

Prayer! (Part 2)

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[0 : 00] Well, Derek has assigned to me the task of preaching on the Lord's Prayer in one go, which I'm a little bit upset about.

I'm just kidding. But I realized as I was thinking about this text and I started to write some things down about it earlier in the week, I have a scope for the amount of things I write, measures to how long I will preach.

I know that when I've hit this point, I've got to stop writing, because I'm going to go over the time and you're going to be upset. When I started to write down my thoughts on the Lord's Prayer, it went double the page count.

So I've had to pull back and just be okay with not saying some things. Jesus tells us to pray like this. When He does so, He interrupts the sermon on the mountainside with a prayer, a model prayer. We cannot forget this. The Lord's Prayer, it's not to be missed, is part of the sermon on the mount.

[1 : 10] And that means something. That tells us something. Why? What's the sermon on the mount doing and why is the Lord's Prayer plopped down right in the middle of it?

If you've been with us for the past number of weeks and even the past semester, we've been working our way through the sermon on the mount. And you know that the sermon on the mount is a radical call to a new ethic, a new way of living, a way of thinking about living.

It's the way of being a city on a hill, is what Jesus says. It's the way of being a light that cannot be put under a basket. It's an ethic that does more than what the law asks.

You remember the formula. You've heard that it was said to those of old. But I say to you, says Jesus.

This formula is Jesus talking about the Torah, the Old Testament, Genesis, Tudoronomy, the Old Law. You've heard the Old Law and it's good and it's right.

[2 : 17] And I'm saying to you now something more. You see, Jesus said that he did not come to abolish the law but to fulfill it. It's an upping the ante.

So don't miss this. The sermon on the mount is an ethic that ups the ante of how we ought to live in the kingdom of God.

You think you haven't committed adultery, he said. Have you ever lusted? You think you haven't murdered? Have you ever been angry? The ethic of the kingdom of God is even more, is what he's saying in the sermon on the mount.

So the sermon on the mount does two things. The first thing it does is it says to you, you cannot be like this. You are not like this.

He's exposing us. You think you've obeyed the Ten Commandments but you haven't. But at the same time he's also saying the power to do such things is in the very one who is speaking them to you.

[3 : 24] It's Jesus himself that is giving and offering the power by grace, by the life he has merited to actually live like this.

It's not to be missed that the sermon on the mount isn't just something we say, I'm never going to measure up to this. I need God's grace. Yes? True? So point one, but point two then is here is the kingdom ethic.

Salvation does not end with forgiveness. The Christian life steps forward into the future as a moral agent, an actor in God's kingdom.

And that's what the sermon on the mount is doing. And so this prayer is plopped down right in the middle of it. We could say it in a sentence.

I would say it's something like this. This prayer is Jesus' corporate invitation for us to be awoken from the dead and to reimagine ourselves as agents of the kingdom of God.

[4 : 33] Actors in the great drama that God is doing in this world of redeeming it. This is the climax of the sermon, this prayer.

And so what I want to do with you for just a few minutes, a few moments is something very simple and that's just highlight three words. We can't go through every petition.

We don't have time for that. So I just want to talk about three words in this prayer that you can take home and put in your back pocket perhaps and remember the words are father, us and today.

Father us and today. So first father. One theologian said it like this. The proclamation of father at the beginning of Lord's Prayer is the primal, the first act of obedience demanded of all Christians. To say Abba, father, it's the first act of obedience that we are commanded to do. What's he mean by this?

[5 : 49] I want to think a little bit about our society. The modern world, the society we live in today is a world that's starving for authority and it's starving for mystical experiences.

It's starving for religion, you might say. It's starving for prayer. About 30, 40, 50 years ago you could dispute the date.

It became really vogue for psychologists and historians and sociologists and all different sorts of people to tell us that our mystical religious experiences are chemicals.

You've heard that. They're just brain activity. They happen to us because of the brain activity. Or being religious in all these types of spiritual longings is nothing more than part and parcel of environmental development.

So it's part of where you were raised, what kind of culture you come from, all these sorts of things. So for about 200 years now and really ramped up since 1950, the story has been this.

