

The Lord's Prayer—When Will It Be Answered?

*"It came to pass,
that, as he was
praying in a
certain place, when
he ceased, one of
his disciples said
unto him, Lord,
teach us to pray. ...
And he said unto
them, When ye pray,
say, Our Father
which art in
heaven, Hallowed
be thy name."
—Luke 11:1,2*

AS THE YEARS HAVE passed into centuries, and the centuries into millennia, these words found in our Lord's prayer, "Thy kingdom come," have mounted up in literally billions of petitions which have come before God. Have they fallen on deaf ears? Will God ever answer? Has he given up on mankind, deeming their future hopeless? If he does answer this prayer, what

form will his kingdom take, and will it bring about peace, joy, and life to mankind? Let us examine

these heart-searching questions and seek their answers.

In response to the disciples' request, "Lord, teach us to pray," Jesus gave them what is now familiarly known as "The Lord's Prayer." In this model prayer we are given a guide as to what Christians may pray for. Of first importance is the fact that in this brief outline of prayer, Jesus indicated the proper method of approach to God: "Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name."

As the human creation of God, we should first of all desire to honor the name of our Father, the Creator. Both by word and by action the Christian's attitude should always be, "Hallowed be thy name." To properly hallow our Heavenly Father implies that when we approach him in prayer we will do so in the manner outlined for us in the Scriptures. Jesus, God's only begotten son, explained that our prayers should be offered in his name.—John 15:16

There is a reason for this. As members of the fallen and justly condemned race, we could have no standing at the divine throne of grace except through Jesus, our "advocate," or intercessor. (I John 2:1) In his name, however, and through the merit of his shed blood, Christians are privileged to go "boldly unto the throne of grace" to seek forgiveness, and all the other blessings which our loving Heavenly Father has promised to give. (Heb. 4:16) If we properly hallow God's name we will never presume to approach him except through Jesus.

When we follow the example of Jesus' model prayer, our requests will not be so much on our own behalf as they will be for the blessing of others. This is indicated in the opening petition, "Thy

kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.” (Matt. 6:10) The response to this request will be an answer to much for which people have prayed throughout the centuries. That answer will satisfy the legitimate desires of all people. It will mean peace, health, and everlasting life for all who conform themselves to the righteous laws of God’s kingdom.

The blessings which the human race craves, and for which millions pray, were all anticipated by God and provided for through the kingdom which he has promised by all his prophets. In these promises we find many details of the blessings which it will guarantee to the people, including the restoration of those who have died. God has not been unmindful of the suffering of the people, nor has he turned a deaf ear to their cries for help. (Ps. 56:8; 139:1-17; Isa. 59:1) His answer to their prayers, when in his due time it comes, will be far beyond anything that they have ever dared to hope.

Take the example of parents who pray for the safety of their son on the battlefield. They love him, and nothing could mean more to them than his safe return to the family home. Yet their child does not return, and their first thought may be that God does not care, that he has no pity. How differently they would feel if they could understand that God has provided a homecoming far more satisfactory than ever entered their minds when they prayed!

How little parents may know in such a case of the hardship and suffering, physical and mental, their son may have been saved from by falling asleep in death. In truth, both the parents and their child are members of a dying race, and the

difference between dying on the battlefield and dying some years later of old age is only a momentary one when compared with the endless stretch of eternity. It is from this standpoint that we must learn to view the subject of prayer and the manner in which God answers our petitions.

The very fact that we pray to God is acknowledgement of our belief that his wisdom and power and love far exceed our own. Yet we often forget this and feel that he has not honored our prayers because he has not answered them as we would have, through the exercise of our own feeble abilities. The length of our condemned life is very short. We tend to judge accomplishments upon the basis of whether or not they reach maturity within the short span of our present lifetime. However, we should not judge God's works from this standpoint.

