The Prayer We Thought We Knew, Part 6:
"For Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever."

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Scripture: Matthew 6:7-15

Pop quiz time. Can you name which gospel this final line of the Lord's Prayer comes from? Two hints: (1) The prayer is found in only Matthew's and Luke's gospels; (2) You just heard Matthew's version, and it wasn't there. Now, can you name where it comes from?

If you guessed "Luke," consider yourself set up by the appearance of binary answers. This line – a doxology – appears in *neither* gospel. Not in the earliest manuscripts, anyway. Someone added it later to Matthew's gospel, so the King James Version includes it, while modern versions leave it out and add a footnote explaining why.

What are we to do with a line from the prayer that Jesus taught us to pray, but apparently never uttered? Should we cut it out as a "fake doxology" or continue praying it? Before we decide, I suggest we consider when and why it seems to have been added.

One of the earliest Christian writings outside the New Testament, written in the late first or early second century, is the *Didache* – a practical guide for how the first generations of Christians were to worship and live. It recommends praying the Lord's Prayer three times a day. And it ends the Lord's Prayer with "*For yours is the power and the glory forever.*" (8:2) While "kingdom" shows up later, we know the full doxology was a common part of the prayer by the late Fourth Century. Probably much earlier.

What I find significant is that the doxology was not added by the later Church of the Empire as a triumphant proclamation, "For Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever." Rather, it was likely added by Christians living in a period when they refused to make sacrifices to the Roman emperor as a god, and sometimes paid for it with their lives.

Does the line sound any different to you in this context: "For *Thine* is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever?" On Christian lips under Rome, those words count as an act of defiance, sometimes prayed at real cost.

It is also a proclamation of hope. If the kingdom, power, and glory belong to the God of Jesus, not the Roman emperor, then as bleak as things might get, the early Christians reflect the hope that things would be different someday.

Some people worry that attributing the kingdom, power, and glory to God could lead to apathy – as if we don't need to work for change if God is in charge. Yet, that doesn't seem to be how the early church understood it. Quite the contrary. Knowing that, in the end, "love wins," seems to have encouraged them not only to stand firm in refusing to pay divine tribute to

Caesar, but also to rely on the power of love rather than violence, even when faced with the harshest persecution.

For instance, an early Christian leader named Tertullian wrote that his Christian siblings counted it "better to be slain than to slay" (*Apology* 37). A Christian martyr named Polycarp, the Bishop of Smyrna, famously had food served to the very men who came to arrest him (*Mart. Pol.* 7.2). Another early writer wrote of Christians that "they love all, and are persecuted by all … reviled, and they bless." (*Epistle to Diognetus* 5)

Why not bless those who revile you? If love wins in the end, you're wise to use loves tools, not those of the opposition. Set against this larger context, our doxology hardly seems apathetic. But it does sound costly.

In this respect, the doxology, while not original, is organically related to the beginning of the prayer: "Our Father …" Those two words show us the kind of love we are to show others. If God is Father, then the kind of love that wins in the end is like a parent's love, only a divine parent, without the issues we human parents have. And if God is not just "my" father, but "our" father, that makes all of us siblings. Not just us in this sanctuary, but those outside it, including those who might consider us their enemies.

The relationship the Lord's Prayer establishes between us has enormous implications for how we treat those with whom we are in conflict. If you have two children and one unjustly hits the other, do you as a loving parent hope the unjust sibling gets beaten up? You may hope that child learns a lesson, but wouldn't you prefer that the child recognizes the injustice, apologizes, and makes amends without incurring injury? How likely is an apology or amends being made if the wronged child smacks him back? Likely, you would be proud of an injured child who found a way to prevent further harm and showed enough brotherly or sisterly love to encourage the aggressor to recognize the wrong done and seek to right the situation.

I think this is exactly what many early Christians believed the Lord's Prayer implied – especially when buttressed by Jesus's other commandments, like "in everything do to others as you would have them do to you" in the chapter that follows the Lord's Prayer (Matthew 7:12), or "love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven" in the chapter that precedes it (Matthew 5:44-45).

For nearly three centuries, the record of the persecuted church is almost entirely free of retaliation. In fact, the only instance of Christians taking up arms against their persecutors is when Peter cut off the ear of a soldier when they came to arrest Jesus. And Jesus made his disapproval clear.) Even smashing pagan idols provoked the church's disapproval, as the Synod of Elvira made clear in around 305 CE.

Things would change after Christianity became the Empire's religion. But that doesn't erase the fact that when Christians lacked coercive imperial power, some of their most remarkable witnesses responded to violence without returning it. Love won out over violence. It won the hearts of the persecuted, keeping them from hating their persecutors. And it won the hearts of many who watched brutality met with fierce, fiery love and decided to join the Christians.

That love even won over a number of the persecutors themselves – like Basilides, a soldier who protected a young martyr named Potamiaena as she made her way through an angry mob to the site of her execution. She promised to pray for him. Afterward, he declared himself a Christian and was beheaded.

Gandhi called this kind of energy Satyagraha. Soul force. The force of active non-violent resistance that appeals to the highest qualities of both the oppressor and the oppressed.

