

Aligning with God's Purpose

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[0 : 0 0] Well, now we come to our reading from Scripture, and perhaps you'd turn with me to Matthew's Gospel, chapter 6, and you'll find this on page 811 in our church hardback Bibles, page 811.

We're partway through the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus therefore is speaking to his disciples, and in this section he's teaching them how to pray. So Matthew chapter 6, and the reading is from verse 5 to verse 15.

And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites, for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others.

Truly I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

[1 : 1 6] Pray then like this. Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

This is the word of the Lord, and may it be a blessing to us this evening. Matthew's Gospel, Chapter 6.

And we're back in this famous teaching of the Lord, which we call the Lord's Prayer. We're thinking about how we are to pray, and we're focusing on the guidance, on the pattern that the Lord gives us in what we call the Lord's Prayer.

[2 : 3 1] Really, it's the disciples' prayer. It's the prayer that they ask him to teach them. But what Jesus teaches his disciples about prayer is that it is absolutely not about techniques, about programs, about formulas, or anything of that kind at all.

It's not at all like the sort of how-to books that tend to fill the shelves of many Christian bookshops today. How to do this, how to live successfully, how to do whatever the other thing is, be a spiritual Christian.

No, prayer is not about how-to at all. It's not about religion at all. It's not about ritual. It's all about relationship. It's all about real relationship with God the Father through Jesus Christ the Son.

Real prayer as opposed to pretend prayer. What we might pretend to other people, what we might pretend to ourselves is real prayer. Real prayer can't happen unless there is already that real and personal relationship between ourselves and God himself.

We can't talk to God unless we know God. And we can only know God truly through Jesus Christ his Son. There is no other way to know God in heaven.

[3 : 55] That's the teaching of the Lord Jesus himself. And he's very, very plain about that all the way through the Gospels. In fact, if you're in doubt, just turn over the page to the end of Matthew chapter 7 at verse 21.

Verse 21. Not everyone, says Jesus, who says, Lord, Lord, in prayer, will enter the kingdom of heaven. But who? The one who does the will of my Father in heaven.

The one who's in a real living relationship with him as his Lord and King. Verse 24. It's the one who hears these words of mine and does them, says the Lord, who will enter the kingdom of heaven, who builds his house upon that solid eternal rock.

It's very Deuteronomic, isn't it? Just exactly what Moses was saying as we read this morning together. Moses and Jesus are speaking exactly the same gospel.

There's never a whisker between them. So prayer begins when we come to know God the Father through Jesus Christ his Son. And therefore, as we said last time, we can address God personally, our Father in heaven.

[5 : 08] And so prayer then is not, as we saw last time, not the fraudulent prayers of Pharisaic religiosity. Nor is it the frantic prayers of pagan religions.

No. It's the simple personal prayer of those who know God personally, who know him as Father, as their Father in heaven, through Jesus Christ the Son.

And the first step in real prayer is to do what Jesus says down in chapter 6, verse 33. It is to seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness.

All these other things then will be added to you. But that's the first thing that we are to seek from God our Father in heaven, whom we know through the Lord Jesus Christ.

And in a sense, the first half of the Lord's Prayer here in Matthew chapter 6, verses 9 and 10 here, the first half help us to focus on that first priority with great clarity.

[6 : 12] Because these verses are teaching exactly that. How to seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness. And if we don't get first things first, then nothing else will be right.

But if we do get first things first, then everything else in our thinking about prayer, in our practice of prayer, everything else will fall into place exactly as it ought to.

That's why Jesus teaches us this pattern. So I want to look at these first petitions this evening, so that we can understand what it means to seek first the kingdom of God.

Because that's what it's all about. And having seen that we can, that we must address God personally in prayer, we need to see then that our first priority, first thing that we're to ask God in prayer, is that we should be aligned completely with his purposes.

His purposes for all time, for all eternity. His purposes for this world. His purposes, of course, for our own life and our part in his kingdom.

[7 : 22] That's what it means, isn't it, to pray, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done. It's a prayer, isn't it, for our priorities and everything to be aligned precisely with God's priorities.

