

Children's Talk and Sermon Notes  
for Sunday, 9 August

## Children's Talk: You Have Done it to Me

Prayer is a conversation that we have with the Lord. When we talk to the Lord it is usually a private thing that happens in our minds. It is all about our personal, private, relationship with God. We also have conversations with other people, which are very different. We have those in person, with spoken words, or online with text and video. The two kinds of interactions seem different: prayer to the Lord and talking with other people are not the same. In fact, if I were to go pray right now, I would turn my back on you; and to talk with you, I have my back to the Word.

And that's true, but there is a connection that we sometimes forget. We sometimes forget that how we talk with and treat other people is also how we talk with and treat the Lord. The Lord explained this surprising connection to His disciples:

Then the King will say to those on His right hand, "Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me."

Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, "Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You drink? When did we see You a stranger and take You in, or naked and clothe You? Or when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?"

And the King will answer and say to them, "Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me." (Matthew 25:34-40)

When we do good things to people, it is like we are doing it to the Lord Himself. So if we want to have a happy, healthy, safe relationship with the Lord, we can do that by building happy, healthy, safe relationships with other people.

Now prayer is still important. It is important that when we are alone with our thoughts we turn to the Lord. Sometimes we have to go have a private conversation, away from everyone else, with the Lord. But we also have to be working on all those other relationships to. That is how we really get to know the Lord and build a relationship with Him.

Interacting with the Lord is not just something we do when we are alone in prayer. It is something we do every day, every time we interact with another person.

# Beyond the Prayer

A Sermon by Pastor Joel Christian Glenn

9 August, 2020

Over the last three weeks we have looked at the Lord's Prayer. This Prayer contains an infinite depth of wisdom about the Lord and our relationship with Him. Today however we move on from the Prayer itself to what came after, at least as recorded in the Gospel of Matthew:

For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses. (Matthew 6:14-15)

This addendum is why many New Church services follow the Lord's Prayer with the phrase, "O Lord, forgive us our trespasses; as we forgive those who trespass against us." But it's a little hard to see why it was added at all. It sounds like a rephrasing of a verse that is already said directly in the prayer, "forgive us our debts, as we also forgive our debtors." Nor is it immediately obvious the connection between the Prayer as a whole and the forgiveness of debts. I suspect that this little phrase serves as a reminder that, having prayer to the Lord, our real duty lies in serving our neighbour. In other words, the Prayer is only as effective as the life of charity that the person praying lives.

The forgiveness of trespasses seems at first glance like a rather specific thing. Forgiveness is but one element of the vastness of religious principles. But in some sense the forgiveness of trespasses is the sum total of religious life. God cannot put aside any person's sins except insofar as that person abstains from those sins (*True Christian Religion* §73); and in abstaining from sins, a person inherently must forgive others, as forgiveness is the removal of hatred, animosity, and resentment. The bulk of spiritual life is made up of this rejection of evil so that good can be embraced.

By following up the Prayer with this important concept, Jesus drew a clear connection between praying to the Lord and living a good life. In fact, a person cannot make a genuine prayer to the Lord if he is not working on living a good life, a point the Lord makes in Matthew chapter 5:

Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. (Matthew 5:23-24)

Reconciliation with others is so important that Jesus here teaches us to make sure to work on that first before we work on our relationship with Him. Without the repentance and forgiveness required to reconcile, our prayers are empty.

The difference is like that between empty words and putting our words into action. When someone consistently makes commitments but then does not follow through with action their words lose power and meaning. Perhaps you even know people who no one believes when they say they will do something because they so rarely follow through. Likewise, when someone puts all their efforts into prayer and none into action, their prayers ring hollow. It is true that prayer is simply having a conversation with God; but our actions and choices will determine how genuine and

meaningful that conversation is. No amount of talk can make up for a lack of taking action.

Another way to describe this is in the concept of presence vs. conjunction, or joining together. Thinking about God, as we do in prayer, makes Him present and available to us. But He is only joined to us insofar as we live His teachings. And that is of course the whole goal: that we be joined to God through how we live. Prayer, and especially the Lord's Prayer, plays a role in making that possible; but it is in how we live that it actually happens.