The Scriptures speak of God as being "from everlasting to everlasting." (Ps. 41:13; 90:2) He is under no necessity to complete any particular phase of his plan within our short lifetime, even if it has to do with our individual requests. If we prayed to God today for some special blessings which would be in harmony with his will, and the answer did not come until tomorrow, or even the next day, we should not lose faith in him, but rejoice when the answer did come. God has his "tomorrows" also. His days are not measured by hours, for they are ages. His age of tomorrow is the thousand-year period of Christ's kingdom. (Rev. 20:4,6; I Cor. 15:25,26) At that time, all those blessings which the world has legitimately craved and for which millions have voiced requests to God, will be abundantly showered upon humanity. In recognition of

this, the people will then respond, saying, "Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, ... we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation."—Isa. 25:9

"AS IT IS IN HEAVEN"

God is pleased to answer prayers that are in harmony with his will and which are in keeping with what he has already promised to do. He also wants our petitions to reflect the desire that his will be done in all matters. Let us note that in The Lord's Prayer, this principle is clearly set forth. It requests God for blessings upon the people of earth, not for any sort of supposedly good things which they may crave, but things which are in harmony with the divine will. "Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven."

What great latitude he has given us in connection with the things which are in harmony with his will! God's will is done in heaven, and it is his purpose that to that same degree it shall be done in earth. We do not know, of course, all the ways in which God's will is done in heaven, but we can be sure that the evils which now exist on earth do not plague the lives of those in the spirit realm we call heaven.

There is no war in heaven. War is an evil which is not in harmony with the divine will. Should we, then, pray for peace? Indeed, we could not pray for God's will to be done in earth as it is in heaven without praying for peace. Our prayers for peace, however, should be in keeping with God's plan to establish peace, and that is his kingdom plan. He has promised to set up a kingdom and establish a government. Jesus will be the king, the ruler, in

that government. "The government shall be upon his shoulder," wrote Isaiah, and "of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end."—Isa. 9:6,7

Doubtless God looks with sympathy upon the yearnings of mankind that war be abolished in the earth. When international tension is at a high pitch, and war seems inevitable, devout people on both sides feel compelled to pray for peace. The differences which threaten to precipitate war may be resolved, or they may not be, but we know that ultimately there shall be peace—universal and lasting peace! This will not happen because the nations have at last found a workable formula for peace, but because the Prince of Peace has taken over the rulership of earth and the prayer, "Thy kingdom come," has been answered.

How many God-fearing people there are in the world today who would like to see the nations disarm. Yet the nations themselves dare not disarm, for they have no assurance that aggressors would not take advantage of the situation and seek to impose a tyrannical dictatorship over them. Nevertheless, many prayers ascend to God that a way may be shown the nations to cease preparing themselves for war. These prayers also will eventually be answered within the framework of the divine government plan.

Christ's government is symbolized in the Scriptures as the "mountain of the Lord," and in Micah 4:1-4 we read that the time will come when the people will say, "Let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, and to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his

paths: for the law shall go forth of Zion, and the Word of the Lord from Jerusalem. And he shall judge among many people, and rebuke strong nations afar off; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning-hooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more. But they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree; and none shall make them afraid: for the mouth of the Lord of hosts hath spoken it."

What a wonderful program for disarmament! It is God's program. When we pray for peace, and for the nations to disarm, let us do so with the assurance that God will hear, and that he will answer our prayers in harmony with his will, which will be through his kingdom. We have this assurance, for the Prophet David wrote that it is God's intention to make wars cease throughout the earth, to break the battle bow and cut the spear, rendering them useless, and to destroy the chariots—the transport of armaments.—Ps. 46:9

NO SICKNESS OR DEATH

Sickness and death have resulted from the sin of our first parents, and are among the evils which God has promised to destroy. Shall we, then, pray for health and ask the Lord to save the lives of those near and dear to us who may have been stricken with serious illness? Herein we must be careful. While it is proper to petition God concerning our health, or of those close to us, and even to humbly request that there be provided some relief or recovery from sickness, it should always be accompanied by the words "Thy will be done." It is important that we

realize, and accept, that it may not be the Lord's will to grant health and life to those for whom we pray at the present time. How thankful we can be, however, that the blessings of health and life will be made available to all during Christ's kingdom.

The Bible tells us that all diseases will then be cured. In that kingdom day, "the inhabitant shall not say, I am sick," wrote Isaiah. (Isa. 33:24) Describing some of the blessings of the kingdom, Paul wrote that Christ will reign until "he hath put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death." (I Cor. 15:25,26) When, in vision, the Apostle John saw the kingdom of God established on the earth, he discerned that as a result there would be "no more death," neither "any more pain."—Rev. 21:4

When, therefore, we pray for health and life, let us endeavor to grasp the meaning of this larger provision the Creator has made to grant these blessings, not merely to us and to our loved ones, but to all mankind. Such will be the blessings of all who will seek them through humility and obedience during the thousand years of Christ's reign. How much better that will be for all concerned! Rather than merely praying for ourselves and our loved ones, how much better it is to pray that God will heal all the sick and keep all the people from dying. Thus we do when we pray, "Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven."

THE LAND OF THE ENEMY

God's ways, and the provisions he has made for his creatures, are always much better and more far-reaching than those conceived by human wisdom.

We pray for health; we pray for protection; we pray for peace. Who, however, has ever dared to think of praying that their loved ones who have died be restored to them? Yet God, in his plan, has gone far beyond what we have presumed to pray for. He has promised to bring back the dead!

How many mothers have been heartbroken over the loss of a precious child? One of these is referred to by the Prophet Jeremiah. Her name was Rachel. Jeremiah wrote, "A voice was heard in Ramah, lamentation, and bitter weeping; Rachel weeping for her children refused to be comforted for her children, because they were not." The prophet continues, "Refrain thy voice from weeping, and thine eyes from tears: for thy work shall be rewarded, saith the Lord; and they shall come again from the land of the enemy."—Jer. 31:15,16

The "land of the enemy" is the condition of death. Death is man's greatest enemy, and it is God's plan to restore to life all who are in the "land" of death. This great favor to man, then, is also included in our petition, "Thy kingdom come," for it will be during the period of Christ's kingdom that all who are in their graves—in the condition of death—will hear the voice of the Son of man, and shall come forth.—John 5:28,29

The bringing of man back to life is described by Apostle Peter as "restitution," meaning restoration. He tells us that the object of the Second Advent of Christ is the "times of restitution of all things" and adds that this has been promised by all God's "holy prophets since the world began." (Acts 3:20,21) Surely that which God has caused all his holy prophets to promise is in full harmony with

his will. Indeed, it is a vital part of his provision for the eternal blessing of all his human creatures who were condemned to death through Adam, but redeemed from death by Jesus.—Rom. 5:18,19; I Cor. 15:21,22; I Tim 2:3-6

SECURITY FOR ALL

Many pray for wealth or at least for economic security. There is a measure of fear and uncertainty on the part of most people as they face their later years. Will we be financially secure when we reach the age when it is no longer possible for us to earn a living? It is quite understandable that anyone who believes in God and thinks of him as one who loves and cares, should look to him in prayer in connection with the need of financial security.

We know, of course, that there are many people in the world today, and this has been true throughout the ages, who are not financially secure. There are millions who are literally starving, and without proper food, clothing, and shelter. God loves all these, and while we would appreciate it if he blessed us with a more favorable situation in life, is it not better to rejoice in the loving provision he has made to care for all the poor and needy in his own due time and way? This is what he has promised to do in his kingdom!