His real praise, he is not about manipulating God so that he will fulfill our wants and our desires. The real prayer is actually God's gracious way of molding and shaping us into children of his, children of heaven, whose wants and whose desires become increasingly filled with his perfect wants and desires.

Prayer is all about God teaching us to be aligned with his purposes. So first then, let's think about this first petition, hallowed be your name.

Now we don't use that word, hallowed, very often today, I suppose, but sometimes we do, don't we? We talk about the hallowed turf, the hallowed turf of some famous sports stadium, whatever.

Next week, next Saturday afternoon, perhaps it's just as well, Edward and I will be on a train coming back from Aberdeen and unable to watch the Calcutta Cup. It's always the point of maximum strain in Cornhill-staff relationships at this particular time of year.

[8 : 43] And it's never a good one at Twickenham for me. I think I was at school last time we beat England at Twickenham on that particular hallowed turf. But anyway, I can just hear, can't you? Those of you who can remember Bill McLaren or if you can't remember him, Ian Robertson today.

You can just hear him saying, can't you, to pull on that Scotland jersey, to stand in the tunnel, to walk out onto that hallowed turf is the highest honour any Scotsman can have. You can hear it, can't you?

But hallowed, to hallowed means to revere, it means to honour, it means to treat us holy and precious. The hallowed turf, that's what the word hallowed means.

And that's what it means here, actually, in the Lord's Prayer. It means the first concern that we are to have is for the wonderful God who has created us, who has redeemed us and called us to be his, called us to be his own, called us to be in relationship with him.

Our first desire is that his precious name, his reputation, should be hallowed, should be held in reverence, with respect, valued, cherished, considered holy.

[9 : 58] Hallowed, that's what it means. In Isaiah 29, verse 23, it says, they will sanctify, it's the same word here, they will hallow, they will treat us holy, the Holy One of Jacob.

They will stand in awe of the God of Israel. That's to hallow God's name, to stand in awe of the name of God.

Peter, in 1 Peter 3.15, uses the same language. He says, in your hearts, regard Christ the Lord as holy. Or the NIV puts it, set apart Christ as Lord.

Set apart Christ as Lord. Hallowed Christ as Lord. Set him apart as holy. Set Christ as the Lord on a solitary throne in your life.

That's what he's saying. Give him the preeminence that is given to no other in life. That's no accident that exactly the same language is used about hallowing Christ as our Lord and hallowing God the Father's name.

[11 : 08] Because you can only hallow and reveal God's name if you do so by honoring the name of Jesus. Jesus. Jesus was absolutely clear himself about that.

If you read in John 17, you'll see him saying, I have manifested, I have made known your name. He's praying to the Father. I have manifested your name.

And I have kept them, my disciples, in your name. I have made them to know your name and will continue to make it known. In John chapter 12, Jesus prays, doesn't he, Father, glorify your name.

And the Father replies, I have glorified it and I will glorify it again. Meaning that his name, the name of God, would be glorified utterly in the saving work of Jesus, God the Son, on earth.

And that's why Paul says in Philippians chapter 2 that God has highly exalted Jesus, the risen Jesus, and given him the name that is above every other name.

[12 : 17] So that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow and every tongue confess that he is Lord to the glory of the Father. So that must mean, mustn't it, that the first step in hallowing God's name is to bow the knee to Jesus, to the Lord Jesus Christ.

to confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of the Father. That's how we hallow God's name. That's how we're aligned with God's purposes. And that's what we're commanded to pray.

We to Jesus bow the knee that your name may hallowed be. That's why we sing it like that. Now obviously that means, doesn't it, that you cannot pray that, that prayer of honoring the Father's name, you can't pray it unless you are honoring Jesus Christ as Lord.

If you don't align yourself with the Father's purpose to make himself known in Jesus Christ alone, to exalt himself in the exaltation of Jesus, his only Son, then you're not in any way hallowing the name of God.

So no Jehovah's Witness can pray the Lord's Prayer. They can't hallow God's name because they will not accord to the Lord Jesus Christ, the name above every other name. No Mormon can pray that prayer.

