

Luke 11:2
A Pattern for Prayer, God's Greatness

The Old Testament had a rich tradition of prayer. The great patriarchs had prayed. The prophets had spoken to, as well as heard from, God. The Psalms are eloquent prayer to God sung by kings and commoners alike. Prayer was integral to the faith of the nation of Israel. It was full of praise and thanksgiving. It recognized the need to confess the sins of the past and promise obedience in the future. It was offered in humility, and it sought the needs of greater things than self. Prayer was a way of life. It was holy. It was godly. Yet over time, it had become routine and ritualized so that eventually, the men who followed Christ when they heard Him pray, said "Lord, teach us to pray" (v. 1).

Luke records Jesus' response to the request. In these verses we have an abbreviated version of the prayer given by Jesus which was recorded in Matthew's narrative. That this was not the same event, is concluded from the fact that Matthew was recording a moment when Jesus was in Galilee, whereas this conversation with the disciples took place in Judea. The fact that the prayers are similar means no more than Jesus must have taught often on the subject, and Luke was simply using this occasion to bring forth the teaching.

We must pause here to recognize that our unwillingness to pray is our own responsibility. Reluctance or fear or shame are no excuses. We need not wait until we have the perfect words to come to prayer. God is willing to teach us how to pray. The Holy Spirit will intercede for us, "²⁶In the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words; ²⁷and He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He intercedes for the saints according to the will of God" (Romans 8:26-27).

The template that Jesus offered is truly profound, despite (or perhaps because of) its few words. It recognized man's need for reverence ("hallowed be Your name"), loyalty ("Your kingdom come"), submission ("Your will be done"), dependence ("give us this day"), and repentance ("forgive us our debts"). It comprehended both God's glory and man's need. It was truly a God-centered prayer.

Prayer must be God-centered to be genuine. Prayer is not an excuse to get what we want from God, but an opportunity to communicate with the Creator and Sustainer of the universe. As we pray, we must remember that,

"The Lord has established His throne in the heavens,
And His sovereignty rules over all" (Psalm 103:19),

and that,

"Whatever the Lord pleases, He does,
In heaven and in earth, in the seas and in all deeps." (Psalm 135:6).

The Person of God

Jesus began by recognizing God as “Father” (v. 2). In some ways this was a new concept. Israel had, from its earliest days, recognized God as the Father of the nation,

“Do you thus repay the Lord,
O foolish and unwise people?
Is not He your Father who has bought you?
He has made you and established you” (Deuteronomy 32:6).

Yet, the idea of God as a “father” in a personal sense is not to be found in the Old Testament. It would have been seen as presumptuous. In fact, when Jesus called God His Father, it caught the undivided attention of the religious leaders, “for this reason therefore the Jews were seeking all the more to kill Him, because He not only was breaking the Sabbath, but also was calling God His own Father, making Himself equal with God” (Luke 5:18).

Yet, Jesus went even further. He insisted that God was the Father of all who believed, “your Father knows what you need before you ask Him” (Matthew 6:8) and “whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father who is in heaven will also forgive you your transgressions” (Mark 11:25).

The word Jesus used is usually translated *pater* from which we get *pater noster* for “Our Father.” The Aramaic word is *abba* - a term of intimacy evoking the ‘papa’ or ‘dada’ spoken by a toddler. Jesus was inviting His disciples to appreciate the intimacy of the relationship they had with the sovereign God. This would become a fundamental teaching of the early Church, “for you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, ‘Abba! Father!’” (Romans 8:15).

One thing we can infer from this is that there is no such thing as universal redemption. It is an ancient heresy; we find it even in the writings of the church father Origen who insisted that God’s love was so great even Satan would eventually be saved. Throughout the years this idea has presented itself in many different guises - usually the Fatherhood (or Motherhood) of God and brotherhood of man. Jesus, however, taught differently,

“⁴²Jesus said to them, ‘If God were your Father, you would love Me, for I proceeded forth and have come from God, for I have not even come on My own initiative, but He sent Me. ⁴³Why do you not understand what I am saying? It is because you cannot hear My word. ⁴⁴You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies’” (John 8:42-44).

