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The Prayer that Turns the World Upside Down

This article is an excerpt from Dr. R. Albert Mohler, Jr. new book, ‘The Prayer that Turns the World Upside Down: The Lord’s Prayer as a Manifesto for Revolution’, which released on January 23, 2018.

We long for revolution. Something within us cries out that the world is horribly broken and must be fixed. For centuries, the word revolution was scarcely heard, buried under ages of oppression. The word itself was feared and speaking it was treason. And then, revolutions seemed to appear almost everywhere.

Some historians have gone so far as to identify our modern epoch as “The Age of Revolution.” Is it? Perhaps it is more accurate to refer to our times as “The Age of Failed Revolution.” Looking across the landscape it becomes clear that very few revolutions produce what they promise. Arguably, most revolutions lead to a worse set of conditions than they replaced.

And yet, we still yearn for radical change, for things to be made right. We rightly long to see righteousness and truth and justice prevail. We are actually desperate for what no earthly revolution can produce. We long for the Kingdom of God, and for Jesus as King of Kings and Lord of Lords. We are looking for a kingdom that will never end and a King whose rule is perfect.

This is why Christians pray the Lord’s Prayer. This is the very prayer that Jesus taught his own disciples to pray. So Christians pray this prayer as a way of learning how to pray and what to pray – as Jesus teaches us to pray.

The Lord’s Prayer is the prayer that turns the world upside down. Are you looking for revolution? There is no clearer call to revolution than when we pray “*Your kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.*” But this is a revolution only God can bring ... and He will.

This short prayer turns the world upside down. Principalities and powers hear their fall. Dictators are told their time is up. Might will indeed be made right and truth and justice will prevail. The kingdoms of this world will all pass, giving way to the Kingdom of our Lord, and of his Christ.

It all comes down to one of the shortest prayers found in the Bible. The Lord’s Prayer takes less than 20 seconds to read aloud, but it takes a lifetime to learn. Sadly, most Christians rush through the prayer without learning it – but that is to miss the point completely.

Perhaps this is part of a larger problem. Gary Millar, who has written some enormously helpful resources on prayer, goes so far as to argue that “the evangelical church is slowly but surely giving up on prayer.”^[i] The statement is shocking, but the truth of his assessment is even more shocking. Why are evangelicals giving up on prayer?



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The Prayer that Turns the World Upside Down - Cont'd

Millar suggests that life is easy for most evangelicals – perhaps too easy. Some of us lack the desperation that most Christians have experienced throughout church history. Desperation leads to prayer. We are also incredibly distracted and busy. Both are enemies of prayer. But giving up on prayer is not only a sign of evangelical weakness. It is disobedience.

Jesus did not only teach his disciples to pray – he commanded us to pray.

I think there is another big reason behind the fact that so many Christians do not pray. Many Christians simply do not know how to pray.

In the Lord's Prayer, Jesus teaches us how to pray.

We remember Martin Luther as the great Reformer, nailing his famous 95 theses to the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg, Germany in 1517 and leading the Reformation of the church. What we do not so often remember is that Martin Luther was also a man who regularly needed a haircut. We should be very glad that he did.

Luther's barber, Peter Beskendorf once asked Luther for advice on how to pray. Luther responded by writing instructions on prayer he called "A Simple Way to Pray, for Master Peter the Barber."

Luther pointed his barber to the Lord's Prayer, and he offered this incredibly helpful advice:

"So, as a diligent and good barber, you must keep your thoughts, senses, and eyes precisely on the hair and scissors or razor and not forget where you trimmed or shaved, for, if you want to talk a lot or become distracted thinking about something else, you might well cut someone's nose or mouth or even his throat."^[ii]

We get Luther's point immediately. We must learn to pray, and to resist distractions in prayer. Advice about cutting hair or shaving is easy to understand. A distracted barber is a dangerous barber. Luther applied the lesson well: "How much more does a prayer need to have the undivided attention of the whole heart alone, if it is to be a good prayer!"^[iii]

We have much to learn about prayer, and the Lord's Prayer is the right place to start. This is no tame prayer for safe times. This is the prayer that turns the world upside down.

So, let's learn to pray, taught by Jesus.

[i] Gary Millar, *Calling on the Name of the Lord: A Biblical Theology of Prayer*, New Studies in Biblical Theology, ed. D. A. Carson (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press/Apollos, 2016), 231.

