

Lord's Day 52b (q&a 128)

Dear children of God, brothers and sisters in Christ, and guests, the text for this afternoon's sermon is a little odd. The text for the sermon is formed by the words "For yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever." This is an odd text, because you won't find it in Matthew 6 or Luke 11, the two chapters in the Bible where we find a version of the Lord's Prayer. True, in Matthew 6 there is a footnote telling the reader that some late manuscripts do include these words. It will depend on what value one attaches to these so-called late manuscripts whether one will indeed include these words as part of the authentic text of the Lord's Prayer. The New King James Version, for example, does include them. I'll spare you the details of this debate, although I personally do believe they should be regarded as original to the prayer taught by our Saviour. Not all are agreed, though, and thus the text is odd: is it Biblical or not?

Mind you, regardless of whether these words are original or not, the thought they express certainly has its origin in Scripture. We read together a prayer of praise voiced by King David when the contributions for building the temple were brought in. 1 Chronicles 29:11-12 is very similar to the concluding words to the Lord's Prayer. So, regardless of where one stands with respect to how original these words are to the Lord's Prayer, they are certainly Biblical.

Now the words of David form a prayer of praise. A doxology. Boys and girls, "logy" means word or words and "doxo" is glory. "Doxology" literally means "Words of Glory". The well-known hymn, *Praise God from Whom All Blessings Flow* is a typical example of a doxology. As are the concluding verses of Romans 11, known as the Romans Doxology. The conclusion to the Lord's Prayer is sometimes referred to as a doxology as well. And yes, they are words of praise. God's is the kingdom, the power, the glory, forever. But are these words simply a doxology? If so, it would seem the Heidelberg Catechism has missed the mark in explaining these words. Answer 128 is hardly doxological. But we respect the church's book of instruction and ask ourselves: why is answer 128 not doxological? There's a good reason. You see, the first word of the phrase is the key word here. The word "for". When uttering the concluding words of the Lord's Prayer, we are not simply praising God. There's logic at play here. "For Yours is the Kingdom, the power and the glory forever."

"For". This "for" is shorthand for "This we pray for." Or, as the Catechism begins to explain these words: "All this we ask of You because..." You may have noticed, I frequently end the second prayers in a worship service in this way. With these concluding words of the Lord's Prayer we make mention of the foundation for our prayer. Why do we ask these things of our Heavenly Father? Why these things and why ask Him? Well, *because* the kingdom, the power, and the glory belong to Him, and not just today, but every day, indeed, for ever.

Kingdom, power, and glory. That's a wonderful triad. We'll learn this afternoon how these three point to God's will (what God wants), God's ability (what God is capable of), and God's faithfulness (He makes it happen). To put it differently: God has the rights to act, He has the strength to act, and He does indeed act. These same three are also found also in the introductory words to the Ten Commandments. I am the LORD (God wants to act), your God (God is able to act), who has saved you (God does indeed act). At the close of our prayer we've come full circle to the opening line of the Ten Words of the Covenant.

We listen to the teachings of God's Word on the closing words of the Lord's Prayer with this theme: We pray God for everything, for He alone is the right address. We'll pay attention to the three elements to these words: (1) God wants to help us always; (2) God is able to help us always; and (3) God does help us always.

1. First, We pray God this, for God wants to help us always.

It's not all that uncommon to have a request and get no answers, no response. Boys and girls, I'm sure you've had it happen. You've got a question, you're looking for help. And no-one has an answer, no-one wants to help you. You're playing this really neat game but you can't figure out how to get to the next level. So you ask your dad, your mom, an older brother or sister, to help. But they're not interested in your game. They don't think it's important enough for them to spend time helping you. They don't want to help you.

It happens to grown-ups as well. Isn't that true, brothers and sisters? It happened to me when we were trying to immigrate to Canada. I needed a police clearance for the time I had lived in Ontario, but I couldn't figure out where to get one from. I was sent from one place to the next. And each time I was told, don't ask us, ask them. The fifth time this happened I was actually pointed back to the very place where I had first put my question, the Canadian embassy in The Hague. I'd come full circle, and it had taken several weeks for me to do it. Now, sometimes persistence pays. The Lord Jesus tells the parable of the unjust ruler being pestered by a widow. In the end the unjust ruler said: "Because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she won't eventually wear me out with her coming!" (Luke 18:5). The Lord Jesus told that to point out that even people who are not fair will respond at some point in time, so one certainly may expect God to respond. But there are also times when questions go unanswered, there's just nowhere to go with your questions. Maybe we've had bad experiences with insurance companies on this score. You've got questions and just can't get the right answers. Or you're looking for a bit of financial advice. It's that time of the year again when many are looking for some help. Will you get an answer to your question? Or think of the people in Syria at the moment, or those who have fled Syria and are living in refugee camps just across the border in Turkey? Looking for help, but nobody seems to want to help.

