

The Answer to the Lord's Prayer

The Word of the Lord from Luke 11: "If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!" This is the Word of the Lord.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen

"Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples." That's the request of one of the disciples to Jesus at the beginning of our Gospel lesson. Each rabbi had personal instructions regarding prayer for his students, so the disciples wanted to hear from their Teacher. In response, Jesus gives them the Lord's Prayer; as Luke records it, "Father, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread, and forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone who is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation." You'll find the complete version in the Gospel of Mark, but our text gives us enough to chew upon.

First, Jesus tells His disciples to address God as "Father." Not "King," not "Master," not "Boss," but "Father." That tells you an awful lot about prayer right there. When God hears your prayers, He does not view you as a grubby peasant, a slave or a lowly employee. As the Small Catechism says, "God would by these words tenderly invite us to believe that He is our true Father and that we are His true children, so that we may with all boldness and confidence as Him as dear children ask their dear Father." You're children of God!

"Hallowed be Your name" is the first petition, and you've heard what that means from the Small Catechism: "God's name is holy in itself, but we pray in this petition that it may be holy among us also." How is God's name kept holy among us? "When the Word of God is taught in its truth and purity, and we as the children of God also lead holy lives according to it. This grant us, dear Father in heaven. But he that teaches and lives otherwise than God's Word teaches profanes the name of God among us. From this preserve us, heavenly Father." So we pray that God's Word is taught purely, and that we live according to it.

"Your kingdom come," is the second petition. The Small Catechism says, "The kingdom of God comes indeed without our prayer, but we pray in this petition that it may come unto us also." Please note: we don't make God's name holy, nor do we cause His kingdom to come. We pray that the Lord would give these things to us. And how does God's kingdom come? "When our Father in heaven sends us His Holy Spirit, so that by His grace we believe His holy Word and lead a godly life, here in time and hereafter in eternity." So we pray that our Father would send us the Holy Spirit and keep us in the faith.

Our text moves on to, "Give us each day our daily bread." Again, the Small Catechism: "God gives daily bread indeed without our prayer, also to all the wicked. But we pray in this petition that He would lead us to know it, and to receive our daily bread with thanksgiving." What is meant by daily bread? "Everything that belongs to the support and wants of the body, such as food, drink, clothing, shoes, house, home, fields, cattle, money, goods, a pious spouse, pious children, pious servants, pious and faithful rulers, good government, good weather, peace, health, discipline, honor, good friends, faithful neighbors, and the like." So we pray that our Father would provide us with all that we need.

"Forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone who is indebted to us," goes the fifth petition, and the Small Catechism explains, "We pray in this petition that our heavenly Father would not look upon our sins, nor on their account deny our prayer, for we are worthy of none of the things for

which we ask, neither have we deserved them, but that He would grant them all to us by grace. So also will we heartily forgive, and readily do good to, those who sin against us." We pray that the Lord would forgive our sins; and forgiven for so much, that we would then forgive others.

Finally in our text, "And lead us not into temptation." We know, as the Small Catechism says, that "God indeed tempts no one, but we pray in this petition that God would guard and keep us, so that the devil, the world and our flesh may not deceive us nor seduce us into misbelief, despair and other great shame and vice; and though we be assailed by them, that at last we may finally overcome and obtain the victory." There's a ton of temptation that will deceive or seduce you, to ruin and destroy you: we pray in this prayer for the Lord's protection and deliverance.

There's the Lord's Prayer, at least as much as Luke gives us. You've heard it before, and you'll pray it again before this hour is through. But here is where I'd like to go from here: when you pray, you are looking for an answer. You ask your Father in heaven with the anticipation that He is going to respond; after all, He's promised to. So when you pray the Lord's Prayer, you are praying for the Lord to answer; and I would propose to you that the answer to the Lord's Prayer is Jesus.

Run through the text of that prayer with me one more time, with a slightly different focus. “Father,” began the prayer; and at one time, only One could call God “Father,” and that was Jesus. You couldn’t honestly pray that, because you were sinful—an enemy of God apart from His grace. But Christ became flesh to be your Savior: at His Baptism, the Father said, “This is My beloved Son.” On the cross, the Son prayed, “Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.” Because of Jesus’ sacrifice for you, God said at your Baptism, “You are My beloved child, and I forgive you for the sake of My Son.” Without Jesus, you can’t even start to pray this prayer, because you don’t have a dear Father in heaven. But because Christ dwells in you, you do; and your Father in heaven delights to hear your prayers.

“Hallowed be Your name” is next; and remember that this petition is a prayer that God’s Word be taught in its truth and purity, so that we might lead holy lives according to it. Now, look at Jesus’ ministry: in our very text, Jesus is teaching His Word in its truth and purity to His disciples. Not only has He come to teach the Word, but He has come to fulfill it by His death and resurrection. Without His sacrifice, the Word is unfulfilled. Without His sacrifice to set you free from sin, you could never lead a holy life according to His Word. But Christ has died and Christ is risen, and He has joined you to His death and resurrection in your Baptism, where He put His holy name upon you. It is only because Christ is with you that God’s name is hallowed among you.

