



Minutes With Messiah

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On the Road

Hurting into a cave of blackness at 75 miles per hour, with only light to see a short way ahead. Doesn't sound like a lot of fun; in fact it sounds downright dangerous. Well, maybe a little less dangerous because it was on I-40 in a mini-van, but scary at times, nonetheless. This was my experience recently, driving back to Albuquerque from Wichita. Headlights can seem pitifully inadequate, sometimes. You have to trust your headlights, your vision, and that the road will not turn unexpectedly.

That sounds a lot like our Christian journey. We are hurtling into the unknown at breakneck speed. We have to trust our headlights, our vision, and that the road will not turn.

That last one is easy. If we are on the "straight and narrow" we can trust the road. We may encounter obstacles, but we are promised that the road will not turn unexpectedly. Jesus said, "I am the path, the truth, and the life." (John 14:6) All four gospel writers made a point of mentioning that John came before Jesus to "make his paths straight." As long as we are following Jesus, and not steering on our own, our road will be straight.

We have to trust our headlights. Therein lies the problem. Some people think they are on the right road, but have changed roads because their lights went out. They tried to travel through life "by their own lights," as the old saying goes. Jesus warned against that. In his discussion of where our treasure should be, he said, "The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light. But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!" (Matt 6:22-23) How many people travel using their own eyes! But we have a light that will not go out. Jesus came "To give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace." (Lk 1:79) John, the apostle, was particularly fond of reminding us that Jesus is our light. He says so at the start of his gospel (John 1:5), and at the end of his revelation (Rev

22:5). In one of his letters he even talks about the light on our road.

God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin. (1 Jn 1:5-7)

If we trust our Jesus headlight, we have fellowship with God. We can hurtle into the dark cave of our future knowing that we have God beside us to protect us.

Finally, we have to trust our vision. We have to trust our faith; to trust our trust. Many of us don't trust our faith as much as we should. We agree with the man who said to Jesus, "I believe. Help thou mine unbelief." (Mk 9:24) We want to trust God, but can't let go of our own control. Of course, that attitude has gotten people in trouble. "Some trust in chariots, and some in horses: but we will remember the name of the LORD our God. They are brought down and fallen: but we are risen, and stand upright." (Ps 20:7-8) If we don't trust that we have enough faith, how can we increase it? Paul had the prescription. "So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." (Rom 10:17) To increase our faith, we have to spend time in God's word. Less time in the Word; less faith.

We may be hurtling into a black cave at 75 miles per hour, but we need not be afraid. We have faith and light, and the road will not turn. Unlike on I-40, we can sit back and relax. We will reach our destination safely.

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The Lord's Prayer, Part 1

In Matthew 6:9-13 we read what has been called "The Lord's Prayer," or by some "the model prayer." It may be the best known passage in the New Testament, and almost as well known as the 23rd Psalm. So much has been written or preached about this passage that one is not likely to add to the knowledge of it, but sometimes it doesn't hurt to remind ourselves of things we may already know.

Prayer or Model?

Before analyzing the wording of the prayer itself, it is important to look at prayer in general. Most people who prefer to call this the model prayer do so because they object to prayers that are not spontaneous. They will sometimes point out that Jesus didn't say "pray this prayer," but "after this manner pray." Ignoring that the proper translation is simply, "pray thus" (which could easily mean pray these words), some say that he is saying to use the prayer merely as a model. This also ignores Luke's version (Lk 11:2), in which Jesus says, "When you pray, say..."

In fact, in Luke's account the disciples come to Jesus and ask him to teach them to pray, "as John taught his disciples." It was common at that time for a rabbi to teach his disciples a specific prayer or prayers, many of which have become the liturgy of Judaism to this day. The disciples are saying that John followed the usual procedure for a teacher, and asking Jesus to do the same. They are probably not saying that they don't know how

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to pray, for every Jew would have known many of the common blessings and prayers. They are probably asking for a new prayer, rather than saying that they don't know how to pray at all.

From before the time of Christ there were certain set prayers that all Jews prayed at given times of the day. Some of these are seen in the Passover *seder*, the order of the Passover service. That Jesus probably knew these prayers, and may even have repeated them himself, can be seen in the accounts of the establishment of the Lord's Supper.

And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and said, Take this, and divide it among yourselves: For I say unto you, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine, until the kingdom of God shall come. And he took bread, and gave thanks, and brake it, and gave unto them, saying, This is my body which is given for you: this do in remembrance of me. Likewise also the cup after supper, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you. (Lk 22:17-20)

Luke's account shows that Jesus was following the *seder* because he blessed more than one cup. If he was doing so, he possibly followed it even to the point of saying the standardized blessings for wine and bread. This is not to say that he said them without meaning. The greatest rabbis of his time had said that anyone saying the blessings without understanding or meaning them was the same as not having said them at all. Even today, when an observant Jew recites the blessings and prayers the formality of them is seen as a means of focusing his thoughts on God, and may add his own personal prayers to the memorized/written ones.

It is possible that Jesus was giving just such a prayer to his disciples to focus their prayers. Whether it was to be prayed as given or not, it does serve as a model for what should be included in our own prayers.

Addressing God

The opening of the Lord's Prayer focuses, properly, on God. "Our father, who is in heaven, holy is your name." Even in this Jesus roughly follows the standard format for a Jewish blessing. A blessing, usually a short prayer on a given occasion or circumstance (a blessing comes before food, a prayer after the meal), generally starts with an address to God. Most blessings in the hundreds that are prescribed for the Jewish people begin with the same phrases: "Blessed art Thou, O Lord our God, King of the Universe, who ...". This is very similar to the way Jesus begins this prayer.

When we address a personal letter there are usually three elements in the address. There is the name, the street (location), and the city and state. In Jesus' prayer he also includes three elements in the address, the same three as in the standard blessing. He address the who and where and the status.

