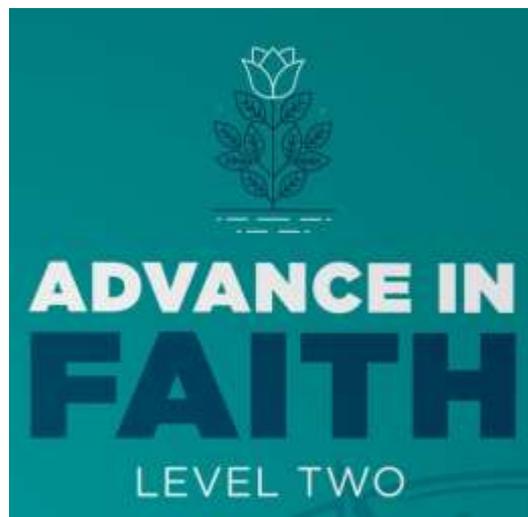


The Lord's Prayer

Week 3 — Your kingdom come



Introduction

When we pray, *Your kingdom come*, what are we asking for?

What is God's kingdom? How does it come?

The next part of the prayer fills us in. When we pray for God's kingdom to come, we're praying for *God's will to be done on earth, just as it is in heaven*.

God's *kingdom* is his kingship, his reign. He already reigns in heaven, but there's been a rebellion against his reign here on earth, so God is at work to bring us back under his governance. As we submit ourselves to God's reign through the one he has appointed to rule us (Jesus Christ our Lord), God's kingdom comes and God's will is done on earth, just as it is in heaven.

It isn't complete until every knee bows to him and every tongue give him allegiance. But the restoration of God's kingdom reign over the earth has already begun. It's already present in the people who acknowledge Jesus is Lord.

How did Jesus become king of kings and lord of lords? Not by the usual means! He didn't assert his power by waging war on his enemies, inflicting death to gain power. The rebellion killed him, but God raised him up, breaking the power of death, establishing him as king with all authority in heaven and on earth.

What matters is how heaven and earth relate to each other. They're not unrelated realms. Heaven and earth were designed to overlap and interlock. Jesus calls us to invite God to reign over us, to invite his kingship, to invite the restoration of heaven's reign on earth, so that life on earth matches what our heavenly sovereign intends, just as it does in heaven.

Your kingdom come is our request for God's reign to be restored on earth, through the one he has appointed—Jesus Christ our Lord. This is the core story of the whole Bible!

Before Jesus: the unfulfilled kingdom

In the beginning, God established two realms: *heaven* (where he lives) and *earth* (where we live). Earth was under heaven's governance.

That was signified by the sun and moon over us (Genesis 1:16-18), and by commissioning humans to be agents of God's rule (1:26-28).

Eden was God's dwelling on earth. He was the tree of life, the source and sustenance of our life (2:9). His divine presence flowed like a sustaining river to water the garden (2:10). He were invited us into his garden, to partner with him in tending and protecting his realm (2:15).

Our ruler reserved only one power for himself, the right to decide good and evil (2:17).

But we wanted the power to determine that for ourselves. Instead of submitting to God, we wanted to have that God-power (3:4). That's the source of all the strife in the world (3:15, 16, 18). Disconnecting from our life-source, we began to die (3:19).

Taking power over each other is the nature of sin. It's the reason brothers rise up and destroy each other (4:7-8). Violent people are now hero-worshipped (4:23-24).

Some called for God's just rulership to be restored (4:26), but violence corrupted life on earth, so God had to deal with his corrupt realm (6:11).

After the cleansing, God replanted his kingdom through Noah. To deal with violence, God authorized humans to have power over the lives of other humans (9:6). That didn't mean God was abdicating from ruling over us: to make that clear, our sovereign made a covenant — a legally binding commitment that he will never give up ruling over the earth, no matter how hard we are to govern (9:8-17).

But since people now had power over each other, they formed into nations (10). They became warriors, using war to build kingdoms, even the kingdoms that ultimately destroyed Israel (10:8-13). They even tried to overthrow God's reign by building a city (administrative centre) to take the power of heaven down to earth (11:4).

That's when God called Abraham to leave the setting of Babel, to establish a new nation under God, in a land God would give them (12:1-3). God released them from oppression under Egyptian rule, establishing Israel as a kingdom that represented God's rule on earth — *a kingdom of priests* to the nations (Exodus 19:6). With a covenant, the heavenly sovereign committed himself to be their ruler and gave them his laws (Exodus 20 – 24). They built a tent for their sovereign to live among them and rule them (Exodus 25 – 40).

