“YOUR KINGDOM COME”

Luke 11:1,2

Key Verse: 11:2b

“Your kingdom come.”

This Summer we’re going to be going through a series of Bible studies on prayer. We’ll be looking at six passages in Luke’s Gospel that help us learn better how to pray. Our first passage is the Lord’s Prayer from Luke 11:1–4. This week we’ll be looking at just the first half of the prayer, and next week we’ll be looking at the second half. It’s been called “the Prayer of prayers,” and great Christian thinkers Augustine, Luther and Calvin wrote extensively about it. So many people in history have memorized this prayer and recited it, especially in desperate situations, being so overwhelmed they couldn’t even begin to pray anything else. This prayer gives us a special bond with our fellow Christians all over the world. We know this prayer very well, or so we think. The danger is, the words can sound so familiar that we become numb to their meaning. This short prayer is so deep that it’s been called the basis of our spiritual formation as Christians. Through our study we want to meditate deeply on each part of this prayer and humbly learn from it how to come to God in prayer each day. May God open our hearts and speak to us through his living word today.

Before we delve into the prayer’s meaning, let’s first take a look at what just happened. Jesus sent out 72 disciples two by two as laborers for the spiritual harvest of God’s kingdom. He also taught them the Parable of the Good Samaritan, to help them grow as humble, compassionate servants for wounded, helpless people. Finally, Jesus went to the home of two sisters, Mary and Martha, who couldn’t have been more different from each other. Mary chose to set aside all the practical preparations, sit down and just listen to Jesus’ words. Martha, on the other hand, became distracted with much serving and ended up anxious and troubled about many things. She even tried to push Jesus to make her sister help her. It illustrates how easy it is for gospel laborers to lose spiritual priority and focus and actually end up not learning anything. Now, in the very next passage, Luke mentions how Jesus taught his disciples to pray.

Look at verse 1a. It says, “Now Jesus was praying in a certain place…” Throughout this Gospel Luke has been emphasizing the importance of prayer. The opening stories of the elderly couple Zechariah and Elizabeth, and of Simeon and Anna (chapters 1 and 2), show how dedicated lives of prayer prepared the environment for Jesus to come. When Jesus first went to John the Baptist to be baptized, he made it a point to pray (3:21). Before beginning his ministry he spent forty days fasting and praying to overcome the devil’s temptations (4:1–13). Luke emphasizes Jesus’ life of prayer not only to teach us to pray but also to illustrate Jesus in his full humanity. When he went to work, people were excited about his healing ministry, but when a new day began, he departed from everyone and went to a desolate place where he could pray (4:40–42a). Surrounded by excited crowds, he made it his habit to go to desolate places to pray (5:16). When people were plotting against him, he didn’t become anxious; he went to a mountain to pray, and all night he continued in prayer to God (6:11,12). In fact, he was praying for the very people who were abusing him (6:28). In the midst of feeding needy crowds and training his disciples to be responsible shepherds, he kept on praying alone (9:18). Once he took his top three disciples Peter, James and John up a mountain to pray with him until they could see him in his transfigured glory (9:28,29). Encountering so much human need, he taught his disciples to pray earnestly for just one thing: that God would send laborers into his harvest (10:2). For us, prayer can become an afterthought, or something we do only reluctantly. We can talk too much, or think too much. But for Jesus, prayer was his life source and at the core of all he did. Through prayer he stayed close to God, depended on him in all things, and didn’t let life’s demands and pressures drag him here and there, but carefully followed the Father’s will. If we’re going to follow our Lord Jesus and grow as laborers for the spiritual harvest, we’ve got to grow in a life of prayer like his, and especially, to pray before doing anything.

Jesus didn’t talk a lot about prayer, or teach a lot about prayer; he just did it, quietly, personally; he led by example. His frequent personal prayers finally got his disciples interested. Look at verse 1b. It seems that this one disciple felt left out of what Jesus was doing. It was good that he wanted to learn how to pray. But there’s a hint that he thought Jesus wasn’t doing as well as John the Baptist, because in his discipleship ministry Jesus had not yet emphasized prayer.

