The Constitution of the Kingdom

A 33-Session Journey through the Sermon on the Mount & the Sermon on the Plain

SESSION TWENTY — Our Father: The Prayer Begins

Part Four: The Practices of Piety · Texts: Matthew 6:9–10; Luke 11:2

The Texts

> **Matthew 6:9–10** *Pray then in this way: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.*
>
> **Luke 11:2** *Father, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come.*

We Have Arrived

Last session, Jesus cleared the ground — not a performance for people, not a technique on God. And now, at the very center of the Sermon, he hands us the prayer itself: the one the church has prayed in every language and every century since, the prayer we call the Lord's Prayer.

And the very first thing to notice is not a word at all. It is an order. Before Jesus lets us ask for a single thing, he makes us say three things — and all three are about God, not about us. Your name. Your kingdom. Your will. Only after that do we ever reach "us."

Here is why that matters: most of our praying begins with "me" and stays there — give me, help me, fix this, protect that. The Lord's Prayer re-orders the heart. God first, then us. This week we are going to sit with just the first half — the God-ward half — and let it do its slow, re-ordering work on us before we ever get to our own requests.

Let's search the Scriptures together.

A Pattern, Not a Formula

"Pray then in this way." Notice the words: pray in this way — Jesus is giving us a model, a shape, a set of priorities for Kingdom prayer. Not merely a magic formula to recite, though the church has rightly prayed these very words for two thousand years.[1]

And it comes in two clear halves. The first half is all about God — your name, your kingdom, your will. The second half, which we'll take up next session, is about us — our bread, our debts, our testing. And the order is the whole point. Jesus teaches us to pray in the order of the Kingdom: God's name, God's reign, and God's will — before we ever mention our own needs. It is also worth knowing that this prayer is thoroughly Jewish through and through; its

[1]Unless noted, Scripture is quoted from the New Revised Standard Version, Updated Edition (NRSVue), the base translation for this course. The prayer is Matthew 6:9–13, with a shorter version at Luke 11:2–4. This session treats the address and the first three "you"-petitions (6:9–10); the "us"-petitions follow next session. The familiar doxology ("for thine is the kingdom…") is a later liturgical addition, not in the earliest manuscripts; we'll note it at the prayer's close.

opening echoes the ancient synagogue prayer, the Kaddish — "magnified and sanctified be his great name… may he establish his kingdom." Jesus is not inventing a brand-new religion's prayer; he is teaching his people to pray as the people of God have always longed to pray, and giving it to us.[2]

Our Father in Heaven

Three words open it, and each one matters. First: "Our." Plural, from the very first syllable. You cannot pray this prayer alone. Even by yourself, behind the shut door of last session, you say our — bound at once to a whole family: the neighbor beside you, the stranger across the world, and — since our Father is also theirs — even the enemy. The prayer breaks the "just me and God" isolation before it has properly begun. Then: "Father." The intimate word we met last week — Abba, the word a child uses at home. It is astonishing, when you stop to feel it, that Jesus invites us to address the Maker of the galaxies the way a small child speaks to a beloved parent. And then, holding all that tenderness in balance: "in heaven." Not a chummy buddy-god you can order around; not a cold and distant tyrant either; but both at once — near enough to call Father, high enough to be hallowed. The whole prayer lives in that beautiful tension.[3]

Hallowed Be Your Name

The first petition: "hallowed be your name." "Hallowed" simply means treated as holy — honored, revered, set apart. And "your name," in the Bible, means far more than a label; it means God's very self, God's character, God's reputation in the world. So this is a prayer that God would be rightly known and honored — and it cuts in two directions. First, it asks that God himself would act to make his name honored across the earth. But second, and much closer to home: it asks that we would hallow it — because the sobering truth is that God's name is honored or profaned in the world largely by how God's own people live. The prophets said it bluntly: the nations blaspheme God's name because of the way his people behave.[4]

So to pray "hallowed be your name" is to ask to become the kind of person — the kind of community — whose life makes God's name look holy and good and beautiful to a watching world. It is salt and light all over again: "that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father." This is no throwaway pious opener. It is a plea that God be rightly loved and honored — and it starts with us.

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[2] "Pray in this way" offers a model—the shape and priorities of Kingdom prayer—not merely a formula, though the church rightly prays the words themselves. The prayer falls in two halves: the "your" petitions (God's name, kingdom, will) and the "us" petitions; the order—God first—is itself the teaching. Its opening closely echoes the ancient Jewish Kaddish ("Magnified and sanctified be his great name… may he establish his kingdom"), a reminder that Jesus teaches a thoroughly Jewish prayer. See W. D. Davies and Dale Allison, and N.T. Wright, The Lord and His Prayer.

[3] "Father" (Abba), held together with "in heaven," balances intimacy and transcendence—near enough to address as a child, holy enough to be hallowed. "Our" is plural from the outset: this prayer cannot be prayed in isolation.