God gave them their land (Joshua), but without human rulers they kept straying from God (Judges). He gave them kings to represent his rule on earth (1 Samuel – 2 Kings), but they still didn't follow God. Eventually they were captured by the big empires: Assyria (2 Kings 17) and Babylon (2 Kings 25). Instead of being a light to the nations, they were overcome by the nations.

Had God's reign failed? Was the whole Abrahamic project over? No, said Isaiah: God himself would come to his people to be their king:

Isaiah 40:9–10 (NIV)

⁹ You who bring **good news** to Zion,
go up on a high mountain.

You who bring **good news** to Jerusalem,
lift up your voice with a shout,
lift it up, do not be afraid;
say to the towns of Judah,

“Here is your God!”

¹⁰ See, the Sovereign LORD **comes with power**,
and he **rules** with a mighty arm.

This unfulfilled promise remained at the heart of their faith. That's why they prayed the Kaddish at the close of each synagogue meeting.

But Caesar had no intention of letting go of his power, yielding his authority to the God of Israel. That's the problem: the oppressors won't let go, so evil continues its rule. How do we ever get free? Do we fight evil, as the Maccabees had done (160s BC), as the Zealots wanted to do in Jesus' time?

How is earth released from evil, from oppression? What happened in Jesus is the most astounding solution to evil the earth has ever seen.

Jesus' vision: the world under God's governance

Into this crushed world, Jesus came proclaiming the end of this oppression. You could summarise his message (based on Mark 1:14):

The wait is over! God's reign [kingdom] has arrived!
Turn back to him! Trust the good news!

Jesus announced this good news in Galilee, the region that had fallen first, more than 700 years before Jesus' time. To the people who had been living under powers that rely on death, Jesus announced, “Turn around, for heaven's reign [kingdom] has come close” (Matthew 4:16-17).

Jesus' teachings and parables were about the restoration of heaven's reign (the kingdom of heaven) over the earth. As he healed people and cast out demons because he was enacting how things should be on earth when God reigns. Jesus' teachings and actions were a single message: *the good news of the kingdom* (Matthew 4:23; 9:35).

He was the promised son of David (2 Samuel 7; Psalm 89; Isaiah 11) sent to re-establish God's rule on earth. Through him, God was weeding out evil, re-establishing God's kingdom (Luke 11:20).

But the rulers that run this world were not about to hand over their power to him. They do whatever it takes to keep their power, including using the ultimate force: death.

The confrontation was inevitable when Jesus made his final journey to Jerusalem, his capital city, to cast out the “ruler of this world” (John 12:31; 16:11).

The rulers arrested him because they saw him as a threat. Jewish rulers wanted to be rid of him to protect their own power (John 11:48). They accused him of being a threat to Caesar (19:12).

On trial, Jesus did not deny the reality of his kingship. He expected to receive his kingship through divine appointment, not through fighting Caesar's forces (18:36). But that doesn't deny the reality (truth) of his kingship: it's what he was born to do (18:37).

But the power that relied on death was the only power Pilate used. He mocked Jesus as a pathetic and powerless “king of the Jews” handing him over to be killed.

That's when God stepped in to raise him up out of death and restore his authority. In the resurrection, God vindicated Jesus, overturning the death sentence, overturning the power of death, overturning the power of the rebellion, restoring the heavenly prince (Son) who restores God's kingship over the earth.

All authority in heaven and on earth has been entrusted to God's anointed ruler. Those who recognize his kingship are now commissioned to bring the nations under his reign, to do as he commands:

Matthew 28:18–20 (NIV)

¹⁸ All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

The resurrection re-launched God's kingdom. When we pray, *Your kingdom come*, we're praying for its completion—the whole earth under his command.

2000 years of God's kingdom

Jesus commanded not only his own nation (Israel) but *all nations* to learn from him, to obey him as Commander in Chief. But he's a different kind of ruler, one who doesn't force obedience. That's a problem: those who refuse to yield their powers are confronted with his royal presence (verse 20), yet they can continue their murderous ways.

They can even attack and kill Jesus' followers (compare Acts 7:60; 12:2). We're as vulnerable as Jesus was: we can't defend ourselves, using the power of death to enforce justice the way the world does. We're following the way of the cross, laying down our lives as Jesus did.

