

**Your Kingdom Come
(Lord, Teach Us to Pray, Part 3)**

Matthew 13:31-33, 44-49; Luke 17:20-21

[A sermon preached by the Rev. Stan Gockel at the First
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I

"Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." (Matt. 6:10)

What if one Sunday we were all praying the Lord's Prayer,
when suddenly, after we had said, "Thy kingdom come,"
somebody jumped up and shouted,
"Stop! You don't really mean it!"

It would make us think, wouldn't it, about whether we really do mean it.

And, the chances are, we don't.

For if we were truly sincere in praying for God's kingdom to come and God's will
to be done on earth as in heaven,
it would mean some *radical changes* in the way we live.

Some of us would spend the afternoon going to see people we've hurt and
asking their forgiveness.

Others of us would go to the bank tomorrow and withdraw money and give
it to fight hunger and poverty in the world.

Others would be thinking about how to give customers more value and
show more care for their employees and their families.

Still others would be thinking how we could redesign our educational
system so that it would lead to wholeness and not fragmentation and failure
for some, especially those in our inner cities.

Many of us would find ways to reduce our carbon emissions so that we can

slow down the rate of global warming.

We would all rearrange our daily schedules to include more time worshipping God and loving our neighbor.

To pray for God's kingdom to come carries all these implications and so much more.

And the fact that we so glibly gloss over this second petition of the Lord's Prayer is an indication that we really don't know what we are praying.

II

What does it mean to pray, "Thy kingdom come"?

We know from the Hebrew Scriptures that the kingdom of God involved the rule of God, the dominion of God over creation.

The people of Israel believed that when the kingdom came,
God would rule the earth as a sovereign ruled a country.

All of the inhabitants would be responsive to that rule...
all of God's power would be unleashed for the benefit of the people.

Amos saw the kingdom as a time of plenty:

*The one who ploughs shall overtake the one who reaps,
and the treader of grapes the one who sows the seed;
the mountains shall drip sweet wine,
and all the hills shall flow with it...*

*They shall plant vineyards and drink their wine,
and they shall make gardens and eat their fruit. (Amos 9:13-14)*

Isaiah saw the kingdom as a time of harmony:

*The wolf shall live with the lamb,
the leopard shall lie down with the kid,
the calf and the lion and the fatling together,
and a little child shall lead them. (Isaiah 11:6)*

Both Micah and Isaiah saw the kingdom as a time of peace:

*They shall beat their swords into plowshares,
and their spears into pruning hooks;
nation shall not lift up sword against nation,
neither shall they learn war any more.* (Micah 4:3; Isaiah 2:4)

The deepest longing of the people of Israel was for the coming of God's kingdom.

When we turn to the New Testament, we find the phrase "kingdom of God" used so often—

nearly 150 times—

that many NT scholars have concluded that the kingdom of God is the central theme of the New Testament.

Clearly, the kingdom of God was central to the ministry of Jesus.

In Mark's gospel, Jesus emerges on the scene speaking of the kingdom:

The time is fulfilled, the kingdom of God has come near; repent and believe in the good news. (1:15)

In Luke 4:43 Jesus describes the obligation that has been laid upon him:

I must proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God to the other cities also; for I was sent for this purpose.

And when Jesus preaches in the synagogue of Nazareth, he reads Isaiah's vision of God's kingdom, and says:

Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing. (Luke 4:21)

The kingdom of God was central to the preaching and teaching of Jesus.

And yet, for all of the references and all of the emphasis placed upon it,
the more Jesus says about the kingdom,
the more mysterious it becomes.

Jesus doesn't describe the kingdom in a travelogue—
because the kingdom is not a place.

It is a condition, and it can only be described in metaphor.

So Jesus calls it: a hidden treasure,
like a box of gold coins someone hidden somewhere in a field—
like finding a million bucks in your own back yard.

He calls it: a precious pearl...
like a jewel worthy of a king's ransom found by a business man
who sells everything he has to buy it.

He calls it: a fishing net full of fish, both good and bad.

He describes the kingdom as being like...
leaven and light,
salt and seed,
a ripe harvest,
a royal feast,
a great banquet,
an enormous party,
a wedding celebration.

Jesus says the kingdom is like finding something you hated to lose and thought
you'd never find again—
an old keepsake,
a stray sheep,
a missing child.

