

Thy Kingdom Come
Matthew 6:7-13
First Presbyterian Church
October 3, 2021

⁷“When you are praying, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do; for they think that they will be heard because of their many words. ⁸Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

⁹“Pray then in this way: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. ¹⁰Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. ¹¹Give us this day our daily bread. ¹²And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. ¹³And do not bring us to the time of trial but rescue us from the evil one.

Sermon

When Jesus teaches us to pray, he begins with the simplest phrase: “Our Father in heaven.” The word he uses for Father is “Abba” – which is a basic word... a word of endearment even. “Abba” evokes very positive images of fatherhood – God as provider... as protector... ever-loving and ever compassionate.¹ And Jesus teaches us to pray to this one Father that connects us all... the One who is “Our Father...”

Yet, quickly the prayer shifts to a more advanced level. If to pray “Our Father in heaven” is Prayer 101... to pray, “your kingdom come, your will be done,” is like a 500-level course. If praying to our Abba in heaven is as NATURAL as a child calling out to her parent for help or comfort, then praying “your kingdom come, your will be done” is as UNNATURAL as surrendering our lives, our desires, our wills to Another. This is advanced prayer, my friends. It is also truth in advertising. The Federal Trade Commission insists that: “Advertising must be truthful and non-deceptive.” Jesus meets that standard and more! If we are going to follow him it’s going to be about God’s Kingdom and God’s will, not ours. And whatever else we hear or say in our worship service, when those words of the Lord’s Prayer leave our lips each Sunday, it is clear this is not our little kingdoms that will come... it is not our will that will be done.² This is advanced prayer... and it takes time and experience and maturity to learn to pray this way.”

I remember back in basic preaching class, our professor saying that most preachers have about seven sermons... and regardless of what the Scripture text is (any given week) from Sunday to Sunday, their congregations will hear one of those seven. With Jesus it was even less than that. Though he spoke about faith and prayer and money and other relevant topics, he had one sermon that he preached over and over and over: “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.”³

¹ Amy-Jill Levine in the Sermon on the Mount – A Beginner’s Guide to the Kingdom of God (Abingdon, 2020) p. 72.

² Introduction is adapted from a sermon by Patrick J. Wilson preached to the Williamsburg Presbyterian Church, Williamsburg, VA. on April 25, 2010.

³ Mark 1:15

But herein is the challenge - this concept of the “kingdom of God” is a hard one for us to grasp. And when it comes to the Lord’s Prayer, it begs the question: when Jesus’ disciples prayed, “Thy kingdom come...” what were they praying for exactly? When they prayed, “... thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven” what did they imagine God might do?

Well, as always with questions like this, there are some things we can know and other things we can’t. One thing we know is that when these Jewish followers of Jesus prayed “Thy kingdom come,” they were longing for the God of Israel to become King. Having lived for over 400 years enslaved by Pharaoh... having been taught the stories of so many failed kings once they were free... and with their present experience being crushed under the heel of Roman emperors and the Herodian dynasty... they were understandably fed up with earthly rulers and longed for God to come and be their king.⁴

Jesus and his disciples lived in a kingdom without democracy. This kingdom was ruled by an emperor and maintained by an army... so coming from their lips “Your kingdom come...” has a palpable political edge... and clearly states that the Roman Empire (with Herod Antipas as king and Pontius Pilate as governor) is NOT what the kingdom of God looks like.⁵ So, when Jesus and his disciples prayed this, they were saying “Take over, God. Take over and rule in the affairs of people and nations.”⁶ “Make your kingdom come... and make it come NOW!”

And yet, listening to JESUS we quickly realize that “Your kingdom come...” is far deeper... far more expansive... (far less obvious) and far more HIDDEN than a quick “regime change.” Jesus thought in pictures... he taught by telling stories – the kingdom of God is like seed sown in the ground... they grow silently, we know not how. But one day there is a harvest, and we must put in the sickle and reap.⁷ It is like a net, sunk down in the water where we cannot see it. Pull it in and it is full of all kinds of fish.⁸ It is like leaven... yeast that a woman hid in three measures of flour. You cannot see it or hear it, but it spreads, and the dough rises, and it is time to bake.⁹ And his point is that the kingdom is at hand, but not fully... it is present, but its presence is a hidden presence. There may be nothing in the morning paper or on your news feed that would lead you to think it is here at all. And yet, seen through the eye of faith, this kingdom that we seek and pray for will be visible... what is hidden now... is nevertheless very much real.

So, let’s just say we take Jesus at his word... let’s say we believe that God’s kingdom will one day come in fullness... that one day our insistent prayer will be answered... what will that answer look like? That’s really the question we’re asking in this series of sermons and classes from the Sermon on the Mount. And according to our Lord, the “simple” answer is that the kingdom of God looks very different from the kingdoms of our world.

⁴ N.T. Wright, *The Lord and His Prayer* (Eerdmans, 1996), p. 25.

⁵ Levine again, p. 78.

⁶ Albert Curry Winn, *A Christian Primer – The Prayer, The Creed, The Commandments* (W/JKP, 1990) p. 41.

⁷ Mark 4:26-29

⁸ Matthew 13:47

⁹ Matthew 13:33

In fact, Jesus speaks often of a great reversal of values and priorities and blessings. The poor will have the kingdom and the rich will have only their memories. The hungry will be satisfied, and the full will be hungry. Those who weep will laugh and those who laugh will mourn. The kingdom turns everything “upside down” – it is a “Great Reversal.” The last will be first and the first will be last. Children will be the teachers of adults and servants and slaves will be the great ones. Tax collectors and prostitutes go into the kingdom ahead of the religious leaders. Those who exalt themselves will be humbled and those who humble themselves will be exalted. It should be evident by now that through the eyes of faith the kingdom of God looks very different from our earthly kingdoms... and that OUR political and economic and social arrangements have absolutely no authority there... and to pray “Your kingdom come...” is to genuinely pray for this Great Reversal” to happen... which is, of course, why this is Advanced Prayer, my friends – why this is Prayer 501 – because it requires us to place our wants and wills aside for the promise of something better. This is what Jesus modeled for us when, in the Garden the night before he was crucified, he prayed, “My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will.”¹⁰ I’m not going to say this is easy... it’s not. It is challenging to pray this way and for most of us it takes a lifetime to even get close to really meaning it.

But one of the reasons we come here every Sunday is to practice... to learn to desire God’s will... to learn to recognize God’s kingdom. It’s not that God doesn’t want to hear what we want... I think God does. It’s just that the problem with ONLY praying for our own needs and wants is that we never get anything better. Thomas Traherne, a 17th century English theologian, recognized that our human wills and wants are awfully small and paltry, but praying the Lord’s Prayer causes us to want like God. I love that... praying the Lord’s Prayer causes us to want like God. And what God wants is vastly more extravagant and beautiful than anything we might dream or desire. Praying for God’s will to be done does not surrender what we hope for, it just realizes that God’s kingdom offers so much more.¹¹ Which means that praying “Your kingdom come...” is above all a prayer of great hope.¹² I like the way John Ortberg says this part of the prayer: "May up there come down here." Please, God, arrange things down here just as you do up there. May up there come down here." This prayer... prayed often enough... prayed long enough... prayed sincerely enough... this prayer has the power to cause us to want like our God. Thy kingdom come... thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

¹⁰ Matthew 26:39

¹¹ Willson again.

¹² Winn, p. 46