[13 : 50] Although their tabernacle choir sings it very beautifully. They can't pray it because they don't honor the name of Jesus and accord him, the name that is highest above all. No Muslim or Hindu or Sikh or anybody but someone who loves the Lord Jesus Christ and honors him.

No one can pray the Lord's Prayer because it's a prayer that treats as supremely holy and precious. The God whose name is made known uniquely and completely only through the Lord Jesus Christ, his Son.

That's why it's so ridiculous to have the Lord's Prayer as a sort of communal prayer for a multi-faith service or something like that. It's quite the reverse of what Jesus is teaching.

But of course, equally to pray hallowed be thy name is to pray a missionary prayer. It's to pray, isn't it, that all over this world, men and women and boys and girls will bow the knee now to God through bowing the knee to Jesus Christ.

To forsake every other name, bow down to no other name and bow the knee now to Jesus and him alone. To be aligned with God's ultimate purpose for this world, for the universe, for time and eternity, which is that every knee should bow and hallowed the name of Jesus who is Lord of all.

[15 : 23] And so we're aligning our prayer with God's purpose when we pray to that end, when we pray, hallowed be your name. Of course, it's also a personal prayer.

It's a prayer for God's name to be hallowed in our own lives, isn't it? For Jesus to be on a solitary throne ruling our life in every part so that his rule really is single party rule, no coalition government, but complete control, lordship, kingship over our lives.

That's what we're praying when we say hallowed be your name. And that brings us to the second petition, your kingdom come. God's kingdom is the place of his realm and it's the exercise of his rule.

Once again, it's absolutely impossible to wrench these words in the Lord's prayer out of their context in Jesus' teaching and make kingdom into some sort of vague notion, some sort of general spirituality.

No, in Jesus' mouth it is absolutely plain. What the kingdom of God is all about. It's about the reign of the Lord Jesus himself. Matthew's gospel is all about the coming of the king, God's king and he's come in the person of Jesus.

[16 : 45] That's how it begins. He is born the Christ, the king of the Jews. He's the son of David. He's the son of Abraham. That's what Matthew's gospel chapter 1 tells us.

And his coming is the light and the darkness that the prophet Isaiah longed to see. That's what Matthew quotes in Matthew chapter 4 at the beginning of Jesus' ministry. And then immediately he records Jesus' very first words in his ministry and there are these words, repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

And Matthew records Jesus' ministry. He calls it preaching the gospel of the kingdom and everywhere demonstrating the power of the kingdom as he heals every disease, every affliction.

Everywhere Jesus is we see the life of the kingdom of heaven here on earth. Because the kingdom is where Jesus is.

The place and the realm of his rule. And in his person and in his work and his earthly ministry was the dawn of the kingdom. And that's why you saw all around him the end of sin and sickness and death.

[17 : 56] He came to restore all things to the rightness of his heavenly kingdom. And it began with Jesus' coming. That's the gospel message.

It began but of course it's not yet complete. It's not yet consummated. And again Jesus makes that so clear in the parables of his kingdom. Matthew chapter 13 for example.

The kingdom is growing. It's spreading. It's multiplying. It cannot be stopped. Even though at present it is largely hidden to most people's eyes in this world.

It's like the growth of leaven. It's like the growth of a tiny mustard seed in the ground not seen. But the day is surely coming when it will be revealed and all its glory will at last be seen.

and to pray your kingdom come is to express both a longing for that great day acknowledging that that great day is coming to this world and that that really is where our priority lies aligned with God's priority but it's also to express faith and trust in the ongoing spread and growth in a hidden way of the kingdom now in this world as his rule is being extended through the proclamation of the gospel.

[19 : 23] The gospel is the scepter of God's kingdom is the way that John Calvin put it. And to pray thy kingdom come is to align yourself with Jesus' priority to extend his kingdom by making your priority being devoted to the means by which his kingdom is extended in this world the spread of the good seed of the gospel.

That's what it means to pray your kingdom come. The kingdom grows doesn't it? Jesus tells us by the sowing of the seed. That's what's going to bring the great harvest on the last day.

Now it's a constant battle Jesus tells us that. Yes, the enemy is at work seeking to spoil. And there are pressures that we face in the world against the deceitfulness of the human heart our own hearts included against all the wiles of the evil one.

But you must keep on sowing the seeds says Jesus because the harvest will surely come. And you see to pray your kingdom come it's to long for that harvest it's to long to see it.

It's to say yes Lord may that harvest come may it come thirtyfold and sixtyfold and a hundredfold to the glory of your father in heaven. But of course if you long for that harvest you'll devote yourself won't you in your life to sowing that seed to making that seed sown the very thing that will lead to that great harvest.

[20 : 56] That's what it means to pray thy kingdom come. It's to pray for the rule of Christ for the reign of Christ to advance through the spread of the gospel and for the fruit of the gospel to develop and grow and be manifest in the lives of men and women.

It's to pray for people to come to Christ to put it simply. Because where Christ reigns there is his kingdom being manifested in the lives of human beings now here on planet earth.

So it's a great outward prayer to pray thy kingdom come. That means obviously that prayer that doesn't have any interest at all in the mission of the church in evangelism in spreading the gospel in sowing the seed.

Well that can't be the kind of prayer Jesus is teaching us to pray. It's not real genuine Jesus prayer is it? But that prayer is also as well as being an outward looking missionary prayer it is also an inward prayer.

It's a prayer for ourselves now as kingdom people. It's a prayer that the beauty of Christ's kingdom would be manifest now in us. And that brings us to the third petition thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

- [22 : 20] Now really in a sense that's just another way of saying your kingdom come because it's a plea for the renewal of the whole earth for everything in it. So that once again the earth which is man's dwelling place and heaven which is God's dwelling place will be reunited so that again all this earth will be like the garden of Eden the place where God and man will be united together in perfect harmony living together as God and as people.

It's a prayer isn't it for that final consummation to come when Jesus comes again to usher in a new heavens and a new earth the home of righteousness where as Peter says everything will be put right.

That's what righteousness means everything put right. Everything right as it should be proper. So the prayer your will be done on earth as it is in heaven is a longing for that day when not only will all the world be put to rights all wrong done away with and everything right but also of course for the day when we will be totally put to rights.

It's a wonderful word isn't it that John says in 1 John 3 and 2 when he says and when he appears we shall be like him. That's so much more personal and wonderful isn't it than just saying when he appears we will be right again we will be as we should be.

Not just that but we will be like him like the Lord Jesus Christ. So it's longing for that but of course John also says in that same letter that we are already God's children even now here on earth.

- [24 : 10] And so of course to pray thy will be done can't just mean a longing for the future when everything will be put right in our lives and in this sinful world. It must express must not a desire for those who are already God's children through Jesus.

Who are already united to Christ by faith. Who are already filled with his Holy Spirit. And who are therefore called in the here and now to manifest the beauty and the goodness and the light of that glorious rule of God in our lives now.

It's a prayer that that would be so in us as God's people as God's children here today. And tomorrow and every day next week. It's a prayer for our lives now asking God to do in us what Jesus is speaking about here in the Sermon on the Mount.

Matthew 5 verse 16 In your same way let your light shine before others so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

You see it's a prayer isn't it? Your will be done in earth as it is in heaven. It's a prayer for the light of God's kingdom to shine now through us to this dark world.

- [25 : 35] But that will only happen where his will where his rule reigns supreme in our lives. that's why Jesus goes right on there in Matthew 5 verse 17 to say that it's those therefore who do and who teach his commandments that will be called great in the kingdom of heaven because that's how light is going to shine in this world to serve the advance of the gospel of his kingdom and to honor his name and not dishonor his name.

That was Paul's great criticism wasn't it of the people of God the Israel of God in Romans chapter 2 so often God's name instead of being honored in the world because of you has been blasphemed in the world because of you.

But to pray this prayer we're paying for the opposite of that that God's name should be honored through our lives and the light that comes from us in this world. This world will only get a vision of the glory of the kingdom of heaven that is to come the home of righteousness the home of rightness if in this sad world they get a glimpse of that world to come in the here and now in their own experience if they see a trailer like a movie trailer if they see a preview of it here on earth in their midst where are they going to see that friends if not in the church of Jesus Christ among us and in the lives of God's children you and me and that's what Jesus is teaching us here to be praying for for ourselves both corporately as his people and individually in each one of our own lives Christ's church is his household it's the people who belong to the new heavens and the new earth but living out that waiting time now here in this old earth that is passing away we're like a colony if you like of the future living here on earth but our task is to live on earth for heaven that's the bible's teaching and the world is to see us like a little embassy if you like that's what an embassy is isn't it a little bit of a sovereign territory of another nation in that other place and we're to be seen like an embassy where the writ of our sovereign runs not the ruler of this world in the ancient world where the

Roman armies took new territory areas of the Pax Romana were established the peace and the rule of Rome that became evidenced in the area that was conquered by Rome and that is what we are to be praying will be established here on earth among Christ's people among his church the Pax Christi we might call it the peace of Christ's rule listen to how Paul puts it in Colossians I referred to some of these words this morning listen to what he says to us to the Christian church put on therefore you put on as God's chosen ones holy and beloved put on compassion kindness humility meekness and patience bearing with one another if one has a complaint against another forgiving each other as the Lord has forgiven you so also you must forgive and above all these put on love which binds everything together in perfect harmony and let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts to which indeed you were called in one body see if this world sees and experiences that kind of kingdom culture that manifestation of the lifestyle of

God's heavenly kingdom don't you think that will have a powerful drawing power don't you think that will make people want to listen to the message that we proclaim the culture that the gospel creates empowers the call that the gospel communicates in this world and that's what we're praying for when we pray thy kingdom come thy will be done on earth among us as it is in heaven that the world might see and give praise to the father in heaven but of course it's very very very important that we remember as we pray this that it is not first of all a prayer for other people to be like that we often pray don't we that the church would change that the church would become a more attractive place that the church would manifest the goodness of Jesus the glory of Jesus to this world but you see change like charity begins at home and Jesus is teaching us that to pray thy will be done involves a very necessary negative that precedes these words you remember what they are when

[30 : 53] Jesus prayed those words himself in the garden of Gethsemane thy will be done not my will but thy will be done Christ won't reign supreme in our churches until Christ reigns supreme in our lives in our personal lives in yours and mine and that won't happen will it until your will and my will is dethroned in our life there's a surrender there's a submission there's a death if you like that's how the New Testament puts it but until we embrace truly and wholeheartedly in our own lives means we cannot be aligned truly and completely with God's purposes a surrender a submission a death

I wonder I wonder what that means in your life an ambition perhaps that you need to let go and give up a relationship perhaps that the Lord has challenged you about that is pulling you away from being aligned with his will an acceptance perhaps of a painful path that may be the consequence of past sin and past rebellion but which you have to accept now at Jesus hand and not be resentful about not be angry with God about could be 101 things in your life and mine we need to hear those words not this but your will if anyone would come after me let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me is how

Jesus put it and that's where all prayer really begins it begins in saying yes Lord whatever the past may have been align my life now and in the future with your purposes lead my feet only in your path no longer in my path but yours it's not my name and reputation but yours to be hallowed in my life not my rule and my ambition but your kingdom come not my will but your will be done in our church fellowship here in the bible study group that I'm part of in the ministry that I'm serving in my whole life in whatever it might be not my will but yours be done in earth here as it is in heaven you see when we're right with

Jesus when our hearts are right and when we're walking with him and listening to him in his light not tugging against him not pulling our own way it's then and it's only then that our prayer is ever going to be right so Jesus says to us you then pray like this our father in heaven hallowed be your name your kingdom come your will be done in earth as it is in heaven well let's pray together heavenly father you know our hearts even better than we know our own hearts and we know we know how deceitful our hearts are how assertive they are how our own will so consumes us and drives us and how difficult we find it to say not ours but yours not mine but thine help us we pray humble us that the spirit of your great son whose name is exalted above every name but who in this world turned his back upon the glory of heaven and humbled himself to death even death on a cross that his spirit and his mind might be in us that we might be people of real prayer people aligned above all things with your purpose seeking first the kingdom of heaven and your righteousness and knowing and trusting that all other things that we ever need you will graciously give us out of the bounty of your heavenly store so help us Lord help us to trust in our

Lord Jesus Christ Amen