Next is “Your kingdom come,” where we pray that our Father would send us the Holy Spirit and keep us in the faith. Apart from Jesus, this is impossible, too. Remember why the Holy Spirit comes: speaking of His death at the Last Supper, Jesus said, “I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you.” Without Christ and His cross, the Holy Spirit wouldn’t come because He’d have no grace to deliver to you. He wouldn’t keep you alive in the faith because you’d still be dead in sin. But because Christ has made that sacrifice, the Holy Spirit has come to you. Jesus is the answer to this petition too. If you’ve got the King, you’ve got the kingdom.

“Give us this day our daily bread.” Remember Jesus feeding the 5000 with five loaves and two fish: at times, He provided literal bread for the day. Remember also His proclamation, “I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is My flesh” (John 6:51). It is for the sake of Jesus that you have what you need for today. And tomorrow. And forever. Apart from Him, there is nothing.

“Forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone who is indebted to us.” The wages of sin is death, a debt you could not pay. Christ has paid it for you, and it’s not that He’s assumed the note so that He can hold it over you and collect. He forgives you freely, and sets you free to forgive others. Apart from Christ, there is certainly no forgiveness and you’re stuck with your sins. But because of Christ, you have God’s promise that He forgives your sins.

“And lead us not into temptation.” Look at Christ in the wilderness for forty days after His baptism, resisting the devil’s temptations at every turn. He already defeats Satan and sends him packing in the desert—and at the cross, He seals the victory over all those enemies that would deceive or seduce you into misbelief, despair and other great shame and vice. They’ll still assail and attack you, and you’ll still daily give in: but though they may win a battle here or there, because of Christ they have already lost the war. Where the devil, the world and your own flesh would lead you into sin and then claim victory, Jesus defeats them again by forgiving your sins and chasing them away.

Do you see? Jesus is the answer to the Lord’s Prayer—every part of it. We pray these petitions and we confidently expect the Lord to answer; and He does. He says, “I have answered already, for I sent My Son to redeem you. I have answered already, because I made you My beloved child in your Baptism for Christ’s sake. I continue to answer as I keep you in the faith and provide you with daily bread. And I will finally answer on the Last Day, when I grant you a blessed end and deliver you from every evil of body and soul, property and honor.

With Christ, you pray the Lord’s Prayer with confidence that the Lord is continually answering it, because He is. Jesus is the Answer to the Lord’s Prayer. But not just the Lord’s Prayer: all prayer hinges on Jesus, not just this one. That is what Jesus means when He says, “I tell you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened.” As the Father’s beloved children, whatever we ask in His name—according to His will—is a prayer that the Father delights to answer. He will, because you have Jesus. But if you do not have Jesus, then there is no assurance that your prayers will be heard.

It is easy to get prayer wrong so that it doesn’t involve Jesus anymore. The most common, perhaps, is the constant temptation to believe that God answers prayers because of you and your behavior, not because of

Jesus, what He does and the faith that He gives. You fall into this trap when you believe that God hears your prayers more when you've been good than when you've been bad, or that God will answer your prayer if you only pray sincerely enough. When this happens, God could rightly respond and say, "Why should I answer this prayer? Have you kept My name holy, lived a holy life that fulfilled My holy Word or paid off the debt of your sin? No! Why should I answer this prayer?" You've got better prayers to pray: you pray not in your name, but in the name of Jesus, who did keep God's name holy, who lived a holy life and fulfilled God's holy Word and paid off the debt for your sin. God hears your prayers because of Jesus, not because of you. Beware the temptation that God's answering depends on your works or your sincerity; repent of it quickly, rejoicing that for Jesus' sake He forgives you—and for Jesus' sake, answers your prayers!

Another way to stop praying in Jesus' name is simply to stop praying. We do not pray as we ought: the Lord of heaven and earth says "Call Me Father and ask any time," and we all too often say, "I'll Pass." There are various reasons for this. One is that we simply take for granted that we deserve the things that we have. That's a terrible sin of pride, because it denies that God provides for us only for the sake of Jesus—it says that Jesus' sacrifice wasn't necessary for God to love you as His child. But another reason we may stop praying is that, when we suffer, we get frustrated and believe that God isn't listening to our prayers. Dear friends, this is also a terrible sin, for it says that Jesus' death was only good enough to make you a beloved child of God for so long or so much, but that God isn't always faithful. It denies that God is answering all the time for Jesus' sake. But He has answered in Christ. He answers even now with more grace, and He will answer with finality on the Last Day.

Therefore, the Lord bids us to keep praying as He keeps answering. He tells the parable in our text of the persistent neighbor who keeps banging on the door next door until his friend gets out of bed

to help him. The lesson is not that the Lord will help you if you bother Him enough; rather, it is that even if you don't see the Lord answering right away, He's at work according to His will. For Jesus' sake, you're not an impudent neighbor, and God is not an irritated friend. If the irritated neighbor is willing to roll out of bed and help, how much more is your Father in heaven, who never sleeps or slumbers but watches over you night and day?

Likewise, Jesus says, if fathers know how to give good gifts to their children (rather than serpents or scorpions), how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!

And if the Father gives you the Holy Spirit, He gives you faith in Christ. If He has given you faith in Christ, you are His beloved child. And so you are—all for the sake of Jesus. So pray; and as you pray, rejoice that the Lord has already answered in Christ. And if He has already answered in Christ, then because you're His dear child He will not cease to hear your prayers and answer them in the way that's best for you. He has answered in Christ. He will answer in Christ. And He does even now, for He declares that in Christ, you are forgiven for all of your sins.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen