

“THE PRAYER OF JESUS #1: OUR FATHER IN HEAVEN”

(Matthew 6:7-13)

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[PROP NEEDED: Video of Lord's Prayer in ancient Aramaic (written & audio)]

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--I--

1. **[WATCH VIDEO of Matthew 6:9-13 in ancient (Syriac) Aramaic**
(show in written form, listen to audio from http://www.v-a.com/bible/Lords_Prayer.html) ¹

2. Whether you realized it or not, these words are, arguably, the most well-known and universally recognized words in all of Christianity.

A--Many (if not most) of us, grew up learning and memorizing these, and using them at least weekly as a regular part of the practice of our faith.

B--And what you just heard and saw here are, in fact, *Jesus'* words as *he* would have spoken and written them (in ancient Aramaic).

3. Of course, they have since come to be called "*The Lord's Prayer*" (or the "*Our Father*" as some refer to it ²), and the English version that most of us know is based on the King James translation of today's scripture from Matthew 6:9-13. ³

A--But what exactly did Jesus mean when he first shared this prayer? Why was it radical & controversial in its time? And what relevance does it still have for our lives today?

B--Well, these are some of the questions I want to address over the next six weeks as we begin a new series called "*The Prayer of Jesus,*" in which we'll be exploring the meaning and value of this powerful prayer, phrase by phrase.

--II--

4. Now, before we begin dissecting each phrase, let me first make a few observations about **the prayer as a whole.**

A--First, we need to remember that this prayer represents *Jesus' response* to his disciples' request for guidance on how to pray.

1--In that day, there were all kinds of competing notions about the "proper" methods and means for praying, & the disciples were looking for clarification.

2--So when Jesus shares this prayer, he's not only revealing something of how *he* prays, but he's also giving the disciples a *starting place* for *their own* prayers. ⁴

B--The sad thing, of course, is that too often today, we use this prayer in exactly the way that Jesus warned his disciples *not* to do in Verse 7: "*When you pray, don't pour out a flood of empty words...*" -- in other words, don't make prayer into a *vain repetition* of words that we never think about and that (consequently) hold no meaning!

1--And don't we often fall into that trap? ...Simply *repeating* the words of The Lord's Prayer over and over without ever *thinking about* what we're praying?

2--Well, if we look carefully at Vs. 9 we'll see that Jesus, in fact, *never* said "*Pray this prayer*" but instead "*Pray in this way.../like this...*" --that's very different! ⁵

C--So what I think his prayer gives us is *not* a set series of words that *must* be repeated over & over *ad nauseam*, but an illustration of *elements* that proper prayer should *include* -- it's really more of a *skeleton* (a structural pattern) that we can *build upon* in our *own* personal and corporate prayer lives.

5. Think about it: the **first three phrases** of the prayer (Verses 9-10) talk about the identity, nature, and character *of God*, while the **last three** (Verses 11-13) focus more on the needs and necessities of *we humans*.

A--So, it's almost as if Jesus is saying, "*In your prayers, begin by praising and thanking God for who He is, what He's done, and for His will and desires to be supreme in your both your life and in the world. Then (and only then) should you turn your petitions to your needs and wants."*

1--And yet, how many times do our prayers begin with *ourselves*, rather than with *God*? ... (e.g., "*Dear God, please do this for me; Please heal so and so; Please help me do such and such!*" -- most of us are extremely selfish in our prayers!).

2--But The Lord's Prayer teaches that the antidote to that selfishness is to *begin* prayer (and life) by focusing on the identity, nature and character *of God* -- by reminding us that only when we give God *His* proper place do all other things begin to fall into *their* proper place. ⁶

B--So, how do we do that, then? **How do we focus on God's identity and character?**
Well, for the rest of today, let's look at how this first phrase (Vs. 9) accomplishes that.
Say it with me [ON SCREEN]..."*Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name...*"

--II--

6. First of all, Jesus begin his prayer with the words "**OUR FATHER...**"

A--Now, a lot is made in some circles today about the patriarchal nature of the word "**Father**" -- how it doesn't help those who've had abusive earthly fathers connect with God as heavenly Father, or that it conjures up sexist images of who God actually is. ⁷

B--But what we have to remember is when Jesus first spoke this prayer 2000 years ago, merely calling God "*Father*" was radical and controversial -- the word Jesus used was the Aramaic term "*Abba*," which literally means "*Daddy / Dad*." ⁸

1--And in that day and culture, God was viewed as an all-powerful, majestic, divine being whose holiness made Him *unapproachable*, and who holds humans strictly accountable for law-keeping, ⁹ ... but God *wasn't "Daddy"*!

