

A Sermon  
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Grace Baptist Church  
Bryans Road, Maryland  
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## **Teach Us to Pray: Your Kingdom Come**

Matthew 6:9-13

Last Sunday, we continued our sermon series on the Lord's Prayer by exploring the prayer's opening address and first petition. "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name." Jesus tells us to join him in his relationship with God, through the work of the Spirit, in a way that acknowledges and honors the holy love of the Father, who is the source of our life and salvation. The beginning of the Lord's Prayer reminds us that God is relational and personal, but not in a way that reduces God's holiness and majesty.

Majesty is a concept we often associate with kingship. And there's plenty of kingship in the second petition of the Lord's Prayer: "Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." Or as many of us have learned it: "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." The idea of God's kingship permeates the Bible. Today's Scripture reading from Isaiah is just one example of Scripture's witness to God exercising kingship: "How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, 'Your God reigns!'" (52:7). The great expectation and hope of God's people Israel was that God would one day come to deliver them, fully and finally, from captivity and oppression, and that all nations would acknowledge the Lord as the world's true ruler.

When we turn to the New Testament, we see that the word the Gospel writers use most often to summarize Jesus' message is the term "kingdom." For instance, in Mark, when Jesus starts his earthly ministry, we're told, "After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. 'The time has come,' he said. 'The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!'" (1:14-15). This was the text of the first sermon I preached as pastor of this congregation, just over twenty years ago. We began our partnership with one another, and set the tone for what was ahead, by centering on the reign of God. That's still the core of our worship, work, and witness.

When we think of kings and kingship, we often think in terms of a place. A kingdom is the territory or space over which a king rules. There's certainly some truth in that. But in the New Testament, the term has more of a sense of activity. A word like "rule" or "reign" comes closer to its meaning. So when Jesus preaches that "the kingdom of God is near," he's announcing that God is returning to claim his throne. God is back on the scene and his rule is taking hold. He's implementing his reign.

For folks like us, living in a modern democracy, the language of kings and kingdoms can sound ancient and strange. But the underlying idea of governing, or being governed, can still help us grasp the nature of the gospel. Even if we're not accustomed to royal coronations, we have experience with the issues created by transitions in power, especially after the 2020 election. Even when we grow cynical about government, we still know that who's in power makes a difference, for our own lives and the lives of others. Whatever your political party or candidate preference, we recognize that those who reign from Washington, or from the state house, or from the town hall, shape our lives. We may not speak the language of kings and kingdoms, but we know that living under someone's authority, or exercising our own authority, are still daily realities for us.

As Christians, we not only pray for those in authority, but most of all we pray for the full arrival of heavenly authority. That's the focus of the second petition of the Lord's Prayer, "Your kingdom come." When we pray in this way, we're joining other followers of Jesus in longing for the future manifestation of the reign of God. We're yearning for God to finish what he has started through Jesus Christ. Our prayer is for our Lord's return to bring about the full reconciliation, restoration, and healing of the entire created order.

"Your kingdom come." What's the content of that expression? Jesus fleshes it out further by saying it's the doing of God's will. "Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." Heaven is the realm where God's will is already done. His righteousness is fully actualized. His character and values are already fully reflected and embodied. In heaven, things operate the way that God likes them and intends them. So when we pray as Jesus has taught us, we're asking for the will of God to be fully actualized here where we are. In other words, as one pastor has put it, we're praying, "May your sphere of authority, O God, be extended to this earth. Please arrange things down here just as you do up there. May your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. May up there come down here."<sup>1</sup>

Pastor Mark Buchanan recounts a scene from the movie *The Soloist*, which tells the story of the friendship between Nathaniel Ayers, a homeless man with an undiagnosed mental illness, and Steven Lopez, an *LA Times* columnist. In this particular scene,

Steven spends the night on the streets with Nathaniel. Rats scurry around them on the street as people weep, laugh, brawl, jabber, stagger, and embrace. They curl up in sleeping bags, huddle in stairwells, hunker down over meals. Meanwhile, Nathaniel recites the Lord's Prayer. His voice floats over the street's madness and tenderness, its beauty and squalor. "Thy kingdom come," Nathaniel says, and a woman screams at a man, flails her fists at his chest. "Thy will be done," he says, and two men share a cigarette. "On earth as it is in heaven," as a church group hands out boxed meals.<sup>2</sup>

According to Buchanan, "We're left to wonder—is Nathaniel asking for the kingdom to come to these streets, or is he announcing that the kingdom is already present?"<sup>3</sup>

In the message and ministry of Jesus, and that of the church, both of these are true. In one respect, the kingdom of God is future. We pray for and look forward to the day when the reign of God in Christ is brought to consummation at the end of the world. But in another respect, the kingdom of God is present. Christ has died for our sins, been raised from the dead, and is seated at the right hand of God. God has reconciled us to himself and to one another. Sin, death, and the devil have already been defeated. God reigns! So the kingdom of God is both already, and not yet.