[4] "Hallowed" (hagiasthētō) means "let it be treated as holy." God's name—God's very self and reputation—is honored or profaned in the world by the conduct of God's people (cf. Ezekiel 36:22–23); so the petition asks both that God vindicate his name and that we hallow it in how we live. Compare Matthew 5:16, "that they may… give glory to your Father."

Your Kingdom Come

And now, the second petition — and here is the beating heart of this entire course, distilled to three words and turned into a prayer. "Your kingdom come." From our very first session we have said it: the Kingdom is God's reign breaking into the world now, not merely heaven waiting for us someday. So "your kingdom come" is the deepest longing of the whole Sermon, made into a cry: come, God — reign, arrive, break in, take over — here, now, on this earth.

It is not a wistful sigh for the afterlife. It is an aching, active plea for God's just and good rule to come and set the world right. And it is a dangerous prayer to pray honestly, because it commits the one who prays it: you cannot sincerely ask God's kingdom to come while you go on living for a rival kingdom — your own comfort, your own will, your own little empire. To pray "your kingdom come" is to enlist. And it is a prayer poised between the times: come, because your reign is already breaking in among us; and come, because it is not yet fully here, and we are aching for the day it will be.

Your Will Be Done, On Earth as in Heaven

The third petition answers the second: what does "your kingdom come" actually look like, down here on the ground? Jesus tells us in the very next breath — "your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." Heaven, in the Bible, is simply the realm where God's will is already perfectly done; and this petition asks that earth would become like that — that the gap between the way things are and the way God wants them would finally close. Notice, once more: on earth. Not "get us up to heaven," but "bring heaven down here" — this world healed, this world remade as God intends it. That has been the whole vision of the Kingdom from the start: God's will done here.[5]

And it is, quietly, the costliest phrase in the entire prayer. Because to pray "your will be done" is to lay down my own. It is Gethsemane in miniature — "not my will, but yours, be done" — the very words Jesus himself would pray, in agony, in the garden. Three of the hardest words a human being can honestly mean: your will be done.

The Order That Re-Forms Us

Now step back and see what Jesus has done. By the time you have prayed "your name, your kingdom, your will," you have not yet asked for a single thing for yourself — and your whole heart has already been re-set. You have been pulled out of your own tight little orbit and re-centered on God, God's reign, God's will. Only then, next session, will you turn to "give us… forgive us…" — but you will arrive at your own needs already re-ordered, having already said, with your own mouth, that God comes first.

[5] "Your kingdom come… your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven" is the Sermon's central hope in petition form— an active plea for God's reign to break in and set this world right (already and not-yet), and a self-committing prayer that surrenders the pray-er's own will (compare Gethsemane, "not my will but yours," Matthew 26:39). See N.T. Wright and George Eldon Ladd on the kingdom coming to earth, and this course from Session One.

That is the quiet genius of this prayer. It is not only what we say to God; it is what the saying does to us. Every single time you pray it, in the right order, it takes a disordered heart — a heart that naturally begins and ends with "me" — and gently turns it right-side up again.

Freedom for Others

Put it to our thread, and notice how outward this whole first half already is. The prayer will not even let you begin with "my"; it starts with "our." And "your kingdom come, your will be done on earth" is about the most for-others prayer imaginable — it is not a plea for my private blessing, but for the whole world to be set right, which is achingly good news for exactly the people this Sermon has cared about all along: the poor, the mourning, the hungry, the oppressed. To pray "your kingdom come" is to pray for a world where the Beatitudes finally come true. And it costs the one praying everything small and self-serving: "your will be done" means my will, laid down; my little kingdom, surrendered to God's. So ask with me: when I pray, do I start with "me" — or can I learn to start with "your"? And whose world am I really asking God to set right? *Freedom for others may cost us the throne of our own little kingdom — what can we lay down?*

Around the Table — For Discussion

- Jesus makes us say "your name, your kingdom, your will" before we ask for anything. How does the order of this prayer differ from the way you usually pray?
- The prayer begins with "our," not "my." What changes when you cannot pray it alone — when even the enemy shares your "our Father"?
- God's name is hallowed or profaned by how his people live. Where does your life make God's name look beautiful — and where might it not?
- "Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth." What would it look like for that prayer to come true in one corner of our corridor?
- Freedom for others may cost us something. What would it mean to truly pray "your will be done" — and lay your own will down?

This Week — A Practice

Two movements. First, pray it slowly. Each day this week, pray only the first half — "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven" — and then stop. Do not rush ahead to your requests. Sit in the re-ordering; let the prayer put God first in you before you ask for anything. Notice what it does to a heart that usually starts with "me." Second, mean "your kingdom come." Pick one corner of the world, or of your own life, that is not yet as God wants it — and pray "your kingdom come, your will be done" over it, specifically, by name. Then ask the harder question: what would it cost me to become part of the answer? Then bring back what you found. This Kingdom, like all the rest, is learned in the doing.

Looking Ahead

Next session, the second half of the prayer — the "us" petitions, where, having put God first, we finally bring our own needs: "Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors; and do not bring us to the time of trial, but rescue us from the evil one." And we'll wrestle with the startling thing Jesus says right after the prayer — the one line he circles back to underline — about forgiving as we have been forgiven.

