

Kingdom Prayer

Jesus had a curious way of taking the ordinary and breathing new life into it. A way of shocking us back to our senses, waking us up from the dull rhythms of tradition and religion. And so in this section Jesus shocks the religious sensitivities of the Pharisees with His persistent: "You have heard it said... But I say to you...". He got right in the face of Pharisaical political correctness and He spoke words of blasphemy that breathed life and brought a little bit more of the Kingdom to earth. Sometimes the greatest challenge we have in staying fresh and alert to the Spirit of God is the challenge of overcoming our own dulled expectations. The challenge of getting unstuck from the familiar and allowing God the right to be God in extraordinary ways.

A friend of mine sent me this first grade project where the teacher asked a classroom of six-year-olds to complete these familiar proverbs. These are sayings that we adults have learned and have embraced as a part of our culture's conventional wisdom. Sayings like, "It's better to be safe than sorry." But these students have a fresh perspective. - They haven't been schooled in the culture or dulled by the ordinary and so their answers breathe new life into old familiar forms:

*It is better to be safe ... than punch a 5th grader
Never underestimate the power of . . . termites
Don't bite the hand that . . . looks dirty
You can't teach an old dog new. . . math
A penny saved is . . . not much
Laugh and the whole world laughs with you,
cry and you ... have to blow your nose.
If at first you don't succeed. . . get new batteries*

We have a challenge this morning, because the Lord's prayer is too familiar. It is likely the most memorized and familiar passage in all of scripture. And because of its familiarity for most of us it has lost its ability to startle us and shock us the way I think Jesus intended it to. And so we're going to need to ask the Lord to give us ears to hear beyond the familiar this morning. And to be sensitized to His Spirit's work in our midst as we gather before His word today.

The grand theme of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount is Kingdom Living: Every character quality described, every command given, every insult hurled is intended to give a clearer vision of what it means to live as citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven. And so when we come to this portion of the sermon today we're confronted with Kingdom praying: And we discover what it means to pray as citizens of the Kingdom. We learn how to pray in a way that is consistent with our status as children and subjects of the King.

Last week in Matthew 6, verses 5-8, we looked at how not to pray. Jesus said don't pray like the hypocrite who worships himself by making a huge public spectacle of his prayer life just so he can fortify his own image before men. So prayer is not

intended to be a means of self-promotion. And then Jesus said don't pray like the pagan who views God as a kind of cosmic slot machine, where all I have to do is mindlessly express the right combination of words in order to unlock His riches. Prayer is not intended to be a shallow ritual that somehow pries open the hand of God. In fact, Jesus says relax because your heavenly Father (like the very best of earthly daddys) already intuitively knows and tends to the deepest need of your heart. And that is the very basis and foundation for Kingdom prayer. That's where Kingdom praying begins. So that's where Jesus begins in verse 9 as He invites us follow Him in this pattern of prayer. **"Pray then, in this way."**

I. Our Father

The prayer is simply structured around six specific petitions: And because this is Kingdom prayer, it is caught up in the work of the Kingdom and the character of the King. The first three have to do with God, His reputation, His Kingdom, and His authority. The next three have to do with man - his most basic needs, his sin, and his absolute dependence upon the Father.

But before we can pray we need to know who it is we are praying to. So Jesus begins with a clear and confident vision of the one to whom our praying is addressed. When we pray we come into the presence of "Our Father in heaven."

He is our Abba, our dad who is filled with affection and sympathy for each of his children. So, when we come into His presence we can relax because His Father's heart is for us. Now most carry a certain amount of distortion and confusion about what it means to have God as our Father. Maybe it's because of the brokenness of our own earthly fathers who defined the parent-child relationship and we carry the wounds of our childhood into our intimacies with God, projecting on to Him the fears and suspicions that are embedded deep within. For some those wounds keep us wondering about the goodness of God, or cowering in expectation of His severity and punishment; or just keep us suspicious, looking over our shoulders waiting for the next wave of inconsistency; having every expectation to be shamed, but no expectation to be loved.

If that describes your picture of the Father this morning, let me say you're in good company. Many of us live there, including myself. But the challenge for us is to embrace a new vision by faith. And we could easily spend a whole morning just on this one point alone. But to pray this Kingdom prayer means first of all that we allow the Father to come close, to touch us in His tenderness, to break down the walls of our suspicion, to establish trust and to cast out our fears. So that when we come into His presence and we say "Our Father. . .", everything about us relaxes inside. We are safe with Him, we anticipate His goodness, we expect absolute love to be poured out on our behalf. That's where Kingdom prayer begins.

