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DID OUR LORD USE THE LORD'S PRAYER?*

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It cannot be denied that Jesus of Nazareth was a great spiritual teacher. Even those least willing to accept his doctrine implicitly do not call this into question. No other teacher has ever had such world-wide influence and such steadily increasing acceptance as the ages roll by. After nearly two millenniums the chief leaders of religious thought profess to have learned from Him. The measure of the acceptance of His words is to-day the measure of civilization. He is not simply first in human esteem, but there is an immeasurable distance between Him and whoever may be regarded as second. Indeed it has come to this, that if any one desires to pose as an original religious thinker, he can only gain a hearing by professing to have a better view of the doctrine of Christ. Each generation has seen opponents with novel objections which like sky meteors have dazzled and died and been known no more. None has ever wrested the sceptre from His hand. At this present time he rules over a larger number of living men and with more intense loyalty than ever.

Amongst other evidences of His wondrous power may be noted the marvellous acceptance of a short prayer He dictated to His disciples, which is called the Lord's prayer. No other form of petition has ever been rooted so deeply in the universal heart of man. All have moments of devotional thought, which are the great formative influences of character, and at such time there is an almost universal remembrance of this prayer. It is the first form of words stored in the memories of little children. Aged men and women desire that they may depart from life with this on their lips. The average man desires to repeat it every day. In the most widely accepted rituals of public worship it takes a place, in some cases more than once, at each service. Herein is a marvel, a devotional

* Dr. Cooke's death has occurred since the above article was written. [ED.]

miracle, and a sign. The sceptic may rear a gigantic fortress of apparently impregnable argument against the spiritual veracity of Jesus Christ; but before we commence an attack, we have a right to demand that he shall explain this mystery. By the Lord's prayer to-day Jesus of Nazareth is supreme in the spiritual life of man.

Looking carefully at this prayer the question calls for consideration. Does it derive its authority from being the one Jesus used, or which he directed to be used? The evidence seems all to indicate that the use is sanctioned by His words, not by His example. It was probably given on two occasions. First, it formed a part of the Sermon on the Mount, which was a comprehensive and an early statement of the practical part of His teaching. Then, at another time, when He had set an example of prayers, His disciples, remembering what John the Baptist had taught, asked Him how they should pray; not that He should give them the petition He himself had used, but something suitable for themselves.

It is a memorable fact, that we never find Christ praying with His disciples. He was often in prayer, yet in this He was alone. He spent whole nights in prayer, but no record is left for our guidance of what He prayed for. In Gethsemane He asked the presence of a chosen few, but except His agonized cry for resignation, they do not appear to have learned the nature of His supplication. This is very surprising. Every true spiritual guide will lead his followers and give expression to common spiritual needs. Not so Christ. He never gathered His disciples around Himself for a prayer meeting, or other gathering for worship. In spiritual matters He ever appeared to be on a different plane. His teaching was from one on a superior height. He rarely argued or quoted, as might have been expected from a great teacher. He asserted. The assumption, that He was on so much higher level in spiritual life that He could neither worship nor join in common prayer with His friends, ought not to be overlooked. Once and once only we find Him joining in singing a hymn. No matter how learned or good a preacher may be we all feel that such an attitude would be insufferable. Imagine a minister of to-day delivering

a discourse on prayer, but when the time came for its exercise would stand apart, in effect says: "My spiritual needs are immeasurably beyond yours; we are not on the same level, I cannot join you, nor you me, at a diet of worship, I have meat to eat that ye know not."

Note the first word of the prayer, "Our", "Our Father". This was for the disciples, in which He did not join. In many instances in His allusions to God He speaks of Him as a Father. But with this peculiarity, that it is never "Our Father"; as though the Fatherhood of God was not the same to His disciples as it was to Himself. He very frequently spoke of "My Father." He does not direct His disciples to use this phrase, but speaks of "your Father." Sometimes when a general, though not a united, term is needed, He refers to "the Father." Once he said: "I go to my Father and your Father." Of this peculiarity there are many illustrations. The idea of the Fatherhood of God was not a novelty. The psalmist had sung: "Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him." Jeremiah described the Almighty as saying: "Wilt thou not from this time cry unto me, 'My Father'?" So Isaiah: "Doubtless thou art our Father." And Malachi: "Have we not all one Father? Hath not one God created us?" The Egyptian had spoken of Father Horus, and the Latins of Jupiter, Father Jove.