[7 : 03] Religion will die out. You've probably heard this, like if you read, I don't know, The Huffington Post or something like that. You've probably heard claims like this, religion will die.

We transform our culture into economies. Everything's about finances. Everything's about the individual. Our needs are mad. We're not hungry anymore.

All these things, religion fulfilled all those things in the past and we don't really need it anymore.

Now it's really fun now to read updated sociological studies and what these guys that wrote like that 30 years ago are now saying because as we all know, that just didn't happen.

Actually religion is busting at the seams throughout the world. It's growing faster than maybe it ever has. Maybe since the very first 100 years of Christianity.

In fact, we're actually inventing more new religions now than we've done in, well, 2,000 years. You guys know about New Age mysticism, the incorporation of Eastern religion over into the West and all sorts of things.

[8 : 14] People are starving for spiritual experience. They're starving for mysticism of some sort. The reason they're starving for it is because we are hardwired to be people who pray.

Prayer doesn't exist in the public sphere anymore. Prayer is something so foreign to our world but we starve for it. Our world starves for these experiences because we're Image Day.

We're image of God people. We're hardwired to communicate with the divine. That's who we are.

You can't open a New York Times article, op-ed piece or any pop newspaper or magazine across the world without every single week reading some type of story that says something like this, titled something like this.

Five things successful people do. You've read these. This is what it looks like to be a successful person. This is what the millionaires do every morning that you never do, that kind of thing.

[9 : 27] You all know what the last one always is. Meditate. Every single article, it's always super successful millionaires every morning do something you don't do and that's they meditate.

They have spiritual experience. You see, we starve for this. This is what we're made for, to commune with God.

This is what we lost in the garden. Holding hands in hand. What we do instead is often we substitute.

Our late modern culture reaches for petty substitutes, meditation and all these things and what is that? I don't know. They're petty substitutes trying to get a hold of what we crave.

Look, we can pick on late modernity and our culture. This is all of us. Do you satisfy the core of your being with spiritual experience apart from prayer?

[10 : 37] Do you occupy your days being satisfied with these longings, these emotive longings with something other than prayer? Is prayer the thing that you saturate yourself in to be fulfilled as a

human being?

Calvin said something really interesting in his famous Institute of the Christian Religion. He said the normal experience for most of us is that we live in a world of self sufficiency and self deception. He called this world living in unreality. He made that word up, I think, probably. It's the world we live in where we think of ourselves, whether we'll say it or not, as completely self sufficient. He said it like this. This is the world where not only the mind, our mind is blind to the truth, but our hearts do not trust.

Calvin's saying that in sin we don't see the real world. We see a deception of it marred and torn apart by sin. We have a tendency, like Luther said, a different way to make everything that we touch into an idol.

[11 : 55] Our hearts are idol factories. We take the good gifts that he's given and we make them ultimate. The gift of physicality and movement and recreation we turn into entertainment and nature and creation we turn into just material nature.

The gift we have of our children and our families, we make them our gods. I was preaching in America and this application hits harder home there than it does here.

But instead of praising the gift of our bodies that God's given us and the gift of movement, the gift of power and strength and all of these things, we trade that in to go to the true cultic centers of worship in our late modern culture and that's the football stadium.

All 60,000 of us sit around and worship the gods down below. That's what we do. We turn things into idols. Francis Spufford says it this way.

He's a British English philosopher and economist. What we're talking about here is not just our tendency to lurch and stumble and to mess up by accident.

[13 : 12] Instead we're talking about our active inclination to break stuff. Stuff here including promises and relationships we care about and our own well-being and other peoples.

You are a being whose wants make no sense. They don't harmonize. Whose desires deep down are discordant so that you truly want to possess things and you don't at the same time.

He says that we're equipped for more farce or even tragedy than happy endings. You're human.

Now when Calvin wrote on the Lord's Prayer and when he read the phrase, our Father, he said this, the cry of Abba is the first moment of our escape from living in this normal experience of unreality. It is the ultimate expression of letting go, of confessing, of saying I don't see the world right. I don't have my desires together.

I don't have it together. The cry of our Father is the cry of letting go. This is a daily prayer because every single day we wake up and need to say Abba, it's your world.