II. Who Art in Heaven

For others of us, the distortions fall on the other side. We have a benevolent but ineffective Father, who is somewhat absent and uninvolved. Our prayers are vacant and unexpectant because our God is too busy to be concerned with us. That's why Jesus instructs us to pray: "Our Father, who art in Heaven...", or literally, "Who is in the Heavens." To the Hebrew mind that's a picture of both intimacy and power. So we have the affections and the tenderness of the Father's heart coupled with His authority and His absolute power to accomplish His purposes. The Father's intentions are for us and He will accomplish everything that He intends. He is not absent but present, intimately involved, and in prayer we meet with Him face to face.

So relaxed and confident in the presence of the Father, Jesus then leads us in the pattern of Kingdom prayer through these six petitions. According to Jesus our first desire in approaching the Father is not about us, it's about Him; His reputation, His Kingdom, His authority.

III. Hallowed be Thy Name

So we pray: Our Father, filling the heavens, hallowed (or holy) be Thy name. In other words, "Father, make your holy reputation greater and greater among us. Enlarge the boundaries where Your holiness dwells. Lord, glorify Yourself and bring Your holiness to earth. " We can get into this, can't we? There is so much unholiness around us, so much that seems sleazy and sick about our world, we want an extra dose of the holiness of heaven to transform this place. And it's a God-given longing. The only problem is, it must begin with us. You see, we are to be the living presence of God in this world. Don't ask me why, but God has decided to tie His own reputation to His church. So, for God to glorify Himself, to make His name holy, He must sanctify His people. And so to pray "Lord, expand Your holy reputation," is to say "Lord, make us a holy people. Lord, cleanse us from our unholiness; Father, transform us, Central Peninsula Church, so that we will be the living presence of Christ on this peninsula. Turn us from our compromises. Wean us from our affections to this world. Wash us from the stains of our impurity; Call us out of our dulled slumber so that Your holiness might be seen in our midst in greater and greater measure. Hallowed be Thy name through your transformed people."

You see, the church is and always has been God's public relations campaign. Can you imagine Michael Jordan being paid millions of dollars to represent Nike but in the secret of a dark gym he takes off his shoes and puts on his favorite pair of Addidas? And then what if he were to be discovered. His credibility would be destroyed, his sponsorship would be discredited. We're like that to God. Through His Son He has paid the highest price for our loyalties. And He intends to promote Himself, His glory, His grace, and His holiness through us, the church. So we pray Father, hallowed be Thy name through your transformed people.

IV. Thy Kingdom Come, Thy Will be Done

Then Jesus continues: Father, Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done. These two really belong together. Because where the King's boundaries extend, His will and authority are established as the sovereign rule of the Kingdom.

So we approach God our heavenly Father and ask that

the fullness of His rule and sovereign reign be extended and completed. By the way, the phrase at the end of verse 10 grammatically belongs to all three of these first petitions. In other words, "On earth as it is in heaven" applies to God's holy reputation, His Kingly reign, and His sovereign will. And we are praying, make Your name holy on earth as it is in heaven: Father, enlarge the boundaries of Your sovereign Kingdom on earth as it is currently in heaven, and Lord, may Thy will be done completely in the here and now as it is among the heavenly host who fall down before you in absolute surrender to Your will.

But how is God's kingdom to be enlarged and His authority established? Here again it begins with God's people. God's chosen agent of change in the world is the church. So we pray for the witness of the church to be effective in this world. We ask the Father, Lord, make me a vessel through which the love of Christ might be evident so that others might fall in love with Him just like I have. Lord, use me to extend Your Kingdom to my neighborhood, my workplace, my family. Lord, use us, your church, in our worship and in our service and our living in the midst of this community as instruments of Your grace. I think this is a Word to us at Central Peninsula Church because God has given us a tremendous opportunity to move into this beautiful new facility. With its new carpet, and lighting and sound system, to be surrounded by its comfort and to experience its ambiance. But shame on us if we should settle for its pleasures without being burdened for the Kingdom of God to be established and expanded in this place. So Lord, we pray this Kingdom prayer: Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done, on the corner of Catamaran and Shell Blvd.

But you know, there is another way in which this part of the prayer touches us because we are asking for His Kingdom rule and authority to have dominion over our lives. We sing it quite often, "Lord reign in me, reign in your power, over all my dreams, in my darkest hour; You are the Lord of all I am, so won't you reign in me again." Lord, establish your sovereign rule and authority in my life. I'm out of control. I'm making an absolute mess out of things. I've been running the show for too long. That's really a remarkable prayer, isn't it? It's also a very disturbing prayer because basically I'm holding up the white flag and saying "God, I surrender. I give up my rights to run my own kingdom. And I surrender my illusion of control; I give it up Lord, for Your will for my life." At some point that touches each and every one of us at a deep deep place. To give up control, to really give it up to God is the most difficult thing we face. And we seem to face it through different layers over and over again.

