

# The Preaching of the Word at Williamsburg Presbyterian Church

215 Richmond Road, Williamsburg, Virginia 23185-3534

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**“For the kingdom, the power, and the glory  
are yours now and forever. Amen.”**

**Concluding a Sermon Series on The Lord’s Prayer**

**The Gospel according to St. Matthew 6:5-15**

**The First Book of Chronicles 29:10-13**

**The 13<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time**

**June 26/27, 2010**

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People complained to the elders of the church about my preaching. Their complaints were two: I talked to much about God and I preached from the Bible too much. I have always found that amusing since that is what Presbyterian ministers are trained to do, but for those who are irritated because I preach too much from the Bible, this sermon is for you. It is not from the Bible. I am preaching about what the Bible does not say even though we expect it to say it.

As we moved through this series of sermons on the Lord’s Prayer you may have noticed that when we read the Lord’s Prayer from the gospel according to Matthew it seems to end with a thud: “do not bring us to the time of trial, but rescue us from the evil one,” and that’s it. No more, it ends right there. It seems incomplete; something else seems called for.

We’re used to saying, “For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.” What about that? What happened to that ending?

There it is, down in the footnotes at the bottom of the page in the pew bibles: “Other ancient authorities add, in some form, ‘For the kingdom and the power and the glory are yours forever. Amen.’” We say it frequently. It’s just tough to find in our Bibles: it’s down in the margin.

Probably no one has spent more time and energy trying to recover and understand the exact words that Jesus spoke in the Aramaic language than the German biblical scholar Joachim Jeremias. With regard to this dilemma of the ending of the Lord’s Prayer, he says, the explanation is simple.<sup>1</sup>

We are quite right in our intuition that the prayer seems to run out of steam after “rescue us from the evil one” or “deliver us from evil.” That doesn’t seem the right way to end the prayer to us and we are right. Moreover, every Palestinian Jew of Jesus’ time, Jeremias says, would have known that’s no way to end the prayer. They would have known also that they were expected to close the prayer with “a seal,” a statement of praise and adoration, a doxology.

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<sup>1</sup> Joachim Jeremias, **The Prayers of Jesus** (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1964), p. 106-7.

Just as we customarily seal our prayers with “through Jesus Christ our Lord” or “to the glory of your name,” so the Lord’s prayer also assumes “a seal,” an expression of doxology, of pure praise.

Just as the Lord’s Prayer begins with praise, praying, “hallowed be your name,” so the prayer should end with praise, freely composed by whoever it was who was doing the praying. A certain elegance and eloquence with such freely spoken doxology was admired and respected. It was said that “Every day R[abbi] Abbahu spoke a new benediction.”<sup>2</sup>

Jesus was not giving the disciples a prayer to memorize word by word, a prayer to repeat by rote. He was teaching his disciples how to pray. It was not a matter of getting the words right as if this were one of those magical incantations out of the world of Harry Potter. In the gospel of Luke, as we shall see in two weeks, the Lord’s prayer has slightly different words—the same shape, the same petitions—but slightly different words.

Jesus gave the prayer as a gift and trusted his disciples to pray it as best they could. Jesus also trusted his disciples to “seal” the prayer appropriately and to find words of praise and doxology to conclude the prayer. Each person was expected to do it in her or his own particular way.

Ending the prayer was a freestyle event, and that was fine for the disciples. It didn’t matter how you ended the prayer until it came to common worship when all the people gathered together.

You can imagine it, if you will: after we pray “deliver us from evil” the prayer dissolves into a cacophony of different voices, each person concluding the prayer as seems best. You’ve seen moments like this at weddings and funerals when we Presbyterians have to pause for a beat twice in the Lord’s in order to let the Episcopalians and Baptists catch up with their “trespasses.”

I can imagine the one presiding in worship pausing at the end of the Lord’s Prayer, looking around the room as if to ask, “is everyone through?”

So the worship of the church would not disintegrate into a chaos of individual mutterings, the church agree that these words or others like them would “seal” the prayer for everyone: “For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and for ever. Amen.” In some ancient manuscripts we find these words included but they are not Jesus’ words and Matthew did not originally include these words.

They’re not in the Bible. They’re included in the Bible because they’re not in the Bible but because some people think they are. It’s awkward to explain. They’re not Jesus’ words and not Matthew’s words, they’re our words of praise and doxology, words filled with the grammar of surrender and adoration.

