

Sunday, January 30, 2022

## Let Your Kingdom Come...

(Series: "Lord, Teach Us to Pray")

(Message Four)

### Scripture:

*<sup>9</sup> "This, then, is how you should pray:  
'Our Father in heaven,  
hallowed be your name,  
your kingdom come...'"*  
(Matthew 6:9-10a)

### Message:

**There is the wonderful story of the boldness of a young woman named Hadassah.**

Though her language and culture are worlds apart from ours, she can tell you about the power of prayer to a king. Her request was not to her father the king, but to her husband, the king. Her request wasn't for herself, but for her people. Because she was willing to enter the throne room and willing to pour out her heart, the King changed his plans and thousands were saved, perhaps even millions, in countries all over the world.

Her drama would make a Hollywood feature film. There is an evil scheming power monger, a secret identity, a beauty pageant winner, a wise and gutsy cousin; a peasant who steps into royalty, a classic pep talk, and a deep conviction to press forward even at the risk of losing her life. Her success makes this a remarkable story.

I'd love for you to meet her, but such an encounter is unlikely, unless you're reading your Bible and come across the book bearing her name – her other name – Esther.

Like Esther, we were plucked from obscurity and offered a place with a King. Like Esther, we have royal robes: she was dressed in cloth; we are dressed in righteousness. Like Esther, we have the privilege of making our request; like Esther, our King listens. We have been invited into the Throne Room of the universe; We have been given an audience with the King! When we pray for God's Kingdom to come, it comes!

In our continuing study of the prayer Jesus taught his disciples to pray, we looked, last week, at the first petition - "*May Your Name be Holy*"; this morning we'll look at the second petition - "*Let Your Kingdom Come*".

Literally translated, the word order is, "*Let it come...your kingdom.*" God alone brings in the **kingdom**; we are to live and **work** toward the goal of its coming.

### THREE VIEWS OF HISTORY

Consciously or unconsciously, every historian looks at history through the lens of a particular philosophy or worldview. We'll mention three; the first two of which were widespread in Jesus' day.

The first view said, "History is **meaningless**" (This view probably includes most high school students). ☺

That is, "If there is a God, he is like a **watch maker** who creates a watch, winds it up and leaves it on the table to run down gradually." That is, God may have created the world, but he has gone on to other things and is no longer interested or involved in nature or current events. That is, the world is slowly winding down and life will, at some point, come to an end.

The struggles through which time and people pass has no **meaning** because there is no metanarrative (large picture or balcony view) to give it direction or **purpose**. In this view of history, a relationship with one's Creator, with God, is not possible, so **prayer** makes **no sense**.

A second view, largely influenced by the Greeks, said history repeats itself over and over like a series of **circles**; like a play being re-enacted over and over. The *circle* might be a thousand years or more, but what goes around comes **around** again...

Our lives may be filled with "sound and fury," with busyness and drama, but life has little **meaning**, no one is really in control, what you see is what there is; we're just re-enacting an old drama. So, we can connect with God, but our **prayers** have little **impact** on the cycle.

Scripture's apocalyptic passages provide a third view. This perspective views history as an arrow moving toward a target called "*the **Day** of the Lord*" (**Amos 5:18**) or "*the Kingdom of God*" (**Mark 1:15**).

History has direction and **meaning**. Since we are often preoccupied with the struggles of the present day, we may not always see "the big picture," that is, the meaning, but there is one. While it may be impossible to discover the purpose (meaning) of any particular event that occurs (no foot soldier sees the full scope of the large battle), we can have **confidence** that the one who

holds the rudder of history hasn't fallen asleep. That brings meaning, purpose, and a sense of quiet confidence.

Using this last understanding of history, Jesus **welcomes** and invites us to pray, "*Let Your Kingdom Come*" with the gift that our prayers can **impact** the course of history. Walter Wink, an American theologian and Biblical scholar, says, "*History belongs to the intercessors—those who believe and pray the future into being.*" In this understanding of history, prayer is not only possible, it is imperative and impactful.

### **THREE PARADOXES WE NEED TO FACE**

**Jesus' teaching on the Kingdom of God has been debated for centuries.**

What we know about the Kingdom of God results in a significant number of paradoxes. A paradox is holding two **truths** that seem to **contradict** each other at the same time; so, it is not an *either/or*, but a *both/and*.

So much of our life is either/or; our understanding of things (even life) is that things are either right or wrong, good or bad, true or false, this or that. We must make choices – choose one or the other - because we can't have both.

Think about a train. Trains require train tracks. Train tracks are always two parallel tracks. Remove either one and the train crashes. Move the tracks closer to each other or farther apart, and the train crashes. The train moves and avoids crashing only if both rails remain present and properly balanced.

**Christ's explanation of the Kingdom of God in the New Testament leaves us with three significant paradoxes.**

The first paradox is that the Kingdom of God has **already come** (in Jesus Christ) **AND** the Kingdom of God is still to come **in the future**.