This summer has been an amazing season of change for me. In June we traveled back East to see our daughter graduate from college. My mother is moving out of the house that I was raised in where she has lived for 41 years. My own family moved from San Mateo to Foster City and is now planning a second move at the end of August. My office is a wreck as I wait to move into my new one. And I hate change. But in the midst of all the chaos and the things that tug on me emotionally, God is persistently reminding me He is my King; He is the sovereign one whose reign extends to the smallest details of my life. So Lord, I surrender, Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done, here and now in my world, in my marriage, in my finances, in my health, just like it is in heaven.

So these are the first three petitions. And we have established the priority of Kingdom praying; it's about God - God's Holiness, God's Kingdom, and God's will. Now we are ready to

talk directly to the Father about us.

V. Our Daily Bread

First we ask God to sustain us with the most basic essentials for living. Give us this day (in sufficient quantity for this day alone) bread to eat. Now bread is symbolic of whatever else is essential for living a simple life. But the prayer really expresses a kind of childlike daily dependence on the Father's faithfulness to provide. This is really how little kids relate to God. Dallas Willard makes this point: "This is just how children do it, of course. A mother who discovers that her child is saving up oatmeal, pieces of toast, or strips of bacon for fear of not having food tomorrow has cause to be alarmed. In normal situations parents will be astonished and pained that a child does not trust them to provide for their basic needs day by day." So we pray with a kind of childlike daily dependence, trusting in the faithfulness of our dad to provide. In the wake of the dot bomb phenomena this might cause some of us to pause for a minute. I don't think that Jesus is calling us to necessarily live at a subsistence level. There is certainly nothing inherently wrong with things like retirement funds or investments for the future. The problem is trusting in them for our security. Looking to them to prop us up, to fortify our own sense of sufficiency apart from the Father. Praying this prayer is freeing because the burden of our future doesn't rest with us, but it rests in His ability to provide, like the faithful Father He is.

It's also important to note that the pronoun is plural. That's a little bit surprising for us self-focused Americans: Give us our daily bread, not give me my daily bread. We are to concern ourselves with the provision of others. About two years ago we got on this earthquake preparedness kick. Which really makes a lot of sense, right. We got the canned food, the batteries, and then we went out and bought a 70-gallon plastic barrel for storing drinking water. So I clean it out, fill it up and now I'm thinking ok, I'm ready. I've got enough water to last eight days; in fact, if I drain the water heater first that would give me about two weeks worth of water rations. But then the Lord started getting to me and I started thinking about my neighbors. The elderly couple that lived next door, our friends across the street. And I struggled. I thought Lord, I went to all this effort to get prepared. Surely you don't expect me to share my water. Does that really make any sense? If I share it all I could be right back where I started. Then I realized that if something should happen God had every right to use my water as a means of provision for others. That's why it's "OUR" daily bread. And in praying this we ask the Father, Lord, how can my resources be a means of blessing for the poor, how can my bread feed the hungry? How can I be used so that you can accomplish your desires for the needy? We are a people of abundance, in a nation of abundance, and a part of a church of abundance. So we must pray this corporate prayer: Lord, use our more than daily supply to help fulfill Your intentions through us for the daily bread of others in need.

VI. Forgiveness

But in this remarkable Kingdom, the King has pledged not only to meet our physical needs, but to meet us at the place of our deepest spiritual needs as well.

"Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors." The central cry of the human heart is the cry for forgiveness. The deepest desire is the desire to have our

guilt removed and to live in the light of grace. This is, of course, the way in which we have entered the Kingdom in the first place. Confessing our sins before the Father we have accepted by faith, the grace and forgiveness that He offers us through the completed work of the cross. That's how we got in. But the need for forgiveness doesn't stop there. In many ways the longer I hang out with the Lord the more I realize my desperate need for His forgiveness. In a very real sense this prayer contains a confession. Because to pray like this means I'm admitting to God that I need forgiveness. I come confessing my sin, and brokenness before my heavenly Father. And I cry out for His mercy. Because in the mercy of God I am made alive. When I ask for forgiveness, He forgives! I don't think there's anything that delights the heart of God more than when we agree with Him about our sin. When we come honestly before His holiness and are overwhelmed by our unholiness. The truth is we have an extremely overinflated opinion of ourselves. J.I. Packer writes, "We are all invalids in God's hospital. In moral and spiritual terms we are all sick and damaged, diseased and deformed, scarred and sore, lame and lopsided, to a far, far greater extent than we realize." Boy, there's an encouraging word! But it's true. We are morally and spiritually pitiful, and we desperately need to throw ourselves before the throne of grace and cry out for pity for our Heavenly Father to forgive us and make us right again.

