

PRAYER for 2021
Promote righteous living in Troubled Times

While our culture may be polarized, the church shouldn't be. How do we keep a kingdom perspective in a polarized politicized world? The answer is found in a familiar passage known as The Lord's Prayer. This will be a great guide for our hearts as we move into 2021.

Matthew 6:9-13

"Pray then like this:

Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name;
thy kingdom come;
thy will be done;
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation;
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
the power and the glory,
for ever and ever.
Amen.

'Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be your name.

#1 Priority for 2021 -Keep God the Main Thing. If we do that, then other issues will resolve themselves.

Perhaps our greatest need is to have a BIG VIEW OF God – HALLOWED BE YOUR NAME.

Things get out of whack when people, agendas and the alphabet soup of the age become big – If any of these are made big in your heart and mind, then you are headed for a meltdown: (not an exhaustive list...)

POTUS, SCOTUS, GOP, DNC, BLM, LGBT+, AOC, MAGA, NPR, NYT, WAPO, FNN, MSNBC, CNN, EIB, CDC, WHO, CBS, ABC, CIA, FBI

We need an Isaiah 6 vision of God -

1 In the year of King Uzziah's death I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, lofty and exalted, with the train of His robe filling the temple. 2 Seraphim stood above Him, each having six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. 3 And one called out to another and said, "Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord of hosts, The whole earth is full of His glory." 4 And the foundations of the thresholds trembled at the voice of him who called out, while the temple was filling with smoke. 5 Then I said, "Woe is me, for I am ruined! Because I am a man of unclean lips, And I live among a people of unclean lips; For my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts."

A biblical vision of God puts everything and everyone else in its proper perspective. What the church needs is a God sized vision and the world needs a church that has a God sized vision. We offer nothing to the world or to the advancement of the kingdom if we merely regurgitate the platitudes and moralisms of a godless culture. Church has to be more than a music concert, TED Talk, and an appeal for \$\$.

1 Pet 2:9

But you are A CHOSEN RACE, A royal PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY NATION, A PEOPLE FOR God's OWN POSSESSION, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light;

Don't dishonor the Name of Christ by exalting your own name or agenda.

G.K. Chesterton – "O how much larger our lives would be if we would become smaller in them."

Keep an Eternal perspective and remember that God is in control. His Ways are not our ways. He has often used troubled times.

The death of Christ is the ultimate example of this – no one watching the crucifixion of Christ was thinking, "This is going to turn out for the advancement of God's kingdom."

Even in a dispute with other believers, remember that God is OUR Father, and our FATHER.

The unity we have in God is more important than any spirit of the age agenda.

HEIDELBERG #120 Why did Christ command us to address God as Father?

"To awaken in us at the very beginning of our prayer that childlike reverence and trust toward God which should be basic to our prayer: God has become our Father through Christ and will much less deny us what we ask of Him in faith than our fathers would refuse us earthly things."

I think that much of the polarization that happens in the political and cultural arenas is the result of people forgetting that there is a God who is in charge or we forget that He is a loving wise Heavenly Father. People who are cut off from a wise loving Heavenly Father take it upon themselves to create their own Utopia.

This "build your own kingdom" mentality goes back to the Garden of Eden and the Tower of Babel and it has infected "kingdom building" from the days of the Pharaohs, to the Babylonians, Persians, Macedonians, Romans, Mayans, Chinese Emperors, The Divine Right Kings of Europe, Manifest Destiny, The British Empire, The Third Reich, The Soviet Empire, and the globalist utopians of today. One reality of our fallen world is that when most people gain political or cultural power they seek to spread their Utopia, by force if necessary.

Human history teaches us many lessons, one of which is beware of Coercive Utopians, for they have lost sight of God's Eternal kingdom.

Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

Lay down your own agenda and keep a loose grip on this things of this world.

PRAY IN LIGHT OF ETERNITY

- Petition God for the souls of men and women, husbands and wives, singles, young people and children. Our lives on this earth are but a vapor but we can invest in eternity as we pray for the kingdom values to be worked out in our lives and in the church. Ask God that our souls would prosper in times of abundance and in times of need. Pray that our joy would not be determined by our circumstances but by our awareness of the spiritual blessings that are ours in Christ.

Give us this day our daily bread,

Learn CONTENTMENT as you depend on God in every area of life— Phil 4

Listen to the polarizing mantras of our day and you hear a lot of discontent, resentment, and angry name-calling. There is little humble reliance on God with a call to prayer.

Recognize your limitations – we are ALL frail, limited people. No one has all the answers. We are not autonomous and don't have all the answers, so approach life with humility.

Don't be surprised at the trials that come – Scripture does not paint a rosy picture for the state of the world prior to the return of Christ.

and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.

CHOOSE TO LOVE YOUR ENEMY AND refuse to impute negative motives

No side is innocent. Your sins are as real as "theirs".

Pursue reconciliation where needed. 2020 has shown how fragile we all are. Don't leave things unresolved when you can be a peacemaker.

If you follow a cultural narrative that demands adherence to the spirit of the age that offers no redemption or forgiveness, then you have abandoned the Gospel of Christ.

At the heart of biblical religion is the scandal of forgiveness. Jesus got what we deserved so that we might be forgiven. We are "bigger sinners...than we dare imagine."

If our worldview or cultural mantra doesn't proclaim a scandalous forgiveness, then we're not in line with the Gospel, and we'll always be polarized or polarizing.

Forgiveness is a scandal because by its very nature we are called to forgive people for things that God and we find morally wrong.

Biblical forgiveness is a supernatural grace that we must experience before we can grant it. But once it is experienced, it must be extended. Don't be the hypocrite who says, "Forgiveness for Me, but NOT for Thee."

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

There is more here than meets the eye –

There is a tendency for us moderns to be "materialistic" Christians. Not in the sense that we put too much emphasis on materialism and stuff (although that may be the case). But we can be materialistic in that we forget that there really is a spiritual battle going on in the heavenly realm and on this earth.

A spiritually materialistic faith sees the essence of Christianity as being culturally, politically, and physically evident, rather than spiritual and unseen. T. G. Melton

Should our faith be evident? YES, James 2 – "faith without works is dead".

But there is a spiritual reality to biblical faith that can't be easily quantified. This is why Paul prays that the "eyes of our hearts would be enlightened" and that "our hearts would be overwhelmed with the love of God that surpasses comprehension."

There is a spiritual realm with spiritual forces that seek to manipulate and deceive our hearts and minds by craftiness in deceitful scheming (Eph 4). There are evil forces at work to control worldly powers and tempt believers into sin and unbelief.

EX: Just this week I got word about a gal we've not heard about for years. When she was 19-20 she was like one of the family. She was a solid believer, married a Christian man who teaches

at a Christian college, heading for a “happy ever after” life. Now she’s late 40’s, recently divorced her husband, and has run off to the mid-east to marry a Muslim man half her age.

You all know stories of spiritual warfare that go beyond the spiritually materialistic realm. Satan is like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour. Be ON THE ALERT. There is more here than meets the eye.

From Genesis to Revelation we see powers of darkness that wage war against our souls and against God’s people. These powers seek to defame the glory of God, disparage the kingdom of Christ, and destroy the faith of God’s people.

I think it is safe to say that most evangelicals, and perhaps especially Presbyterians ignore this reality. Such stuff doesn’t fit into the “decently and in order” categories we like. Demonic powers just aren’t into following the Book of Church Order or the Westminster Confession.

If we’re not careful, we will fail to engage in prayerful spiritual warfare and will pursue battle against spiritual forces using sinful and fleshly methods. As a result, our battle – against the world, the flesh, and the devil- is impotent, self-powered, and self-centered. When this happens the church devolves into a socio-political machine that becomes a pawn of the evil one. We begin to see humanly devised power, strategy, and coordinated religious defiance as strong, and we see prayer, grace, love, and the power of God as weak. – T. G. Melton Intro: Valley of Vision Remix: Our Triune God

HOW TO RESPOND...

Remain faithful no matter the current situation. God is still in control and He is working to bring about the advance of HIS Kingdom, not ours. His kingdom is eternal, not ours.

We are on the right side of history when we are on the right side of HIS Story

For Thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory forever

Our true kingdom is NOT on this earth. We are citizens of heaven. We are aliens and strangers on our way to eternal life.

World history is filled with kings and kingdoms that have all passed away.

Empires and rulers have come and gone and many are forgotten. If it weren’t for the references to some of them in the pages of scripture, many would never be heard of inside or outside of the church.

Cities and palaces were built to honor the fame and power of ancient rulers who thought their reign would last for centuries. Those cities and palaces are now in ruin. Some can still be visited when travel is allowed. Others can only be seen in an artist’s drawing.

Acts 12 shows how quickly power fades:

Following the arrest and the miraculous escape of Peter...

When Herod had searched for Peter and had not found him, he examined the guards and ordered that they be led away to execution. Then he went down from Judea to Caesarea and was spending time there.

20 Now he was very angry with the people of Tyre and Sidon; and with one accord they came to him, and having won over Blastus the king’s chamberlain, they were asking for peace, because their country was fed by the king’s country. 21 On an appointed day Herod, having put on his royal apparel, took his seat on the rostrum and began delivering an address to them. 22 The people kept crying out, “The voice of a god and not of a man!” 23 And immediately an angel of the Lord struck him because he did not give God the glory, and he was eaten by worms and died.

One day Herod is acting like a God who holds men's lives in his hands and is enjoying the acclaim of the people; and then he is struck down because he did not give God the glory.

We are so accustomed to God's grace that we are shocked when He responds with righteous judgement. I dare say that Herod was surprised.

Let this be a warning to all of us, for we will all face our day when God calls us to give an account before Him. Will the verdict be "You did not give glory to God" or will you be covered by the righteousness of Christ.

This is not a hypothetical question. It is for real.

Guiding our hearts and lives by the Lord's Prayer is a good way to give glory to God in our daily practice.

Amen

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