In the prophecy of Isaiah, an assurance is given us concerning God's blessings for the world in the age to come. We are told that then the people will not build houses for others to inhabit, and that they will not plant and another eat, but that the people—all those who through the acceptance of

Christ and obedience to his kingdom become God's people—shall long enjoy the works of their hands. (Isa. 65:21,22) They shall enjoy the fruit of their labor forever if they continue to obey the righteous laws of that kingdom which then will be ruling the world.

In this chapter of Isaiah's prophecy, it is indicated that the blessings of God which in that kingdom day will become available to all, are to be poured out upon the people in answer to their prayers. Concerning this the Lord says, "Before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear." (vs. 24) This has not been the experience of the vast majority of those who up to the present time have prayed earnestly to God for help. This is not because he has lacked interest in them, but because his time had not come to extend the favors for which they have asked. It is also because, in his wisdom, God has known that mankind's experiences with adversity will enable them to appreciate more fully the blessings he will provide for them throughout the eternal years.

When the kingdom for which we pray is established and functioning, how different it will be. Many of the blessings which the dying race has longed for will then become available even before they think of praying for them. "Before they call, I will answer," declares the Lord, and when they do learn to ask him for his bounties, the answers to their prayers will be so real and so immediate that it will seem as though they came before the petitioner had finished his prayer. "While they are yet speaking, I will hear," is God's promise.

DAILY BREAD

In the answer to the prayer, “Thy kingdom come,” are included the many material blessings for which devout people of the world customarily pray, but so often fail to receive. How we should rejoice that the time is coming in God’s plan when these legitimate material blessings will begin to flow to all the families of the earth in harmony with the promise made to Abraham. (Gen. 12:1-3; 22:15-18; Acts 3:24,25) Meanwhile, it is well to consider the manner in which God answers the prayers of his people now, the prayers of those who address him as, “Our Father which art in heaven.”

Faithful Christians have continued to pray for God’s kingdom to come, and in thus praying have known that the kingdom will be God’s channel of blessing to all mankind. At the same time, they have had the privilege of petitioning God for their own immediate daily needs, since Jesus taught them to pray, “Give us this day our daily bread.”—Matt. 6:11

This is a very reasonable request. When made in the proper spirit, it is acknowledgment that the Lord knows best what our daily needs may be, and that we will be satisfied with whatever provision he considers wise to make. In addition to this, for those who are walking in the sacrificial footsteps of Jesus, it is important to recognize that our spiritual needs are more important by far than the material. Bread is used in the Scriptures to symbolize the Truth of the Gospel, the Truth of God’s Word, the Truth of the divine plan for man’s salvation and blessing. God has promised to feed us abundantly with this “bread of life,” so we can pray thus with full assurance, knowing that our petitions are

primarily for the spiritual food which he has promised, and therefore in harmony with his will.—John 6:48-58,63

FORGIVENESS

“Forgive us our sins, as we have forgiven those who sin against us.” (Matt. 6:12, *New Living Translation*) This portion of The Lord’s Prayer can be uttered sincerely only by those whose hearts are filled with the same spirit of love which prompted our Heavenly Father to send his Son into the world to be the Redeemer and Savior. This was a love which made a provision for the forgiveness of sinners, those who had trespassed against God by disobeying his laws.

The Lord is willing to forgive us, but only on the condition that we are in the proper heart attitude toward those who have sinned against us. “If you forgive those who sin against you, your Heavenly Father will forgive you. But if you refuse to forgive others, your Father will not forgive your sins.” (vss. 14,15, *NLT*) Certainly this is a heart-searching test of our sincerity in prayer.

DELIVERANCE FROM EVIL

“Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.” (Matt. 6:13) The first temptation mentioned in the Bible was that of mother Eve. She was tempted by the fallen Lucifer, through the serpent, to disobey the law of God. (Gen. 3:1-6) The transgression of God’s law is designated in the Scriptures as sin, and the word temptation is used to describe any effort, allurements, or enticement to sin. The Devil is the greatest of all tempters. (Matt. 4:1-11) He uses many and various agencies by

which to present his sinful appeals to those he endeavors to lure away from God and into the paths of unrighteousness.