To be looking for help, and no one wants to help. It happens all too often.

"Our help is in the Name of the LORD," we say. We look to God for help. Our prayer sums up all our needs in six requests for help. Lord, have us know You. Lord, establish Your Kingdom on earth. Lord, have us be obedient. Lord, grant us our bodily needs, food and health, and our spiritual needs, forgiveness and Your Spirit. In many of prayers we'll have all manner of more specific questions. But does God *want* to respond? Is God *willing* to give us what we need?

We'll have our doubts. The basic necessities in life, sure. The first, second, third petitions, well, they're all about God so, sure God will hear us. The fifth, the sixth, God has promised it and in Christ we have it. The fourth, about daily bread, about health, that's where we have most of our doubts. Would God want me to pass that exam? Does God want me to have that job? Will God let me get better? And we do well, indeed to be careful with such questions. In all we look to do, God's glory must be central. But the fourth petition is praying for all our bodily needs, as answer 117 makes clear, and it is God Himself who instructed us to pray this way. So we shouldn't have our doubts regarding the fourth petition either.

God wants us to ask Him for all the things referred to in the Lord's Prayer. That's true, not only because the Lord Jesus taught us to pray in this way. We know that, also, because His is the Kingdom, forever. God is our King, we are His subjects. He cares. He cares about us, He cares for us. Nothing, we read in Scripture, will separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus, our Lord (Romans 8:39). He loves this world, which He has made, so much, He gave His only-begotten Son to save it (John 3:16). As a true King He is always ready to save those who call upon Him.

The histories in the Old Testament, one thing they want to teach us, is the royally saving character of God. Israel in Egypt. Scripture tells us: "The Israelites groaned in their slavery and cried out, and their cry for help

because of their slavery went up to God. God heard their groaning and He remembered His covenant with Abraham, with Isaac and with Jacob. So God looked on the Israelites and was concerned about them.” (Exodus 2:23b-25). It’s a refrain in the book of Judges: the people are in dire straits, they call out to the LORD, He hears their cry for help, and sends a judge, a deliverer. God is willing, He is a faithful Father, His Kingdom is at stake when it comes to our requests.

It’s the theme of Salvation History. The sighs and groaning of the world reaches the ears of God. The blood of Abel calls for revenge. God is not an unmoved God, not even when faced with the wicked. “Do I take any pleasure in the death of the wicked? declares the Sovereign LORD. Rather, am I not pleased when they turn from their ways and live?” (Ezekiel 18:23). On the one hand, we long for the fullness of God’s Kingdom to be present. It would mean living perfect lives, without sin, without misery. On the other hand, we know that if God’s Kingdom were to come right now, many would miss out. God knows that feeling. Scripture tells us: “The Lord is not slow in keeping His promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.” (2 Peter 3:9). God wants no one to perish, God wants everyone to come to repentance. For God wants His Kingdom to be populated by all.

All those things mentioned in the Lord’s Prayer, we ask them of God for the Kingdom is God’s. Does God indeed want to be acknowledged and praised as God and Creator? Of course, God the Lord is King and this whole creation is His Kingdom! Does God want His Kingdom to come in all its fullness? Of course, it is *His* Kingdom. Does God want people to obey Him? Of course, He is King of the Kingdom, and the King should be obeyed. Does God want us to be supplied with all our bodily and spiritual needs? Of course, for if our needs were not supplied, there would be no citizens in the Kingdom of God.

Go with these requests to anyone else – Satan, some false god like money or the environment, humanity – and they’ll turn a deaf ear. Oh yes, sometimes a need is supplied. But only to for the sake of a personal desire. Satan might seem kind at times, but that’s because he’s after influence. Fallen humans may do nice things, but it’s only to further their own cause. If it doesn’t serve their cause, they’ll over turn their backs on you. Beloved, there’s only one place to go to with your requests, and that is God. He wants to help us. He wants to help us, for the Kingdom is His. It is His forever. Our God is an everlasting King. And thus, He wants to help us, always. Never doubt God’s willingness, be reminded of it when you say “For Yours is the Kingdom ... forever.”

2. We come to our second consideration, drawing on the word *power*. We ask all this of God, for He is *able* to help us always.