[ii] Martin Luther, "A Simple Way to Pray, to Master Peter the Barber," in *Luther's Spirituality*, eds. Philip D. W. Krey and Peter D. S. Krey, Library of Christian Classics (New York: Paulist Press, 2007), 222.

[iii] Ibid.



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Don't Forsake the Public Reading of Scripture

Bible reading has become a largely private practice—something we do in our own personal “quiet time.” A few verses, or perhaps as much as a chapter, are often read before the sermon on Sunday morning. But when was the last time you heard multiple chapters or, better yet, a whole book of the Bible publicly read aloud from beginning to end?

This has become a relatively rare experience in the church. However, the public reading of Scripture is one of the most ancient, time-honored practices of God's people that is recorded in Scripture. It is a practice that is repeatedly described and commended at crucial moments in redemptive history, from the very beginning to the very end of the Bible. In fact, it is something that God's people are specifically commanded to do with devotion. As Paul told Timothy, his young pastoral protégé, “*Devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture*” (1 Timothy 4:13, emphasis added).

Public Scripture Reading in the Old Testament

The first place that we find the public reading of Scripture in the Bible is at the foot of Mount Sinai in Exodus 24. This is also arguably the first place that the corporate public worship of God is fully described in the Bible. Thus, it is not insignificant that it was in this key context, after the Israelites had been rescued from slavery in Egypt, that Moses “*took the Book of the Covenant and read it in the hearing of the people*” (Exodus 24:7).

Following this formative moment at the foot of Mount Sinai, where God established His covenant with Israel, we find numerous other places where this practice also appears. In Deuteronomy 31, the Lord commands the Israelites through Moses to read the entire law at the end of every seven years “*before all Israel in their hearing*” (v. 11). In other words, God's people were called to remember the covenant that they had entered into with the Lord, and an essential part of preserving this memory was the public reading of Scripture. Through this practice of reading, the identity of Israel as the covenant people of God was formed and renewed, and the people of this former slave-nation recommitted themselves to the service of the God who had saved them.

This kind of covenant renewal ceremony, in which the public reading of Scripture played a central role, is exactly what we find described after the Israelites first entered into the Promised Land. Joshua 8:34–35 records that Joshua “*read all the words of the law, the blessing and the curse, according to all that is written in the Book of the Law. There was not a word of all that Moses commanded that Joshua did not read before all the assembly of Israel, and the women, and the little ones, and the sojourners who lived among them.*”

This is the same practice we find described later in Israel's history after the law, which had been lost for a time, was found in the temple. When God's Word was rediscovered, King Josiah brought about reforms that began with the public reading of Scripture: “*Then the king sent, and all the elders of Judah and Jerusalem were gathered to him. And the king went up to the house of the Lord, and with him all the men of Judah and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem and the priests and the prophets, all the people, both small and great. And he read in their hearing all the words of the Book of the Covenant that had been found in the house of the Lord*” (2 Kings 23:1–2).

This is the same practice we find after God's people returned from exile under the leadership of Ezra and Nehemiah. They read for hours “from early morning until midday” on a special “wooden platform” that appears to have been the first “pulpit” in history (Nehemiah 8:3–4).



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Don't Forsake the Public Reading of Scripture - Cont'd

Public Scripture Reading in the New Testament

This story of the public reading of Scripture reaches a high point when Jesus famously launched His public ministry by standing up to read the Scriptures. *“And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up. And as was his custom, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and he stood up to read”* (Luke 4:16). When Jesus stood up to read in the synagogue at Nazareth, He was practicing the same ancient practice that began with Moses at the foot of Mount Sinai and continued through Joshua, Josiah, Ezra, and Nehemiah. And yet, when Jesus stood up to read, He could also say, *“Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing”* (Luke 4:21). Here was the Word not only read but made flesh.

As we continue to read the New Testament, it is clear that the practice of the public reading of Scripture is normative for the church. Consider Paul's words to the church at Colossae: *“And when this letter has been read among you, have it also read in the church of the Laodiceans; and see that you also read the letter from Laodicea”* (Colossians 4:16). Or, similarly, consider Paul's letter to the church at Thessalonica:

“I put you under oath before the Lord to have this letter read to all the brothers” (1 Thessalonians 5:27).