These words and this phrase is not in the Bible, we have to admit that and think through that, but we also cannot help but saying they are in the Bible because the Bible is filled with language like this, a language that we hear no where else except in the Bible and those places our Scriptures touch, like this service of worship.

Did you hear David’s words from First Chronicles?

Yours, O LORD, are the greatness, the power, the glory, the victory, and the majesty; for all that is in the heavens and on the earth is yours; yours is the kingdom, O LORD, and you are exalted as head above all. Riches and honor come from you, and you rule over all. In your hand are power and might; and it is

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<sup>2</sup> Ulrich Luz, **Matthew 1-7**, Hermeneia Commentary (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), p. 232n.

in your hand to make great and to give strength to all. And now, our God, we give thanks to you and praise your glorious name. David is praying, isn't he? But he doesn't pray for anything. He doesn't ask anything. Instead he speaks to God about God: "Yours... are the greatness, the power, the glory, the victory, and the majesty." Presumably the LORD knows this. This is not new information being visited upon the Almighty and Holy One. So what is David doing?

Some time ago I visited a young couple at the hospital, and here she was, their first child, not twenty four hours old. For a few moments the mother was indisposed and so this newly minted father and I were given some time to sit with his enchanting little fairly daughter and talk. We talked about the usual things: did the deliver go okay?; how is mom doing? After exchanging such pleasantries we fell silent, just watching this little miracle who had come to visit. Dredging around in our silence words arose to begin to inventory this treasure. "Five perfect fingers," he said, playing with her hand. "Those perfect fingernails," I added. She squirmed as we scrutinized her. "She kicks," her aunt added, and then "those little legs."

To read this back to you in transcription sounds maudlin and perfectly ridiculous. "Five perfect fingernails"—well what did I expect, talons?

There, in that hallowed space where life is born in great and terrible struggle, we were speaking the language of wonderment, the only dialect appropriate to such a moment. There are seasons in our souls when no other language will do.

Lovers know this. Listen to the language of lovers. What they say may be perfectly mindless or endlessly repetitive:

I **love** you. I love **you**. I love you! I love you... I could go on but you and I both know this conversation is not going anywhere... or where it's going we're not going to follow right now. There is nothing else to say, nothing else that can be said, but even the saying of it cannot exhaust their feeling or explain fully what they wish they could say.

It's the language of love. Ira Gershwin had it right "'S wonderful! 'S marvelous—'S awful nice? 'S paradise.'<sup>3</sup> The words are a cheerful sort of nonsense but we know exactly what they mean. It's the language of love and devotion.

There are things so marvelous, so sublime, so heart-rending that cannot find a way of speaking of them with our ordinary grammar. We cannot speak of them or explain them but only point to them with a language of adoration.

You would think that you could find in the Bible a simple, rational and clear explanation of what God has accomplished in Jesus Christ. That doesn't seem an unreasonable thing to ask. The Apostle Paul would appear to be a likely candidate to write that explanation, and as a matter of fact, he tries to do that in the middle of his epistle to the Romans. Paul spends three chapters and eighty five verses working at making it all clear and logical before surrenders to the mystery and dissolve into pure adoration:

O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God!  
How unsearchable are God's judgments  
and how inscrutable God's ways!...  
For from God and through God and to God are all things.  
To God be the glory forever. Amen. (Romans 8:33, 36)

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<sup>3</sup> "'S Wonderful," by Ira Gershwin, in Robert Gottlieb and Robert Kimball, **Reading Lyrics** (New York: Pantheon, 2000), p. 305)

The language of adoration won't tell you how to change a flat tire or do your income tax return or contribute to rocket science but there are times when no other language will do.

You hold an infant in your arms and you can say every reasonable, rational thing you can think of saying but in your heart you sense there is yet more to be said, and that more is to be said heavenwards, "Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever."

You stand in the Intensive Care Unit and the doctors and nurses and technicians are speaking that language they speak, as strange to us as Urdu. It's hard to know what to say in such a place and at such a time, but is always correct to say, "Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever."

It's just about the last thing we say at a funeral service. We pray all the prayers and we hear the promises of God read and the preacher says whatever can be said in the face of death and terrible loss and at the end we pray the Lord's Prayer and end it, surrendering those we love, surrendering our own loss and vulnerability to the One with whom we have to do: "Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever."

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