It's the force that seemed at work in 6-year-old Ruby Bridges, the first Black child to integrate William Frantz Elementary School in New Orleans in 1960. Every teacher but one refused to teach while she was enrolled, and many White parents withdrew their children. Each day, Ruby was escorted to school by federal marshals, passing a mob that included a woman who daily threatened to poison her, and another holding a Black baby doll in a small coffin. Yet one of the marshals would later recall that she never shed a tear and walked with courage. A young psychiatrist named Robert Coles witnessed Ruby's walk through the mob and volunteered to meet with Ruby weekly.

When her teacher told Coles that Ruby regularly moved her lips as she walked, as if talking to someone, Coles asked who she was talking to and what she was saying. As Coles recounts, Ruby replied that she was praying. Each day, she prayed, "Please, dear God, forgive them, because they don't know what they're doing."

Most of us aren't six-year-olds praying for the mob. Our hands are better practiced at the opposite: resentment, contempt, wanting "them" to get what's coming to them – myself included. I wonder what the future of our country would look like if even just those of us who claim to follow Jesus prayed "Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory" as a conviction, not just a prayer. A conviction to love our enemies as siblings, and therefore practice active, non-violent resistance not as a strategy, but a commitment. A commitment to the *Way of Life* that Jesus himself practiced and required of anyone acting in his name.

MUSICAL INTERLUDE: "Equally Skilled," by Jon Foreman. (Text drawn from Micah 7:1-9)

How miserable I am, I feel like a fruit-picker who arrived here after the harvest
There's nothing here at all, nothing at all here that could placate my hunger
The godly people are all gone, there's not one honest soul left alive here on the planet
We're all murderers and thieves, setting traps here for even our brothers
And both of our hands are equally skilled
At doing evil, equally skilled
At bribing the judges, equally skilled
At perverting justice
Both of our hands
Both of our hands
The day of justice comes, and is even now swiftly arriving
Don't trust anyone at all, not your best friend or even your wife
For the son hates the father, the daughter despises even her mother
Look, your enemies arrive right in the room of your very household
And both of their hands are equally skilled

At doing evil, equally skilled
At bribing the judges, equally skilled
At perverting justice
Both of their hands
Both of their hands
No, don't gloat over me, though I fall, though I fall, I will rise again
Though I sit here in darkness, the Lord, the Lord alone, he will be my light
I will be patient as the Lord punishes me for the wrongs I've done against him
After that, he'll take my case, bringing me to light and the justice for all I have suffered
And both of his hands
Are equally skilled
At ruining evil, equally skilled
At judging the judges, equally skilled
Administering justice
Both of his hands
Both of his hands
Are equally skilled
At showing me mercy, equally skilled
At loving the loveless, equally skilled
Administering justice
Both of his hands
Both of his hands

As a way of wrapping up both this sermon and this series, I invite you to pray the Lord's Prayer with me in a particular way. As many of you are aware, I've regularly practiced some form of meditation for nearly 50 years, and a form known as Four Bows for the last ten. While I developed Four Bows under the influence of not just Christianity but Judaism, Islam, and Buddhism, I did not become aware of a striking connection between the Four Bows and the Lord's Prayer until a few weeks ago. We won't do a full meditation right now, but I'll point out the connections between Four Bows and the Lord's Prayer as we pray through it.

Let us pray the first line of the Lord's Prayer: Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.

Bow One: We bow internally to you, O God, as we give thanks for the blessings we've received over the last twenty-four hours …

Let us pray the next line of the Lord's Prayer: Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Bow Two: We bow more deeply before you, internally, as we pray for someone we know who is hurting right now, or someone with whom we've been in conflict, asking that your heavenly Realm be made manifest in their lives on earth …

Let us pray the next two lines of the Lord's Prayer: Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

Bow Three: We bow now, as if on our knees, as we pray for what we ourselves need this coming day in order to live our prayer, not just pray it …

Let us pray the final line of the Lord's Prayer: For Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever.

Bow Four: We bow again more deeply, as if prostrate before you, letting go of our need for control, letting go of our fear or resentment toward those who seek to control us, surrendering ourselves to your loving presence and guidance …

Amen.

Questions for Individual Reflection and Small Group Conversation

1. Power That Belongs to God. Praying "Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory" reminds us that ultimate power does not belong to us—or to those with whom we are in conflict.

How might believing that power ultimately belongs to God change the way you respond when you encounter injustice or conflict?

2. Seeing an Enemy as a Sibling. If God is truly "Our Father," then even those who oppose us remain members of the same human family. This does not mean tolerating injustice, but it may change how we resist it.

Think of someone or some group whose actions you strongly oppose. What would it mean to resist what is wrong while still seeking their transformation rather than their defeat?

3. Surrendering What Is Mine. The final movement of the Four Bows Meditation corresponds to the doxology: letting go of our need for control and surrendering ourselves to the presence and guidance of God.

What are you presently holding onto that might feel different if you could genuinely pray, "Thine—not mine—is the kingdom, the power, and the glory"?