

Prayer

*Sermon Preached by the Rev. Robert A. Arbogast
Celebration Fellowship, Ionia, Michigan
March 5 & 6, 2018*

Scripture

*Yours, LORD, is the greatness and the power
and the glory and the majesty and the splendor,
for everything in heaven and earth is yours.
Yours, LORD, is the kingdom;
you are exalted as head over all.
Now, our God, we give you thanks,
and praise your glorious name.*

1 Chronicles 29:11,13

Sermon

A Christian is a person who prays. And the Church is a people who pray. In our prayers, we adore God, because God is beautiful and mighty. In our prayers, we confess our sins to God, because God is holy and good. In our prayers, we give thanks to God, because God is merciful and kind. And in our prayers, we make our supplications to God, because God is faithful and just.

We can pray anywhere anytime about anything, and our Father will hear us. In every situation, we can present our requests to God, and our Father will hear us. We can pray without ceasing, and our Father will hear us. So by all means, pray, pray, pray!

Now, here's something about prayer. And it comes from Jesus himself. Listen. When Jesus teaches his disciples to pray, he teaches them to pray big. When Jesus teaches his church to pray, when Jesus teaches us to pray, he teaches us to pray big. Because he teaches us to say the Lord's Prayer.

I'm going to say that prayer now. It may sound a little different from what you're used to. But it's a good translation of the Greek text of Matthew.

*Our Father, who is in heaven:
on earth as in heaven,
your name be hallowed,
your kingdom be present,
your will be accomplished.*

*Give us our daily bread today.
And forgive us our debts,
as we forgive those indebted to us.
And don't lead us to testing,
but rescue us from evil.
The kingdom and the power and the glory are yours forever.
Amen.*

Now, that's a big prayer. It's as big as prayer gets. And that's how Jesus wants us to pray. He wants us to pray big!

Just look at that prayer. It begins where all big prayer begins. It begins with the glory of God. We say, "Our Father, who is in heaven." And when we say that, we're lifting up our eyes to our exalted God. Our God is high and holy and mighty. Big prayer never forgets that.

That's where King David's prayer begins, the prayer in 1 Chronicles 29. "God, you are exalted above heaven and earth. All glory and praise belong to you." That's where David begins, because that's where big prayer begins. And that is where the Lord's Prayer begins.

The next thing we say in the Lord's Prayer is, "On earth as in heaven." And those words go with three petitions, not just one. "On earth as in heaven, your name be hallowed. On earth as in heaven, your kingdom be present. On earth as in heaven, your will be accomplished."

"On earth as in heaven." When we say that, we're praying for the great picture that's found in Revelation 21 & 22. When we say, "on earth as in heaven," we're praying for the New Jerusalem to come down from heaven and to settle on the earth. And we're praying for the gates of that city to swing open and to welcome all peoples to light and life and healing.

"On earth as in heaven." When we say that, we're praying for God's name to be honored throughout the world. We're praying for God's justice to prevail all over the world. And we're praying for God's plans to be fulfilled in every part of the world. So when we say, "on earth as in heaven," we are praying big.

How big? Well, when we say, "on earth as in heaven," we're praying for God to turn this up-side down world right-side up. Does it get any bigger than that? And our world is up-side down. Don't ever doubt that.

In our world, sin and evil have turned money, sex, and power into gods. In our world, sin and evil have turned justice into vengeance and mercy into shame. Our world is up-side down. But to say the Lord's Prayer, to say, "on earth as in heaven," is to ask God to shake things up, to break things down, and to rebuild the world completely. That is big prayer.

Do you wonder what a rebuilt, right-side up world will look like? Well, keep saying the Lord's Prayer, and you'll get to "Give us our daily bread today." That's what a right-side up world looks like.

Have you ever heard the expression "a hand-to-mouth existence"? It's a hard way to live. It's when someone is so poor that he never thinks about tomorrow. Because there's never enough for today. And so, as soon as a morsel of food comes into his hand, it goes into his mouth. There's only today. There's only now. There's no hope.

"Give us our daily bread today." When we say that, we're remembering Israel wandering in the wilderness. For forty years, God provided their daily bread. They had nothing extra, but they always had enough.

"Give us our daily bread today." When we say that, we're praying for that kind of world. We're praying for a world in which we live by the daily mercies of God. It's a hand-to-mouth existence, but the hand this time is the generous hand of God.

"On earth as in heaven" is a right-side up world where we all have what we need. "On earth as in heaven" is a world where we don't take more than we need. "On earth as in heaven" is a world where we live without fear, because we trust God to provide for us. And praying for that kind of world is big prayer.

What does a rebuilt, right-side up world look like? Well, keep saying the Lord's prayer, and you'll get to "Forgive us our debts, as we forgive those indebted to us." Now, before it's anything else, "forgive us our debts" is a prayer for the year of Jubilee.

Jubilee is the will of God for his people Israel. But there's no record in the Bible of the year of Jubilee ever happening. And no wonder. Jubilee changes everything. When Jubilee happens, debts are cancelled, slaves go free, and real estate returns to its original owners. Jubilee completely messes with property and money and power. And when we say, "forgive us our debts," that's what we're asking God to do, to mess with the world as we know it.

The implications are staggering. Jubilee would completely upset the economic system we live by. It would change the world we live in from top to bottom. And it would make this world better than it has ever been! So praying for the year of Jubilee, that is big prayer.

“On earth as in heaven.” That’s what it’s all about. That’s what we’re praying for when we say the Lord’s Prayer. But here’s something you can count on: earth is not ready to be like heaven.

“On earth as in heaven” is no simple process. It’s no simple action. “On earth as in heaven” is dangerous. It’s deadly. Sin and evil fight tooth and nail to keep earth and heaven apart. Sin and evil fight tooth and nail to keep earth up-side down, even to the extent of driving nails into Jesus, the Lord of glory!

And that’s why we say, “Don’t lead us to testing, but rescue us from evil.” Because the world we’re praying for when we say the Lord’s Prayer, it won’t come without resistance. The world we’re asking God to bring about, it won’t come without warfare.

But it’s not a battle against flesh and blood. No; it’s a battle against spiritual forces of evil. It’s a battle against principalities and powers. It’s a battle against every being that profits from the ruin of the earth. It’s a battle against every system and structure that’s built on the up-side down foundation.

“Don’t lead us to testing, but rescue us from evil.” That’s our prayer, because we don’t want to suffer as the earth goes through the pangs of new creation. That’s our prayer, because we don’t want to be oppressed and abused as the will of God is resisted. “Don’t lead us to testing, but rescue us from evil.” That’s our prayer. But it’s only part of our prayer.

Despite the risk, we keep saying the entire Lord’s Prayer. Despite the danger, we keep saying “on earth as in heaven.” It’s a big prayer, we know. It’s as big as prayer gets. And we keep praying it, because that’s how our Lord Jesus taught us to pray.

✠

Glory and thanks be to God:
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

✠