James 1:13 tells us emphatically that God tempts no one. This means that we can depend upon it that the Heavenly Father will not lead us into temptation. Thus in our prayers we claim this assurance. We do not pray for the kingdom because we have any misgiving as to whether or not it will come; neither do we pray, “Lead us not into temptation” because we are fearful that God may assume the role of the fallen Lucifer and seek to entice us to sin. God will not do this, and we know it, so we express our confidence in his integrity by acknowledging this assurance that he tempts no one.

How hope-inspiring is the contrast to this—“Deliver us from evil.” The Devil, the arch-deceiver, has throughout the centuries been exerting his influence upon all mankind in an effort to alienate them from God. The result has been tragic. Mankind lives in a world largely controlled by sin and selfishness: “this present evil world.” (Gal. 1:4) However, God has promised deliverance from “the snare of the fowler,” and from the evil which the fowler has engendered in the world.—Ps. 91:3

God’s promises of deliverance are of personal concern to all those striving to follow in the footsteps of Jesus, for they assure such that Satan will not be able to ensnare nor entrap them. As individuals, God delivers us daily from Satan’s pitfalls of error and sin. “The angel of the LORD,” wrote the psalmist, “encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them.” (Ps. 34:7) What a reassuring

promise, and how glad we are to claim it as our own when we pray, "Deliver us from evil."

There is still larger deliverance, however, for the people of God. It is the deliverance of the entire church of Christ in the "first resurrection" to live and reign with Christ. (Rev. 20:4,6) Jesus said that the "gates of hell [Greek: death, the grave] shall not prevail" against his church. (Matt 16:18) In fulfillment of this promise, the gates of hell—the death condition—will be opened wide, and all who have suffered and died with Christ will be released from death, and will be exalted to glory to reign with him throughout the thousand years of his kingdom.

For this glorious deliverance the church has waited throughout all the centuries since Pentecost. True Christians have known that this deliverance would not come until he returned. Paul knew this and wrote that a "crown of righteousness" had been laid up for him and that he would receive it at "that day." Then he added, "and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing."—II Tim. 4:8

In Jesus' great prophecy concerning this end of the age, in which he identifies so many of the conditions in the world today, he said to his disciples, "When these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption [Greek: deliverance] draweth nigh." (Luke 21:25-32) The fact that "these things" foretold by the Master, which signal the near approach of deliverance from this present evil world, are now clearly discernible in the daily news, gives us confidence that soon the blessings of his long-promised and much prayed-for kingdom will begin to flow out to a suffering and dying humanity.

Thus we pray, “Deliver us from evil,” not only because we are longing to be free from a world that is evil, but also because we know that the answer to this prayer will also mean the answer to our other petition: “Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.” Viewed in this manner, even that part of a Christian’s prayer which means most to the one who utters it, is at the same time unselfish, for it also contemplates rich blessings soon to come to all mankind.

Such are the prayers with which God is pleased—that is, unselfish prayers. While God is pleased when his people seek individual guidance, forgiveness, and spiritual strength from him, he also wants them to be interested in all whom he loves. This, of course, is the entire world of mankind. (John 3:16) We show our interest in his plan for blessing the people when we pray, “Thy kingdom come,” for it will be through the agencies of that kingdom that he will “make unto all people a feast of fat things”; and it will be the time when God “will swallow up death in victory,” and “wipe away tears from off all faces.”—Isa. 25:6-8; Rev. 21:1-5

Above all, let us continually thank God that his love made provision for the eternal joy of all. Let us not only praise him individually in our prayers, but also tell the whole world about his love. Let us make known to them that through Christ, provision has been made for them to live, and soon his kingdom will provide peace, health, and everlasting life for all. Peace will come through the Prince of Peace, and health and life through the one God’s love provided—his only begotten Son—to be the Redeemer and Savior of the world. ■