[14 : 40] It's your will, you see, first petition. It's your kingdom. It's not mine. I don't have it together.

Tim Keller says it this way, to the degree that you can shed the unreality of self-sufficiency, to that degree your prayer life will become rich and deep.

To speak Father is to lose self-sufficiency. To lose the sense of autonomy, of self-governance, and to live in absolute dependence.

The question that comes up when we say the word Father is this, how are we able to say it? It's really interesting in the Old Testament, there's almost no references to God as Father.

The very few that there are, they're spoken in delivered prophecies. There's not one single incident of an Old Testament character speaking or praying to God by the name Father.

[15 : 52] Not one. Jesus is the first person to do it. Look, if you were to walk up to a person on the street that you didn't know and just say, hey, by the way, I was wondering if you could do this for me today.

What kind of an interaction would that be? They would think you're ridiculous. Why? Because you have no basis on which to address the stranger.

You have no basis to walk up to a person on the street, no prior relationship and say, hey buddy, hey, I need you to pick up my dry cleaning today. That would be ludicrous.

They wouldn't know what to do with you. But that's because in all the ways we address and we speak to one another, anytime we speak to anyone, we speak to them on a basis, on a ground, on an account of a prior relationship of some sort or the making of a relationship for the first time.

You don't go to God without a basis either. So in the incarnation, when Jesus became the God-man, we call that event good news.

[17 : 10] But it's not only good news. It's also bad news. When the Son becomes man, we're not only being sent a message of good news, we're also being sent a message of judgment.

When God becomes man, God says to us, you are not what you ought to be. The world is not what it ought to be. The cosmos is not what it ought to be.

The mission given to Israel to set up the kingdom of God has failed. God becomes man because we could not set the world right the way it ought to be set.

We were never going to do it. And so in the very act of incarnation is the statement to us that God says, I come to you as judge.

And prior to Matthew chapter 6, the event of the Sermon on the Mount, when he says, pray like this, our Father, God comes to us as judge.

[18 : 21] And it is in the power of the resurrection that he comes to us again and says, daughter and son. The basis on which you have the ability to say the first two words of this prayer, our Father, is the one who taught us to pray it.

That's the only way. Jesus Christ was the first one to utter these words. And then Paul in Romans 8 tells us this about these words.

You did not receive the spirit of adoption. Sorry, you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the spirit of adoption as sons and as daughters by whom we cry, Abba, Father.

The spirit bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God. So you might consider those two words in the Lord's prayer as preface.

The ground, the basis from which we speak to him. Now secondly, and the last two points will be much more brief. In the cry of Abba, a Father, we are being called to be awoken from the dead for the first time to our agency.

[19 : 44] By agency I mean to the fact that we are called to do something in the kingdom of God, that we are moral agents, moral actors in God's kingdom.

This is why the Lord's prayer appears in the middle of a sermon about morality, about ethics, about how we ought to live. It is in the cry of Abba, Father, that we confess Jesus Christ to be our Lord, and in confessing Jesus Christ to be our Lord, we are now prepared to be moral agents in his kingdom.

So you see this, our Father in heaven, glory or holy is your name, your kingdom come, your will be done. The very next petition that we receive is for us to cry, come Lord Jesus, bring your kingdom. So the cry of Abba, Father, is the opening of us to be agents in God's kingdom, moral agents. Now look at who the prayer is addressed to, it's addressed to God, look to who the subject is, our Father in heaven.

How would be your name, your will be done on earth that is in heaven, give us, us this day and forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors.

[21 : 03] It's corporate, it's not simply the prayer of I, but the prayer of we, it's the prayer of the body, the prayer of the church.

The first thing that God is wanting us to see that when we pray Abba, we are being awoken to the fact that we are on a mission for a kingdom, not for simply an individual salvation.

Justification, sanctification, all these things are not just for me, they're not just an I issue, but they're a corporate issue, they're an issue for the whole body.

This way of praying screams against the individualism that we are trained to imbibe in our late modern cultures.

This is not the prayer of the iPhone. This is not the prayer of walking down the streets with the earbuds in your ear.

