

Misunderstanding The Lord's Prayer

Part Three

What Is It's True Ending?

Overview

Did Jesus teach the doxology, or did the church add it? The earliest text of Matthew ends at “deliverance from evil.” Millions close the Lord's Prayer with the same words of praise, yet the oldest copies of Matthew, the earliest church commentaries, and the first Christian prayer manual all tell a more precise story. This article traces the Lord's Prayer doxology from the worship of the earliest believers, through the scribes who copied the Gospels, to the King James Bible and the prayer you learned as a child. Along the way, the Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant endings stop looking like a contradiction and start looking like church history standing in the same room. By the end, you will know exactly which words belong to the prayer Jesus taught and what is really happening when you say the rest.

Nothing was removed; the manuscript record is simply reported honestly. Is the King James Version wrong? No. The KJV faithfully translated the Greek text available in 1611, which included the doxology from the Byzantine manuscript tradition. Why do Catholics end the Lord's Prayer early at Mass? Because the Latin Bible never included the doxology, the Roman tradition stops where the oldest text ends, and the congregation prays the doxology a moment later in response.

Summary

The familiar ending rests on three Greek words: βασιλεία (basileia), the kingdom; δύναμις (dynamis), the power; and δόξα (doxa), the glory. In Matthew 6:13, the earliest manuscripts close the prayer before those words appear, and in Luke 11:4, they end without them in every manuscript tradition. Yet the words themselves are deeply biblical. In 1 Chronicles 29:11, David stands before Israel and prays that the greatness, the power, the glory, and the kingdom belong to the Lord alone, a thousand years before the Sermon on the Mount. The earliest believers knew that prayer. When their oldest surviving manual records them ending the Lord's Prayer with "the power and the glory," they were answering Scripture with Scripture, and the fuller threefold form grew from there into the church's worship and, eventually, onto the page of Matthew. If you have ever noticed the small footnote under this verse, or stood in a congregation where the prayer seemed to end early, this is the history your Bible has been pointing to all along. Once you see it, the verse becomes clearer rather than smaller.

An Examination of the Text

"For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen." You've said those words your whole life. Your parents said them, and their parents said them. Here's what almost nobody in a pew has been told: **Jesus never said them.**

Open your own Bible to Matthew 6:13. If you're holding a modern translation, the prayer ends at "deliver us from evil," and just beneath it sits a small footnote that almost everyone skips. That footnote exists because the earliest manuscripts of Matthew we possess end the prayer right there: No kingdom, no power, no glory, and no amen. This isn't a theory from skeptics trying to tear Scripture down. It's printed in the Bible on your shelf, and it's been quietly telling you this for years. This leaves two questions, and this article answers both with the actual evidence. First: if Jesus didn't give us that ending, who did, and how did it get into the most famous prayer in the world? And second, the one that matters more: once you know where it came from, should you ever say those words again? Because what's actually happening when you pray that line is not what you think.

We will start with two Bibles that disagree and are probably on your shelf. Maybe you've seen this in your own home. A grandmother's King James on one shelf and a newer translation on another. Open both to Matthew six and read verse thirteen side by side. The King James gives you the full ending you memorized: "And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen." Now look at the other one, whether it is the New American Standard Bible, the New International Version, or any other translation. In almost every major translation of the last hundred years, the verse reads: "And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil." Full stop. And then, in small print at the bottom of the page, is a footnote that usually says something like this: "Some late manuscripts add, 'For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory, forever. Amen.'" Read that wording carefully: (1) Some manuscripts, (2) Late manuscripts, (3) Add.

The translators are not hiding anything. Rather, they are reporting what is there. The doxology is real and ancient, appearing in thousands of copies of Matthew. *But it does not appear in the earliest ones.* The oldest surviving text of this prayer ends at deliverance. And there's a second witness most people never think to check: Jesus taught this prayer twice. Matthew records it in the Sermon on the Mount. Luke records it in chapter eleven, when a disciple asks, "Lord, teach us to pray" [so, shouldn't it be called the Disciple's Prayer?]. Now, here is the remarkable part: Luke's version contains no doxology in any manuscript tradition. Not in the early copies, not in the late ones, and not even in the King James itself. When you read Luke eleven in your grandmother's Bible, the prayer simply ends. There is no kingdom, no power, and no glory.