In fact, the last book in the Bible begins with this remarkable encouragement: *“Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear, and who keep what is written in it, for the time is near”* (Revelation 1:3).

Conclusion

The public reading of Scripture is an essential element of Christian worship for the covenant people of God. Indeed, it is arguably the most foundational element of worship because all other elements of worship (such as prayer, praise, preaching, and the sacraments) come in response to the hearing of God's Word. It is a great tragedy that this practice has fallen on hard times and, in some cases, has been largely replaced by the private reading of Scripture.

Private meditation on God's law cannot replace the public reading of Scripture. Especially in a society like ours, which has become increasingly characterized by “expressive individualism,” the church desperately needs to return to this ancient practice of spiritual formation in community. This was the practice of the early church, as Justin Martyr notes in his famous description of worship in the second century. *“And on the day called Sunday, all who live in the cities or in the country gather together in one place, and the memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read, as long as time permits; then, when the reader has ceased, the president verbally instructs, and exhorts to the imitation of these good things. Then we all rise together and pray”* (1 Apology 1.67; ANF 1:186).

May the covenant people of God be renewed as we return to this ancient practice and rediscover our true identity through the public reading of Scripture. Indeed, as Justin Martyr might say, may we be exhorted *“to the imitation of these good things.”* ~ *Reverend Justin Borger - associate pastor of St. Paul's Presbyterian Church in Orlando, Fla*



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The Joy of Sainthood

Every Christian is a Saint!

"To all the saints in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 1:1).

Many people think of saints as men and women who are especially holy or who have been canonized by an official church body. Usually only those who have been long dead and have extraordinary religious accomplishments to their credit qualify.

God, however, has a different perspective on sainthood. Paul called the Corinthian believers saints (1 Corinthians 1:2) then went on for many chapters correcting their sinful practices. He called the Roman, Ephesian, and Colossian believers saints but they weren't perfect either.

What then qualifies someone as a saint? The answer is in Philippians 1:1: *"To the saints in Christ Jesus"* (emphasis added). That's the criterion. Sainthood is not reserved for the spiritually elite. It belongs to every believer because every believer is in Christ Jesus.

If you love Christ you also are a saint. That might come as a surprise to those who know you best, but it's true nonetheless!

The hallmark of sainthood is holiness. In fact, the Greek word translated "saints" in Philippians 1:1 (hagios) literally means "holy ones." It is used throughout the New Testament to speak of anyone or anything that represents God's holiness: Christ as the Holy One of God, the Holy Spirit, the Holy Father, holy Scriptures, holy angels, holy brethren, and so on.

To God, you are holy and beloved in Christ (Colossians 3:12). You have received a saintly calling (1 Corinthians 1:2) and a saintly inheritance (Colossians 1:12). You have redemption, the forgiveness of sins (Colossians 1:14), and every other spiritual blessing (Ephesians 1:3).

With that privilege comes the responsibility of living a holy life. That's why Scripture admonishes you to present your body as a living and holy sacrifice (Romans 12:1) and to live in a manner worthy of your saintly status (Ephesians 5:3).

The power for godly living is the Holy Spirit, who indwells you. As you yield to Him through prayer and obedience to God's Word, the characteristics of a true saint become increasingly evident in your life. Make that your commitment today. ~ **Dr. John MacArthur**

"Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good! Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him! Oh, fear the Lord, you his saints, for those who fear him have no lack!" - Psalm 34:8-9 (ESV)



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Birthday and Anniversary Corner - February 2018

Birthdays

None to Report

Anniversaries

Jonathan and April F. (5)

Daniel and Diana K. (11)

Mike and Rose M. (17)



Please welcome into this world Samuel Godwin Hughes born to Nathan and Audrey (Joyner) Hughes. Samuel was born on January 27, 2018 at 6:42 pm and weighed in at 5.1 lbs. and was 18.5 long. The grandparents are Patrick and Rhonda Joyner and Baker and Jane Hughes. The Joyner and Hughes families live in Texas.



West Suffolk Leadership

The West Suffolk Epistle is a monthly publication of West Suffolk Baptist Church.

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Please submit information to Walt Lawrence by the second Sunday of each month preceding publication by e-mail, in person or at the church office. The editor reserves the right to edit for content or space. May the Father be glorified in every word.

Disclaimer: The views and opinions from the contributors to this newsletter do not necessarily reflect those of West Suffolk Baptist Church or it's leadership.