This means that our lives reside in this strange territory between Christ's first coming and his final coming. We live, as author Philip Yancey puts it, "in a transition time—a transition from death to life, from human injustice to divine justice, from the old to the new—tragically incomplete, yet marked here and there, now and then, with clues of what God will someday achieve in perfection."<sup>4</sup>

Indeed, it will be God's achievement, and not our own. When we pray the Lord's Prayer, we're acknowledging that God is God, and that God is ultimately responsible for bringing in God's rule. The Lord's Prayer isn't a prayer for those who believe that humans can save the world and fix everything that's wrong with society. We're all part of a world in rebellion against our Creator, subject to powers and forces that are greater than what mortals can remedy. Our deliverance can only come from outside us, beyond us. From heaven to earth, which is exactly our Lord has taught us to pray for. "Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven."

What a grand vision of cosmic redemption, of God's faithfulness and his determination to set things right in his world. No more sickness. No more war. No more pandemics. No more racial or ethnic oppression. No more hatred on the internet. No more abuse of the planet. No more haves and have nots. No more family strife. No more teenage depression and suicide. No more gun violence and mass shootings. No more death. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. The reuniting of the heavenly realm and the earthly realm, with God's peace and justice accomplished and undisturbed, forever.

I once passed by a church sign that put the critical question to passersby: DO YOU WANT WHAT GOD WANTS? God has shown us, most of all through Jesus Christ, what he wants. And he has not only shown us, but has done what is necessary to bring it about. Through Christ's death and resurrection, God has accomplished what he wants, the salvation of sinners, the restoration of humankind, and the bringing about of a new creation.

So what are you doing with what God has done? Do you want what God wants? What he wants for the world. What he wants for you. What he wants is for you to be a kingdom person. He wants to bring you out of self-sovereignty and under his sovereignty. As J. I. Packer has rightly pointed out, "God's kingdom is not a place, but rather a relationship. It exists wherever people enthrone Jesus as Lord of their lives."<sup>5</sup> Repent and believe the good news. Be someone who lives in and under the reign of Christ. Join in praying, "Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven."

Remember how the words of that prayer echoed into Jesus' own anguished prayer in Gethsemane. "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet not what I want but what you want.... My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done" (Matt. 26:39, 42). In the original Greek, the wording of that prayer and the wording of the Lord's Prayer are identical. Clearly, God's will coming to be done on earth, and in my life and your life as followers of Jesus, doesn't happen in an easy, convenient, pain-free way. On the contrary, the arrival of God's reign is costly. So you and I need to consider carefully what we're praying for in the Lord's Prayer. When we petition God for his kingdom to come and his will to be done, are we prepared to make the sacrifices that it will require of us? What will you and I have to give up in order for his will to be done on earth? Are you and I willing to go through the kind of transformation that's necessary in order to live lives that look more heavenly, reflecting the righteousness and justice of the world to come?

The good news is that the power to be kingdom people is available to us in Christ, here and now. Each day, as you wake up your phone, open your web browser, turn on your television, or step out your front door, and encounter a world that looks so at odds with God's will and purposes, remember that that's not the only reality going on. There's a deeper and more durable reality called the reign of God. It's present and future, already and not yet. And as you pray for God to bring it about, you're called to participate in bringing it about. The wholeness, life, and love of God take root on earth in your action, including the act of prayer. So as you pray for God's reign to become more fully visible, God stretches your heart to desire and long for heavenly realities, and to display those realities in your life, and in our life together as the church.

<sup>1</sup> Jeffrey Arthurs, in his sermon, "Thy Kingdom Come." Preaching Today website. <https://www.preachingtoday.com/sermons/sermons/2011/july/kingdomcome.html> (October 20, 2021).

<sup>2</sup> Mark Buchanan, "The Kingdom Come." CT Pastors website. <https://www.christianitytoday.com/pastors/2010/spring/thykingdomcome.html> (October 20, 2021).

<sup>3</sup> Buchanan, "Thy Kingdom Come."

<sup>4</sup> Philip Yancey, *The Jesus I Never Knew*. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995) 253-254.

<sup>5</sup> Quoted in *Christianity Today*, Vol. 53, No. 2 (February 2009) n.p.