2--No. The term "*Daddy*" was a term of intimacy, tenderness, and familiarity.

3--So when Jesus called God "*Father*", he was inviting his disciples (and us) to think of God in terms of intimacy, trust, tenderness and mercy, NOT as one who "lords over" others using fear or oppression.

4--You see, this is a *different kind* of "*Father*" either than what was traditionally understood by the Jewish people of *Jesus'* day or by some in our *own* day. ¹⁰

7. But notice, too, that Jesus uses the phrase "***OUR Father***" --NOT "*my Father*" but "*our Father*."

A--The reminder here is that God is the Father of us *all*. And if He's the Father of *all*, then we're all related to *one another*, which also means that we can really only relate to God to the extent that we relate to others!

B--How does 1 John 4:20 put it? "*Whoever says they love God but hate their neighbor is a liar, for how can you love God who you cannot see when you do not love your neighbor who you can see?*"

C--I think it's significant that *nowhere* in the Lord's Prayer do we find the words "*I, me, my, or mine*" -- because Jesus wants us to remember that God cannot be monopolized; that's He's not the privatized, individualistic God often portrayed by today's culture.

1--Yes, God loves us *personally* & individually... but NOT *exclusively!* He loves *everyone* that way, too -- including those that we don't like or get along with, or those who's race or ethnicity or sexual orientation or social standing is different their own!

2--And so, just as God shows no partiality or favorites, neither should we!
...Because He is, after all, "*OUR Father*." ¹¹

8. Now, the second phrase in Verse 9 is "***...WHO ART IN HEAVEN...***"

A--First of all, notice God is addressed as the one "***who IS***" (i.e., "*who art*")-- it's a reminder of God's identity in the Bible as "*the great I AM*" ^{12/} the one who "*was, & is, & is to come*." ¹³

B--In other words, our prayers call upon a God who is *not* dead and aloof (I.e., who *was*), but IS alive, active, and present both in our world and in our lives today.

C--And then, too, let's not forget that even though God *is* a God of intimacy and compassion ("*Abba/Father*"), He nevertheless still is also a God of *Holiness and accountability*... which I believe to be the meaning of the words "*...In Heaven.*" ¹⁴

1--Bible scholar William Barclay puts it this way, "*When we call God 'Father,' we must never use it cheaply or easily, as if God is an easy-going parent who tolerantly turns a blind eye towards all sin and evil.*" ¹⁵

2--Yes, He is "Our Father," but He's "Our Father in Heaven..." -- one to be approached not only with the boldness of a child, but *also* with the reverence, adoration, awe, and wonder of a servant, because in God love and holiness, forgiveness and accountability, are all combined.

9. And of course, the mystery of that combination is one reason why Jesus taught us to pray that last phrase of Verse 9: "**HALLOWED BE THY NAME...**"

A--You see, the word "**Hallowed**" means "*holy, honored, revered, unique, set apart,*" and in ancient times one's "**Name**" revealed something about the nature and character of something or someone.

B--So, to pray "*Hallowed be thy name*" means to treat God's nature & identity (God's "name") fundamentally differently from (i.e., with more reverence than) anyone else.

1--When we pray that, we're really saying, "*Lord, help us give to you the unique place in our lives which your nature and character deserve and demand,*" and then we're asking ourselves if we're really *doing* that?

2--E.G., *Are* we giving God reverence and honor by the way we... treat our employer or employees?... speak to and treat our spouse or children? ...or by how we act around our schoolmates and friends?

C--It's a phrase, in other words, that demands that we each examine our *own* lives (our words & *behaviors*) to see if the *way* we're living truly honors God. ¹⁶

--III--

10. So then... "*Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name*" ---...

A--...Ten short words from Jesus that focus our hearts and lives on the nature and character of *God* as one who reigns over all the universe *supremely*, but who also knows and loves each of us *intimately*. ¹⁷

B--And as we begin this new series for the Christian season of Lent, my prayer is that this "*Prayer of Jesus*" will both inspire our hearts and transform our lives!

