

**Notes for Children's Talk & Sermon Outline for  
Sunday, 19 July 2020**

# Children's Talk: The Lord's Prayer Always Has Something New In It For Us

- Today and for the next couple of weeks we're going to be talking about the Lord's Prayer.
- That's the name that we call the prayer that the Lord taught His disciples.
  - Luke 11:1-2 (NKJV)
    - Now it came to pass, as He was praying in a certain place, when He ceased, that one of His disciples said to Him, "Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples."
    - 2 So He said to them, "When you pray, say:  
Our Father....
- That's a prayer that many of you probably can already say off by heart.
  - Or if you can't say it already, you'll learn how to say it off by heart as you grow up.
- When you do learn to say the Lord's Prayer off by heart and when you say it all the time then sometimes it can just become like a chore or like something that you do without thinking.
  - You just rattle through it quickly without meaning what you're saying or without knowing what you're saying.
  - I'm hoping that I can help you to get more out of it.
  - One way to do that is simply to say the Lord's Prayer more slowly.
    - So, today, when we say it we're going to say it more slowly than normal.
    - But before we do that I want to read you something really interesting.
- Do you remember who Emanuel Swedenborg was?
  - He's the person who the Lord gave the job of writing down the teachings of the New Church.
  - The Lord allowed Swedenborg to see into heaven and to experience all sorts of amazing spiritual things, so that he could tell us about them.
  - Listen to one of the things that He wrote about the Lord's Prayer:
    - *Secrets of Heaven* §6476.
      - Whenever I have been reading the Lord's Prayer, I have plainly perceived an elevation toward the Lord which was like an attraction, and at the same time my ideas were open, and from this there was effected a communication with some societies in heaven. And I noticed that there was an inflowing from the Lord into every detail of the Prayer, thus into every idea of my thought that was from the meaning of the things in the Prayer. The inflowing was effected with inexpressible variety, that is, not the same at one time as another. From this it was also made evident how infinite are the things contained in the Prayer, and that the Lord is present in every one of them.
- The Lord's Prayer lifts us up spiritually towards the Lord.
- It brings us into communication with angels in heaven.
- Ideas from the Lord flow into every detail.
- Different ideas come different times because there's infinite depth in it.

- I often notice that when I say the Lord's Prayer different phrases stick out to me.
  - Sometimes it's "Give us this day our daily bread...."
  - More recently it's often been "Thy kingdom come...."
- So, as we say the Lord's Prayer in just a minute, pay attention to what phrase sticks out to you, if any.
  - Or, those of you who can read, read through the Lord's Prayer and see if one part seems like it's got something special in it for you today.
- It's OK if nothing happens to stick out for you today.
  - You can then just pick a phrase to focus on.
  - Or you can just focus on thinking about how saying or reading the Lord's Prayer can lift you up towards heaven and connects you with the angels.
- The Lord's Prayer can just be words that we say without thinking.
- Or it can be a whole lot more.
- *Amen.*

# Revisiting the Lord's Prayer, Part 1: "Our Father..."

A Sermon by Pastor Malcolm G. Smith  
19 July 2020

## Intro

- Why do we revisit places that we've been to before?
  - Some places are places that we kind of have to keep going back to—our home, our work, school, shops, *etc.*
  - And then other places we revisit because we want to.
  
- There's a hike in the Kloof Nature Reserve that my little family likes to go on fairly regularly.
  - We're not going there for a brand new experience—with little kids it's nice to have a familiar, tried-and-tested, hike to go on.
  - But, while it is familiar, it is also different each time.
    - The waterfall is more full or less full, different wildflowers are blooming, *etc.*
- Because we're not there all the time, we appreciate it each time we go.
  - That's how it seems to be with places that we like that we revisit every so often.
    - It's familiar but new as well.
  - This is why I can never tick places off my list of places I want to go.
    - If I've been to some beautiful place like the berg or Cape Town that doesn't mean that I'm done going there; it just means that I want to go back.
  
- Then there are the places that we revisit regularly because we *have* to—like our home, or our workplace—and these places we can tend to start taking them for granted.
- It's interesting I found that this was the case with our church building.
  - When things were normal I didn't really think about the space very much but when we could finally get back in here after the lockdown eased up, I appreciated revisiting it in a fresh way.
    - This is a beautiful space to get to worship in.
    - And I imagine that all of you who haven't been lucky enough to be able to come back yet will feel the same way.
  
- I find that, with familiar places like home or work, we don't really see them and appreciate them; we just use them for their function.
  - Unless we're showing someone around who hasn't been in that space before.
  - When you give someone a tour of your house or orientate someone new at your work, you see it all with fresh eyes.
  