So, this is where we stand. One Gospel ends the prayer early in its oldest copies. The other Gospel ends it early in every copy ever found. That's the fact your footnote has been holding all along. But a footnote can only tell you that something happened. It cannot tell you how we know

or how strong the evidence really is. For that, you have to meet the witnesses. And they are older and, more surprising, than most Christians have ever been told.

In the mid-nineteenth century, at a monastery beneath Mount Sinai, scholars uncovered one of the oldest complete Bibles, the Codex Sinaiticus, copied in the fourth century, within living memory of the last great persecutions. Turn to Matthew 6:13, and the Lord's Prayer ends with "deliverance from evil." Nothing follows. In the Vatican Library sits its companion, Codex Vaticanus, also from the fourth century and among the oldest Bibles on earth. It is identical to Codex Sinaiticus: the same chapter, the same verse, and the same ending. "Deliver us from evil," and then silence. It is vital to know that two of the most ancient complete copies of the Gospels we possess, copied independently in different places, agree completely. **The ending you recite does not exist.**

You do not need to take anyone's word for this, including mine. Codex Sinaiticus has been photographed page by page and published online for anyone to examine. You can pull up Matthew six tonight on your own screen, look at the fourth-century Greek with your own eyes, and see that the prayer ends where I told you it ends. That is the kind of claim this website deals in: not secrets, not speculation, but evidence you can check before you finish reading. Research like this takes time, so stay with me, because the next witness is even older than these Bibles.

Manuscripts are only the first class of evidence. There's a second, and in some ways it's even stronger. Long before Sinaiticus was copied, the early church fathers were writing about this prayer. Around the year two hundred, Tertullian wrote a treatise on the Lord's Prayer, walking through it phrase by phrase. A generation later, Origen did the same, and then Cyprian, the bishop of Carthage, wrote his own. That is three teachers in three different geographic regions, each writing a commentary, moving line by line through the prayer that Jesus taught His disciples. Not one of them comments on the doxology! They explain "hallowed be thy name." They explain "thy kingdom come." They explain "deliver us from evil." And then they stop, because the text they used stopped. It is impossible to explain a line of text that you have never seen. Their silence is not an argument from nothing; it is the sound of the prayer ending where the oldest manuscripts say it ends. Thus, the absence is established twice over, by the Church's oldest Bibles and by the Church's own leaders and teachers.

This is not a claim invented by modern skeptics. It is the church's own record, kept in the church's own hands. This finally sharpens the question this whole article turns on: of all the words you pray in that prayer, *which ones are actually His*? Here is where the story takes its strangest turn: Christians were praying a nonexistent ending to this prayer almost from the beginning. We have the document, and the oldest ending on record is missing a word you say every time. In 1873, in a library in Constantinople, a Greek scholar named Philotheos Bryennios found a manuscript that stunned the Christian world. It contained the Didache, which simply means "the teaching." Scholars had known it once existed because the early Church quoted it, but it had been lost for centuries.

It turned out to be one of the earliest Christian writings outside the New Testament, composed within the living memory of the Apostles. The Didache is a Church manual: it tells the

earliest believers how to baptize, fast, and pray. In its eighth chapter, it gives them the Lord's Prayer, almost word for word as Matthew records it, with one instruction attached—pray this three times a day. Then comes the part that should make you sit up! The Didache's version of the prayer has an ending. The earliest Christians did not stop at "deliver us from evil." **They added a line of praise.** Listen to it carefully: "For thine is the power and the glory forever." Say that again slowly, "The power. The glory." Compare that to what you say: "the kingdom, and the power, and the glory." The oldest ending in recorded Christian history does not include "the kingdom." The word you lead with every time you pray that line, βασιλεία (basileia, meaning "dominion," or "kingdom") in Greek, is not there. It didn't show up until much later.