A brief consideration of the many passages in the Gospels which refer to the Fatherhood of God, will bring the conviction that there was a real difference between the view He would have us receive, and that which was His own. In His words, "My Father," He did not imply the same Sonship as "Your Father." John in the introduction to his gospel calls our Lord, "the only Begotten of the Father," and again, "the only Begotten Son." More than once a voice from heaven announced, "This is my beloved Son." That Sonship with Christ meant much more than Sonship with us is evident in the account of the trial of Christ before the High Priest. The charge which, from his office, Caiaphas had to consider, was that of blasphemy. The first count of the indictment was a misrepresentation of what our Lord had once said in reference to the temple, and that fell

through. Then came a more serious accusation. The High Priest challenged Him, "I adjure Thee by the living God that Thou tell us whether Thou be the Christ the Son of God." This Christ admitted and upon this He was condemned. A profession of the Sonship of God was considered to be blasphemy and worthy of death. This evidently had a meaning different to that avowed of Divine Fatherhood which every Jew, with the Old Testament in his hand, would have admitted; and which indeed few intelligent men would deny. Thus in regard to God's Fatherhood, our Lord and His disciples were not on common ground. They, in one sense, would pray to God as "Our Father." He, in another, would say, "My Father."

At the miraculous conception the angel said to Mary, "That holy thing which shall be born of Thee shall be called the Son of God." In Christ's infancy he was taken to Egypt that the prophecy might be fulfilled, "Out of Egypt have I called My Son." At His baptism a voice from heaven was heard saying, "This is My beloved Son," and John saw and bore record that He was the Son of God. The tempter in the wilderness approached Him saying, "If Thou be the Son of God." Nathanael said to Him, "Rabbi, Thou art the Son of God, Thou art the King of Israel." The full statement of the Gospel given at the close of the interview with Nicodemus was, "God so loved the world that he gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him, should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not His Son unto the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved." Then we learn, "The Father loveth the Son, and hath given all things into His hand. He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life, and he that believeth not the Son, shall not see life." The confession of Peter, which our Lord said was the rock on which the church was to be built, was, "Thou art the Christ the Son of the living God." Although we do not grow weary in hearing about the Lord Jesus Christ our Savior, yet this may be sufficient. It does not exhaust the list of passages which bring the conclusion that the Sonship of Christ was not the same as the sonship of ordinary men. Thus the first word of the prayer could not be common to our Lord and His disciples.

In the use of the most holy petition, the foundation of all true prayer, "Thy will be done," we do not find Christ and His disciples standing at the same place. It is a prayer in which all created beings must unite, that the harmony of the universe may be ensured. Our Lord at the hour of His deepest trial bent His desire to this, "Nevertheless not as I, but as thou wilt." The prophetic record of His intention on assuming humanity was, "Lo I come to do thy will O God." But in His earthly life there were many manifestations of a distinct and determined will; though never in antagonism to the Divine will. He spoke of doing the will of Him by whom He had been sent. But there were times when He spoke of His own will as supreme. As in the great prayer, "Father I will that they also whom Thou hast given me be with me where I am."

This different level of spiritual feeling and thought may be more clearly discerned in the central petition of the prayer, the cry for forgiveness. No one feature of the life of Jesus is more evident than His absolute freedom from sin. No untrue or profane word ever came from His lips; and we are assured that no unhallowed thought or desire ever dwelt in His mind; no unholy feeling found admission into His heart. He knew no guile. No pride or haughtiness dimmed the lustre of His meek and lowly life; neither was any deceit in His mouth. Living in the bright and searching light of watchful foes, ever seeking to entangle him in one way or another, having frequently brought against him accusations which fell to the ground immediately they were uttered, He could boldly challenge. "Which of you convinceth Me of sin." This is the more striking when it is remembered that His demand of men for acceptance with God should be penitence. The repentant Magdalene was more acceptable than the gentleman of irreproachable character who did not recognize his sinfulness. At the Temple the publican was justified rather than the Pharisee, for one came with a sense of his sin and the other with thoughts of His good works. The opening benediction of the Sermon on the Mount was for those who are poor in spirit and we cannot regard that as exemplified by Christ.

The strict scrutiny of His life was not only by men. In His last

recorded prayer He could approach God saying, "I have glorified Thee on the earth. I have finished the work which Thou gavest me to do." This is very far from the lowly abasement before God which is the right attitude of sinful men. Not a single thing left undone which ought to have been done and not a single thing done which ought not to have been done. How could He, with any genuineness, have joined in the petition, "Forgive us our trespasses"?