The who, of course is God. Unlike the more formal "O Lord our God," though, he personalizes God as "Our father." This is a radical shift. His disciples

were used to praying to “the God of our father, Abraham.” God was dissociated from them by a whole generation. Their father was Abraham. God was Abraham’s God, and only by extension from that was he their God. Jesus, on the other hand, removes Abraham from the equation. God is now “our father” in place of Abraham. Even “our father, Abraham” was at least forty-two generations prior (Matt 1:17) But God is no longer far from us in time or in relationship. He is “our father,” at once generationally and temporally immediate. God is not some grandfather in a long beard who lives somewhere three generation gaps away. He is “our father.” We can go to him and know that he lives where we live; he is current with our affairs. We may not understand what a radical change this may have been for the disciples, but we can understand sometimes, even in our own lives, how easy it is to put God in another time or generation. Even we sometimes have difficulty praying to “our father” and believing it.

The street address of God is heaven. Even this may have contained a subtle shift in understanding. When one thinks of “King of the Universe,” one almost necessarily thinks of God as in charge of the physical. God becomes the controller of physical things, and the bestower of physical blessings. And he is that. There is nothing intrinsically wrong with seeing God in this light. There is a difference, though, in seeing him as “in heaven.” This puts God in his spiritual address. When we come before God it is sometimes important to understand that he is not just a “super President,” but is also able to give us “all spiritual blessings” (Eph 1:3). It reminds us that there is a spiritual realm, and, one hopes, it reminds us that we are as much or more a part of that spiritual realm as of this physical one. By addressing God in heaven we acknowledge him as king of more than the universe—as king of both universes.

Of course, the danger in addressing God in heaven is that we place him only there. We think of the spiritual realm as being far away from us, and God as being separated from us by “the firmament” of Genesis 1:6-8. In reality we should be thinking of God as nearer if he is in heaven, rather than farther away from us. The physical world is always outside us. Our houses, our things, our world are external to us, and only become internal for a short time. But the spiritual realm, rather than being far from us or external to us, is within us. It is as close as our own soul, and God lives within us. The reality of God being in heaven is that “but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God.” (Rom 8:26-27) God in heaven is as close as our own spirit, for if we are his children his spirit is within us (Eph 3:16-17).

God’s status, the third aspect of his address, is expressed by the words blessed or hallowed (holy). This is an understanding on our part that even though we are made in God’s image, we are not on a par with God. Some people own copies of the famous bust of Beethoven. None would imagine that the statuette was a full representation of the personality of “the master.” So we also acknowledge that we are a poor imitation of God. Not poor in the sense of faulty, but in the sense of incomplete. We are in God’s image, but we know that he is the substance of the shadow that is us. The only blessedness or holiness that we may obtain comes from God. “Ye shall be holy, for I am holy.” (Lev 11:44-45)

In essence, addressing God as blessed or holy implies our lack of those qualities. By addressing God in this way we are bowing our heads to the ground at

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the foot of his throne. We have acknowledged him as our father, but also as a king. By blessing his name we come before him as the subjects of an earthly king come. Even a prince may be required to bow before his father, the king. So also we bow before our father, because his is also our king. We come, though, as the prince would come, not in fear but confidence, while still acknowledging the power and majesty of the king.

Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, By a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh; And having an high priest over the house of God; Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water. (Heb 10:19-22)

We come to God acknowledging our weakness, but with the confidence that he has granted us his holiness. We come not as peasants, but as the kindred of the prince, His son.

If the Lord wills, subsequent issues will continue to look at the Lord’s Prayer. A letter is more than just the address and salutation. So is this prayer; and so should be all of our prayers.

ISGOD4U

Not long ago I came up behind a car bearing a New Mexico personalized license plate which read ISGOD4U. My first reaction was to wonder whether the real question should not be RU4GOD. After further reflection, though, I realized that both concepts would be scriptural.

My initial thought was based on the concept that, although God continues to love his creation at all times, not all men will be saved because they will refuse to follow him. I thought of the incident of the golden calf, when Moses asked, “Who is on the Lord’s side?” (Ex 32:22) If we are not, like the Levitical tribe, on the Lord’s side then God can never be for us. Jesus said there is no middle ground. “He that is not against us is for us.” (Lk 9:50)

Joshua put it simply. “And if it seem evil unto you to serve the LORD, choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.” (Josh 24:15) If he had a chariot it might carry the license plate IAM4GOD. Joshua understood that God will not forsake those who trust in him.

Paul had the same idea. Romans 8:26-28 talks about the Spirit helping our prayers. He concludes by saying, “And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to his purpose.” John phrased it “But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus

Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.” (1 John 1:7) God grants His fellowship and cleansing to those who walk in his light. (See page 1)

On the other hand, the owner of that license plate obviously had in mind Romans 8:31—“If God be for us, who can be against us.” We want God to be for us.

We want God for us because of the advantages. If God is for us we will be abundantly blessed, both physically and spiritually. (Matt 6:25-33; Eph 1:3)

If God is for us, he has something better for us than the faithful of old. Hebrews 11 talks about all the faithful people who followed God before Christ. The writer concludes by saying, “And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise: God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect.” (Heb 11:39-40)

We want God on our side, because then we will be winners. It’s like a bunch of kids on the playground choosing teams for football or red rover or any other game. The first one picked is either the biggest or the best, and its even better if he is both. Well, God is both. Can you imagine somebody choosing the small, weak, untalented one first? Worse yet, can you imagine somebody picking a team and the last one picked is the best player? Unfortunately, there are many who do this. They don’t want God on their team, even though he has never been on a losing team and never will be.

I want to be a winner. Therefore, IM4GOD and, as a result, GODS4ME.

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