A document from the following centuries, the Apostolic Constitutions, records the prayer again, and by then the ending has grown into "kingdom, power, and glory," the full threefold form you recite today. Do you understand what that means? The ending was not dropped from the Bible. It was built, piece by piece, in the Church's praying life. We watched it grow, document by document, like rings in a tree. First, nothing; then power and glory; finally, kingdom, power, and glory. Growth like that points in only one direction. If the doxology had been original and scribes had cut it, we would see it shrink over time. Instead, we see it expanding. Now we know what the ending really is: it was a response, worship rising up to meet the prayer. But that only deepens the mystery.

A congregation's response lives in the worship service, not in the Bible. So how did these words physically climb off the church's lips and onto the page of Matthew's Gospel? That part of the story has a hero no one names; all we know is that he was a copyist. Picture a scribe somewhere in the Greek-speaking East, hundreds of years after the Apostles. His task is sacred and tedious: copy the Gospel of Matthew, letter by letter, *without error*. He reaches chapter six, and something happens inside him that you can probably feel yourself. He has prayed this prayer since childhood, perhaps three times a day, just as the Didache taught. His hands know an ending that his example text lacks.

We know what came next because the manuscripts show us. The doxology begins appearing in the margins, written beside the text as a note on liturgical practice, much like a modern hymnal prints a congregational response. But a margin is a dangerous place for beloved words. The next copyist, finding them there, faces a choice: is this a correction the last scribe forgot to include, or just a note? Out of reverence, many copyists chose to include it. By roughly the fifth century, Greek manuscripts of Matthew began to carry the doxology within the verse itself. In the Byzantine tradition, the great manuscript family of the Greek East became the standard text. Now stop and notice what this was not: it was not a conspiracy, nor was it deception. No one profited. No doctrine was invented. The words were already a thousand years old, and the church was already praying them in public.

What happened was devotion, working the way devotion works: words loved long enough eventually leave their fingerprints. And here is the part that should strengthen your confidence in Scripture rather than shake it. It was caught. The record is so honest, so carefully preserved across centuries of copying, that scholars can trace the doxology's entire journey. It is absent

from the earliest witnesses; next, it appeared in the margins; then it settled into the later text. Nothing was burned. Nothing was hidden. The evidence sat in libraries until we learned to read it, and your footnote is the confirmation.

One more thing belongs on the record here. Not a single Christian doctrine rises or falls on this ending. The kingdom of God, his power, his glory: every one of those truths stands on dozens of other passages that have never been in question. Nothing you believe was built on this line, and nothing you believe is shaken by its history. Keep that picture of the scribe in your mind, because once you see how the ending got in, you are very close to seeing what you are really doing every time you say it.

But first, this history has to account for something you may have witnessed firsthand: why does half of Christendom seem to stop this prayer early? That difference has a clear paper trail. Maybe it happened at a wedding or a funeral. The Lord's Prayer began, with every voice together, and then, at "deliver us from evil," the Catholics around you stopped, but you kept going. Most Protestants quietly assume the Catholic Church dropped the ending somewhere along the way. However, the paper trail says the opposite—Rome never had it. In 382, the Church, still a single entity, commissioned the scholar Jerome to produce a definitive Latin Bible, the translation we call the Vulgate. Jerome worked from the manuscripts available to him, and in his Latin Matthew, the prayer ends at "deliver us from evil." There was no doxology. For over a thousand years, the Western church read, taught, and prayed from that Latin text. So the Roman tradition ends the prayer early for the simplest reason imaginable: it ends where the oldest text

Curiously, Catholics do pray the doxology at Mass today. After "deliver us from evil," the priest prays a short petition for peace and protection, and then the whole congregation responds: "For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours, now and forever." The response was restored to the Roman Mass in the reforms of the last century and deliberately set apart because the church knows it is a response rather than part of the verse. In the Orthodox East, the priest himself intones the doxology at the end of the prayer. Three traditions, three placements, one shared instinct of praise. So, where does the Protestant inline ending come from? Just follow the Greek.

