

**Altavista Presbyterian Church
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**“The Lord’s Prayer, Part I”
Isaiah 45:18-21
I Peter 1:13-19**

**Transfiguration Sunday
March 3, 2019**

Isaiah 45:18-21

For thus says the Lord, who created the heavens (he is God!), who formed the earth and made it (he established it; he did not create it empty, he formed it to be inhabited!): “I am the Lord, and there is no other. I did not speak in secret, in a land of darkness; I did not say to the offspring of Jacob, ‘Seek me in vain.’ I the Lord speak the truth; I declare what is right.

“Assemble yourselves and come; draw near together, you survivors of the nations! They have no knowledge who carry about their wooden idols, and keep on praying to a god that cannot save. Declare and present your case; let them take counsel together! Who told this long ago? Who declared it of old? Was it not I, the Lord? And there is no other god besides me, a righteous God and a Savior; there is none besides me.”

I Peter 1:13-19

Therefore, preparing your minds for action, and being sober-minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, since it is written, “You shall be holy, for I am holy.” And if you call on him as Father who judges impartially according to each one’s deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile, knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.

“The Lord’s Prayer, Part I”

The grass withers and the flower fades, but the Word of the Lord remains forever. Friends, this is the Word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God. May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be pleasing and acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

This week we are starting a new series that will take us through to Easter. We just finished a mini-series on types of prayers, and now we’re going to look at the model of prayer that our Lord established. A few words before we begin. First of all, the Lord’s Prayer is a model, not a prescription. What I am saying is, some folks might think when Christ says “pray like this” he is saying the following are the only words a person should pray or that a worship service is incomplete without the Lord’s Prayer. In the Quaker tradition, for instance, everytime a prayer is given, they start by reciting the Lord’s Prayer. So when they pray for confession, for the offering, for illumination, etc., they always begin each and every prayer with the Lord’s Prayer. I don’t think that’s what Jesus had in mind when he said “pray like this.” Rather, he is setting before us the model our prayers should take. Hopefully, this will become clearer as our series progresses. Second, we must keep in mind what we talked about last week, which is prayer is effective, it is effective at changing us. The Lord’s Prayer is a model, not only for speaking with God, but also for our very lives. It is not something we should limit to liturgy, but should instill into our very being.

The final note I wish to add is concerning the question, “Why a six-part series on the Lord’s Prayer, why so much study of it?” We learn about prayer not so that we might know a lot of facts

about it, but so that it may be rightly focused on God. By his sovereign grace, we know that he is there, he listens to our prayers, and answers them in accordance with his perfect will for our ultimate good and his glory. When we recognize God's sovereignty in prayer, we are reminded of his love, grace, holiness, and righteousness. Therefore, Christians don't actually believe in the "power of prayer," rather, we believe in the power of God, and that is why we pray and why we learn about prayer.

With all that said, the Lord's Prayer is recorded for us in two places: in Luke 11 and Matthew 6. Both are similar, but also very different. Unfortunately, examining the historical and textual critiques of both versions is beyond the scope this series. For our purposes we're going to focus on the prayer preserved for us in Matthew 6:9-11, which is the one most Protestants repeat in worship. It is important to note that the Lord's Prayer falls in the middle of Christ's Sermon on the Mount. And I mean it is quite literally the middle passage of the whole sermon that started in chapter five and ends in chapter seven. In a literary context, this places the Lord's Prayer as the axis around which Jesus' ethical teaching revolves. Keep this in the back of your mind as we begin by looking at the opening and first petition: *Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.*

When Christ tells us to consider God our heavenly Father, he is not making some patriarchal statement nor is he attempting to solidify misogynistic ideologies. There's a growing trend in the church to wipe out or erase the masculine language concerning God. I think this is a massive overreaction and an infringement of modernist ideals. Let me assert, God has no gender. While God made us in his image, he made humans *both male and female*. So either we believe God is both genders or he is no gender, and made us to complement one another. The latter is the position of historic Presbyterianism and biblical Christianity. So I agree with my feminist colleagues that God is not a man. God is not a bearded old fella sitting in the clouds. I speak of God with pronouns because language makes God accessible. This also means it's not wrong to use mothering images for God. The Bible describes God as the mother hen who protects her children. Or as the mother who nurses her children from her very breast. To call God "she" is not a bad thing, unless of course one is saying it with malicious intent or with the purpose of "gendering" God. God has no gender.

But the question remains, "Why does Jesus tell us to pray to our *Father*?" The answer is simple. We are God's children. For instance, the opening verse of Hosea chapter eleven has God talking about Israel. He says, "When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son." In fact, this same chapter of Hosea has God using feminine imagery to describe his nurture over Israel: "it was I who taught Ephraim to walk; I took them up by their arms...I bent down to them and fed them." The facts of Scripture are that we are God's children and God is our divine parent. It's important to add that this is not a natural relationship. While it is indeed true that mankind is created by God and made in his image, not all of our race is considered God's children. As Paul reminds us, by nature we are children of wrath. Because of Adam and Eve's sin, their offspring, i.e. all of us, are children of unrighteousness. Our natural state is sinful and at enmity with God. This means something has to happen in order to be considered a child of God. Adoption is what happens.