11. [PRAYER]

ENDNOTES:

¹ Or view full video of this prayer in Aramaic with phonetic English pronunciation scrolled at http://www.v-a.com/bible/lords_prayer_video_on_youtube.html. The phonetic transliteration is as follows:...

*"Avvon d-bish-maiya, nith-qaddash shim-mukh.
Tih-teh mal-chootukh. Nih-weh çiw-yanukh:
ei-chana d'bish-maiya: ap b'ar-ah.
Haw lan lakh-ma d'soonqa-nan yoo-mana.
O'shwooq lan kho-bein:
ei-chana d'ap kh'nan shwiq-qan l'khaya-ween.
Oo'la te-ellan l'niss-yoona:
il-la paç-çan min beesha.
Mid-til de-di-lukh hai mal-choota
oo khai-la oo tush-bookh-ta
l'alam al-mein. Aa-meen."*

The literal translation of this phonetic Aramaic is as follows...

*"Our heavenly Father, hallowed is your name.
Your Kingdom is come. Your will is done,
As in heaven so also on earth.
Give us the bread for our daily need.
And leave us serene,
just as we also allowed others serenity.
And do not pass us through trial,
except separate us from the evil one.
For yours is the Kingdom,
the Power and the Glory
To the end of the universe, of all the universes. Amen"*

² This is how the Roman Catholic tradition refers to it, from its first two words in Latin, "*Pater Noster*."

³ Jesus' followers revered this prayer so highly that they continued to use it in worship and to adapt it, just as the words of institution for the Lord's Supper went through a process of adaptation (Mark 14:22-26; Matt 26:26-30; Luke 22:15-20; 1Corinthians 11:23-25). A similar prayer is found in Luke 11:2-4, and some scholars believe that while the gospel of John does not mention it, he nevertheless does give a lengthy high-priestly prayer Jesus said on behalf of the disciples before his arrest (John 17:1-26). It is likely John was aware of the tradition of the Lord's Prayer, and this high-priestly prayer may be his version of the Lord's Prayer.

In fact, as shown here, the Lord's Prayer as recited by Jesus is almost certainly borrowed from the *Kadish* of the ancient Jewish Talmud: "*Our Parent which art in heaven, be gracious to us, O Lord, Our God; hallowed be thy name, and let the remembrance of thee be glorified in heaven above and in the earth here below. Let thy kingdom reign over us now and forever. The holy men of old said, Remit and forgive unto all men whatsoever they have done against me. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil thing. For thine is the kingdom, and thou shalt reign in glory for ever and for evermore*" (The *Kadish*, translated by Christian scholar John Gregorie, cited in the website "The Nazarene Way of Essenic Studies: The Lord's Prayer" at www.thenazareneway.com/lords_prayer.htm).

For an excellent summary of the origins and development of the Lord's Prayer as used in historic Christian tradition, visit www.thenazareneway.com/lords_prayer.htm

⁴ "Just as synagogue prayers functioned to strengthen the belief and identity of the Jewish community, the Lord's Prayer served to shape the faith and life of Jesus' followers as a group. Using the Lord's Prayer as their liturgical prayer, Jesus' followers acquired a new identity, distinguished from that of John the Baptist. This model prayer was then used in catechism to instruct new members of the church how to pray. Through repeated use in worship and teaching, its main themes, such as God's name to be honored, God's kingdom to come, and God's will to be done, could gradually be internalized to shape their world view and define their purpose of life. Thus, the Lord's Prayer has two related uses in the church: liturgy and instruction.... The Lord's Prayer provides us with a clear glimpse into Jesus' prayerful life. It also summarizes the key themes of Jesus' kingdom message, the good news of the new age wherein God's reign has come to provide for us and protect us in all circumstances. As a communal prayer, used regularly in catechism, daily office, and holy Eucharist, the Lord's Prayer has shaped the faith, life, and worship of the church throughout history. As a model prayer, it can also enhance our spiritual life by teaching us how to pray.... The Lord's Prayer is for Matthew a model prayer showing people how to pray rightly to honor God, to relate well to each other, and to be vigilant for the end of days." (Article "The Lord's Prayer" in The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible).

Eugene Peterson puts it this way, "Jesus prayed. When we go to language school with Jesus, we pray. But we are not left to figure all this out on our own. We have a primer, these set prayers of Jesus prayers. If we are shy, unsure of ourselves, we can pray them with the confidence that we are praying after the manner of the Master. We keep company with Jesus at gradually get the hang of what he is doing and how he is doing it" (Tell It Slant, Eugene H Peterson, Zondervan, 2008, p. 165).

