankind. Only God can change the human heart, and He invites believers to ask Him to do this. It is required that Christians take to their knees as never before. This is the only hope for our children and grandchildren to have a childhood and a future!

The Lord's Prayer must be understood in the context of the whole Sermon on the Mount. Whenever we pick passages out of this sermon and take them out of context, we make a great error. There was a time when people said that if only we turned the other cheek, wars would cease. This was a misuse of the verses in this sermon, and we must stop chopping it up to suit our own ends. We must take it as a whole, or we are best to leave it alone.

The Sermon begins with the description of the character of the perfect man, of Christ, and what believers are to aspire to and become by the working of the Holy Spirit in them. It is only Christians who are growing in this character who can give, pray and fast in a way which is acceptable to God. I know that there are testimonies of people who prayed for this and that and got what they wanted. However, what good did it do them? Did it cause them to turn to God? If not, the end is bad. Salvation, being reconciled to God is what matters most.

There is not a lot of prayer in our congregation, and in this generation. Why is this? It's not because we don't want things, but because we are so wealthy and self-sufficient and indeed rebellious, that we think we can do stuff ourselves! It is the poor in spirit, those who mourn, who are meek and who hunger and thirst for righteousness who pray. Such as these know their desperate need of God, of His righteousness, not only as a covering, but worked through their beings to the destruction of the love of sin, and the

breaking of the power of sin and the cleansing of the pollution of sin, who will pray as Jesus instructed.

The Lord's Prayer is a model of prayer, not a set of words to be mouthed, though this does not exclude such a practice. Just make sure that we do not stop at that, but get taken up with the priorities that Jesus has in prayer.

There are 6 petitions in the Lord's Prayer. 3 relate to God's person. 1 relates to our physical needs, and 2 relate to the care of our souls. Is this the way we pray, or do we pray mostly for things that relate to our bodily, physical condition? If so, we are not praying the Lord's Prayer, and lack Christian character!

The prayer begins with an address to God as Father. Prayer is relational, and if we do not know God as Father, then the only prayer we can pray is for saving mercy. If we do not know that God is our Father, then turn to Him with all your energy and ask Him to have mercy on you and save you!

The first petition – hallowed be your Name. This should be the great interest of every Christian, that God be honoured, feared and worshipped as is His due. We should be concerned first and foremost with God's honour, in our lives, in our congregation, in our nation and in the world. This is the first priority in prayer. Everything else is secondary to this. We are to do all, and live to the praise of God's glory. This is not only required of Christians, but of all people.

The second petition is for the coming of the Kingdom of God. We saw that the Kingdom of God is not a geographical area, nor is it the Church, though the Kingdom should be expressed in and through the Church. The visible Church is made up of sheep and goats. It is not a pure Church, so in any Church meeting, we have a mixture of spiritually living and dead people. This has been true in every generation. The Parable of the wheat and tares, the sheep and goats tells us so.

We saw that the devil also has a kingdom, though his is creaturely, not eternal. However, his kingdom is strong, stronger than any collection of men. We explained that the devil was cast out of heaven to the earth, and that earth is now the battle ground between the devil and God, and humanity is in the center of this battle.

As Christians we are the object of Satan's malice and hatred and having lost us to God, his purpose is to render us as useless to God as he can, and to inflict injury on us out of hatred to the fact that we are the object of God's love.

We are unequal to the fight, hence the pressing and desperate need to pray for God's Kingdom to win the day. Be under no illusion, this is a serious war, a shooting war, a war where no quarter is taken, and it will last until the end of our lives! It is not a game, so put the computer games away, we get one life, and we can't reset it!

Therefore the pressing question is this. **What provision has God made so that we may not only survive the conflict, but overcome in this conflict?**

It all comes back to the Cross. By faith in Christ our whole standing with God is changed, from alien and enemy to kinship and peace. On the Cross Christ accomplished everything that is required for our complete rescue and safety for both time and eternity. This is ours as a gift of grace received by faith, but it also has to be worked through our beings. We are declared righteous when we believe in Christ, but the rest of our lives is a pilgrimage into the experience of becoming righteous, holy, through and through. Do not be in any doubt, this will be a battle in which we need God's provision every moment of every day!

When we believe in Christ, we become a joint heir with Him, and we become His betrothed, engaged to Christ as it were. The picture is of course of marriage, and one of the things that happens is that He gives us a dowry, or He gives us of His own goods, we have what is His bequeathed to us. One of the gifts He gives to us is His armour.