- We're starting a sermon series on the Lord's Prayer today.
  - And you might feel like, "Do we really need that?"
    - You've probably heard sermons about it before.
  - But the Lord's Prayer can be like those familiar places that we go all the time—like our home or work—that we don't really notice as we're using them.
  - I want to revisit the Lord's Prayer.
    - I want to take you on a tour of a familiar place and help you to see it with fresh eyes.

- Part of what religion and religious practices can do for us is to help us get into a more contemplative, reflective, mindful, and grateful headspace.
  - To focus on one thing, to go deeper, to slow down and appreciate what's right in front of you.
  - Part of the value of getting to go to a beautiful place (in nature or an art gallery or beautiful building) is that you're there to appreciate the beauty in what's there and so you tend to notice more.
  - It's the same when you get to have special food that you take time to make at home or that you get at a restaurant—it's special and so you take more time to enjoy and mindfully appreciate all the flavour in the food that you're eating, rather than just shoving what's in front of you into your face and then moving on to what's next.
- So, for the next few minutes, let's revisit the Lord's Prayer—let's contemplate it, savour it, and see it with fresh eyes.

## **A Caution**

- One caution before we get into it.
- As I was working on this sermon and saying the Lord's Prayer, I found myself getting into an overly intellectual frame of mind.
  - I was trying to hold on to all the many different meanings that were contained in each phrase and it was tiring and also I was no longer praying.
- Any time we work to really understand something in detail, we run the risk of not seeing the forest for the trees.
- It reminds of this observation about explaining a joke:
  - "Humor can be dissected, as a frog can, but the thing dies in the process and the innards are discouraging to any but the purely scientific mind" (E. B. White and Katharine S. White. "The Preaching Humorist". The Saturday Review of Literature. 18 October 1941)
    - I'm going to try not to do that to the Lord's Prayer for you.
- It also reminds me of a time when a group of us were wine tasting and we were trying to sniff and swoosh it and pick out flavours and we were asking the man who had made the wine lots of questions about it and he said, with a smile on his face, "Just drink the wine and enjoy it."
- I hope that you'll still be able to just say the Lord's Prayer and enjoy it.

## **"Our Father who art in the heavens,..."**

- The Lord's Prayer starts with the words, "Our Father, who art in the heavens...."
- This is *who* we're meant to pray to—our heavenly Father.
- The Lord has many names—Lord, Jesus Christ, Saviour, Redeemer, Shepherd, Bread of Life, God—so it's intriguing that the Lord taught us to pray to our father.
- There are many reasons for this but one that I hadn't seen before is that it makes sense developmentally.
  - Little children don't have clear intellectual distinctions between different things and so their ideas and feelings about their parents or caregivers and God are all a somewhat fuzzy blur.
    - A warm, fuzzy blur if things are going well.

- But, with time, that fuzzy parent/God figure idea they have can gradually grow into a fuller, more clearly delineated understanding of who it is that they're praying to.
- There are multiple aspects to how a child's understanding of their heavenly Father can mature with time.
  - One is that a child gradually starts to see God as distinct from their parents.
  - I like picturing a little girl praying the Lord's Prayer next to her father, saying, "Our Father who art in the heavens...."
    - As she kneels next to her *earthly* father and prays with him to another *heavenly* father, the seeds of that important distinction are being planted.
    - And that process continues for a long time, as even adults need to still be doing work to distinguish what they value and believe for themselves from what their dad values and believes.
    - The goal is to get to a point where adult children and their parents are all looking to the same God together.
    - Creating a distinction between one's earthly father and one's heavenly father is particularly important for people whose earthly father hurt them, through abandonment, neglect, abuse, belittling, *etc.*
      - A person's experience of their earthly father cannot help but be formative in their relationship with their heavenly father.
      - But, as they grow and meet other people's fathers, they can gradually start to develop a picture or ideal or archetype of what "our father" should be like by taking what's best from all of our earthly fathers.
        - *That* father's love; *that* one's compassion; *that* father's humour; *that* father's ability to hold his children accountable with love; *that* father's principles, *etc.*
        - Take all of those qualities and roll them into one and you get a picture of our heavenly father.
- Another aspect to how a child's understanding of their heavenly father can mature with time is that they can gradually see that their heavenly father is father to more than just them.
- Listen to what the teachings of the New Church say this about how little children in heaven (who died in infancy or childhood) are led to grow in their acknowledgment of the Lord as they get older.
  - *Heaven and Hell* §4
    - All little children... are led first into an acknowledgment and belief that the Lord is their father. Later they are brought into an acknowledgment and belief that he is Lord of all, which means God of heaven and earth.
  - First, their father; eventually, everyone's father.
    - Or first, *my* father and eventually, *our* father.
- It's hard but useful to learn to share your father with other people.
  - Each of my kids individually would love to have my full attention on them, generally for as long as possible—to play with them, listen to them, do fun things with them, *etc.*
  - Because my time can be a scarce resource, they often will get upset if I seem to be giving to much of my time and attention to someone other than them.