Between AD 68 and AD 312, Rome persecuted and killed many Christians. That changed then the Roman Emperor finally submitted to Jesus as Lord. When Constantine converted, it seemed like *the kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Messiah* (Revelation 11:15).

But this so-called "Holy Roman Empire" still faced the temptation to collude with evil, to use violence to subjugate people. They used war to try to force Muslims to submit to them (the Crusades). They killed Christians who dissented (the Inquisition). They repressed discoveries that threatened the church's power (e.g. Galileo). They so profaned God's name that these evils—performed in God's name—remain as barriers to faith for many to this day.

This is not how King Jesus intends his kingdom to function on earth. This is not God's will being done on earth as it is in heaven.

Even today, there are "Christians" who are so frustrated with the oppressive powers that they advocate manipulating the levers of power and even using guns to fight for the oppressed. The "machine gun preacher" (Sam Childers)¹ is a recent example. Some "liberation theologians"² advocated taking up guns to fight for the oppressed. At the other end of the political spectrum are those who advocate "dominionism."³

These power-grabs are not Jesus' way—the way of the cross. This is not how God restores his rule on earth.

¹ <http://www.machinegunpreacher.org/> Accessed 13 May 2019.

² Schuback, Thomas L. "Liberation Theology" in *The Encyclopedia of Christianity* edited by Erwin Fahlbusch and Geoffrey W Bromiley. Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2003. Vol 3, 258-265.

³ For example, Peter Wagner's New Apostolic Reformation. See "The Evangelicals Engaged In Spiritual Warfare" <http://www.npr.org/2011/08/24/139781021/the-evangelicals-engaged-in-spiritual-warfare>. Accessed 1 May 2019.

Your will be done

The way of the cross is not easy. How would you feel tonight if you knew you were to die tomorrow? Particularly if you knew you were to be publicly humiliated, stripped, condemned in the mockery of a trial, betrayed, forsaken by your closest friends, and strung up in a public execution that was designed to be as excruciating as possible? If you could not run and you could not fight: you just had to drink the worst of humanity's evil? How would you feel? Would you find yourself crying, "God, I really don't want to do this! Isn't there another way? Are you sure this is what you want?" That is Jesus' Gethsemane prayer. And he keeps praying, persisting until he can say, "If it is what you want, I'll do it" (Luke 22:42). That's what it means to pray, "Your will be done" when every fibre of your being is screaming out for something else.

God's will⁴ is not primarily about my comfort. Gethsemane was not comfortable for Jesus. Seeking God's will is not about asking God which choices give me the best life! That's often how we think of God's will: Is it God's will for me to marry Toby or Gena? Should I take the house in Carlisle or in Lynwood? Is it God's will for me to take the job at the Casino or in mining?

Back in Jesus' time, people rarely asked those kinds of questions. If your father was a carpenter, you were a carpenter. There was no choice. Your parents arranged a marriage partner for you. You lived in the same village as the rest of your extended family. Life was simple.

By comparison, we are overwhelmed with choice. You walk into a supermarket and choose from thousands of possible meals for tonight. Or perhaps you prefer a restaurant tonight? Fish'n'chips or Thai? Buffet or á la carte? Tea or coffee? With dairy milk or skim milk or soy milk or almond milk or ...?

Of course, the big choices really do make a difference to our lives, so we need to make them with care, with understanding, after talking them through with God and with people we love. But this is not a matter of pinning down God's will. In the Bible, God's will is not a predefined blueprint that maps out each detail of our lives and absolves us from the responsibility to choose wisely. *God's will* in Scripture means *life-consistent-with-his-character*. Some things are

⁴ "C. F. Mitton points out that the phrase, 'the will of God,' occurs hardly at all in the Hebrew Scriptures. God's purposes are indicated by more inflexible words such as 'law' and 'commandment,' whereas, in the New Testament, the phrase 'will of God' is 'indicative more of personal relationships than of impersonal legislation.'" Garland, David E. "The Lord's Prayer in the Gospel of Matthew" in *Review and Expositor* Volume 89, 2 (1992), 221.

outside God's will, e.g. murdering your enemy, spreading gossip to demean someone, being unfaithful to your spouse, or accumulating stuff while others starve to death. Those things dishonour God. They do not demonstrate what life should be like when God is running the world.