[22 : 05] This is not the prayer of the individualistic identity of Facebook. This is the prayer of us, the corporate, we.

Your kingdom God has now become for us, our kingdom. This is why for thousands of years the church in almost every liturgy, which a liturgy is a way of organizing a church service, an order of worship, every liturgy you'll read of from of old will always almost have the corporate prayer of the Lord's prayer together.

Yes, this is a model prayer. It's a model prayer for us to take as individuals and go and pray in the mornings and pray on our own, but it is at the same time our prayer.

Together, it is the prayer that makes us the community. When we say our Father, we are saying our Savior, our church, our body, your kingdom has become our kingdom.

We live in an age, and this is not entirely a bad thing. Don't hear me saying this, but where our spiritual lives are basically measured by quiet times.

[23 : 38] Individual 10, 15, 30 an hour in the morning, quiet times. This must not be the only measure of what we're doing spiritually in life.

The kingdom of God is our kingdom, not my kingdom. My salvation is our salvation.

We are being awoken to the fact that this is corporate. It's for us. Now last point.

Father us and now today. What do God's people need then to be effective agents of the kingdom?

This is unbelievable, and this is perhaps in addition to the confession of Father, the most incredible part of the prayer, because we're so familiar with it.

[24 : 38] We miss it entirely. What do you need to be an agent of the kingdom of God? He tells us something interesting.

Give us this day our daily bread. When you wake up in the morning and you are reawoken to the fact that you are an agent of God's kingdom, He's telling you that you need to be reawoken to the fact that you need food, that you need to eat.

Sorry, my notes, I just clicked off my notes on accident. Let me pull them back up. There we go.

He's calling us to be reawoken to the fact that we are people who eat. And the second thing is he's calling us to do is be reawoken to the fact that we are people who need forgiveness.

Now before we talk about that for just a moment, that'll be the last thing. Come with me to verse 11.

Give us this day, he says, our daily bread.

[25 : 52] That phrase for this day could also be translated as today. The prayer draws our attention to today.

Not to yesterday, but to today. Our prayer for food and our prayer for forgiveness is a prayer for today.

Today do not harm your hearts. Hebrews chapter three. Today beware lest you fall. Hebrews chapter six.

It's a prayer of today. Today put your feet on the floor when you get out of bed in the morning and reimagine yourself as a servant of the kingdom of God.

Yesterday's sins are yesterday's sins. Yesterday's repentance is yesterday's repentance.

[26 : 51] God is calling us to see that when you are so wrapped up in yesterday that you cannot be an agent for today. Our agency, our actions in God's kingdom are for today.

They're acting out into the horizon of the future. For many of us, for years and years we've heaped on guilt after guilt after guilt from sin that we have not been able to defeat.

You know what that is. Some of you, you've been fighting it for decades perhaps. Every single day you fight the temptation to be crushed by the guilt of it.

The shame. The Lord's prayer is a prayer of freedom. When he says give us today our daily bread, forgive us today our debts.

It is the prayer of today. It's not the prayer of yesterday. The guilt and the shame that you heaped up and up upon themselves from the sins of the past, they are gone in Christ Jesus.

[27 : 57] This is the prayer of today. And so what do you need then to be an ethical agent, an agent of God's kingdom, one who goes out in faith and steps into the world acting in the way God has asked us to act, is to know that the forgiveness of yesterday has already been given.

When we heap up guilt and shame from the sins of our past, we're doing two things. We're making ourselves ineffective today.

Number one, we proceed on a questionable theology. And that theology is this. God, I'm not so sure you actually do what you say.

Does he actually forgive you your sins on the basis of Christ when you ask for it? Yes. Yesterday's sins are yesterday.

Today do not heart in your heart. Today forgive us our debts. Debt is a liability of the past that is put away in Christ Jesus.

[29 : 06] The Lord's Prayer is the prayer for today. It's a daily prayer. It's the prayer of putting your feet on the ground in the morning, you see. And the second thing that we need, in addition to this forgiveness of for today, he says, what we need is to be reawoken to the way we treat food.

This one may be the most surprising. Eating is a profoundly important activity for human beings.

