

FOR THE KINGDOM, THE POWER, AND THE GLORY ARE YOURS, NOW AND FOREVER. AMEN. LORD'S PRAYER 9

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When we began this series in early June, my hope was more than that my addresses would help our understanding of prayer in general and of the prayer that Jesus taught us to pray in particular. I hope to help us to expand and enrich our conversation with God, so that prayer grows as a source of hope, joy, and comfort for us.

Firstly, we looked at the connection between prayer and God's Word. Each supplies and reinforces the other. When we read God's Word, the Holy Spirit moves us to pray. When we pray, the Spirit drives us to God's Word.

Then we considered how prayer and our actions are connected. Prayer is faith in action. The last part of the introductory addresses dealt with the 'what, where, when, and how of prayer.' Today we come to the conclusion of the Lord's Prayer.

Since early June, the world has rolled along – a deranged man driving his car into pedestrians and other cars in central Melbourne, again!; the Bureau of Meteorology warning of a likely El Nino weather pattern with the risk of severe bushfires; an earthquake in Morocco and floods in Libya.

We look for signs that God really is governing the world. We yearn to meet fellow believers in whom we can clearly sense the presence of the Lord. We search for explanations that help us understand the world in the light of eternity.

When we pray the Lord's Prayer to the end, we pray with trust that God is listening to us, that he is not like an old man whose hearing aid batteries have long since gone flat. We trust that we are not addressing a vast empty universe with our petitions for the coming of his kingdom, for daily bread, for the forgiveness of sin, for deliverance from evil.

In the doxology of the Lord's Prayer – to use its proper title – Jesus gives us a decisive reason for our confidence in addressing our heavenly Father in all the previous petitions. The reason starts with a three-letter word. The three-letter word is "For". (You could make a riddle out of that, couldn't you? What three-letter word means "for"?)

This little word reinforces the foundation for everything which began with "Our Father in heaven." Because God rules as king, he has the power to hear us. Because he loves us and has mercy on us, we can pray with confidence, asking that he provides our daily bread and forgives our sin.

Let's consider now what God's kingdom consists of. Remember that Jesus said that "My kingdom is not of this world". And didn't he make this statement at a critical moment in his earthly life, when he was standing before Pontius Pilate, with the crowd baying for his

blood? At the perfect moment then, when God as king had every opportunity to demonstrate his superiority over the puny powers of this world!

When Jesus declares that his kingdom is not of this world and that he wouldn't be challenging the might of the Roman empire, then is it pointless to finish the Lord's Prayer with the doxology?

Throughout history, God's people have been puzzled, troubled, and even tormented by the nature of God's kingdom. In Luke 17 the Pharisees ask Jesus when God's kingdom is coming. The answer Jesus gave would have puzzled the people, "The kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be observed, nor will they say, 'Look, here it is!' or 'There!' for behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you."

I can imagine the long faces in the crowd. This is not what they wanted to hear. "The kingdom of God is in the midst of you." "Where? Where is it? I can't see anything!" The crowd didn't realize that Jesus was referring to himself. His kingdom was not of this world in the sense that it was not about dazzling crowns and golden thrones, majestic robes, and mighty armies waiting on his every word.

Jesus' kingdom was concerned with proclaiming good news to the poor and liberty to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind, and freedom for the oppressed. That's the sort of king Jesus was. His royal robes were strips of cloth wrapped around him when he was newly born. His throne was a manger for feeding livestock. His royal crown was woven from nasty thorns.

This king and his kingdom are still a mystery to the world. They can never be recognized from the outside by a casual observer. It is like the stained-glass windows of a great cathedral. What are they from the outside? Nothing! They are drab and gray, and you wonder what all the fuss is about.

If you are looking for their beauty from the outside you will never see it, because you are looking from the wrong perspective. However, from the moment you enter the church, the windows begin to shine. They dazzle and delight with their brilliance and majesty. Surely these windows aren't the same non-descript bits of glass that I saw from the outside!

The mystery of God's kingdom can only be seen from within. The majesty of the king is only visible to his subjects. That's why Pilate never discovered who Jesus was. Jesus had more than 12 legions of angels ready to follow his command. Pilate saw and heard nothing.

Instead, it was the Mary who washed Jesus' feet with her tears and dried them with her hair, it was the thankful leper who was healed, it was the poor in spirit who received comfort, it was the children on whose heads he laid his hands of blessing – these are those who saw the king and his kingdom.

Thus, the doxology does two things for us. Like the introduction – "Our Father in heaven" – it founds our confidence in God, rather than in our eloquent words or fervour. Then it invites us to extend our trust and confidence in God. We pray this prayer and discover that God indeed provides for our needs and delivers us from evil.

We learn how good and generous, how mighty and wonderful God is when we learn to call on his name. Then we discover that there is no end to his goodness. Confessing the doxology is not the condition for God listening to us. It is the conclusion that we come to know from experience when we pray the Lord's Prayer regularly.

This last sentence of the prayer is praise for a God who overwhelms us with his goodness, a God who is able to do far more than we can ask or imagine. Do you remember the story recorded in Acts 16 in which St Paul and Silas are arrested, severely beaten, and thrown into prison? At midnight they are praying and singing hymns of praise to God. What is their secret? How is that bruised and bloodied, their legs in stocks, confined in a damp and dark prison, they can burst into song?

They could sing because they could see God's plan being fulfilled. They had come to know that God could use all circumstances for his plan of salvation.

The theologian Thielicke wrote of a man during World War 2 who inspired peace in many people when their city was being bombed. His secret? When the bombs were falling and he was most frightened, he stopped asking God to save him. Instead, he praised God.

He explained that praising God lifted him above his feelings of mortal terror, and he could see the vast expanse of eternity and the fulfillment of God's plan of salvation. Against that big picture, the present anguish was but a moment.

We give praise when we have seen what a person has accomplished. When we praise God, our eyes are opened all the more to see his kingdom, his power, and his glory. The doxology helps us to see the fulfillment of what God has in store for his people.

So, the Lord's Prayer begins with praise to our Father in heaven and closes with praise of him whose is the kingdom, the power, and the glory. Everything we pray for is enclosed with praise. Amen.