How did Jesus respond? Let’s read verses 2–4. Jesus taught this disciple, and all his followers, a very simple, model prayer. The first half of the prayer is God-focused; the second half focuses on our daily needs. Before we go into the first half, the format itself tells us something: prayer is a two-way street, a kind of conversation. We don’t just come to God and talk about ourselves. First, we quiet ourselves and focus our thoughts on who it is we’re talking to—God himself. We begin with our relationship with him, with his nature, and with his concerns. After that, we share honestly with him what’s in our hearts, what we really need. It’s a beautiful kind of give and take. Jesus’ model prayer doesn’t mean that we have no freedom to tell God whatever we’d like. The Bible encourages us to cast all our anxieties on him (1Pe5:7). Sometimes, our private prayers can seem inappropriate because we’re sharing so honestly our griefs, our agonies, our frustration, even our doubts. So Jesus gave us a model prayer to help us develop a healthy focus, to bend our hearts from being self-centered to being God-centered. The first half of the Lord’s Prayer teaches to focus on three things.

**First**, “Father.” Our Lord Jesus taught us to call God “Father.” Human beings have had many ideas about God. They’ve called him “the Supreme Being,” “the Prime Mover,” “the First Cause,” or some great power that’s completely and utterly unknowable. Many think of God like this, only as a concept. But Jesus called him “Father” and taught us to do so as well (cf. Jn20:17). This one word, “Father,” means so much. Jesus addressed him as “Lord of heaven and earth,” but also as “Father” (Lk10:21). Above all else it means that God is a person. It also encourages us to come to him anytime, anywhere, no matter what has happened. For many people the concept of father is, sadly, not so pleasant. They had abusive fathers or absent fathers or unapproachable fathers. But the healthy concept of father is someone who loves us so dearly as his own, who always welcomes us, who provides for us and protects us no matter what. God our heavenly Father is far better than even the best human father; he doesn’t spoil us but is eager to give us the best gifts (11:13). In Luke’s Gospel Jesus told the Parable of the Prodigal Son to illustrate that God is like a brokenhearted father, ready to give his all, even to the point of looking foolish, eagerly waiting for his lost child to finally come home (15:11–32). With a good father people feel secure, but without a good father we can feel vulnerable and even lost. The Bible calls God “the King of ages, immortal, invisible, the only God” (1Ti1:17a). To describe God the Old Testament frequently uses the word “awesome” (Ge28:17; Ex15:11; Dt7:21; 10:17; 28:58; Ne1:5; 4:14; 9:32; Job37:22; Ps68:35; 89:7; 99:3; 111:9; Da9:4; Zeph2:11). Hebrews tells us to worship God acceptably, with reverence and awe (12:28). But our Lord Jesus also taught us that this awesome God we can simply call “Father.” In our recent study of Romans 8 we learned that when we live by faith in Jesus, we receive the Holy Spirit, who heals us of our deepest fears and gives us the conviction that God has adopted us as his own children; through the Spirit we now can call God “Abba! Father!” (Ro8:15) The Apostle John wrote: “See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are” (1Jn3:1a). When we pray, we shouldn’t rush in, but first spend some time reflecting on the reality that God is my Father and I am his child, by his amazing grace in Jesus. It’s the best privilege in the world. Knowing God as my Father gives deep peace and rest to my soul. Calling him Father also helps us realize that in Jesus we’re all brothers and sisters. It helps us see our fellow human beings very differently.

