Matthew 6:9-13 - An Exegesis

**Introduction**

In today’s societyPrayer is the main focus of the majority of world religions, Christianity being one of them. From the early days of Jesus’s ministry, Jesus would point out the virtues of prayer, often taking the time to talk alone with the Father for days at a time. There are many forms of Prayer it can be in private or public, in times of fasting or times of personal reflection. Jesus desired to help his disciples communicate more openly with the Father, and to educate future followers, on how to do the same. Jesus spent a great deal of time speaking on the topic of prayer. A perfect rendition is the Lord’s Prayer, forming the foundation of Matthew 6:9-13. The Lord’s Prayer is likely the most commonly recited prayer throughout Christianity, some theologians fear its true meaning, context, and relevance have been lost through the generations. They argue the prayer is not supposed to be a simple prayer to be recited by routine, the prayer is designed to teach Jesus’s disciples, and followers about not only the importance of prayer itself, but also of the need for developing a spirit of forgiveness and of oneness with God the Father. With this in mind, it is important to look at the context of the prayer to receive commentary on its importance, and to look at the theological implications that still apply to all Christians to this day.

**Literary Criticism**

**Context**

The focus of this particular prayer seems to be on the continued teaching that Jesus Christ was doing in regard to how his disciples should conduct prayer. In the beginning of the chapter verses 1 cautions against practicing righteousness in front of others. Later verses speak of giving to the needy in secret. Verses 5 and 6, points out the need to pray in private behind closed doors. Jesus pointed out to by praying in the open he points out to the disciples that much of their prayer seemed to be self-centered, as opposed to centered on God. This can be seen in the detail effort that Jesus is putting forth to us in verses 9-13, Jesus wanted the disciples to realize several things, first and foremost, the Lord’s name is to be respected. Verse nine reminds us, of the fact, that His name is hallowed. This is deference to verse nine, which in some cases followers referencing their own name as they pray. In addition, Jesus makes the shift in this passage towards a more public Father, with Him being addresses in verse nine as ‘Our Father’, as opposed to the urging us to ‘pray to your Father’ in verse 6 (O’Collins 360).

The Lord’s Prayer is a change from the common prayers of the Old Testament. While many people today speak the Lord’s Prayer at public gatherings, such as a fellowship meeting, and other events this seem to take away from the context in which Matthew 6:9-13 was written. The prayer is designed to be more of an example for how we should pray, rather than what we should say while praying. Again, focusing on our needs, Jesus uses this particular block teaching to ask us to take time to reflect on the needs of the Father. It is a move, again, away from self-centeredness, and towards a truly God-centered mindset that can enable followers to tap into what Jesus desires and wants for our life and for the world in general.

**Form Criticism**

As mentioned earlier, in the beginning of Chapter 6, Jesus cautioned the disciples against praying as the pagans do. In fact, in verses seven and eight, he urges followers to ‘not be like them’, which is largely telling them to not be arrogant and self-righteous. This begins with a focus in this teaching for followers to try as hard as they can to not just say words while praying simply for words sake. In fact, the Lord’s Prayer, consists of 57 words in the Greek, and only 54 words in many English translations. Upon further examination, Jesus teaches us that lengthy prayer are acceptable, as long as the purpose of prayer is about making God the center of it all. Jesus compared this to the fact that too many pagan prayers, were lengthy in words in an effort to try to manipulate God into a certain action. As we know, God cannot be manipulated and, as such, lengthy prayers do little except to draw attention to the person praying, the time taken to conduct the lengthy prayer limits the actual attention actually given to God. Recently arguments have surfaced and compared our use of the Lord’s Prayer in today’s society borders on falling back into the habit the Pagans themselves employed. This is based on the reality that followers today all too often treat the Lord’s Prayer as a common prayer, and pay little attention to what is actually being said (O’Collins 360). This is actually what Jesus was attempting to teach with this prayer as he was warning his disciples to be more direct and alert in their prayer. Jesus taught each word that is directed to the Father should have meaning and should be spoken from the heart, with a spirit of worship and a passion for God the Father. However merely saying the Lord’s Prayer in multiple forms, is paramount to simply speaking words without any meaning, just as Jesus taught that the pagans were guilty of.