The reason we pray to God as Father is because we are adopted sons and daughters of his kingdom. God promised Israel that he would be their God and they would be his people. Another way to say this is God adopted Israel as his child. Everything that we can think about adoption comes into play here, too. Boundless love to see beyond the situation of birth. Endless care to teach the familial heritage. Fearless discipline to instill morals and character. What adoptive parents do today, God does on a grand and perfect scale throughout history. Likewise, children that are adopted take on the identity, heritage, and discipline of the new family. Adopted children of God shed off the old, sinful identity to take on the identity of Christ. Adopted children of God learn the orthodoxy of faith through the heritage of the church. Adopted children of God submit themselves to his discipline and his rule. To pray to our Father in heaven is for God's children to submit themselves before him in humility, and open themselves to be transformed by his grace.

Now, the childrenhood of God's people is not limited to a vertical relationship. Remember, everything in Scripture teaches us about both our vertical relationship with God *and* our horizontal relationship with one another. Being an adopted child of God means we are siblings to the faithful, and neighbors to all. Notice, I'm making a distinction here, and that distinction is biblical. Just as Paul said we are naturally children of wrath, our race is naturally at enmity with God. This natural enmity with God means that without any intervention, every single one of us is going to hell. An outside force needs to come in and fix the situation; because we can't do it, we are part of the problem. Enter Christ and the cross. Sons and daughters of God are adopted through the work of Jesus Christ. Jesus, himself, speaks of distinctions between the wheat and the tares, the sheep and the goats, the righteous and the unrighteous. What I am saying here is that while God's adoption is unlimited in the human race—meaning anyone from anywhere can be a child of God—adoption is not universal in the human race—meaning not everyone will be a redeemed child of God.

What I'm about to say next is really important, so I want you to pay attention. God is the Father of our race in the sense that he created us and every one of us bears his image. This is known as the universal fatherhood of God. It is incorrect to assume this means there is a universal brotherhood of mankind. The Bible is clear that not all men are brothers, only those who are in Christ. However, the Bible is also very clear that all men are neighbors, and we are required by God to treat all people as we would expect them to treat us. We are required to love our neighbors as much as we love ourselves. Adoption into the household of God does not mean the faithful are never to care for outsiders. In fact, the opposite is true. True adopted children of God recognize that they have a responsibility to their neighbors, even if their neighbors are unbelievers or heretics. Jesus was very clear that the neighborhood is not restricted to the brotherhood. That was the mistake of the Pharisees. They believed that all of the biblical obligations to love one's neighbor were limited to their fellow Jews, to the brotherhood. Based on that conclusion, they didn't have to be loving to Samaritans, for example. We are all neighbors, one of another, and the true children of God recognize this, admonishing brothers and loving neighbors.

Now, that was the opening to the Lord's Prayer. The first petition, then, asks, "hallowed be your name." Most of the time—and I know this was true for me—when we start the Lord's Prayer, we think we are saying, "Our Father in heaven, your name is holy." But remember, Jesus is teaching

us a prayer, not an assertion. We are not simply stating that God's name is holy, rather we are asking "Father, may your name be hallowed." Jesus is teaching us to ask that God's name would be regarded as sacred, that it would be treated with reverence, and that it would be seen as holy.

When we pray, "Hallowed be your name," we are hoping that God's name will be regarded as sacred around the world. While we pray for the manifestation and the victory of God's kingdom, it is futile to hope for that victory on this planet until or unless the name of God is regarded as sacred. This is because God's kingdom does not come to people who have no respect for him. The beginning of godliness, the very beginning of transformation in our lives and in society, starts with our regarding God as who he is, as sacred. The only way to regard God sacredly is through reverence. The Bible tells us that we are to approach God with fear and trembling. We are to have respect for him and his name. There's a comedy skit by the duo Keegan-Michael Key and Jordan Peele called *Substitute Teacher*. In it, Key plays a substitute from the hood who's come to what appears to be an upper-middle class science lab. He begins taking the roll, but ends up mispronouncing the kids names. He calls Jacqueline, "Juh-Quellen;" Aaron, "A-A-Ron;" and Blake, "Buh-Laké." The kids get upset and offended because his mispronunciations are taken as disrespectful. How do you think God feels when we take his name in vain? He is, after all, our divine parent. If earthly children should respect their earthly parents, then all the more should God's adopted children revere him. In fact, no true worship, no true adoration, no true obedience can flow from a heart that has no reverence for the name of God.

The reason we revere God and regard him as sacred is because he is holy. God's holiness, what makes him unique and what makes him perfect, is also what separates him from us. God is perfect and pure. When we pray that his name be hallowed, we are praying that this world come to recognize his holiness and humble itself under him. We pray for this because we cannot forget or ignore that there is no blasphemy in heaven. There is nothing profane in heaven. We have this comical image of heaven as an endless ice cream bar or endless playtime with puppies. Heaven is not what makes us happy. No one in heaven, neither angel nor spirit, ever does anything but the will of God. And they do it joyously, for his glory. If we would honor God here on earth, as we petition in the Lord's Prayer, then we must begin by regarding his name as holy and treating it that way.

Let us pray. Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might, heaven and earth are full of your glory; yea, they bear witness to your creative handiwork. The beauty of nature and society echo your presence and design. You are our Creator and we bear your image. Forgive us for the times we hurt our neighbors, for in so doing we cast assaults upon you. You are our Father and we are adopted through Christ into the heavenly household. Forgive us for the times we fail our brothers and sisters in the faith. Help us to change our attitudes by remembering your holiness and conforming our lives to your will. May our prayers transform us to be better disciples of our Lord and Savior, in whose name we pray. Amen.