Jesus tells his opponents, "*If it is by the finger of God I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you*" (**Luke 11:20**). This text affirms the Kingdom of God is already here.

Then, here in the Lord's Prayer, where Jesus teaches us to pray, "*Let your kingdom come;*" we are asking for a future Kingdom that has not yet come or taken place.

This is known as the "*already (now), but not yet.*" Both statements are true! Both statements seem to contradict each other. Paradox number one!

The second paradox is that the kingdom of God is **near** **AND** the Kingdom of God is **far away**.

Peter wrote, "*The end of all things is near*" (**1 Peter 4:7**). Many Christ followers of his day felt Jesus' return was imminent (cf. **1 Cor.7:20, 10:11; Romans 13:12**).

On his last journey to Jerusalem, Jesus went to Zacchaeus' house. Jesus told him, "*Today salvation has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham.*" (**Luke 19:9**). The phrase, "*Today salvation has come*" suggested to the disciples who were listening, that the end of history was about to take place. They lived with great expectation and anticipation of Christ's return.

But the text continues: "[Jesus] *went on to tell them a parable...because the people of God thought the Kingdom of God was going to appear at once.*" (**Luke 19:11**). The parable of the Ten Minas suggests, in the giving of minas (talents) to three individuals to invest, that the Kingdom is still off in the distance. Two apparently contradictory statements. Paradox number two.

The third paradox brings together two more statements Jesus made: There are the (clear) **signs** of the coming Kingdom AND only the **Father knows** when.

In **Luke 21:5-36**, Jesus describes signs of the coming Kingdom and then tells his disciples that only the Father knows when (**Matt. 24:36**); they'll never figure it out. The "secret" isn't even entrusted to Jesus or the angels (**Matthew 13:32**).

So, the coming of the kingdom is predictable (i.e., there are signs), but unknown and unknowable; a seeming contradiction where both statements are true. Two seemingly contradictory statements. Paradox number three.

**Believers in every century have been convinced they are living in the last days.** This conviction started almost immediately after Jesus ascended (**2 Peter 3:3-10**).

Christians in every age are called to live expectantly and, at the same time, never to presume to know the mind of the Father regarding the time of the end of history.

A paradox affirms the truth of two opposing truths that cannot logically be reconciled. The resulting, combined truth is greater and deeper than either of the two truths by themselves.

In summary, the Kingdom of God gives **purpose** and **direction** to (all) history. In Scripture, the kingdom is affirmed to *have come* and yet it lies *in the future*. It is *just about to happen* and is still *far off*. There are *signs*, but the timing of the fulfillment of the kingdom is to us *unknown* and unknowable.

We can confidently affirm that the ship of history moves in the direction **God intends** even while we live in the midst of destruction, pain and tragedy. Meanwhile we pray, "Your Kingdom Come" in faith and confidence as we labor to prepare for that coming.

## THE NATURE OF HIS KINGDOM (five understandings)

The first understanding we should acknowledge is **eschatological** (We'll call this "**Heaven**").

Almost everyone agrees that when praying "*Let Your Kingdom Come*" we're asking for the end of history as we have come to know it. We're not only praying for **Jesus' return**, his second coming; we're praying for the new Creation, the new heaven(s) and the new earth.

The New Testament teaches that we are to pray for and eagerly anticipate the end of this world and the coming of God's Kingdom in its fullness.

The spirit of *Maranatha* ("*Come, Lord*") surrounds every sentence and permeates every paragraph as Scripture anticipates this great event.

Beginning in the first chapter of Scripture, we read darkness comes out of light; promise comes following a fall; our wanderings lead to the promised land; a bad Friday leads to a Resurrection Sunday; after death comes New Life; and the day is coming when we will be with Jesus. Whenever we pray, "*Let Your Kingdom come*" we express our longing for that day.

While this may be the easiest meaning to understand, it is probably the most difficult to pray and mean. Most of us have it pretty good in this life; we'd like to live longer, see our family and investments grow, and have more of our dreams come true. We would rather extend our life as we know it than pray for an unknown change.

The (quick) coming of God's Kingdom (by this first understanding) would also mean the end of evangelism and an uncertain destiny for billions of people in our world as much of the *Harvest* still remains in the field.

And, every time we pray this petition, we are (also) asking God to make us really want his kingdom to **come quickly** (i.e., more than anything else) in our heart, life and world.

**The second understanding is **mystical** (We'll call this "**Heart**").**

This popular and widespread understanding invites the Kingdom of God to take up residence in our **believing hearts**. "*Let your Kingdom Come*" is synonymous with "*Make me a **Disciple** of **Jesus**.*"

This petition means discerning God's will so we can obey it; tearing down our little kingdoms so his is the only one; making the necessary changes in our heart and life, and making Jesus Lord and having him set the direction of our lives. To ask "God's Kingdom to Come" doesn't make any sense if we're not willing to make him **King** (Lord) of the two feet of **earth** we each **occupy**.