On earth as in heaven

What would earth look like if God was running earth? Everyone would have food to eat. Wars would cease. Evil and injustice would no longer squash or imprison people. Disputes would be resolved by people sitting down to sort out their differences: speaking truth to bring reconciliation, releasing each other in forgiveness. It is for this that Jesus bids us to pray: for God's will to be done on earth as it is in heaven. In the fourth century, John Chrysostom described it like this:

Here again is enjoined on each one of us prayer for the whole world, inasmuch as we are not to say, Thy will be done in me, or in us; but throughout the earth, that error may cease, truth be planted, malice be banished, and virtue return, and thus the earth not differ from heaven.⁵

It's not easy to live like this. It can cost you dearly, especially in a world that is wracked by evil and injustice. It could even cost you your life. This prayer is not primarily about asking God to help me decide between the thousands of choices in our Western world. It is the decision to take on God's values, to seek his kingdom rather than mine, to seek his will for others rather than my selfish ends. That's exactly the struggle Jesus faced when he prayed this prayer (Luke 22:42).

What a fantastic vision of life on earth as God intended! This is the prayer: "May what you want be done here on earth as it is in heaven."

[The Lord's Prayer] is the prayer most used and least understood. People think they are asking God for something. They are not—they are offering God something. ... The Lord's Prayer is not a prayer to God to do something we want done. It is more nearly God's prayer to us, to help Him do what He wants done. ... The Lord's Prayer is not intercession. It is enlistment.⁶

⁵ Saint Thomas Aquinas and John Henry Newman, *Catena Aurea: Commentary on the Four Gospels, Collected Out of the Works of the Fathers*, Volume 1: St. Matthew (Oxford: John Henry Parker, 1841), 227-28.

⁶ Laubach, Frank. "Meditation on the Lord's Prayer" in *Man of Prayer*, edited by Karen R Norton. Syracuse, NY: Laubach Literacy Foundation, 1990, 325-326. (Quoted in David Timms' postscript.)

The Holy Spirit brooded over creation to bring it to birth (Genesis 1:3) and breathing God's breath into Adam (Genesis 2:7). The same Spirit worked through Jesus to heal and restore, and he raised Jesus body from the grave as the first piece of new creation. The same Spirit to works in us—the living and present body of Jesus, through whom he continues his work of restoring his world.

Conclusion

Our goal is to live in such a way that people see God—so God's name is honoured. God has appointed Jesus as earth's king. As citizens of his kingdom, what we do either profanes or hallows our King's name.

We are Jesus' body, present in God's world, the expression of his governance. In praying this prayer, we ask what Father is doing restoratively in the world he rules. He calls us to join him—to do his will as Jesus did—incarnationally identifying with “the desperate, who recognize that this world is not as it should be and that only God can set things straight—the broken to whom Jesus promises the blessings of the kingdom (5:3–12).”⁷

Father, your kingdom come! Your will be done on earth as in heaven.

For discussion

What is the gospel Jesus proclaimed, the gospel of the kingdom?

How do we express the good news that Jesus is now king in a world where there has been so much oppression and injustice?

What does it look like as God's will is done on earth as it is in heaven?

⁷ Keener, Craig S. *The Gospel of Matthew: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*. Grand Rapids, MI; Eerdmans, 2009, 216.

For further thought

Meditate on what Jesus meant by the “kingdom of God.”

Here are some definitions to spark your imagination:

kingdom: The dynamic reign of God as sovereign over creation. Although the roots of the term lie in the OT, the Christian understanding arises more specifically from Jesus' proclamation of the inbreaking of God's rule. Hence the kingdom is God's divine, kingly reign as proclaimed and inaugurated by Jesus' life, ministry, death and resurrection, and the subsequent outpouring of the Spirit into the world. In this sense Christ is reigning now, and the kingdom of God has arrived. At the same time the church awaits the future consummation of the divine reign. This “already” and “not yet” dimension of the kingdom of God implies that it is both a given reality (or the divine power at work in the present) and a process that is moving toward its future fulfillment or completion.⁸

Ultimately, the world is transformed by sanctified Christians through whom the life of Jesus becomes a mystifying manifestation.⁹

The Bible is not about how God fits into *our* story, but how we fit into *His*.¹⁰

⁸ Stanley Grenz et al, *Pocket Dictionary of Theological Terms* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1999), 71.

⁹ Daniel Henderson, *Transforming Prayer: How Everything Changes When You Seek God's Face* (Grand Rapids, MI: Bethany House, 2011). Chapter 2.

¹⁰ David Timms, *Living the Lord's Prayer*. Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House, 2008.