Therefore, this is a prayer for believers only. Galatians 4:6-7, “⁶Because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, ‘Abba! Father!’ ⁷Therefore you are no longer a slave, but a son; and if a son, then an heir through God.” And as sons, we can know that our relationship with the God of the universe is one of love. This means that we need not live in fear. Ours is a prayer of hope. A confident prayer to the One Who will never fail. We have a hope “laid up for [us] in heaven” (Colossians 1:5). And our hope is secure. Our Father has unlimited power and resources to guarantee what He has promised. He is omnipotent and sovereign. Our relationship with Him is secure,

“³⁸For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:38-39).

“²⁸I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand. ²⁹My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand” (John 10:28-29).

The Name of God

Jesus continued, “hallowed be Your name” (v. 2). When we approach God in prayer, it is true He is our Father, personal and intimate, but it is also true that He is the Lord God of the Bible. We must recognize that as well.

“I am the Lord, that is My name;
I will not give My glory to another” (Isaiah 42:8)

“Ascribe to the Lord the glory due to His name;
Worship the Lord in holy array.” (Psalm 29:2).

“Not to us, O Lord, not to us,
But to Your name give glory” (Psalm 115:1)

The word itself means to set apart as holy. It is related to words that mean ‘glorify’ or ‘praise’. Ultimately, it means to recognize that God is Who He has said He is in Scripture. It is to live in a manner that seeks to bring glory to God as Jesus did, “²⁷Now My soul has become troubled; and what shall I say, ‘Father, save Me from this hour’? But for this purpose I came to this hour. ²⁸Father, glorify Your name” (John 12:27-28). Since prayer is a way of life, this means that we should “sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence” (1 Peter 3:15), and “do all to the glory of God” (1 Corinthians 10:31).

In the ancient world, the name was much more meaningful than today. Today, our name might be in memory of a parent or grandparent. Or it might have some biblical reference. Or perhaps, it might refer to a characteristic that our parents hoped to see in us as we matured. But long ago, the name was the things itself. It defined the person named. “¹⁸Then Moses said, ‘I pray You, show me Your glory!’ ¹⁹And He said, ‘I Myself will make all My goodness pass before you, and will proclaim the name of the Lord before you’” (Exodus 33:18-19). The name of the Lord meant God Himself,

“Fear the name of the Lord” (Psalm 102:15).

“I have manifested Your name to the men whom You gave Me out of the world” (John 17:6).

The Kingdom of God

Jesus told His disciples to pray, “Your kingdom come” (v. 2). Jesus knew His disciples. Man is a stubborn animal. Despite God’s grace, He has always been so. We want our own kingdom to flourish. We want our own agendas accomplished. It has been so from the beginning.

Moses complained, “ You have been rebellious against the Lord from the day I knew you” (Deuteronomy 9:24).

Asaph agreed that Israel was, “A stubborn and rebellious generation,
A generation that did not prepare its
heart
And whose spirit was not faithful to
God” (Psalm 78:8).

God warned Jeremiah that “this people has a stubborn and rebellious
Heart;
they have turned aside and departed”
(Jeremiah 5:23).

And He told Ezekiel, “Son of man, I am sending you to the sons of Israel, to a rebellious people who have rebelled against Me; they and their fathers have transgressed against Me to this very day” (Ezekiel 2:3).

The disciples were no different. We are no different. Therefore the charge was given to continually pray for God’s kingdom to come. This concept of kingdom has many interpretations. First, it refers to the ‘rule’ of God over all things. His sovereignty is emphasized. So one sense in which this prayer is intended is to have God's ultimate sovereign rule over all things inaugurated. It is a prayer that the world may be in fact what it is in promise.

This was what Jesus had preached, and told His disciples to preach.

“⁴²When day came, Jesus left and went to a secluded place; and the crowds were searching for Him, and came to Him and tried to keep Him from going away from them. ⁴³But He said to them, ‘I must preach the kingdom of God to the other cities also, for I was sent for this purpose’” (Luke 4:42-43).