The sinlessness of Jesus and his absolute sincerity of speech are apparent in every part of the Gospel record. Either the narrative is genuine, or it is not. Some may assert that it is not wholly reliable. It was colored by the love of his disciples. It has been exaggerated like the story of Siddartha the Buddha. To arrive at this conclusion it is necessary to deny the Divine inspiration of the Book. In such case if we accept Jesus as our Messiah we must have a Christ of our own manufacture, built up of fragments chosen in our own wisdom. This must necessarily be something other than the real man. Our faith then would be in a creature of our own contrivance. It will not do, like the idolators of old, as described by the prophet, to hew down the plant of renown, and get the religious smith with his tongs to fashion it, and the philosophical carpenter to mark it out with his compasses and make it after the figure of a man, according to the beauty of a man; to burn part in the fire of criticism, and with the residue thereof to make a god, and fall down and worship it, and say, "Deliver me." If we reject the divinity of Jesus of Nazareth it is folly to use His name and carve out a new Savior by scientific criticism to suit our ideas. We may reject the Christ of revelation for the Christ of the riper results of modern science. But after all it will be a self-made God, to trust in which is the zenith of human folly.

Or, we may accept the gospels, and the Christ therein revealed, as revealed, and submit our preconceived ideas to what we find there. Surely this is the more reasonable attitude. There must be difficulties in the way of such a faith. Reason tells us that there must be some things which we did not expect and which do not accord with our notions of what a Re-

deemer should be. Fancy cannot be worth more than fact. We read that on one occasion there was a discussion concerning Christ. The learned men of that day, not without reason, argued thus, "Shall Christ come out of Galilee? Hath not the scripture said, that Christ cometh of the seed of David, and out of the town of Bethlehem?" It was the ripest result of their criticism and silenced enquirers. They were right in the fact that Christ was to have come from Bethlehem, but wrong in their ignorance that this was truly the case. The stumbling block, which turned many aside, was on a par with the arguments of many who reject our Lord. Their insuperable difficulties are simply discreditable ignorance.

The denial of the Deity of Jesus of Nazareth not only prevents many blessings, but makes the story of His life a mass of inconsistency. It is assuredly very difficult to admire His words and His character, were He an ordinary man. This is apparent in the incident we are considering, that when His disciples asked to be taught how to pray, he told them to pray one way, whilst He prayed another. In His general conduct there was an assumption of authority which to say the least is not lovable. His teaching was continually based on His own assertions without presenting any proof. He demanded implicit faith, when Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews, came to Him; the surprising statement of the necessity of a new birth, was given, not as the result of a process of reasoning, but on His own authority. "Verily, verily I say unto you." He did not claim so much having received special revelation from some point of light, but spoke as though His word was truth itself, and He were ruler in the moral world. No other teacher with any force ever taught like this. When men sought to be right, they often only heard the precept, "Follow Me." The fisherman must leave his net, the publican his duty to the state, the rich man surrender his wealth and attendant responsibility, even the bereaved man a solemn attention to the burial of his father, that they might obey the dictates of one who claimed more than any king or emperor. His demands were not satisfied in the region of act and thought, but he insisted upon entering the inner chamber of the heart, and

ruling there. He demanded a higher love than that of a child to its parent, or a parent to a child. No one, however near, was to be loved equal to himself. He must have a regard higher than that felt for life itself. There is a boldness in His doctrine concerning the unseen world that is unparalleled. He speaks as one perfectly familiar with the great invisible, and not only knows all about it, but has the direction of its affairs. He is not only sure of His own entrance into paradise, but has the authority to admit, and even to exclude, whosoever He will. He even dared to claim that the judgment of mankind at the last assize would be under His supreme charge. Yet He constantly taught the excellence of humility. The men of his age, from amongst the great of former days especially revered three men: Jonah, as a powerful preacher of righteousness; Solomon, as the most magnificent of monarchs, and the great glory of the nation, and Moses, who was the God-appointed law giver. Jesus compared himself with each of these. As we read His words we may recall that He taught "whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased, and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted", and that he claimed to be meek and lowly in heart. Yet shortly after He asserts, "The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this generation and shall condemn it, because they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and behold a greater than Jonah is here. The queen of the south shall rise up in the judgment with this generation and shall condemn it; for she came from the uttermost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon and behold a greater than Solomon is here." These are strange words for a teacher of humility. But there is even greater boldness in His repeatedly saying, "Moses said," and then giving a different, even contradictory, law with the words. "But I say." And whilst admitting that Moses was taught of God, he does not advance a similar claim for Himself, but speaks as though there were no higher authority in the universe. Granting that His doctrine was noble and true, yet looking with unbiassed eye on his methods we fail to say that they were lovely. Yet strange to say they seem right and suitable with Him. But any modern teacher, adopting a similar style could not fail, not simply to

repel, but to be met with strong and well deserved censure. Our love and loyalty to Him may make us hesitate to give it utterance, but, is not this the truth?