Let me just say, if you have come here this morning with some burden of guilt, some desperate sense that you need His forgiveness, don't leave this morning without praying this prayer of confession. He loves it when we agree with Him about our sin. So whether it's some sin from the past that haunts you and you can't keep secret anymore, or it's some habitual pattern of impurity that's keeping you in shame and robbing you of life, or it's your lousy attitude towards your spouse on the way here this morning. Whatever it is, come to the Father this morning, He loves it when we honestly bring ourselves before Him and ask for forgiveness.

But to be serious about this business of forgiveness means that we ourselves are to be transformed into mercy givers. So we pray Father, have mercy on us so that we can be merciful in our relationships with others. Jesus sees this element of the prayer as so critical that He expands on it in verses 14 and 15. Let's look there for a minute, **"For if you forgive men for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions."**

Our ability to forgive is completely tied to our having received forgiveness from the Father. One is a reflection and verification of the other. Our ability to forgive the wrongs done to us indicates the depth of forgiveness that we ourselves have received from the hands of a merciful Father.

There is probably no greater testing ground for forgiveness in our lives than in our relationships with our parents. I'm 48 years old and I'm just amazed how God unearths new layers of hurt and struggle in this area of my life. For a lot of us that's where the stuck point is. That's where the bitter seeds of unforgiveness have taken root. To be sure there are abuses and violations of the parental role that no child should have to endure. But it's in forgiving that we ourselves are freed from the bitter wounds of unforgiveness. In forgiveness we are released from the powerful forces of fear, anger, bitterness and rage. Now maybe for you it's not in the parent-child relationship, maybe it's a spouse or a boss that has trespassed against you. But whenever we are able to forgive our abusers, or anyone who has wronged us, we

are released from the power of their violation. We are set free to demonstrate the Father's love and pity even for them. Let me just say that this kind of forgiveness doesn't come in an instant. It grows over time. As we persistently plead with the Father for His mercy because we have understood our spiritual poverty, an amazing thing begins to happen. We begin to have compassion on men and women just like ourselves whose only hope is found in God's faithfulness to forgive pitiful human beings just like you and I.

So we pray Father, forgive us and enlarge our hearts so that we can have pity and sympathy with broken human beings just like you do.

VII. Deliver Us from Temptation

And then in verse 13, **“And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil.”** The best manuscripts actually stop here. The rest appears to be an addition made by the early church as a kind of expression of worship in response to the greatness of God.

But if our greatest spiritual need is for forgiveness for past sins and the ongoing pattern of sin in our lives, it's also critical that we pray for spiritual protection for the future.

And that's really what we're asking for in this final petition. Lord, wrap your arms around me, protect me, keep me from being entangled in the things that cause me to stumble and fall. We all have those areas, don't we. . . areas of particular weakness, a lustful eye, a sarcastic tongue, a tendency to live in fantasy creating our own reality around us, a fear of conflict that makes us shrink from the truth. We pray Father, protect us from ourselves and our weakness. So here again it's a confession. But this time it's a confession of our absolute inability spiritually speaking to manage life on our own. Lord, don't let me face temptation in my own strength, it will surely swallow me up. But it's not just temptation itself that we battle. So Jesus instructs us to pray; Father, lead me not into temptation, but deliver me from evil. Literally, deliver me from the evil one. This may come as a shock to our modern sophistication, our scientific world view. But Jesus believed in the devil. Jesus believed in a supernatural being who is intent upon waging war against the King and who stands defiantly opposed to the work of the Kingdom. So you can be sure that if you are praying Lord, transform me by Your holiness, Lord establish Your Kingdom authority in greater measure in my life, and you're confessing Father, I'm dependent upon your daily provision, and dependent upon your work of forgiveness to make me a more forgiving person. Father, please do this work in and through me". . . If that's your prayer, then you can be certain that you are going to need to be delivered from the evil one because he hates it when God's children take the Father seriously. The Apostle Paul writes in the book of Ephesians, **“For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the full armor of God, that you may be able to resist the evil day.”** Satan is alive and well in our modern, relativistic, morally broken, spiritually compromised world and he stands opposed to the work of the Kingdom of God in your life, in this

church, and in our community.

CONCLUSION

So this is the pattern of Kingdom praying that Jesus leads us in as citizens of the Kingdom and subjects of the King. Kingdom prayer begins when we come relaxed in the love of the Father, confident of His power to accomplish what He desires for our lives. In Kingdom prayer we focus on the purposes of the King, His reputation, His Kingdom and His authority. We bow before Him in worship and we ask that He transform us into the likeness of His Son.

Then we confess our poverty and sin. Like little children we come in absolute dependence for our daily bread. We confess our sin. We seek His work of grace to be poured out in our relationships. And we cry out for His protection so that we can walk in victory over the weakness of our flesh and over the defiant tempting of the one who stands against the Kingdom's presence.

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