“¹And He called the twelve together, and gave them power and authority over all the demons and to heal diseases. ²And He sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to perform healing” (Luke 9:1-2).

In one sense, this kingdom was in the future, “truly I say to you, I will never again drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God” (Mark 14:25). But the kingdom of God was not only in the future. It was here now. Jesus told the seventy to “say to them, ‘the kingdom of God has come near to you’” (Luke 10:9) and challenged the Pharisees, “if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.” (Matthew 12:28).

To pray for the kingdom of God therefore means two things. First, it means to pray that God’s kingdom grows as people come to faith in Christ. From the advent of His ministry, “Jesus began to preach and say, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand’” (Matthew 4:17). Scripture exhorts that “¹entreaties and prayers, petitions and thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men. . . [because] ³this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, ⁴who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Timothy 2:1, 3-4).

Second, it means we are to pray for the consummation of God's kingdom. Believers should be "looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God" (2 Peter 3:12). We ought to live a life of anticipation of this blessed occurrence. We should, "¹²deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age, ¹³looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus" (Titus 2:12-13).

The day of God refers to the eternal state where all enemies have been defeated .

"The LORD says to my Lord:

'Sit at My right hand

Until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet.'" (Psalm 110:1),

"¹⁰At the name of Jesus every knee will bow, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." (Philippians 2:10-11),

Related to this concept is implied by Luke but stated by Matthew, "Your will be done" (Matthew 6:10). Jesus did this to perfection. Even at the most trying of times, one that we will likely never face, Jesus "fell on His face and prayed, saying, 'My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; yet not as I will, but as You will'" (Matthew 26:39). He told His disciples, "My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to accomplish His work" (John 4:34).

We might ask at this point why we pray at all? If we are to pray for God to be glorified, can't He see to that. Does God really need us to pray that His perfect will be accomplished. Won't it be accomplished anyway? Is His will contingent on our prayers?

Many fall victim to this foolish thinking. Some fall into a passive resignation that their prayers do not matter. This is simply contrary to Scripture. Prayer becomes routine and ritual once again, and there is no expectation of answer. These people pray because they think they should, not because they expect God to hear. Acts 12 provides an excellent illustration.

"¹Now about that time Herod the king laid hands on some who belonged to the church in order to mistreat them. ²And he had James the brother of John put to death with a sword. ³When he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter also. Now it was during the days of Unleavened Bread. ⁴When he had seized him, he put him in prison, delivering him to four squads of soldiers to guard him, intending after the Passover to bring him out before the people. ⁵So Peter was kept in the prison, but prayer for him was being made fervently by the church to God. . . .[when Peter is freed] ¹²he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John who was also called Mark, where many were gathered together and were praying. ¹³When he knocked at the door of the gate, a servant-girl named Rhoda came to answer. ¹⁴When she recognized Peter's voice, because of her joy she did not open the gate, but ran in and announced that Peter was standing in front of the gate. ¹⁵They said to her, 'You are out of your mind!' But she kept insisting that it was so. They kept saying, 'it is his angel'" (Acts 12:1-5, 12-15). This is not the kind of prayer Jesus taught. Jesus taught perseverance in prayer, "Now He was telling them a parable to show that at all times they ought to pray and not to lose heart" (Luke 18:1). The Bible teaches that prayer accomplishes things, "the effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much"

(James 5:16). Believers are to be “rejoicing in hope, persevering in tribulation, devoted to prayer” (Romans 12:12). It is to be done at all times, “with all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints” (Ephesians 6:18), “pray without ceasing” (1 Thessalonians 5:17). Prayer will relieve or stress, “be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God” (Philippians 4:6) and help us to be more thankful, “devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with an attitude of thanksgiving” (Colossians 4:2).

Take Aways

Reflect this week on your prayer life. Are our prayers truly full of praise for God and a desire to further His kingdom and bring glory to His name?