This armour has been tried by Him in His humanity, and it has been proved to be entirely effective against all the wiles, strategies and weapons of Satan. Jesus has test driven it, fashioned it, and tailored it to our use. It is the Christian armour as described in Ephesians chapter 6. God has not left us defenseless, but gives us Christ's armour. We must use it as He commands, and as He has designed it.

Let us briefly consider the Armour of God.

As a starter, it would be useful to read some of the Hymns, especially the Wesley Hymn 'Soldiers of Christ Arise.' Google the whole version, it has three parts, each of four stanzas. Wesley wrote his hymns to teach the people and as short commentaries of Bible passages, so do not neglect the good hymn writers. In times past, revival times, the people had a Bible and a Hymn book, and that did them. I wonder how much of our stuff is only a distraction?

Look at how the passage begins. The object of Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians is summed up here in verse 10. They are to become 'strong in the Lord, and in his mighty power.' Whose strength and power? The Lord's, not theirs! This is the crux. If we are growing in the character of the Beatitudes, this is where we will be looking, to God's strength and power, not our own.

Verse 11 instructs us and makes an implication or two. We are instructed to 'Put on the full armour of God.' We are to put it on, it does not go on automatically, and we are to put on the whole armour, not just some of it. Forget about asking if the helmet ruins your hair do, or catches your beard. It is better to be sweaty and ruffled than run through with a fiery dart. So, put it all on. The purpose of wearing the armour and using it as prescribed is so that we may take our stand against the devil's schemes. He is a deceitful and powerful foe. He has been tempting for a long time so knows what buttons to press, and what buttons to press for each of us. My areas of vulnerability are

probably different from yours, but we all have them by temperament, weakness, and choice.

The implications regarding the armour are twofold. If we fail to put it on, we are naked on a battle field and liable to every shot and shrapnel that comes our way. However, if we put it on, the implication is that after the battle ceases to rage, we will still be standing, even if bloodied and weary, we will be alive. Not only that, but having stood in a battle, we will be hardened for the next fight having grown in strength and battle readiness. Every time we stand in the armor against the devil, we become a tougher adversary for him, as long as we stay in dependence upon God and not go out in our own strength!

If you want a readable and masterly account of the armour of God, why not treat yourself to Martyn Lloyd-Jones Vol. eight of his series on Ephesians. This is a great starting place to study the life of the 'Christian Soldier.'

The first thing to face up to is the need to be 'strong in the Lord.' We need to be strong in the Lord, which is a growing relationship of faith and obedience to God. We need this to put on and use the armour. It is a spiritual armour, so takes more than just a physical act of putting something on. It requires that we see that Paul is using the example of the Roman soldiers armour to connect the spiritual realities we need to understand and believe and trust in. Just reading the text is not putting it on, unless we are so grounded in the realities of each part that it all springs to life in our hearts as we remind ourselves what is true of us in Christ.

The Belt of Truth.

The allusion is to the belt that caught up all the loose garments so as not to hinder the soldier. The belt is buckled, not left loosely hanging! It is the belt of truth. We are here told to put all our trust in the truth as God declares it. There is truth, there is absolute truth, and it is God's truth as revealed in Scripture. Can you see how flabby our hold on the armour is? We are ever being told that there are no absolutes, that truth is relative, that it is proud and arrogant to say that my truth is better than your truth. My truth and your truth is rubbish, but God's truth is true truth! This is the belt. If we think that we can debate Scripture, alter it, discard some, alter some to suit the views of our present culture, then we have not fastened the belt of truth. Is it then any wonder that our nation and the Church are in such a condition?

The Breastplate of Righteousness.

The breastplate protected the vital organs. The heart lungs and gory bits. This spiritually is referred to as the seat of the will and emotions. We need to have our hearts and emotions protected. The Breastplate is the righteousness of Christ which is credited to our accounts when we believe. The consequence of this is in effect that when God looks on us, He sees us as beautiful and desirable as Jesus His own Son. Therefore we can come with boldness and confidence into God's presence without fear of rejection, even when we sin. Our standing with God has changed. When we sin we do so as a child of God, so He deals with us as with His children, not as His enemies. The

implications of this have had books written about it. So fasten on the breastplate of Righteousness, to protect our desires, emotions and wills. An old hymn has it correct. Speaking of the devil it says,

He tells us we're weak,
Our hope is in vain,
The good that we seek,
We ne're shall obtain.
But when such suggestions
our spirits have plied,
this answers our questions
the Lord will provide!