There’s still a difference between wanting to help and being able to help. Right boys and girls? Let’s go back a moment to the game you were playing. Remember, you can’t figure out how to get to the next level, but no one wants to help you. It’s not important to them. But then one afternoon, Grandpa is over. He hears you say “Nobody ever wants to help me.” “I do,” he says, “what’s the problem?” Your face lights up, you take Grandpa over to the TV so he can see the game. Grandpa looks at the screen, at the control. And then you see Grandpa shake his head. “I’m sorry but I haven’t got a clue what this is all about. I want to help. But I can’t.”

Brothers and sisters, this sort of situation too is not just limited to the world of children. It happens in every area of life. For example, parents are more than willing to do everything that’s needed for their children to have a good life and a good future. But they may not have the money to send them to a certain school. There’s an illness and they can’t figure out what is best for their child. There’s the question of nurturing your children and raising them in a right way. How do you do that? Or look at the international scene. Many people want to help the peoples of the Middle East. But how should we help? What is wise? Syria: the Arab League tried, and failed.

Should the United Nations now step in? Or NATO? A no-fly zone over Syria? A second Libya? The desire to help is there. But not the ability.

It happens so often. There's a request for aid. There's the willingness to help. But the ability to help is lacking.

In our prayer, we ask God to help us. But is God truly able to help us? Modern theology likes to speak of God as the sympathizing God. By that they don't just mean that God is sympathetic, that He cares. They mean it in a more literal sense of the word: sym-pathos, to suffer along with. God is to people what cuddly toys, stuffies, are to children. Stuffies give a sense of security. But at bottom it's a false sense of security. Prayer, such people say, prayer is a bit of self-reflection. It helps you get things straight. God would help us if He could. But He can't. He's not Almighty. He's as much a victim of circumstance as we all are. Just look at all the misery around us. If God was Almighty, it wouldn't be there. For God is a loving and caring God.

But beloved, it's just not true. It's just not true. At the end of our prayer we'll say "For Yours is the *power* forever." God is Almighty. God is El Shaddai.

It's what the Scriptures tell us of God. Take the life of King David. We read the song he sang as a song of thanksgiving. He had blood on his hands, and so God would not allow him to build the temple. Yet, David does pull it off to make many preparations for the building of the temple. Much is given. But how does David characterize these gifts? Verse 14. "Everything comes from You, and we have given You only what comes from Your hand." "Everything comes from You", see there the ability of God. He has given people the ability to give.

God is able. What is the most impossible thing we can think of? Our Lord once told the story of a poor man and a rich man. The poor man, his name was Lazarus, went to heaven. The rich man went to hell. The rich man still had some brothers. He figured they would believe if someone would arise from the dead. Yes, that would have to be one of the most impossible things we can imagine. That someone should arise from the dead. That'll convince my brothers, the rich man thought. If someone arises from the dead. And the resurrection from the dead is the very point with which the Gospel stands or falls (1 Corinthians 15). The resurrection from the dead is proof of God's almighty power. Indeed, 2000 years after the Christ there is still a church proclaiming the resurrection of the dead throughout the world. We too believe the resurrection of the body: God is able to do that!

For Yours is the power forever. God is most certainly able to help us.

All those things we ask with the words of the Lord's Prayer. The hallowing of God's Name. It happens, even the devils shudder at the mention of God's Name. The coming of God's Kingdom. God is able, just see how the church continues to exist and grow. Obedience to God's will. Just look around you in this building, everyone you see is here because God by His Spirit brought them here. Bodily and spiritual needs, God provides it all. He is an Almighty Father, God the Son became one of us to make forgiveness happen, and God the Spirit makes His dwelling in our lives.

Satan is no match. Money cannot buy everything. Human beings are so limited in what they can do. But God, our God. He is Almighty. Our help is in the Name of the LORD, Maker of heaven and earth. Indeed, all that His love and grace endeavour, will Him His power not deny. Whatever God might want to do as faithful Father, He is able to do as Almighty God. Always.

Do not doubt God's ability. But be reminded of it every time you say "For Yours is ... the power ... forever."

God wants to help us: His is the Kingdom forever.

God is able to help us: His is the power forever.

3. But does He help us? That's our third consideration: We ask these things of God for He does and will help us always.

One might think, God wants to help us, God is able to help us. We're done. But in daily life, that's not the way it works. Often people are both willing and able, yet they don't want to. Boys and girls, let's go back to the video game one more time. This time, it's not Grandpa who is offering his help, but your older brother. He knows all about the game. And he's prepared to help too. "Yes," you think. But as you give him the control, his cell phone goes. It's that special ringtone he has for his girlfriend. You groan, not now! And sure enough, he takes the call and is gone. A brother who was willing to help, able to help. And yet, in the end, he didn't. And by the time he's done with the call, it's dinner time.