At times we lose sight of this crucial link between our relationship with God and our relationships with other people. Yet these relationships are so tightly bound together that the one cannot exist without the other. This connection is amply spelled out in the parable of the forgiven servant. As you may recall, the parable involves a servant who owed his master an inconceivably large sum of money; yet his master forgave him all that debt. Shortly thereafter however, the servant himself refused to forgive a much smaller debt that he was owed by one of his fellow servants. Upon hearing this the master reversed his previous forgiveness and had the servant thrown in prison. The parable concludes with words that echo the words that follow the Lord's Prayer:

So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses. (Matthew 18:35)

The two debts were not, as the servant assumed, unconnected. His own forgiveness depended on his willingness to forgive others; his relationship with his master was intimately tied up with his own relationships with the master's other servants.

The truth of the matter is that our relationship with the Lord is also intimately tied up with our relationships with others. As a result, it is literally impossible for us to love the Lord if we do not also love other people. On the surface this does not appear to be true, as we see in the stereotype of the intensely Christian person who goes to church on Sunday morning and then is rude and thoughtless towards the wait staff at Sunday lunch and the car guard in the parking lot. But when considered from the point of view of what the Lord loves, it becomes clearer:

Love to the Lord cannot possibly be separated from love towards the neighbour, for the Lord's love is directed towards the whole human race whom He wishes to save eternally and to join so completely to Himself that not a single one of them perishes. Anyone therefore who has love to the Lord possesses the Lord's love and so cannot help but love the neighbour.  
(*Secrets of Heaven* §2023)

The Lord's infinite love extends to each and every human being. If we claim to love the Lord and yet despise the ones that He loves, we do not in fact love Him. Imagine saying to someone, "I love you," and then belittling and trashing every last thing that they love. We would immediately see that their statement, "I love you," is empty and meaningless. In that same vein, if anyone says, "I love the Lord," and then belittles and trashes His children, their love to the Lord is, in reality, non-existent, no matter how strongly they may feel it to be real and powerful. As we discussed in the children's talk, insofar as we do good or evil to even the least of these His brothers, we do good or evil to the Lord Himself.

This then is perhaps why Jesus followed up His prayer with those words,

For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses. (Matthew 6:14-15)

It affirms that link between our connection to the Lord through prayer and our treatment of others. So let's spend some time looking at a few examples of how this might play out with the specifics of the Lord's prayer.

Take for instance the phrase, "Hallowed be Thy name." It is a demand that God's name be treated as Holy, and really an affirmation that we hold His name to be holy. And perhaps we treat His name with reverence and respect, as we ought. But what about in our relationships with other people? Do we let our light shine such that they can see our good works? So that they can see and understand what it truly means to take on the name of Christ as a Christian? To the extent that we hold God's name holy in how we treat other people, it will have real holiness when we utter it in our prayers.

Or take the phrase, "Give us this day our daily bread." It is an acknowledgment that all good is from the Lord and that we need what He gives us in order to live. But have we also shared that daily bread with our neighbours? Have we, spiritually, fed the hungry by taking in all the spiritual good we receive and freely sharing it out to those who are struggling to get by? The Lord does not just bless us directly; He also uses other people to bless us. Have we in turn allowed the Lord to bless other people through how we treat them? If we do not share the good things we are given, then others may not receive their daily bread that the Lord might have given them through us. To the extent that we share love with others, we will feel that we too have been loved by the Lord when we reflect on His blessings in our prayers.

Or for a final example, take the phrase, "Deliver us from evil." It is true of course that no one but the Lord can save us from our own evil tendencies. Yet we are also required to put in what seems to be our own effort in resisting those tendencies, especially in preventing them from coming out in such a way that they harm other people. Even as we ask the Lord to do it for us, have we actively striven, as if under our own power, to shun evils and sins, and to abstain from all harm to others? It is through this active effort of ours that the Lord actually does deliver us from evil. In having done our part, or even in committing to do our part in the future, the prayerful request that the Lord save us will actually be accomplished.

We could go on through each and every phrase of the Prayer to see that it has power insofar as it is lived. We all have trespassed against the Lord. We have flaws and errors and mistakes, to an overwhelming degree. The whole of the Lord's Prayer is an acknowledgment that anything good is from Him and a request to receive that goodness and to be saved from evil. In short, it is an acknowledgment that we trespass and a request that He forgive us. But for this Prayer to come to pass, it is essential that it not remain merely a private conversation between us and the Lord. If we want it to have power, we also must offer the same thing we ask; as we have been forgiven, we also must forgive. In living a life of forgiveness, we invite the Lord to forgive us, to amend our trespasses, and to make the words of His Prayer come to pass. *Amen.*