Eating is what gives us life, but eating is also what brought death to life. Take and eat. The verbs spoken to Eve in Genesis 3 are the same verbs taken eat on that night that he was betrayed. Taken eat. The verbs of death, the subject of death is eating, the subject of life is also eating. God has put eating as the centerpiece of both who we are as physical embodied spirits, but also as the centerpiece of redemption.

When God comes to meet with us in the new heavens and the new earth, Revelation 19, the first action of Christ that takes place, you'll remember, is sitting down for the marriage supper of the Lamb.

[30 : 34] Eating is so important. Why does Jesus put it here? Peter Schmemmann, an old theologian, says this, man is presented from Genesis 1 as hungry being and the whole world is his food.

He must eat in order to live. He must take the world into his body and he must turn it into flesh and blood. He is what he eats and he turns the world into his banquet table.

We share this activity with all of mankind for all of history. It is the activity of the first day and the last day.

This is why we treat food with reverence still. In the day we live, the late modern culture we've been talking about, the sin of McDonald's, the sin of eating on the go, the sin of eating unnatural foods that has befallen all of us.

Even in that world, we still hold up food with a sort of transcendence and a reverence. You guys know the best meal you've ever had, don't you?

[31 : 44] Mine was at Butcher and Singer in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania and it cost me \$130 for my plate. I'll never forget it. It's the best meal I've ever had. You know the best meal you've ever had.

You treat those special meals with reverence. When somebody gives you a gift card to the best restaurant in Edinburgh, it means something big.

We know there's something special about eating. Because for I think almost all of us here, the way we get food today is we simply hand money to someone to get it, we miss a huge point of why this prayer is here in the Lord's Prayer.

That's this. When the Wendell Berry said it best, the great superstition of our consumerist age is that money brings forth food.

Money does not bring forth food. Cultivation brings forth food. The rain brings forth food. Human beings and their work brings forth food.

[32 : 51] This prayer is here to acknowledge the fact and reawaken us to the fact that without God controlling God's world, we die.

Give us this day, today, our daily bread, Lord, because today we completely depend on you to keep the world going. Today if the world is not cultivated in the way you have promised, then we will not eat.

No matter of money saved up in our bank accounts will promise that tomorrow there will be bread on our tables. Unless God grants it so.

The second and last thing this prayer reminds us of in regards to the things we need to be agents of God's kingdom is that this prayer for today of praying for our food and praying for forgiveness and deliverance from our sins.

Being a corporate prayer means that we need to be praying like priests. We'll close with this thought. It is a corporate prayer.

[34 : 01] It is the prayer for us and we say today, give us our daily bread. Forgive us our debts as we forgive all of them, their debts.

In praying this prayer, we are God's priests praying for the world. Get into the prayer is give the world its food, Lord, by your grace.

Give the world your kingdom. Bring it to this earth to those that don't know it and don't have it. Paul calls us the priesthood of God's kingdom.

We are priests. Don't miss out on that holy and high office that you have been called to. I am no singular priest. Derek is no singular priest.

The people who preach to you are in no way singular priest. We are a priesthood together. And in this corporate priesthood, we step out of our beds in the morning, out of church on Sunday, praying this prayer of moral agency that we would be lights to the lost world, that we would be the city on the hill, that we would bring the kingdom from God to the world.

[35 : 24] The priesthood is embedded in this prayer. You see, give us our daily bread. Give the world our daily bread. Bring your kingdom. Let us be the agents of your kingdom.

Let us do these things. Yes. You have been called to such a high and holy office as this.

As is a priest of God. And yes, you and I have been called to such a high and holy ethic as agents of God's kingdom. What do you do when today and tomorrow and the next day you wake up and you realize that things don't seem to be changing?

You pray then like this, our Father who art in heaven. That's what the prayer is there for. The renewal of your own heart as an agent of God's kingdom.

Let's pray. Our Lord and God, we ask our Father in heaven that you would make us into these people, these kingdom vision people into agents for your holy kingdom being spread across the world and that we would use this prayer, that we would draw it so close to our hearts that we would imbibe it, that we would pray it every day and that we would form the way we think from it.

[36 : 44] We ask for this in Jesus' name. Amen.