

# Explore the Bible: Approaching the King

December 28, 2015

• This *Explore the Bible* lesson for **January 10** focuses on Matthew 6:5-18.

I performed a funeral a few weeks ago. In helping the family prepare for the funeral, they asked if the Lord's Prayer could be prayed as part of the service—a wonderful idea, indeed. They told me the dear saint who had passed away, a kind and gentle grandmother, prayed the Lord's Prayer every day for years. I wasn't surprised. Praying this model prayer is an excellent spiritual practice.

This prayer Jesus taught the 12 disciples certainly can be prayer verbatim; however, it also can serve simply as a model of what prayer should be like. It contains certain elements essential to prayer. I would like to simply break it down for you phrases by phrase. I've chosen to use the King James Version, since many people have it memorized that way.

## **Our Father**

From the beginning, this prayer probably was a bit shocking to the 12 disciples. The idea of God being our Father is mostly a New Testament idea. In fact, just to give you a point of reference, one of the largest books of the Bible, Genesis, has no reference of God as our Father or heavenly Father. This idea is almost exclusively found in the books of poetry of the Old Testament, popularized by the psalms of David.

But there was Jesus, the One who was truly the Son of God, teaching his disciples to pray "Our Father." It was a very strong reference to what was to come from the life of Jesus—reconciliation with our Father through the

work of the Son. It was interesting to them but probably a bit shocking.

### **Which art in heaven**

Remember, Matthew's gospel most often uses the reference "the kingdom of heaven" rather than the kingdom of God. This simple phrase was about ancient near eastern cosmology (the way one views the universe). Jesus was letting his disciples know that the heavenly Father was just that—heavenly. He was teaching them God isn't bound by time or space; rather, he transcends time and space, for he created time and space.

I can just see them looking to the heavens, amazed at how vast it truly was, and realizing there was a kind Father, far above, ruling and reigning over their lives. It's a beautiful truth that begins to shape up in the New Testament, but truly begins here—God is the heavenly Father. A new understanding of intimacy with God begins to take hold in the New Testament, beginning in this text.

### **Hallowed be thy name**

Literally, God's name is full. That is what Jesus was teaching them. Holy is the name of this heavenly Father. This phrase probably finds its origin in the third commandment: Do not take the Lord's name in vain. The perfectly holy God also had a perfectly holy name.

### **Thy kingdom come, thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven**

Back in Matthew chapter four, Jesus taught the disciples his basic message: "Repent, for the kingdom of God is near." This should sound familiar. It also was the message of John the Baptist. In praying, "Thy kingdom come," a person is asking God to change his or her priorities. This simple phrase is to acknowledge we live in a fallen world, one that is upside-down compared to the kingdom of God. In praying this phrase, Jesus was teaching his disciples to pray for a new priority.

But Jesus qualifies it. The request, “Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven,” is to pray for God’s will to be accomplished on this broken, parched and sin-sick earth in perfection, just as it is perfected in heaven.

Look at the wording again. Jesus is teaching the disciples that, even though sin rules on this earth, God can bring restoration. Why? Because the “kingdom is near.” In fact, the King of the kingdom was standing before them, teaching them the elements of prayer. Like never before in human history, God had stepped onto the scene. He was bringing the perfect will of his Father.

### **Give us this day our daily bread**

Neither “give us this week” nor “give us this pay period.” No, Jesus taught the disciples to pray for daily provision. This phrase is perfectly in line with Jesus teaching about worry. Remember? He taught people should not worry about tomorrow, for today has plenty of trouble of its own.

One of the spiritual disciplines of Jesus was simplicity. We find this alive in Jesus “having no place to lay his head.” Jesus taught the disciples not to be brought down by the financial priority of the world. He taught that money is certainly useful and necessary, but people should not love it. So simple should be our request: “Lord, if I have provision for today, I have enough.”

### **And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors**

This phrase is amazingly similar to a command in Deuteronomy. According to the Deuteronomic Code, every seven years, all slaves were to be released to go home to their families, and all unpaid debts were to be forgiven in Israel. In Jesus’ teaching, that concept was to become a part of daily living.

Jesus was teaching his disciples they would need forgiveness every single day. A kind and benevolent heavenly Father was glad to release daily debts through the life and ministry of his Son. But what should our response be? Certainly, to forgive others as well. A high calling for sure.

Just to be clear, there is no biblical evidence that Israel ever followed the command of seven-year debt release. In the New Testament, Jesus made that command right by releasing man of his debt daily and even eternally.

### **And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil**

Many people have misunderstood this phrase. Some have understood it to mean that God leads us into temptation. That's simply not correct. Our own sinfulness leads us down the path of temptation. Also, the "tempter" leads us down that path.

In this phrase, Jesus was teaching that we can simply ask our loving Heavenly Father to lead us away from the temptations of the world. "Thy kingdom come" is in view. The request is something like: "Lord, I want to stay focused on the priorities of your kingdom. When I'm tempted to stray, put me back on the holy path."

In the Old Testament, God often was seen as a shelter or a refuge. That is the essence of the phrase "deliver us from evil." Jesus was teaching the disciples that ultimately, this heavenly Father alone could be a retreat, a refuge, a strong tower of shelter from the temptation of the evil one.

### **For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever**

What's the No. 1 subject matter of Jesus? The kingdom of God. It's everywhere in his teachings. Almost every parable is to help us understand his kingdom. Who can deliver us from evil? The King over the kingdom, of whom we are subjects and citizens. He is all-powerful, Jesus taught. He deserves all glory.

### **Amen**

Let it be!

### **Application**

1. There are many great recordings of the Lord's Prayer in song. Consider playing it in conclusion of your study.
2. Ask: What phrase of the Lord's Prayer do you need most today? In this phase of life?
3. Going phrase by phrase, call your participants to "reword" each phrase of the Lord's Prayer. Write the responses on a board.