

The Lord's Prayer?

Matthew 6:9-13 has been called the "Lord's Prayer," but it is really "Our Prayer." Jesus was teaching the crowd sitting on the hillside how they should pray "Pray, then this way . . ." This is not the Lord's prayer. Jesus would have never asked His Father to forgive His sins because He never sinned (Hebrews 4:15). This is "Our Prayer." Yet, there are similarities between the prayers of our Lord in the gospels and this one. He taught us to pray "like" He prayed. Would you like to know how He prayed? Come and listen to Jesus teach the crowd,

Pray, then, in this way: "Our Father who art in heaven, Hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, On earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen." (NASB) Matthew 6:9-13

BACKGROUND. This prayer of Jesus is in sharp contrast to the prayers of the Pharisees. Here is an example of a Pharisee's prayer as recorded in the gospel of Luke,

The Pharisee stood and was praying thus to himself, 'God, I thank Thee that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax-gatherer. 'I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get.' (NASB) Luke 18:11-12

This prayer is similar to other prayers found in Jewish literature. The Pharisee's spiritual life is missing a key ingredient - a relationship with God. He missed the fact that God was holy, and the Pharisee did not see himself as a sinner. Are we like the Pharisee? Once again Jesus has surprised the crowd when He taught them to pray. The example Jesus gives us has five simple parts: honor, submission, a request for daily needs, a request for holiness and humility.

HONOR. The literal Greek wording of the first two lines of the prayer are very meaningful,

Our Father, the one in the heavens, Be made holy your name
...

Now think about what He said, ". . . the one in the heavens." This God is not an idol sitting on the earth, nor on a table in the house. This is the God that King Nebuchadnezzar was introduced to by Daniel the prophet,

However, there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries, and He has made known to King Nebuchadnezzar what will take place in the latter days. (NASB) Daniel 2:28

Jesus' point is that when we pray, we are to remember He is not just any god. He is the God in the heavens.

FRIENDLY & HOLY. Did you notice that Jesus did not say, "Our God." He said, "Our Father." As a boy, I do not ever remember calling my dad, "Father." That seemed cold and unfamiliar, but I respected my dad.

For Jesus' Jewish listeners the name of God, Jehovah, was believed to be too sacred - too holy - to speak. So when Jesus said, "Our Father," it must have felt uncomfortable. To suggest that we should be friendly with God and call Him "Father," (like a family member) must have seemed like an insult. The Jews believed God was holy and that the very letters of His name were holy. To the Jews, the name of a person described the personality of the person. So Jesus said,

“make His name holy” and the Jews understood that. Jesus is also calling us to believe the “Father” is holy. We are to honor Him “with holiness” because His name reflects His holiness. He is our holy Father who lives in the heavens. Is He holy to you? Have you ever listened to your own prayer?

When you pray, do your prayers sound like you are talking to a friend or to a wall? Let me illustrate. When you talk to God, do you sound like this, “I pray that you will give me this . . .” or “I ask that you will give me this . . .?” That is the usual wording. But if you were talking to a friend would you not ask like this, “Is it possible that I could have . . .” “Could you do this for me?” One is distant and the other is personal.

OUR NEEDS. In Jesus next statement in the prayer He shows us how to ask for our needs. When you ask the Father to meet your needs, how long is your list? How many wants and desires do you have for yourself? It is amazing to me that Jesus only includes one non-spiritual request in the prayer. There is no request for physical healing. Jesus does not include a request for the synagogue or the nation’s leaders. It is amazing that in verse 8 He says,

Therefore do not be like them; for your Father knows what you need, before you ask Him. (NASB) Matt. 6:8

His prayer is simple - only one request! Why?

SPIRITUAL LIFE. The next two lines and verses 14 and 15 are the heart of this section. It is about forgiveness. Our Lord is very concerned about the evil attitude we have towards others. Since this is a major point with our Lord we will devote the entire next study to this topic.

Next, Jesus tells us to ask the Father to keep us from testing and “to rescue” us from evil. Have you ever been in a situation where you had a strong desire to sin? You knew it was sin; yet the urge to sin was great? I have been there! I have

asked the Father to rescue me. That is what Jesus is talking about - being rescued by the Father through the Holy Spirit. We need the help of the Holy Spirit to escape temptation (Gal. 5:16-21). Are you trying to flee sin all by yourself? If so, why? Ask for help!

CONCLUSION. Jesus’ prayers are almost like “Our Prayer.” If we look at the prayers of our Lord, as recorded in the gospels, we find three important things. First, His prayers were always short. “Our Prayer” is a short one - 68 English words. It takes less than 30 seconds to say. Now that is short!

Second, Jesus starts His prayers with “Father,” and then talks about the Father’s will (Matt. 11:25-26; Matt. 26:39; John 12:27-28; John 17:1-15). As far as we know, Jesus never asked for any of His daily needs to be supplied. But Jesus did have personal requests (Matt. 26:39) and He prayed for others (John 12:27-28).

Finally, “Our Prayer” is really about our holiness. It starts with the Father and His holiness and concludes

with requests for forgiveness and being rescued from evil. The Greek word for evil has the idea of passion, lust and desire. Evil in the heart! The Pharisee did not pray like this. How often we forget God sees right through us with “x-ray vision.” He sees our sin. He is holy and we are not. He is the one who is in the heavens and we are on earth. He is the Holy Father and we are the sinful creature. There is no escape. How much of your prayer life is about holiness?

If I regard wickedness in my heart, The Lord will not hear. (NASB) Ps 66:18

The majority of “Our Prayer” should be about our spiritual condition and a desire to be like Jesus - to be holy!

A Heart Before God

In the early days of the American Republic, a stranger once asked a man at Congress how he could find George Washington (the first president of the United States). He was told, “You can easily recognize him when Congress goes to prayer. Washington is the gentleman who kneels.”