Let us consider one of the incidents of the life of Jesus fairly and dispassionately, regarding Him as a man altogether like ourselves. It may be difficult to do this reverently, for at this burning bush we need to take off the shoes of human reason, for it is holy ground. But we are practically challenged to do so. Fearlessly would we face every view that men put forth of Christ, and we are sometimes told that He is the Son of God in the same sense as we are the sons of God. In the incidents of the great threefold trial the judges cannot be accused of having acted altogether unlawfully. An accusation of blasphemy was brought. Amongst the laws they sat to administer was one against blasphemy. We should certainly consider that if charged with blasphemy it would be our duty to repudiate the charge and take measures to clear ourselves. But Christ did not. He admitted the accusation. And so, took a course which was a profession of His Deity. Ought he not, in justice to his disciples, as well as to himself, to have repudiated the very serious imputation? He practically pleaded guilty and was led forth to death according to the law divinely given and clearly defined in the Book of Leviticus. As He hung on the cross one of His fellow-sufferers addressed to Him some kind words. Immediately He gave to the man, all stained with crime as he was, an assurance that he should be in paradise ere the day closed. It was an awful thing for a mere man to say to another, with dying words and especially on the confession upon which the promise was based. We can form but one of two conclusions. Either this man with expiring breath comforted his fellow-sufferer with words that no good man would imitate, but rather regard with serious reprehension; or these were the gracious words of one who was divine; and intended not only to comfort the dying thief, but to be a power in the world throughout all coming generations; and a source of hope to sinful souls who at their last hour would humbly look to Christ for salvation. The one belief staggers our faith and brings repulsion to the whole of

Christ's life and teaching, if it ended thus. With the other, it brings one of the most blessed truths that ever came to sinful dying men.

Were Jesus but a man we are driven to regard his teaching as far from satisfactory, coming with self-assertion rather than argument. His character does not awaken our full esteem notwithstanding its many beauties; there was so much that looks like self-righteousness and sense of superiority. Even His good works, His miracles and sacrifice, have an element of being self-centred, as though He sought His own glory. His death and every incident connected with it is a mystery, which the more it is considered the more perplexing it appears. If we are to have a rational view of Christ, as it is sometimes termed, there is very much that requires to be explained away. But take into our studies the belief that He was the Son of God as well as the son of man and although the mystery does not cease, yet it becomes one which reason can accept.

It is not unreasonable to expect that the revelation of God in Christ should in some respects resemble the revelation of Himself in nature. There He is to be sought out. The heavens declare the glory of God, but the stars are not so placed as to spell His name in characters of light on the scroll of the sky. His eternal power and godhead may be learned from the foundations of the earth, but they must be sought out by those that have pleasure therein. So with God in Christ; the revelation not simply of His power, but His personality. His Deity is to be seen by those who with true heart meditate on His character and work. Read with a belief that Jesus was no more than human, the gospels are not satisfactory. We fail to surrender our hearts to the Christ there represented, unless we change some of the features, rejecting or explaining away several things. So actually forming another Redeemer, not by revelation, but our own preconceived notions. There are indeed several passages in the New Testament which appear to assert beyond question the Deity of Christ. But were it not so, it would not be surprising if the light were to be gradually revealed, first to dawn, and then grow clearer and

clearer. It was so in His earthly career. He led His disciples to infer from His life and teaching rather than at first to tell them plainly that He was the Christ. When enquirers came to Him, he showed them a divine act, and left them to form their own conclusions. Hence His teaching by miracles, which were indeed blessings, but chiefly as signs, the first steps on the ladder to higher things. The light would have blinded had it come too suddenly. Men had to grow into the belief. As indeed we have now. It is not by the first view that the truth is clearly seen. As in nature the belief in the Divine handiwork grows as we search it out. As with the disciples the revelation was from glory to glory. So with us. We must believe to understand. And as we look on the life of Jesus, and stand gazing at the cross, we need no higher wisdom than the Roman Centurion to assert, "Truly this is the Son of God."