**More Than Incantations**

Matthew 6:9 Pray then like this: “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. **10**Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.**11**Give us this day our daily bread, **12**and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. **13**And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. **14**For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, **15**but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses. (ESV)

The Lord’s Prayer as seen in this passage is a very well-known prayer. Even many of the unchurched are familiar with this prayer. When the passengers of Flight 93 decided to take back the plane from the hijackers on 9/11 they asked the woman at the end of the 911 line to recite the Lord’s prayer with them first. There is no doubt this passage is one of the most famous in the Bible and is held in high regard by many. Some people believe when Jesus says this is how we ought to pray that He is saying that every prayer must be prayed exactly like this. There are some people that believe you can only pray this prayer, and if asked to pray at a church service they will pray these exact words of Jesus. They have these words memorized and they think somehow the only right or holy way to pray is to recite them.

That is not at all what Jesus expects of us. Our prayers aren’t stronger because we say the same words over and over again. This is not some incantation that when stated correctly produces the desired results. No, the Lord’s prayer is a formula. It is an establishment of principles—of principles that ought to be found in every prayer we pray. He has laid down some aspects of prayer that should always be present when we pray.

Jesus begins this prayer with calling upon the name of God. Every prayer recorded in the Bible begins with an invocation—with calling upon God and worshipping Him. In Daniel 9 we see Daniel begins his long prayer by worshipping God. Jesus, in John 17, does the same, and there are many other examples of this in the Scripture. So in this instance Jesus begins by using the word “Father”. Understand that only a child of God can truly use the word “Father”. Only a person whom God has adopted into His family can truly begin prayer with such worship. This is not to say that a person has to be a believer before they can call upon the name of the Lord. Calling upon the name of the Lord is how we are saved (Romans 10:13) so one must be able to do that regardless of whether they are a believer yet or not. But here is the thing: our relationship to God has an influence on our prayers. Only those who are truly in relationship with God can go to God and begin their prayers rightly, and only those who are in right relationship with God will want to begin their prayers with worship

Suppose a king is sitting on his throne and a common person comes in requesting help, and the Prince, the king’s son, comes in requesting help. Who do you think the king will be more quick to help? The common person or his own son? God is a good Father. When we pray to God we can have confidence that we are His children and therefore He hears us. A person who does not know God does not have any confidence in praying because they don’t know if they are speaking to their Father

Beyond this, our Father is in heaven!! He is far above every other father there is! He is high and mighty, holy, majestic, wonderful and powerful! There is no limit to His power of His effectiveness in answering prayers. We worship Him when we pray. Jesus follows this calling upon the Father with the phrase “Hallowed be your name”. To “hallow” means to revere or keep holy. As we pray this we are praying that God’s name would be upheld and revered in the earth. First we pray and worship God, and then we pray that He would be worshipped in all the earth.

Each of the petitions laid out in these prayers naturally carries over to the next one. As you may note, if the name of God is hallowed across the world, naturally God’s kingdom will come down which is our next prayer. We pray that God’s kingdom would come because we know that currently the world is of another kingdom. Satan is described in the Bible as the “Prince of the power of the air” (Ephesians 2:2) The Kingdom of Satan, the Kingdom of Sin, the Kingdom of Darkness reigns on this Earth now. It is why men and women alike live so contrary to the teachings of God. But God has promised that He would set up His kingdom here. His kingdom is in the hearts of believers, but one day His kingdom will be set up on this earth as a whole too. And God calls us to pray His kingdom down. We must anticipate the coming of God’s kingdom in people now and in fullness later on.

Once again this petition carries over to the next. When God’s kingdom comes His will will indeed be done. Why does He say, “on earth as it is in heaven”? Because in heaven the will of God is accomplished in everyone and everything. On this broken, beaten, sinful earth, God’s will is not always done, because mankind does not always want it done. But in heaven, God’s will is done at all times, and on earth one day it will be the same. We pray that God would cause His will to be done as He brings His kingdom to this earth.

Now we see this natural progression: as we worship God, others will begin to worship God, and because men begin to worship God His kingdom is established in their hearts on this earth and His will is done in the earth

The next few things Jesus teaches us to pray are important for our life as a whole. “Give us this day our daily bread”: Jesus is here addressing our physical needs, in our body. We need food to get us through the day. Jesus is calling us to ask God to provide what we need to get through each day. We are to ask God to give us what we need to continue our existence in this world. It is not just about food, but about the stuff of life: that which helps us move forward.

But our physical needs are not the only important things in this life. We find this with the next two prayers Jesus calls us to pray. He calls us to ask God for forgiveness and to be delivered from the power of evil. In reality, our need for bread does not matter if our spiritual needs of being cleansed from the condemnation of sin and the power of sin are not met either. That is why He calls us to pray for all these things.

We need to pray forgiveness for our daily failings. Even after entering the Christian life one will sin and fall. We have a new nature but not a new body and as long as we are alive in these bodies on earth, sin can take hold of our bodies and lead us into evil. That is why we also pray that God would deliver us from evil. Because evil can still creep up in our lives.

Even more important: We need to pray for deliverance from evil so that our fellowship with God is not broken.

We ought to be daily praying for our daily bread, forgiveness and deliverance from evil because each off these are daily matters no matter how strong you are in the Christian life. The Lord’s Prayer shows us that we entirely depend upon God for our existence and spiritual life

Jesus finishes His discussion of prayer with a sober reminder: to forgive! We know Jesus mentions the need to pray for forgiveness in our prayers but why would He bring this up at the end of His words on prayer? It is because Jesus wants to remind us that unforgiveness hinders prayer

The Bible speaks of many things that may hinder our prayers from truly being answered. These include sin, selfish praying and so on. But Jesus Himself brings this to the forefront because it is so important. You cannot truly pray if there is unforgiveness in our heart. If you have unforgiveness towards someone do not dare pray until you have felt the relief of forgiving them. If necessary pray for that person. Pray good things for that person for it is truly difficult to hold onto hatred or unforgiveness toward someone for too long if you are praying for them