Benediction

So go this week and pray the prayer slowly enough to be changed by it. Begin, as Jesus taught, not with your own long list but with his name, his kingdom, his will — and let that holy order set your heart right-side up. Dare to pray "your kingdom come" and mean it, even knowing it will enlist you. Dare to pray "your will be done" and mean it, even knowing it will cost you your own. And remember, every time you begin: the God you are addressing is near enough to call Father and high enough to be hallowed — and he was leaning toward you, listening, before you ever said a word. Blessed are those who learn to pray "your kingdom come" — for they have begun to want what God wants, which is the beginning of the Kingdom in us.

Love, practiced — not just professed — reveals the Kingdom among us.

Blessings,
Pastor Mick Finch

SESSION TWENTY

Introduction Video Script

Single presenter, to camera · target 5–6 minutes · warm, steady, unhurried

[Begin still.]

Welcome back to the table. Last session, Jesus cleared the ground — not a performance for people, not a technique on God. And now, at the very center of the Sermon, he hands us the prayer itself: the one the church has prayed in every language and every century since. The Lord's Prayer.

And the very first thing to notice isn't a word at all. It's an order. Before Jesus lets us ask for a single thing, he makes us say three things — and all three are about God, not us. Your name. Your kingdom. Your will. Only after that do we ever reach "us." Because here's the thing — most of our praying starts with "me" and stays there. Give me, help me, fix this. The Lord's Prayer re-orders the heart. God first, then us. And this week we're going to sit with just the first half — the God-ward half — and let it do its slow work on us before we ever get to our own requests.

[A pattern.]

"Pray then in this way." Pray in this way — Jesus is giving us a model, a shape, a set of priorities. Not just a formula to recite, though the church has rightly prayed these very words for two thousand years. And it comes in two halves. The first is all about God — your name, your kingdom, your will. The second, next session, is about us — our bread, our debts, our testing. And the order is the whole point. And notice — this is a deeply Jewish prayer; its opening echoes the old synagogue prayer, the Kaddish: "magnified and sanctified be his great name… may he establish his kingdom." Jesus isn't inventing some brand-new prayer. He's teaching his people to pray the way the people of God have always longed to.

[Our Father in heaven.]

Three words open it, and each one matters. "Our" — plural, from the first syllable. You can't pray this prayer alone. Even behind the shut door, you say our — bound to a whole family: the neighbor beside you, the stranger across the world, and — since our Father is also theirs — even the enemy. "Father" — the intimate word from last week, Abba, the word a child uses at home. It's astonishing that Jesus invites us to address the Maker of the galaxies the way a small child speaks to a beloved parent. And "in heaven" — holding all that tenderness in balance. Not a buddy-god you can boss around; not a cold, distant tyrant; both at once — near enough to call Father, high enough to be hallowed.

[Hallowed be your name.]

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become the kind of people whose lives make God's name look beautiful to a watching world. It's salt and light again. No throwaway opener — a plea, and it starts with us.

[Your kingdom come.]

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[Your will be done.]

And the third petition answers the second: what does "your kingdom come" look like on the ground? "Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." Heaven is simply where God's will is already perfectly done; and this asks that earth become like that — the gap between how things are and how God wants them, finally closing. Notice again — on earth. Not "get us up to heaven," but "bring heaven down here." This world healed. And it's the costliest phrase in the prayer, because to pray "your will be done" is to lay down my own. It's Gethsemane in miniature — "not my will, but yours" — the very words Jesus himself would pray in the garden. Three of the hardest words a human being can honestly mean.

[The re-ordering, thread, and practice.]

Now step back and see what he's done. By the time you've prayed "your name, your kingdom, your will," you haven't asked for one thing for yourself — and your whole heart has already been re-set, pulled out of its own orbit and re-centered on God. That's the genius of it: the prayer isn't only what we say to God; it's what the saying does to us. Every time you pray it in order, it turns a "me-first" heart right-side up again.

So here's our question this week — freedom for others: when I pray, do I start with "me," or can I learn to start with "your"? And whose world am I asking God to set right? Two things to practice. First, pray it slowly — pray just the first half each day, then stop; sit in the re-ordering before you rush to your requests. Second, mean "your kingdom come" — pick one corner of the world or your life that isn't yet as God wants it, pray it over that specifically, and ask what it would cost you to be part of the answer.

Next time, the second half — the "us" petitions: give us our daily bread, forgive us as we forgive, deliver us from evil. And the startling thing Jesus says right after the prayer, about forgiving as we've been forgiven.

[Slow. Land it.]

For now, go and pray the prayer slowly enough to be changed by it. Begin, as Jesus taught, not with your own long list but with his name, his kingdom, his will — and let that holy order set your heart right-side up. And remember, every time you begin: the God you're addressing is near enough to call Father and high enough to be hallowed — and he was leaning toward you, listening, before you said a word.

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