The form of the Lord’s Prayer, as directed in Matthew 6:9-13, is focused on the sacredness of God’s name. Again, this seems to be Jesus imploring his followers to stop speaking up words of prayer just for words sake. Even the mere mention of the Father should be measured, and should not necessarily be used over and over again in prayer. One of the biggest mistakes is that some believed that the more time the name of the Father was lifted up or spoken within a prayer, the greater the possibility that God would actually receive the prayer and issue a favorable response. This is another point where another warning is potentially being issued by Jesus to stop using the name of God just to be heard. Jesus is teaching us that God is our Father and should be spoken to in that manor when we pray. In a future scripture (Matthew 26:39-44), Jesus actually questions his disciples about keeping watch, then he calls upon his Father and asks for the cup to be taken away and that the Fathers will be done. (O’Collins 360).

**Structure**

The Lord’s Prayer forms a basis for Matthew 6:9-13. The structure of the prayer begins with multiple benedictions that includes various components of the believer’s life. The first part of the prayer deals with the address, which is to get the attention of God the Father. This is a standard part of prayer that notifies God his followers are entering into a spirit of self-meditation and wish to speak with him alone. This followed up with three equally important sentences that teach the believer to acknowledge the name, kingdom, and will of the father. This is an apparent effort to center the prayer on God and his will for his people from the beginning, rather than jumping right into body of the prayer. In contrast, the next three sentences of the prayer offer structure and revolves around human needs. These include, in order, forgiveness of trespassers, and not leading followers into temptation, and then the deliverance from evil (Viviano 342).

**Redaction Criticism**

This prayer itself, while being used as a model offered to the disciples, is much more than that. There is instruction in this prayer as to the being of the Father, as contained in the way that we are to address him in prayer. At this point in his teaching, Jesus Christ appears to now be inviting followers to address God the Father in much the same way as he did while he was on earth. This can be found as well in a similar scripture found in Mark 14:36. As a result of this, Jesus is making it clear that all true believers can have just an intimate of a relationship with God as Jesus himself enjoys. In this sense, God is to be addresses as ‘The Father’, and relates prayer as being a deeply personal time of reflection, which again is the opposite to the prayers said by the pagans, which largely contained arrogant words.

When we address God as ‘Our Father’, it also implies a sense of individualism in fact, upon careful review of verses 9-13, we take notice that in these verses Jesus does not employ the use of any singular pronouns (Viviano 343). Verses 9-13 is all about the community of believers and their fellowship and relationship with God the Father. This is to be the case even when praying in private, as the needs of the community of believers should come before the specific needs of the individual. Jesus appears to be reminding us that we should not have selfish desires when we pray, as payer should be seen as a special time, and part of our responsibility, to speak on behalf of all of followers while praying to God. As such, we should use the same terminology in our prayers, as modeled by Jesus himself, when addressing God the Father (Viviano 344). In essence, Jesus uses this teaching to move believers away from pagan teaching and towards a deeper understanding that there is no room for individualism within the Kingdom of God. Also, we, as believers, should isolate ourselves in pursuit of selfish desires, but rather we should constantly remain aware that we are all a part of one community.

Jesus also uses this prayer to remind his disciples that their Father is in heaven. While this may seem like simple logic, the theological significance very deep. Jesus appeared to use a portion of this teaching to challenge the views that the disciples had of God. Some scholars have referred to the sense of divine power being in line with divine fatherhood at the same time. While Jesus firmly states that every believer can have an intimate and personal relationship with God the Father, one must also be mindful that the Father is divine and is master overall of the heaven and the earth. This parallels with Matthew 11:25, where Jesus describes his own ascription of who he addresses as Father, and further speaks of his father being Lord of the heaven and earth. Jesus is using this time again to caution the disciples from gaining the wrong idea about their relationship with the Father, particularly in terms of their familiarity and level of comfort with God himself. This is a relationship that should not be approached with overconfidence and a lack of humbleness (Viviano 347).