This sort of thing happens all too often. We see it happen in international affairs, especially in relation to economic and environmental issues. Take the oil pipeline that's to go from Alberta to Texas. The present American government was both willing and able to have it happen. Yet it didn't. Other interests got in the way.

This past week I saw an item on the news about a lady who was very much alive, but according to Canada Revenue she passed away last December. Every attempt on her part to get Canada Revenue to change her status from "deceased" to "alive" is met with "we'll get it done right away", but nothing has happened yet. Want to help. Able to help. Yet don't.

It happens in church life. There's this particular problem you are dealing with in your faith life. Your ward elder and minister prove to be a great help. They're always prepared to help, and they're able to as well. But then the term of the elder is done, and someone else becomes your ward elder, a person not so able when it comes to your particular need. But, there's still the minister. Then he accepts a call to some other place and moves. You feel like you've been abandoned.

Yes, that's it. You feel like you've been abandoned. Someone is willing to help. Is able to help. But when push comes to shove, they don't.

In our prayer, we put our requests to God. But does God do what we ask Him to do? *Will* He do it? Or does He sometimes abandon us as well? For pagan religions, that's the biggest fear, that gods would suddenly abandon you, leave you to yourself. What about our God?

Beloved, there's no need for us to fear. For the *glory* belongs to God as well. Glory. That's the majesty, the honour of God's Name. Everything in our prayer is focused on the glory of God. Anything we ask in the context of God's glory will happen, does happen, did happen.

The accounts in Scripture make this amply clear. God grants Abraham offspring and the land of Canaan, for the sake of His Name. David receives the kingship and his future son will be King of kings and Lord of lords. The mother of all promises, the downfall of Satan and evil, God made it happen by sending His own Son. And He did it, for the glory of His Name. The Christ was faithful and pressed on, even when everybody abandoned Him. On the cross, He was still concerned for the murderer beside Him, for His mother, even praying for those who had crucified Him. And today, we see God act, for the sake of His Name, causing His Spirit to live in our lives. We find ourselves doing things that, from a human perspective, from a fallen, sinful human perspective, do not make much sense. Just look at us right now, we're in church worshiping God while who knows how many are getting comfortable in front of a TV right now to watch the Super Bowl game. To God belongs the glory, we've prayed for His Kingdom to come, for His will to be done, and that's why we're here, right now.

For Yours is the glory forever.

It makes sense to pray all those things found in the Lord's Prayer. Remember, boys and girls, what we learned when dealing with the first petition, Hallowed be Your Name? "For God's sake", we live "for God's sake". It's the first thing we ask in our prayer, it's the last thing we mention in our prayer. Lord, glorify Your Name, for Yours is the glory. And indeed, creation sings God's glory. God's Kingdom is expanding, throughout this world people sing God's praise. Obedience to God, it was central to Christ's preaching, it forms an important part of church life today. Daily bread, forgiveness and renewal, God is indeed making it happen in our lives. The glory belongs to God, He does act. And if we feel that God is deserting us, while we are convinced that our cause is at bottom God's cause, all we need to do is point God to that truth. Lord, we are acting in Your Name, not for our glory but for Yours. It's what Moses did when God was about to turn His back on Israel in the desert (Exodus 33). It's what Daniel did at the end of the Exile (Daniel 9). It's what the church today does as well (Revelation 4:11).

There's another side to the glory being God's as well, which I don't want to leave unmentioned. Only God is worthy of the honour of being asked all these things. We should not even contemplate asking someone else, something else all the things we need in life. The honour of being asked for all things we need in life, belongs to God alone. We are created in His image, our lives are about glorifying God, well then, we should go to God alone with all our needs.

Never doubt that God will indeed act upon your prayer. Be reminded of it, every time you say "For Yours is ... the glory forever."

Indeed, all this we ask of God, for He alone is the right address. He wants to help us, is able to help us, and does help us, always.

The closing words of the Lord's Prayer form the foundation of the prayer. More than just a song of praise, there's a logic to them. They remind us that God is willing, able, and ready to help us, always. Praying is not a shot in the dark.

Those closing words are a song of praise as well. A doxology. And doxologies, those are not things you talk about, but things you utter, things you pray in praise, things you sing and live. To glorify God. For God is great. Let us indeed praise the Name of God our King! Amen.