**Second**, “hallowed be your name.” “Hallowed” means “holy” and God’s name represents his character and how people perceive him. God is already fully holy and no amount of our praying will change that even the least. But by praying for his name to be hallowed, we’re praying gently that people may repent and come to truly know him. We pray for the people of all the nations on earth to no longer profane God’s name by their ignorance, words and deeds, but for God’s holy name to be vindicated (Eze36:23). God has many attributes: the greatest power, wisdom, faithfulness, justice and mercy there is. But without his one trait—his holiness—he would no longer be the same God. Calling him “Father” is balanced with these words, “hallowed be your name.” We’re not just praying for other people to know him, but also for ourselves, that our lives would not dishonor his name. As believers in Jesus we all bear God’s name in the world. But when our character and behavior don’t reflect our Father God, we dishonor his name. So this prayer is our way of asking God to help us glorify him in who we are and wherever we are, in all we do. We need to remember that this request “hallowed be your name” is the first actual request in the Lord’s Prayer. So, above everything and everyone else, we need to learn to pray for God to be glorified. It might be through success or failure, through blessings or hardships or great suffering, but we can always pray, “Lord, through this may you be glorified.” When Job famously lost everything and was plunged into great suffering, he said, “‘Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked I shall return. The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD.’ In all this Job did not sin or charge God with wrong” (Job1:21,22). Our Lord Jesus showed us the best example: he prayed that through his death on the cross God would be glorified (Jn17:1). So to pray “hallowed be your name,” we’ve got to get genuinely interested in God’s glory. To really pray for this, frankly, we’ve got to fall in love with God, not just try to use him for our benefit. In our sinful nature, deep within we’re mainly interested in our own glory and honor. We want people to be impressed by us as much as possible and to respect us. But this prayer request, “hallowed be your name,” trains us to focus on God’s glory, not ours. We should be praying every day, in all that we do: “Hallowed be your name!”

**Third**, “your kingdom come.” In this Gospel Luke mentions God’s kingdom a whopping 39 times! In his other book, Acts, he mentions it further (Ac1:3; 8:12; 14:22; 19:8; 20:25; 28:23,31). Jesus said this good news of the kingdom of God was why he was sent (4:43). God’s kingdom was always in his heart and on his lips, the main focus of his preaching and teaching, and it’s still our greatest hope. To pray “your kingdom come” means to make this heavenly hope our very own. We all get engrossed in the things of this world. We naturally love the world and everything in it: the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride in possessions” (1Jn2:16). But when we come to have the love of the Father in us, we long for the day when God’s kingdom comes, when God is rightly worshiped and adored as God, when all creation is restored to God’s intended order. It’s not the kingdom of any human being, but the kingdom of God. What is this kingdom? Human kingdoms are visible; God’s kingdom is invisible. Human kingdoms are temporary; God’s kingdom is eternal. Human kingdoms are built on power, money, injustice and oppression; God’s kingdom is based on humility, sacrifice and love. Uniquely in Luke’s Gospel, the Pharisees asked Jesus when the kingdom of God would come, and he answered that it would not be with some special signs or drama, because it’s already “in the midst of you” or “within you” (17:20,21). The kingdom of God is about personally having “righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit” within us (Ro14:17). In other words, it’s about God ruling our hearts and lives. The more the Holy Spirit fills our hearts through faith in Jesus, the more God’s kingdom comes in this world, one person at a time. When we pray “your kingdom come,” we’re not only praying for our Lord Jesus to come again soon (Rev22:20); we’re also inviting him each day to come and reign in my heart as my Lord. And we’re praying that more and more people today who don’t know him may come to live in his grace and experience this beautiful kingdom of peace, love and hope. In this world people experience all kinds of pain, hatred and indifference. The Bible says this world is under a curse, and sin and death are reigning. In fact, the devil is ruling people’s hearts and minds, always planting pride, fear, doubt, hatred, rebellion and complaints. There are so many problems in this fallen world, and Jesus warned us that we’re going to experience tribulation of all kinds (Jn16:33). So he taught us to pray every day, “your kingdom come,” as the best possible prayer request. We need to pray specifically for our ministry, both here and around the world, but we also should be praying, working and living with the much bigger picture of God’s greater kingdom in mind. We may not see many visible fruits, but, by faith, all that we’re doing is for God’s kingdom. When we focus our prayers not on all our needs and wants but on “your kingdom come,” we’re learning the faith to seek first his kingdom (Mt6:33).

May God bless each of us to meditate on the Lord’s Prayer and learn how to pray it every day so that we can grow in a God-centered prayer life. May he deepen our awareness that God is our Father and help us grow in real love for him. May he help us pray every day for his name to be hallowed, first in my life, and then in the world around me. May he help us not to focus on problems and petty issues, but fill us with a renewed zeal and faith to pray fervently, “your kingdom come.”