Feet shod with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace.

There are two parts to this. Firstly suitable shoes give stability and freedom of movement. What are these shoes? They are the peace that comes from believing the Gospel. This peace is firstly, and most importantly, the conviction that comes from the work of Christ on the Cross, that God is at peace with us. The reason for God regarding us as enemies has been removed by Christ, therefore God is now our friend and no longer our enemy. As this takes root in our souls, we become at peace with Him and ourselves because the fear of God's wrath has been removed. Satan will attack us on all these fronts by reminding us of past and present failures and sins, but the shoes will keep us firm in this that God has made peace with us through the blood of the Cross.

The shield of faith.

Wesley says of this,

'But above all take hold of faiths victorious shield,
Armed with that adamant and gold, be sure to win the field.
If faith surround your heart, Satan shall be subdued,
Repelled his every fiery dart, and quenched with Jesus blood.'

Do you know what a fiery dart is? It can be a sudden strong temptation which seems to come from nowhere. I know of people who have had a sudden urge to drive into a wall and kill themselves when no such thought was in their minds. I have known people wake up in the night with a fright with the thought that a loved one was in danger or on the brink of a foolish act. If this happens, pray and go back to sleep! Others have found themselves cast down about a sudden thought of the future such as, how will I cope if my husband, wife, son, daughter were to die? Others have a thought of how will I cope if I get ill, or poor or fired or any and all of these sudden thought that come to us as it were out of the blue. These are darts. The shield of faith says, we are God's, He knows, He will provide even if we don't know how.

The birds without barn or storehouse are fed,
From them let us learn to trust for our bread.

The saints what is fitting shall ne're be denied
As long as tis written, the Lord will provide!

This is the domain of all things work for good to those who love God and are called according to His purpose. God is able to sanctify our deepest distresses, as He did for Joseph and Job. This is the victory that overcomes the world, even our faith.

The Helmet of Salvation.

This protects our minds. Essentially the helmet is this, that God who begins a good work in us, will complete it. Having called and justified us, God will bring us to glory!

The Sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

It is not sufficient to quote verses at the devil, he is well able to quote them back! Luke 4 gives the account of Jesus being tempted by the devil in the wilderness. Three times Satan misquotes the Bible to Jesus, and three times Jesus quotes the Scripture back at him. Jesus quotes the Scripture in faith, Satan quotes the Scripture in deceit. The Scripture quoted in faith is the Sword of the Spirit. Jesus returns from this encounter in the power of the Spirit. The devil leaves wounded and bloodied by being hewn by the Sword of the Spirit. The sword is the word of God wielded in faith.

There is a sense that the purpose of the armour is directed to us being able to function beyond standing to actually fighting offensively. This is where prayer comes in. Many people never get to this dynamic, powerful prayer, because they do not put the armour on. As a result of this neglect, they become casualties before they have struck a blow! God means for us to know much more than just being cannon fodder. His desire is for us to know the thrill of breaking through the enemies' lines beside our Captain, and bringing release to those held by the enemy.

Be assured of this, spiritual conflict is the norm of the Christian life. The Russians are not our enemy. The Muslims are not our enemy. The Liberals are not the enemy. The political parties are not our enemies. It is the spiritual powers that are behind these philosophies and world views that are the enemy. Spiritual enemies can only be engaged by spiritual means and spiritual weapons. Do not let us put our hope in the UN or treaties or any other material means. The battle for nations and souls is spiritual.

If we really understood the meaning of, 'Thy Kingdom come,' and the absolute necessity of the armour of God, we would be queuing up to get into prayer meetings.

On a visit to Bogota in Colombia many years ago, we were taken to the youth leaders meeting. There were about 10,000 12 to 20 year olds there. These were just the leaders, not the total youth of the Church! At one point the pastor leading the meeting said 'let's pray!' and all the people started to pray out loud all together, and loudly! Eventually they rang a bell to indicate that the time of prayer was over. It was awesome to be there!

We come from a different culture, our expectations of what is proper are different. However, I have been in prayer meetings in Aberdeen in the past that went on for two plus hours, and you had to fight to get in, such was the intensity of the prayer. I think the youth of Bogota and the grey haired elders in Aberdeen understood better than we our desperate need of the Rule of God in our congregations, lives and land. We need to establish time for a congregational prayer meeting. Joint prayer can be very potent, and is where we get our personal devotional homework checked out!

Pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints. This is the word of our Commander in Chief!