- It's hard for them but it's also useful for them to be grappling with the fact that they have to share their father with other people.
- And when we pray to our father we also need to realise that we are praying to someone who is father to way more people than just us.
  - When we pray to our father we eventually come to realise that we need to pray for not just what's best for me but what's best for all of us, because that's what our heavenly father is working towards.
    - Along these lines the prophet Micah asks,
      - Micah 2:10 (NKJV)
        - Have we not all one Father?
        - Has not one God created us?
        - Why do we deal treacherously with one another...?

### **Why Not “Our Mother who art in the heavens....”?**

- Another interesting question to consider is why the prayer doesn't say, “Our *Mother* who art in the heavens....”
- The 4<sup>th</sup> of the 10 Commandments is “Honour your father and your mother....”
  - The teachings of the New Church explain that, at a literal level, this commandment is about honouring our earthly parents or caregivers and, more broadly, it also includes honouring anything and anyone that fathers us or mothers us—like government officials who provide for the whole country or the country itself (*True Christianity* §305).
  - And then, at a deeper level it means honouring the Lord and the church.
    - *True Christianity* §306
      - In the spiritual meaning, honouring your father and your mother refers to revering and loving God and the church. In this sense “father” means God—the Father of all—and “mother” means the church.
- I think it is in this same sense that we pray to our *father* instead of our *mother*.
  - Ultimately, the Lord is the source of all the good fathering and mothering—at a natural level and at a spiritual level.
  - Symbolically or correspondentially the term “father” is used to represent the caring for us that the Lord does directly and “mother” means the caring for us that other people do, in co-operation with the Lord.
- Another option would have been to go with something neutral like, “Our *Parent* who art in the heavens....” but somehow that feels more distant, cold, and generic.
  - And, as we'll get into in the next phrase of the prayer, it's important for us to be praying to the Lord God Jesus Christ, not to some vague, gender neutral Divine being or provider.

### **“...hallowed be Thy name.”**

- The next phrase of the Lord's Prayer is “...hallowed be Thy name.”
- When we say, “...hallowed be Thy name”, on a literal level, we are saying to the Lord, “Please may it be the case that Your name be kept sacred or hallowed.”
  - This is similar to the 2<sup>nd</sup> commandment—“You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain....” (Exodus 20:7).
- The fact that this idea is in the Lord's Prayer and the 10 Commandments would suggest that there's something important contained here.

- A person's name is the way they are known—I'm known as Malcolm.
  - And a name becomes a sort of shorthand for talking about everything to do with that person.
    - If you were talking to someone else about me, you would use my name as a way of talking about everything to do with me—my physical body, my character traits, my actions—you would use my name as the container for any and all of those things.
- The Lord's name is the way that He is known to us.
  - And the Lord's name is a container for all of the things that we know and feel about Him.
  - At the most basic level, to hallow the Lord's name or to not take it in vain is to not use the Lord's name in a disrespectful, thoughtless, or antagonistic way.
  - More broadly it means to love, honour, and treasure everything about the Lord and everything that comes from Him, including His Word.
    - When we manage to hold everything about the Lord and from the Lord in the right way, it has a profound effect in our lives, as this passage indicates.
      - *Secrets of Heaven* §2009:2
        - ...[B]y "name" is... [meant] all things of love and faith; for these are God's or the Lord's, and are from Him. And as these are holy, the Lord's kingdom comes and His will is done on earth as in the heavens when they are held to be so.
  - Isn't that cool how this phrase connects to the following ones?
- So when we pray to the Lord and say, "...hallowed be Thy name." we are asking that we might be receptive of everything the Lord wants to give us.
  - And a key part of being able to be receptive to the Lord is to know Him in the right way.
    - The teachings of the New Church are quite adamant on the importance of us approaching God as the Lord God Jesus Christ (see *True Christianity* §108).
  - If we try to approach God as God the Father up in heaven who is separate from Jesus Christ, that really changes and messes with our ability to have a good relationship with our God.
    - Jesus said, "No one comes to the Father except through Me" (John 14:6).
    - If we want to know and understand our God then we need to approach Him in the way that He came to us, as Jesus Christ.
      - Jesus Christ is our heavenly Father in human form.
      - He is God with us.
      - We should not try to climb up to a relationship with God some other way (John 10:1ff).
- All of this is wrapped up in the phrase "...hallowed be Thy name".
- It might be that you struggle with how best to understand who God is.
  - Or maybe you're wrestling with the whole Trinity thing.
  - Or maybe you're going through one of those times where you're struggling to believe in God or to believe that He is real.
- In any of those cases I would recommend focussing on this phrase from the prayer.
  - If you're on your own you can even say it a bunch of time, "...hallowed be Thy name." "...hallowed be Thy name." "...hallowed be Thy name." "...hallowed be Thy name."
    - As you do that you can be thinking, "Lord, please help me to know you in the right way."