**Key Words**

We must begin by looking at the significance of the words ‘The Kingdom of God’. This comes from the Greek word basileia, and is meant to imply God’s Rule’ (Viviano 349). Beginning back in Matthew Chapter 4, Jesus describes the reality that anything that is God’s by right, becomes his in reality as well. In essence, everything on earth is subjects to God’s rule and becomes part of his kingdom. ‘Thy Kingdom Come’ are also key words in the prayer and offer support to the teaching of Jesus in terms of how the disciples were to pray and prepare for the first advent to be consummated in the person and lordship of Jesus Christ himself. In addition, Jesus issues the order that we are to pray ‘Thy will be done’ as a means of establishing the reality that God’s Rule is final. When we do this we acknowledge that we want his will to be done on earth, exactly as it is in heaven, without any interference from us. Finally, the words ‘hallowed be thy name’ is a final acknowledge that God is truly the ruler over all. This is a universal order and establishes Gods authority as an omnipotent creator and designer, and takes us back to Old Testament teachings that remind us that there are no other gods but God. In remarking about this particular phrasing and tenses used by Jesus, Birger Gerhardsson remarked that, “This tense is chosen to denote God’s resolute intervention at the end of history, and is his final, eschatological act of redemption” (Byargeon 353**)**

**Theological Analysis**

**Relationship with God**

The Lord’s Prayer is almost entirely a teaching about how Jesus wants us to view our personal relationship with the Father. He is an intimate being that desires us to commune with Him often. He also wants us to arrive at the conclusion that God alone is our sustainer and provider. This can be seen in verse 11, which states simply ‘Give us today our daily bread’ (v. 11, NIV). To understand the significance of this passage from a theological perspective, perhaps the best place to begin is by going back to the Greek. This is a petition to God, espousing the use of the word epiousios (Viviano 349). This particular word only appears two times in the entire New Testament, with the other being in Luke’s narrative of this same teaching in Luke 11:3. Many commentators believe the significance is that Jesus is already looking toward tomorrow, or His second coming, in asking his follower to be mindful of the need for prayer, particularly in terms of look forward to the end. As such, He encourages believers to take the Bread of Life now so that we can appreciate and understand the magnificence of the Kingdom to come (Viviano 349).

**Question Answered in Original Community**

It is important to remember that the Lord’s Prayer is a teaching given by Jesus that was designed to meet the people where they were at the particular time in Christendom. With Jesus still physically among them, it possible to teach the disciples about the ways in which God the Father would like to commune with his followers. It is a personal relationship that He desires, where believers are seen and heard acknowledging the sovereignty of God, His omnipotence, and the reality that He is the supreme ruler over all. Jesus makes this apparent to us, however, in that, while we should be in awe of all the God the Father is, we should also be mindful of the fact that he still cares about us and our needs. This is contrast to the prayers of the pagans, who spent most of their time praying using big words and focusing on self interests. Jesus is telling us that God can not and will not be forced into action, so no amount of haughty words is going to thrust Him into doing so.

In his desire to help His disciples communicate more openly with the Father, and to educate future followers of the same, Jesus spent a great deal of time speaking on the topic of prayer. One such exhortation is in the form of the Lord’s Prayer, forming the foundation of Matthew 6:9-13. While this is likely the most commonly recited prayer throughout Christendom, it is feared that its true meaning, context, and relevance have been lost through the generations. Not being meant to be a simple prayer to be recited by rote, it is designed to teach followers about not only importance of prayer itself, but also of the need for developing a spirit of forgiveness and of oneness with God the Father.

Matthew 6:9-13 does focus on this historicity of prayer. Jesus does take the disciples through various ways that individuals have prayed in the past, and then He draws them into a new type of prayer that is designed to cover them while he ascends back into heaven for a season. By covering various aspects of the divinity and supremacy of God the Father, and then moving into areas of personal supplication, believers to this day have a mechanism by which they can approach their creator from the true perspective of Him being their Father. It is a radical change in the way we pray and approach God. The only caution is not to get caught up in the ritualistic nature of the Lords Prayer, but rather to embrace the truly teaching that we are to pray in a God centered manner, as opposed to a self-centered way.

Works Cited

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