

## PRAYING FOR WHAT GOD ALREADY HAS

Scriptures: Revelation 4:1-11; Psalm 93

Before I read our second scripture lesson, turn with me for a moment to the Lord's Prayer in Matthew 6:9-13 (NT, p. 6). Look at the end of the prayer in Matthew 6:13: "And do not bring us to the time of trial, but rescue us from the evil one." If you notice, in this translation the Lord's Prayer ends right there at verse 13. But there is a footnote "j", and if you look at the footnote "j" at the end of the page, it says, "Other ancient authorities add, in some form, *For the kingdom and the power and the glory are yours forever. Amen.*" This means that some ancient Greek manuscripts of the New Testament include those words and some do not. That's why some churches, like ours, include these words, while other churches, like the Roman Catholic Church, do not.

Let me be fair. A couple weeks ago I said that the Presbyterians were right about debts and debtors. There is no question that the Greek word Jesus uses in the Lord's Prayer means "debts," not "trespasses." However, when it comes to the ending of the Lord's Prayer, the Presbyterians may be wrong. The oldest Greek manuscripts of the Lord's Prayer do not include the words "For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory for ever. Amen."

However there is a very important truth in those words that we should include in the Lord's Prayer even if they were not part of the Lord's Prayer originally. To show you what I mean, turn with me to our second scripture lesson: Revelation 4:1-11 (NT, p. 247).

(Read)

To understand this strange description in Revelation 4, you have to understand the situation in which Revelation was written. The Roman Empire in the time of Revelation contradicted almost everything that Christians believed. Christians believe that Jesus is Lord. In the Roman Empire you were taught that Caesar is Lord. Christians believe that we are saved by God's grace. In the Roman Empire you were taught to believe that you are saved by military power or by quality education or by civic development--basically that you are saved by works. If you were a Roman citizen, you were taught to be proud. If you were a Christian, you were taught to be humble--to believe that all have sinned and fallen short of God's glory. In that environment it was hard to be a Christian. The influence of the culture seemed much stronger than the influence of Jesus.

It still does. If you look at television commercials, the most important values of our culture are 1) your looks, 2) your accomplishments, and 3) your possessions. In our culture we are bombarded with messages that those three things--your looks, your accomplishments, and your possessions-- are the keys to personal fulfillment. What impact does one sermon or one Sunday School lesson have compared to that? As in the Roman Empire the influence of the culture today seems much stronger than the influence of Jesus.

But notice what is said in Revelation 4. Verse 2: "At once I was in the spirit, and there in heaven stood a throne, with one seated on the throne." The one on the throne is God. Revelation tells us that despite the suffering and persecution which Christians experienced in the Roman Empire, despite that fact that Christians were an unimpressive minority in a largely hostile culture, God is still in charge. The Lord reigns.

Later in the chapter we are told about four strange creatures who are gathered around the throne praising God. With them are twenty four elders, which symbolically represent a combination of the twelve tribes of Israel and the twelve apostles of Jesus--the Old Testament people of God and the New Testament people of God. The idea is that in heaven all the people of God throughout history are gathered around the throne of God singing: "You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power." It does not matter that down on earth the followers of Jesus seem like a small powerless minority. It does not matter that on earth Jesus' followers seem totally dominated by a culture that spends more money on a 30-second commercial than most churches raise in a year. It does not matter that on earth the love of God seems completely overshadowed by violence, disease, hunger, suffering, broken families, and broken lives. Despite all this, God reigns; God is in charge.

The same point is made in Psalm 93, which we read as our first scripture lesson. Psalm 93 starts out, "The Lord is king, he is robed in majesty; the Lord is robed, he is girded with strength. ... (His) throne is established from of old."

I like to imagine some of the situations in which this psalm was sung. We don't know for sure when it was written, but we know it was sung by the Jewish people in exile in Babylon. Despite the fact that the Babylonian army marched into Israel, destroyed the temple, and carried off large segments of the population into exile, despite the fact that their homes were gone, their families separated or killed, and that they were living as refugees under a foreign dictatorship, the people of Israel sang this psalm: "The Lord is king, he is robed in majesty; his throne is established from of old." About 400 years later when the land of Israel was conquered by the Greeks and the newly rebuilt temple in Jerusalem was desecrated by foreign troops, the Jewish people sang this psalm: "The Lord is king, he is robed in majesty; his throne is established from of old." About 250 years after that when the Roman army marched into Israel, conquered Jerusalem and destroyed the temple for the second time, the Jewish people sang this psalm: "The Lord is king, he is robed in majesty; his throne is established forever." Eighteen hundred and fifty years later, when Jews were marched into concentration camps across Europe, they sang this psalm: "The Lord is king, he is robed in majesty; his throne is established forever."

That is what we call faith: the ability to face the most destructive powers and circumstances of this world and say, "The Lord is king; his throne is established forever!"

In effect that is what we also say every Sunday morning when we pray the Lord's Prayer. We say, "Thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever." In the Lord's Prayer we not only pray for God's kingdom to come, we announce that God is already king: "Thine is the

kingdom." We not only pray that God's power will deliver us from evil, but we announce that God's power has already triumphed over evil: "Thine is the power." We not only pray that God's name will be made holy, we proclaim that God's name is already holy: "Thine is the glory." When we pray the conclusion of the Lord's Prayer, we are saying that all the other things we pray for in the Lord's Prayer are a done deal: the honoring of God's name, the coming of God's kingdom, the deliverance from evil--God has all these things in hand, because the kingdom, the power, and the glory already belong to God. The world just doesn't know it yet.

Let me compare it to a game of bridge. I am not a great bridge player. But I know is that the highest card in the suit that is led takes the trick, unless it is trumped by a card from the suit which has been declared to be trump. Imagine a game where one team, the team which is trying to make its contract, seems headed for certain victory; all they have to do is take the last trick. The trump cards have all been played and the player on the team which appears to be winning leads with an ace. His opponent to his left slumps in her chair. She was hoping that her partner had the last ace. She throws down a four, the only card she has left, and resigns herself to losing the game. But when she looks up, she sees that her partner across the table is smiling. She can't understand. Why is her partner smiling when they are about to lose? There is no way they can beat an ace... unless... she has miscalculated the number of trump cards that have been played.

I know you can't do this in a game of bridge, but at that point her partner across the table shows her the last card in her hand: the final trump card. The opponents don't see it. Apparently they have also miscalculated the number of trump cards which have been played. They are cocky and confident that they have won the game. They have the biggest gun on the table: the ace. But there is an upset about to take place. The ace won't have the last word. The victory has been won by the other team. They just don't know it yet.

Friends, at this moment in the game we are like those bridge partners. Our cards seems small and weak. After all, how much influence can a Sunday School teacher or youth group leader have compared to the overwhelming influence of television, Facebook, or You Tube? How do our feeble prayers for food, forgiveness, and deliverance stack up against all the poverty, violence, and suffering of a fallen world? The forces of greed and alienation seem to have all the aces. But we have the last trump. It was shown to us in the book of Revelation. The kingdom, the power, and the glory still belong to God; the rest of the world just does not know it yet.

That's why I think the ending of the Lord's Prayer is so important. Yes, we need to pray for God's kingdom to come. Yes, we need to pray that God's name would be hallowed. Yes, we need to pray for God's power to feed the hungry, save us from trials, and deliver us from evil. But don't forget the ending. The kingdom and the power and the glory already belong to God. God holds the last trump. It was shown to us in Jesus' resurrection, and nothing can stop him from winning the game.

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August 22, 2010