- “Help me to see where my understanding of you is off or unhelpful or confused.”
- “Help me to see where I am making You in my image rather than allowing You to make me in Your image.”
- “...hallowed be Thy name.”

### **“Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, as in heaven so upon the earth.”**

- The next part of the prayer and the last part we’re going to look at today is “Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, as in heaven so upon the earth.”
  - This part is, perhaps, a bit more self-explanatory and so we’ll spend less time on it.
- In this part of the prayer we are praying that heaven might come on earth.
  - That’s a good way of summarising what the Lord wants for all of us—heaven, even at the lowest level of our lives.
- Remember that the Lord’s kingdom, though, is “not of this world” (John 18:36) and “the kingdom of God does not come with observation....” (Luke 17:20).
  - So we’re talking about spiritual changes not just a physical paradise to live in.
- One passage summarises the meaning of these phrases like this:
  - *Apocalypse Explained* §48
    - “Thy kingdom come” is a prayer that truth may be received; “Thy will be done,” that it may be received by those who do God’s will....
    - Kingdom has to do with truth—the Lord’s kingdom is a place where His truth is what reigns.
    - And will has to do with love and action because what the Lord wants or wills is all about love.
  - *Apocalypse Explained* §295:3
    - Because a person’s will is his love, and God’s will is the Divine love,... in the spiritual sense by “doing the will of God” and “the will of the Father,” [means]... to love God above all things, and the neighbour as oneself. And because to love is to will, so it is also to do.... Therefore “doing the will of God” or “of the Father” means doing His commandments, or living according to them from the affection of love or charity.
- This part of the prayer pushes towards action, if we are not willing to take action then we are not being sincere when we say to the Lord, “Thy will be done.”
  - What the Lord wants to be done by us is loving, charitable, good things.
  - But, to get to that place of understanding what His will is and being willing to try to do it, the first step is to work on having His kingdom come in our individual lives—to have His truth and His commandments be the rule of law in our lives.
    - It is in the discipline of trying to obey His commandments that we learn His will and learn how to be loving.
- I find that it’s in these phrases of the prayer that what / want most clearly bumps up against what *the Lord* wants.
  - If I’m not careful my prayers to the Lord will be some version of telling Him how I want things to be—“*My* kingdom come. *My* will be done....”
    - I want to be in charge; I want things to go my way.

- And we all do—we all have things that we want and ideas about what would be best.
- And that's fine as long as we hold those things with humility and surrender them to our God.
- As Jesus did, in the Garden of Gethsemane, praying to the Divine love and power within Himself,
  - "Father, if it is Your will, take this cup away from Me; nevertheless not My will, but Yours, be done" (Luke 22:42).
- We can want what we want and even pray for what we want, as long as we then remind ourselves that it's actually more important that the Lord's will be done than that we get what we want (see *Secrets of Heaven* §8179).

## Conclusion

- This leads us back to where we started, talking about how the Father of all of us knows better than we do what would be best for all of His beloved children.
- As a concluding thought I invite you to think about all the different contexts in which you've said the Lord's Prayer over the years.
  - Part of a daily routine in the morning or evening.
  - With little children who are still learning the words.
  - As a child with your parents.
  - At weddings.
  - At memorial services.
  - In the middle of the night, trying to help a child who has just had a nightmare to calm back down and go back to sleep.
  - Or in the middle of the night when you can't sleep.
  - Or at those times when things are so bad that you can't think of anything else to do than try saying the Lord's Prayer.
- The Lord taught us a prayer that is well-suited to all of those situations.
  - We revisit the significance of the prayer each time we say it and in each context that we say it.
- It's hard to be so physically separated from other people at the moment.
  - It's easy to feel disconnected and cut off.
- And so I find it all the more powerful to think of all the people around the world, experiencing all of those different joyful and sorrowful states, praying this same prayer in many different languages, with many different voices, along with the angels in heaven who also pray this prayer.
  - All of us together praying in a beautiful chorus to our father who art in the heavens that His name might be hallowed, that His kingdom might come and His will be done, "as in heaven so upon the earth."