And when the kingdom comes,
and when you find it,
it's as if the missing thing you lost,
and never thought you'd find,
is you! (Buechner)

III

To pray "your kingdom come" is to affirm some important realities.

First, we learn that the kingdom is already present.

"The kingdom of God is at hand," said Jesus...
 "the kingdom of God is among/within you."

Theologians have debated the question of the kingdom of God for centuries—
 what it is,
 what it isn't.

To put it simply—the kingdom is where the King is.

If the King is part of your life,
 if he reigns in your heart,
 then you are part of his kingdom.

To pray "Thy kingdom come" is to realize that you are no longer number one.

You never have been—God is.

And because God is, you should seek God's kingdom and not your own glory
 in the way you live your life,
 how you spend your money,
 the way you think about your career,
 and especially in the ways you treat those around you.

Ask yourself this question:

*"In all I do and say am I seeking first the kingdom of God and God's
 righteousness, or my own glory?"*

"Thy kingdom come" is about seeing everything as God's, not yours.

Frank Sinatra sang, "I did it my way,"
 but this petition calls us to do it God's way.

And with this little prayer Jesus is knocking the selfishness right out of our prayers
 and our lives and filling our minds not with what we want,
 but with what God wants for our lives and our world.

He is *reorienting* our lives away from ourselves and our petty little worries about this or that (most of which is pretty trivial) and toward God.

Jesus is saying,

“Get your theology straight. See the world and your life in a totally different way when you pray and really believe ‘THY kingdom come.’” (Carl)

IV

Second, we learn that the kingdom of God is different from the kingdoms of this world.

The former is eternal...
the latter are temporal.

Jesus said to Pilate, "My kingdom is not of this world."

In other words, it does not involve principalities and powers,
thrones and kings,
lands and dominions.

It does not require taxation and national defense.

It does not revolve around material prosperity and national greatness.

It is not enforced by the rule of law,
but by the law of love.

The kingdom of God is invisible, yet powerful.

It is within you, says Jesus, and in following him you are part of his kingdom.

One of the dangers we face is confusing the kingdoms of this world,
including this nation we call the United States of America,
with the kingdom of God.

This results in what has been called civil religion—an institutionalized set of beliefs about our nation that in the minds of some become indistinguishable from the Christian faith.

But, as Gregory Boyd points out in his book The Myth of a Christian Nation, the danger of failing to distinguish civil religion from the kingdom of God is that we end up wasting precious time and resources defending and tweaking civil religion—as though doing so had some kingdom value.

“We strive to keep prayer in the schools, fight for the right to have public prayer before football games, lobby to preserve the phrases ‘under God’ in our Pledge of Allegiance and ‘in God we trust’ on our coins, battle to uphold the traditional civil meaning of marriage...—as though winning these fights somehow brings America closer to the kingdom of God.”

In being associated with these various civic functions, he says, the Christian faith ends up being trivialized.

Boyd asks:

“Aren’t we actually reinforcing this trivialization by fighting so hard to preserve this pseudo-Christian veneer? Maybe Kierkegaard was right when he stated that the worst form of apostasy the Christian faith can undergo is to have it become simply an aspect of a culture.”

So the kingdom of God is not to be equated with the United States of America, nor is the US Constitution on par with holy scripture,

Our calling as US citizens is only penultimate—
our ultimate calling is as citizens of Christ’s eternal kingdom.

V

Third, we learn the connection between praying for the coming of the kingdom and doing the will of the kingdom.

It is most significant that in the Lord's Prayer the petition "Thy kingdom come" is immediately followed by "Thy will be done."

This is an example of Hebrew parallelism,
where the second phrase explains and elaborates on the first.

There is the closest possible connection between being part of the kingdom of God and doing the will of God.

The kingdom of God is present whenever and wherever the will of God is done.

When we ask for God's will to be carried out in our lives,
then we become a part of God's kingdom.

When we pray "your kingdom come," we are expressing a longing not only for God's future reign, but also for God's authority over our lives right now.

In the gospels we see that the kingdom of God begins with an invitation...
a personal invitation from God to each individual.

This is captured in the words of the old spiritual:

*"Not my mother, not my father, but it's me, O Lord,
standin' in the need of prayer."*

In Luke 17:20-2, Jesus said, *"The kingdom of God is not coming with things that can be observed; nor will they say, 'Look, here it is!' or 'There it is!' For, in fact, the kingdom of God is within you."*

The Apostle Paul wrote:

"For the kingdom of God is not food and drink but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit." (Romans 14:17)

The kingdom is not merely a theological doctrine.