This understanding also invites the Kingdom of God to take up residence in the hearts and lives of unbelievers; that is, this is a prayer for reconciliation, for justice, for mercy, and for their salvation.

In asking, “God’s Kingdom to Come,” we are personally committing to be evangelists; to share the Gospel with our family, our neighbors, our fellow students, and our co-workers. In asking “God’s Kingdom to Come,” we are committing to bringing **shalom** and **jubilee**; racial reconciliation; an end of injustice, abuse, violence, and trafficking to a world desperately in need of love, grace, and forgiveness.

**The third understanding is political (We’ll call this “History”).**

This option tends to place the Kingdom of God in a **particular empire** (e.g., the Byzantium Empire in the East or the Holy Roman Empire in the West). This was Israel’s primary understanding of the Kingdom of God. They longed for their Messiah to set up and rule an earthly kingdom, defeat their oppressors, and bring them liberation and freedom. Constantine also identified the Kingdom of God with his empire; many today tie America and God’s Kingdom closely together.

Israel missed that an earthly Kingdom was not part of God’s plan. The truth is, it is **incorrect** to associate the Kingdom of God with any one nation, or any sort of nationalism; the truth here is that the Kingdom of God does have to do with this **world**...

The Kingdom of God has significant implications for the hungry, naked, ill, marginalized, imprisoned (just look at **Matthew 25**). The Kingdom of God has significant implications for peace, justice, ecology, and stewardship now – in this world. And...every time we pray this petition, we recommit ourselves to transforming our world (nation) in Christ’s name for the sake of God’s Kingdom.

**A fourth understanding is God’s Kingdom as the institutional church (We’ll call this “House of Worship”).** This understanding of the Kingdom of God was dominant in the Roman Catholic Church from Augustine (4<sup>th</sup> century) until the middle of the twentieth century.

This gave God’s Kingdom a viable, visible, earthly presence; Kingdom and Church could be (and often were) used **interchangeably**. But the Kingdom of God is far more than the institutional church; especially one part of the organized Church. But a healthy Church, the body of Christ, must be a key player in preparing us to receive the gift of the Kingdom of God.

When we pray this petition, we commit to being a church which reflects God’s Kingdom to this world – a forgiving, grace-filled, **Christ-centered family** seeking to usher in the Kingdom of God through our life and witness.



**The final understanding is Kingdom as the Word (We'll call this "Homily").**

The reformers taught that when we pray "*Let Your Kingdom Come*" we are praying for the increase of God's Word as the means by which the Kingdom is now present in our lives and in our world.

Wherever God's **Word is faithfully preached** (and obeyed) Christ becomes King. That is, Christ rules in our hearts and lives through his Word. That is, wherever the Word is preached, God's Kingdom is present and at work. That is, the proclamation of God's Word brings God's **sovereignty** over hearts and historical events.

Our prayer for the *Coming of God's Kingdom* becomes a prayer for Truth; for the Word in the Flesh, for the Way, the Truth, and the Life, to take up residence as King (Lord) of our heart and life.

"Let Your Kingdom Come" is a prayer for the increase of Christian mission and ministry at home, at work, in our neighborhood, and throughout our world. When we pray this petition, we **commit to help** and take an active role in making that happen.

## **SUMMARY**

**Each of these understandings of Kingdom contain truth – some more than others. Yet each one is not complete.** The kingdom of God includes **everything** that **Jesus** said and did.

Each of Jesus' parables explain an aspect of it. The Kingdom establishes ethical patterns and must be approached like a child. It is hard for the rich to enter into the Kingdom. Its great commandment is to love God above all and our neighbor like ourselves. The eucharist is related to it; it is the central focus of Jesus' preaching.

We labor to receive its blessings in our hearts; we look to the future with hope. The Kingdom of God is a now and future divine breaking into human history. His Kingdom is already present in signs, anticipation, and momentary ecstasy, yet in its fullness still to come. We see the Kingdom in the teaching and ministry of Jesus himself; and long for it in His Church and our lives. God, and God alone, brings in his Kingdom and we are to live and work focused on the goal of its coming.

The coming Kingdom will have a community rather than an individual character and a political manifestation of justice and peace as well as a new and greater outpouring of God's Spirit upon those who enter this Kingdom.

Like the first petition, this request deals with a narrative that involves the whole world and all of history; as we pray, we are to look well beyond our own needs and catch a vision of this world under the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

So, like Hadassah, like Esther, we live for, prepare for, the opportunity to accept the King's invitation and step boldly into his throne room to present our requests. The author of Hebrews underscores this: "*So let us come boldly to the very throne of God and stay there to receive his mercy and to find grace to help us in our times of need.*" **(Hebrews 4:16)**

Walter Wink reminded us that the **future belongs** to those who pray, and so we pray...

*Our Abba, Father, in the heavens,  
Holy be your Name.  
Let your Kingdom come...*

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