The Byzantine manuscripts, those containing the doxology within the verse, were the ones available when the scholar Erasmus printed the first published Greek New Testament in the early sixteenth century. His text fed the editions known as the Textus Receptus, the received text. And the Textus Receptus is what the King James translators faithfully rendered into English in 1611. They did not add a word; they translated exactly what their Greek texts said. The doxology entered English memory through the most beloved translation in the language, and from there into your childhood. This means no one in this story is the villain, and no one is careless. Each tradition is faithful to its own stream of the text.

The contradiction you thought you witnessed at that funeral was never a contradiction at all. It was church history, standing in the same room. And that resolves everything except the question you have been carrying since the title of this article. The historical case is closed, and

the personal one is wide open. So the question that remains is: If Jesus never said these words, is it wrong for you to do so? Go back to the hillside and listen to how Jesus introduced this prayer in the first place. He did not say, "Recite after me." Matthew 6:9 tells us that Jesus said, "Pray then like this." It is a pattern, not a recording, a shape for prayer, not a script to be performed. Luke's shorter version proves the point; Jesus himself gave the prayer in more than one form. Thus, the question was never whether you may add words of praise to this pattern. The question is whether the words the church added are worthy of it. And this is where the story turns breathtaking.

The doxology is not a church invention, since it predates the church. Roughly a thousand years before Bethlehem, King David stood before all Israel at the dedication of the Temple treasury and prayed these words, recorded in First Chronicles 29:11, "Yours, O Lord, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the victory and the majesty. Yours is the kingdom, O Lord." There it is: Kingdom, Power, and Glory. βασιλεία δύναμις δόξα (basileia, dynamis, doxa), as the Greek-speaking church would later pray them. When the earliest Christians reached the end of the Lord's Prayer and could not bear to stop at the word evil, they did not compose something new; instead, they turned to David. They answered Scripture with Scripture, as Jewish prayer had always ended, in doxology, just as the Psalms close their books with blessing: "Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, from everlasting to everlasting. Amen and Amen."

Think about what they refused to do. The prayer Jesus gave ends with the word "evil." Rescued from it, yes, but the word still hangs there at the end. The early church would not let evil have the last word on the praying believer's lips. So they answered it with a king's confession that the kingdom, the power, and the glory belong to God alone. That is not corruption. That is theology, prayed. The words are biblical, and the practice is ancient. Now you stand just one step from the answer you read this for. Something specific happens when you say that line, and it is better than what you were taught. "And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil." That is where the voice of Jesus stops on the hillside. That is where the listening crowd was left: *with rescue*. Hold the silence after that word for a moment, because that silence is where two thousand years of believers have stood before you. And then hear what enters it. Not a forgery, nor a mistake, but the voice of the whole church, answering with the words of David: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.

Here is the truth you came for. When you pray that final line, you are not quoting Jesus; you are *answering* Him. The prayer is His, but the amen is ours. Every generation since the Didache has joined that response, and when you say it, you take your place in an unbroken line of praise stretching back through the scriptorium, through Carthage and Constantinople, all the way to a king standing before the altar of God. You now know exactly which words are His and exactly what you are doing when you say the rest. Both belong. One is the pattern He gave. The other is His people, still answering. And that little footnote at Matthew 6:13? It was never a crack in your Bible. It is a window, left open on purpose, showing how carefully these words were watched, copied, and kept for you.

A suggestion: tonight, pray it both ways. Pray it the way Jesus gave it, let it end at deliverance, and feel how complete it already is. Then add the church's answer, with your eyes open, knowing whose words they are and why they rose. The prayer will not be smaller. It will be deeper. The kingdom, the power, and the glory were his before we ever said so. They will be His long after. Saying it is not what makes it true. It is what makes us part of it. Amen, and amen. But before you go, the ending was not the only part of this prayer that the church changed. In the year 382 AD, the same Jerome you met here stood over the line “lead us not into temptation,” and what he did with it is why that line still troubles people today. Go to Part Three for the explanation.