



Sermon, October 16, 2016
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The Prayer that Changes Us #7: "On Earth as It Is in Heaven"

Matthew 6:9-13

New American Standard Bible (NASB)

9 "Pray, then, in this way:

'Our Father who is 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 [a]our daily bread.

12 'And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.

13 'And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from [b]evil. [c][For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.']

Footnotes:

- a. Matthew 6:11 Or *our bread for tomorrow*
- b. Matthew 6:13 Or *the evil one*
- c. Matthew 6:13 This clause not found in early mss

Opening joke

It is always revealing, and sometimes entertaining to find out what our children think we are saying and praying in church. Like one of my brothers who came home from church one Sunday and told my mother that his favorite part of the service was the "Glory Patrol." (True story.) Or the following youngsters who seemed to have misheard some parts of the Lord's Prayer:

A mom was listening to her child say his prayers. He started, "Dear Harold." At this, his mom interrupted and said, "Wait a minute. How come you called God, 'Harold'?" The little boy looked up and said, "That's what they call God in church. You know the prayer we say, "Our Father, who art in Heaven, Harold be Thy name."

Or take the little girl, who was around 3 years old, who every night would say the Lord's Prayer with her Dad. One night she decided she wanted to recite it all by herself. She went through almost the whole prayer perfectly except for when she said, "Give us this day, our daily bread. And deliver us some email..."

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But none of these could compare to one little boy who was heard praying this in church one Sunday:

Our Father, makes art in Heaven
How do you know my name?
The Kingdome comes, the wallaby runs a nurse that is with Kevin.
Give us this day our dilly bread
And forgive us our trash passes,
as we forgive those who passed trash against us.
And lead us not into Penn Station.
But deliver us from eagles.
For mine is the kingdom, the flower and the jewelry. Amen.

Hopefully after having spent these several weeks looking closely at this Prayer of Jesus, none of us will ever make those kinds of mistakes. Although, I must say, the idea of forgiving other people’s trash passing to us does actually make a lot of theological sense. It is actually not a bad sentiment, or translation.

One idea in triplicate

Today we are looking at the phrase, “on earth as it is in heaven,” which completes the line of thought that begins with “Thy kingdom come, thy will be done.” This phrase, “on earth as it is in heaven,” triplicates the previous 2 phrases. In other words, it completes a tripled thought: “Your kingdom come. Your will be done, On earth as it is in heaven” is the same basic idea expressed 3 ways. We are imperatively inviting God into our homes and lives, we are imperatively commanding that God’s will be done, and now we are asking that our world be modeled and patterned after the Divine Way.

What is operating here is a form of an integral approach. When we invite God in (“Thy Kingdom come”) we are seeking an integration of inner and outer. We are seeking to align our inner lives with our outer lives. “On earth as it is in heaven” seeks to integrate and align heaven with earth, the upper with the lower. “Thy will be done” seeks to align our individual faith and life with society. “On earth as it is in heaven” continues this thought. It is asking that our world – the whole of all

societies – be aligned according to heaven. If you think about it, there is a full three dimensionality to this. Or maybe not just three but four...

4 dimensions (St. Paul)

In Ephesians 3:16-19, Paul offers this prayer: “I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love. I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the *breadth* and *length* and *height* and *depth*, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.” These 4 dimensions echo the dimensions of the Prayer of Jesus. We have an inner and outer dimension as individuals. We have a personal and a social dimension. We have a vertical dimension that connects us as individuals with God, but there is also a vertical dimension that represents the design of heaven for the whole of human society.

Spirituality is all of the above. It is integrated and multidimensional – taking in every dimension of human life, interpersonal interactions and human society. The prayer of Jesus prepares us to open our deepest inner dimensions to God, to align our lives and thoughts with God, to perceive God’s deepest delight for this beloved creation and humanity, and trains us up to go out and work to bring this about. John Wesley caught hold of this idea and said there is no personal holiness separate from social holiness.

Ancient formula, very modern sentiment

In Greek, the phrase is ὡς ἐν οὐρανῷ καὶ ἐπὶ γῆς, which literally translates this way: “As in heaven, so on earth.”

This phrase is very straight forward. It is also expressing a formula that is very old, and is actually found across the world. It is basically the idea that the realm of the divine provides a model for life on earth. This formula is stated simply this way: “As it is above, so should it be below.” Plato talked about the Ideal patterns residing in a higher realm according

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to which every earthly counterpart was designed, or from which derived their form.

Jesus phrases this notion powerfully in his prayer: “Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.” In its most condensed essence, the way of life that Jesus taught and lived is all about taking this divine and eternal pattern of life and applying it to earthly life. This is both an individual and personal matter as well as a communal and social matter. There is a heavenly pattern for human communities that are based upon justice and right relationships. This pattern is based upon the character of God: God is justice. God cares for the poor and the vulnerable in society, therefore, a just human society cares for the poor and vulnerable. All of this is a direct result of abiding in the God who is love, and whose Life is manifested in loving care for one another here in this earthly life.

But we recognize that this heavenly pattern is not always applied in our world. Isaiah says, “let the wicked forsake their way, and the unrighteous their thoughts; let them return to the Lord, that he may have mercy on them, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts. (Isaiah 55:7-9 NRSV).

But this character needs to be a pattern for individual behavior as well. The mark of a follower of God is one whose character reflects the character of God. Jesus came as the incarnate revelation of the character of God, and so models for us a God-infused life.

Aligned and Integrated

The quest to align inner and outer, personal and social, heaven and earth is very ancient actually. In the Bible it goes all the way back to Moses. You can see this best in the Book of Deuteronomy, which is set just east of the Jordan river. All of Israel has spent forty years wandering in the wilderness, and Moses gathers them all together to impress upon them one last time what it means to be a people of God, a holy society. He

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reiterates commandments that are all about how to treat one another justly, fairly and compassionately. He tells them that they are to be this way because God is this way. “As in heaven, so on earth.” And it can all be summed up this way: “Hear, O Israel, the LORD thy God, the LORD is one, and You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might.” When Jesus was asked to sum up all the commandments, he quoted Moses, and added another one from Leviticus, “Love your neighbor as yourself.” There you have it – all 3 or 4 dimensions.

We are aligning earth with heaven when we care for one another, when we feed the hungry and work to keep programs in place that make sure no one is without food or water. We align earth with heaven when we work to be sure all people have access to appropriate health care. We align earth with heaven when we work to eliminate bigotry and negative discrimination. We align earth with heaven when we work to eliminate human trafficking and any form of slavery.

Closing Prayer for integration

In closing, I invite you to join me in this prayer for alignment and integration. Please settle into an attitude of prayer, focused and centered. And then repeat after me:

Holiest Center of All that Is,
That Was
and that Will Be
Imbue me with your Holy Spirit.
Enter my life,
unclutter my mind,
simplify my heart.
Where my actions are divided
from my deepest values,
reunite me with myself.
Where I nurture anger,
calm and gentle me.
Where I harbor prejudice,

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Set me in their shoes.
Let Your ways become my ways.
Let Your ways become our ways.
Let your ways become the world's ways.
Your Presence come,
Your love be done,
On earth as in heaven.
Amen.