⁵ "The context for this prayer is after Jesus' disciples asked Him, "How do you pray?" What do you do when you pray? "Jesus covers several points. He says, first of all, "Don't pray like the hypocrites. "In other words, don't pray like people who are praying because they want attention or they want to look spiritual or religious, and so on like that. Secondly, He says when you pray don't use vain repetitions. In other words, don't just repeat something over and over again; thinking that by repeating it you are going to get some kind of favor from God. No, repetition doesn't gain favor from God. Now that doesn't mean you can't take a portion of the Bible or a certain prayer that is your favorite and say it over and over again. No, it is talking about vain repetition. In other words, if what you are saying and what you are praying is not coming from your heart, and how you feel, and your desires, then that is not real prayer. Jesus then gives what people call the model prayer or the Lord's Prayer. It has different names." (Taken from a Cable TV broadcast called In the Beginning by Drew Haninger, Message #TV0023, from Drew's website www.DrewHaninger.com).

⁶ Read Matthew 6:33.

⁷ This view is especially prominent in some feminist theological circles, to the point where some Progressive Christians either no longer recite The Lord Prayer in worship, or change the phrase "Our Father" to "Our Good Parent."

⁸ Other places where God is referenced as "Abba" ("Daddy") are: by Jesus Mark 14:36; and by Paul in Romans 8:15 and Galatians 4:6.

⁹ This view and understanding of the nature and character of God is especially prominent in Islam and some versions of the Jewish faith

¹⁰ The story is told of a Roman Emperor who was once marching his army and his chariots down the streets of Rome following a great victory over his enemies amidst the pomp and splendor of crowds exalting and shouting his name. At one point along the triumphal route, the Emperor's chariot passed by a grandstand where his Empress and children cheered him on. As he passed by, his youngest son jumped off the platform and into the crowd to meet his father. He was immediately stopped by a guard who told him, "You can't do that, boy! Don't you know who that is in the chariot? That's the Emperor!" The boy instantly replied, "He may be the Emperor, but he's still my Father." As Christians, we may have an all-powerful, all-knowing, almighty God, but He's still *"our FATHER."*

"Teaching his followers to say the Lord's Prayer, therefore, Jesus is authorizing them to call God their 'Father' as he does in the same intimate relationship and with the same obedient disposition. Calling God 'Father' was considered an inspired confession in the early church. To address God as Father is, therefore, a privilege and an assurance of our identity and status as God's children" (Article *"The Lord's Prayer"* in The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible).

¹¹ *"Our Father' in the Matthean version indicates, moreover, that the Lord's Prayer is a communal prayer. ...God is dear and gracious to each individual, but no one can monopolize God, who is Father to all people and shows no partiality.... Because the Lord's Prayer is a collective prayer, we should always pray it in solidarity with all believers as a family of God and with each other's needs in mind"* (*"The Lord's Prayer"* article in The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible)

¹² Exodus 3:14

¹³ Revelation 1:8.

¹⁴ *"The idea that God is 'in the heavens' reflects a Jewish apocalyptic faith in God as the almighty one who creates the world and the holy one who transcends all, indeed the one in control of time and place from above, a sphere of authority. The sense of transcendence makes the bold address to God as 'Our Father' even more shocking as a privilege granted by Jesus. To say God is 'in the heavens' is, thus, to reassure us that we can trust the almighty God to answer our prayers and meet our needs. It also reminds us how much we should honor our heavenly Father to whom we owe our existence, blessings, allegiance, and worship"* (Article *"The Lords Prayer"* in The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible).

¹⁵ William Barclay's Commentary on the New Testament, Book of Matthew, Chapter 6.

¹⁶ *"In Jewish thinking, the name represents the person, so to honor God's name is to honor God. To honor God's name as 'holy' is to recognize, respect, and worship God as the Lord who alone is true and living, as is daily confessed in the Shema"* (Article *"The Lords Prayer,"* The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible).

¹⁷ *"To pray this first petition is, therefore, to pledge allegiance to God as the Lord, honoring God with a holy life and glorifying God's name among all people"* (Article *"The Lords Prayer,"* The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible).