

THE LORD'S PRAYER

"Holy is His Name"

(On January 17, 1965, Dr Terpstra began a series of messages on the Lord's Prayer. The following sermon is the second in this series.) Makiki Christian Church, Honolulu, Hawaii

Martin Luther's great hymn, "A Mighty Fortress is our God", gives, in its various stanzas, an insight into Luther's life. We find that as we study the words of the hymn, we have depicted scenes and events out of Luther's own experience.

It has also been suggested that the Lord's Prayer, in its several parts, presents the life of Jesus Christ. The opening statement, "Our Father, who art in heaven", sees Jesus either at the age of 12 in the temple saying, "know ye not that I must be about my Father's business," or at the Jordan during his baptism when the voice from heaven says, "this is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased." The phrase we are considering today, "Hallowed be Thy Name" is seen in the cleansing of the temple. This house of prayer is ringing with the shouting of the sellers and the bargaining of the buyers. Christ's spirit rebels against this materialism and he drives them all out of the temple.

Another approach to our message this morning is to remind ourselves that there are two requirements to prayer. The first is to know to whom we are speaking. The second is to know who we ourselves are.

To whom are we speaking? To whom is our prayer addressed? Jesus Christ has come to reveal to us that the Ultimate Power which stands behind all is God. But what is God like? What do we conceive of God to be? What we conceive God to be makes a difference. In fact, it makes all the difference in the world! Is God a great force similar to military force? Is our motto thus "Trust in God and keep your powder dry?" Or is God the upholder of the present condition of things! Is He opposed to all these "do-gooders" who endeavor to apply their Christianity to social evils?" Is He the Upholder of the status quo?" Or is God the God of the respectable class, - the people who have their rigid rules for behavior, but who are liable to swallow the camel in straining out the gnat? What is God like? "Canst thou by searching find out God? The answer after numerous centuries is still "no." But God has made Himself known. Jesus said, "I have manifested Thy name unto men." And his name is "Father" - "Our Father who art in heaven."

To whom then do we pray? To our Father who art in heaven. He is the One altogether righteous, thrice holy: "holy, holy, holy, Lord God almighty." He is eternal love and perfect justice. There is no limit to His power, other than His love. He is not one in a series, but He is "King of Kings" and "Lord of Lords." When the Hebrew people came to His name, they did not even pronounce it. It was too holy to be taken upon their lips. In His name was his personality, and thus His name must be sanctified.

This is One to whom we pray when we say, "Our Father who art in heaven." It is any wonder that our first utterance, our invocation, our calling out - is a prayer of thanksgiving? "Our Father who art in heaven: ... we are filled with praise and adoration and thanksgiving as we contemplate our God.

Secondly, we would consider who we ourselves are. As we contemplate the character of our God we say, "hallowed by Thy name." God is righteous, altogether holy, and just. But as we stand or kneel in His presence, we realize we are not like Him. We have not hallowed His name. By the inconsistencies in our lives, we have rather blasphemed His name. In time of trial, we have betrayed Him; in moments of testing, we have denied Him; in the dark hour we have forsaken Him. The prophet's accusing finger points our way as he says, "You are the man."

This first petition, "hallowed by Thy Name" is thus seen as a prayer of repentance, of confession of sin. In prayer we not only appeal to the Father's heart but we also beat upon our breasts, and cry, "God be merciful to me a sinner." "Confession is good for our soul." As we confess our sins, we find that the infected wound of our soul is lanced, and the poison is released, and healing can begin from the very base. Thus, this prayer of confession, or repentance, also becomes a prayer of self-conservation. To whom do we pray? To God the Father who is in heaven. And who are we ourselves? You and me and all of mankind ... who are we? We are men made in the image of God, but men who have forsaken God. We are people from a far country, from a land of rebellion, where we have been wandering in our aimlessness. What a contrast: the holy Father in heaven and sinful man! What a tremendous gulf separates the two! But have you ever observed that there is nothing in the Lord's Prayer which asks God to make you or me a sanctified believer, a devout soul, a strong trusting saint? There is no prayer for the inner man. The prayer does not read "may I be hallowed." Rather it turns attention away from ourselves.

Whenever we turn our attention inward and emphasize our own intentions, and our own moral efforts the result is always the same. We conclude as did the rich young ruler who had done so much ... "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" Beyond our very best efforts, our very best intentions, there is always something left undone.

I think one of the reasons we fold our hands when we pray is to indicate that we are ceasing from our own activities. We have given up on our own efforts and are turning elsewhere for help.

The God who is holy has said, "Be ye holy, for I am holy." How are we to become acceptable in God's sight?" The clue is to be looking to God and not to self. Fold your hands and lift up your eyes in faith to God!

Jesus' name is not mentioned once in the Lord's Prayer, yet He is in every phrase. We would not know God as Father unless Jesus had come to earth. The question now is, "How are we going to become acceptable in God's sight? We who are undone and wayward by nature? We who do not hallow his name.

We are told to pray "in the name of Jesus." It is in the name of Jesus that we can stand in God's holy presence cleansed and accepted. Upon the cross of Calvary, He blotted out our transgressions; He forgave our sins; He canceled the bond which stood against us. His cross (X) crossed out all our blasphemy, our denials, our betrayals. They are buried in the deepest seas. He has removed them as far as the east is from the west, to be remembered against us no more.

Indeed, "blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven; whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord imputes no iniquity, and in whom there is no deceit."

He whose name is hallowed and exhorts us to be holy as He is holy sees us in Jesus Christ. Upon that cross Christ not only took our sins upon himself, cleansing us from our guilt, but we become the righteousness of God in him. We are accepted in the presence of the hold Father through the merit of Jesus Christ, ... "in the name of Jesus," we pray.

We become devout believers, spiritual men and women, saints of God, not by looking inward to our intentions and moral efforts, but by looking away to the Son of Man.

"Hallowed by thy name!" Have you ever really prayed this prayer of repentance, of confession of sins? Have you ever seen yourself as a needy, undone person in the presence of the Heavenly Father? Have you ever smitten your breast and called out, "God, be merciful to me a sinner?" "Confession is good for the soul." Unless you repent, you shall also likewise perish" are the words of Jesus. The wages of sin is death. God "commands all men everywhere to repent."

"Today is the day of salvation. Behold, now is the acceptable time." Make your peace with God today. Amen.