It is not a political program.

It is not a matter of social reform.

It is not to push a particular view of the world or of faith.

It is God face to face with you and me.

It is being eyeball to eyeball with Jesus on the shore of Galilee and hearing his words, "Follow me."

It is to be confronted with a personal challenge to either accept or reject the will of God for our lives.

It is to pray, "**Lord, bring in your kingdom...beginning with me.**"

VI

**Finally, we learn that even though there is a sense in which the kingdom of God is present with us now,
there is another sense in which it is not yet.**

Jesus told of a time when he would return to establish his kingdom,
to bring its truth, righteousness and justice to fulfillment in our lives and in our world.

Jesus said, "The kingdom of heaven is at hand."

Yes, it is, but where?

Do you see it in the world,
in your community,
in your life?

In the upper room Jesus said to his disciples:

Truly I say to you, I shall not drink again of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it with you in the kingdom of God.

Those who are committed to that kingdom,
those who do the will of God,
those who follow Jesus,
will find a place in that kingdom,
and will share the cup of salvation with Jesus.

Friends, I firmly believe there will come a day when all the violence, oppression, starvation, and destruction that happens in this world will come to an end.

There will come a time when...no more bombs will be planted,
...no more children will be forced into sexual slavery,
...no more babies will die for lack of adequate nutrition,

...no more people will be forced to become refugees because of political unrest and violence.

As Margaret Magdalen wrote in her book, Jesus, Man of Prayer:

It may seem that the forces of evil are now winning—dragging the whole world with them in a cosmic tug-of-war, but the Kingdom has already broken through, the victory already been won. To pray, "Thy kingdom come" is not the expression of a vague wish, a rather forlorn hope unlikely ever to be fulfilled. It is to affirm the work of Christ; to unite ourselves to it in fervent longing and desire for the consummation of that reign of peace and love and truth which Jesus inaugurated.

Friends...God's kingdom will come in fullness and in power...

God will triumph over all the forces of darkness and hate...
and Jesus Christ will rule over this world in love and justice.

How are we to live faithfully until that time comes?

How are we to cope with this tension of the already and the not yet?

One of my favorite stories* out of World War II gives us the answer.

It happened in a German prisoner-of-war camp where Allied soldiers were being held. The camp was divided into two compounds with a fence running down the middle. On one side were British soldiers and on the other side where Americans.

There were two chaplains, one British and one American, each of whom hailed from the Scottish highlands.

The two chaplains would meet at the fence each day, and, so as not to be understood by the English-speaking German guards, would speak to each other in Gaelic, the ancient language of Ireland and Scotland.

Unbeknownst to the Germans, the Americans had a wireless.

Each day the American chaplain would come to the fence with the latest news of the war and pass that news on to his British counterpart.

*One day the news came over the wireless—
Germany had surrendered!...
the war in Europe had ended!*

Quickly the word spread throughout the camp, and in a matter of minutes the celebration began.

*It was a glorious party, as British and American soldiers cheered,
waved to each other,
sang patriotic songs,
shouted and hugged each other,
cried and planned for their release from prison.*

The German guards were mystified because they did not know that the war had ended.

This went on for three days.

*For three days the British and American prisoners celebrated the end of the war,
while the German guards looked on in puzzlement.*

*They were still prisoners...
they were still surrounded by barbed wire and guards with guns,
but they knew the war was over...
they knew they would soon be free.*

*On the morning of the 4th day the soldiers woke up to find the guards gone,
the prison gates open,
and the prisoners walked out as free men.*

VII

Sisters and brothers, that is what it means to live as part of the kingdom of God—
with a sure and certain hope that...

*One day the battle will be over...
One day the victory will be won...
One day the prison gates will be opened...
Christ's reign on earth begun.*

Until that day, we continue to pray as Jesus taught:

**Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come!**

In the words of Georgia Harkness:

*This is my prayer, O Lord of all earth's kingdoms,
Thy kingdom come, on earth thy will be done;
Let Christ be lifted up till all shall serve him,
And hearts united learn to live as one:
O hear my prayer, thou God of all the nations,
Myself I give thee--let thy will be done.*

Amen.

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Sermons by Tooze, Julian, Gockel.

*I first heard the story of the WWII POW camp from my seminary professor Dr. Raymond Bakke, and have retold it several times over the years.