

“THE PRAYER OF JESUS #2: THY KINGDOM COME”

(Matthew 6:7-13)

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1. Today's scripture (Matthew 6:7-13) shared as musical versions of "*The Lords Prayer*." (10:55am, Praise band special "*Our Father*"; At traditional Service have soloist sing Albert Malotte version)
2. "***The Prayer of Jesus***" from Matthew 6:7-13 that we just heard -- better known as "*The Lord's Prayer*" -- is probably the most well-known prayer in the whole world.

A--People who aren't even Christians are often familiar with at least a few phrases of it, and many of us who *are* Christians grew up reciting it each & every week in worship.

B--But what exactly does it all mean? Why was it so radical and controversial when Jesus first shared it? And what relevance does it still have for our lives today?

C--Well, these are just some of the questions we're addressing in a series we began last week in which we're exploring the meaning of this powerful prayer, phrase by phrase.

3. Now, I mentioned last week that this prayer was *never* intended to be merely repeated over and over again in rote fashion with absolutely *no thought* given to its meaning (as we often do) -- Jesus even warns against this in Verse 7!

A--Instead, Jesus shared it as a *pattern/skeleton* of six petitions around which we can develop our *own* prayers (& it's *okay* to recite or sing it in worship if *that's* our goal).

B--So today, our focus turns to the second and third petitions of the prayer in Verse 10, dealing with the nature & character of God's *kingdom* & God's *will* --say it with me, if you will: [ON SCREEN]... "*Thy Kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.*" [PRAYER of illumination...]

--II--

4. First, let's look at the phrase "**THY KINGDOM COME...**" -- what exactly does that mean? What IS God's "*kingdom*"? And in what way(s) are we to pray that it "*comes*"?

A--Well, first we need to know that the phrase "***Kingdom of God/Heaven***" is one of most frequent in all of the New Testament, occurring 109 times (85 of those in the 4 gospels).

1--The preaching & teaching of Jesus is filled with references to it, ¹ and his miracles were said to be a sign of its presence.

2--So obviously, if it was so important both to Jesus and to the writers of the New Testament, then it should be to us, as well, right?

B--But what exactly IS the "*kingdom of God*," as Jesus understood it?

1--Well, the word "kingdom" itself often conjures up images of a political entity or country (like France), or a place (like Heaven).

2--That certainly was the case in Jesus time, where "*kingdom of God*" was usually just a metaphor for the nation of Israel, most often used in conjunction with prophecies about the restoration of a Davidic, military king on its throne.

3--But if we look carefully at how Jesus uses the word, we'll find very *little* about it being a political/geographic *place* involving earthly might and power, and more about it describing an inward *state of being*.

C--This was both radical and controversial for the people in Jesus' day. But even today it goes against our usual understanding, as well.

1--Think about it: a "kingdom" is an area around which a King holds authority/rule.

2--If so, then Jesus praying for God's "*kingdom to come*" was his way of reminding his original hearers (and us today, as well) of our need for *God* to have authority/rule over all parts of *our* lives. ²

3--And we're not just talking about when we're at church, but *everywhere*, and in *every* relationship.

4--So... are you letting God have "authority/rule" in your life... when you're at work? at school? at home? on vacation? in the relationship with your spouse? your children? your friends? in your sex life? in how you handle your money, or treat your employer/employees?

D--About 15 years ago, I was at a place in my life where everything looked good on the surface: I was a successful pastor who had a good marriage and family, doing all the "right" things.

1--And yet, there were areas of my life that I had failed to give God control over. And my need to control these things myself began to threaten my very soul.

2--Yet, God's grace allowed some things to happen that helped me realize the peril I was in. I was able to get help, and turn those areas over to God's "kingship," and my life has been different since.

E--You see, this verse teaches that the "kingdom of God" is wherever and whenever God *reigns supreme* as "King / Lord" of our lives -- and that should be over *everything* in life!

5. Now, I should also point out, though, that there's a paradoxical tension in this first phrase, as well.

A--On the one hand, praying for God's kingdom to "**Come**" is an invitation for God to have authority/rule over us *today, in the present*.

1--Now, some Christian traditions teach that this phrase is a invitation for God to come down from heaven in power and might and "fix" things in today's messed up world (or, alternately, for people of faith to be taken *away*/"raptured" from it all).

2--But what this view misses is the more biblical notion that God's kingdom does not merely exist "out there" *in the future*, but exists *within us* here *in the present*.³

3--Bible scholar N.T. Wright says that The Lord's Prayer teaches that "*Jesus' resurrection is the beginning of God's new project not to snatch people away from earth to heaven [ie, Left Behind books], but to colonize earth with the life of heaven*"⁴

B--On the other hand, though, the fact that Jesus prays for God's kingdom "*to come*" *does* imply that there is at least *some* part of God's kingdom that has *not yet arrived!*⁵

1--Oh, we see *glimpses* of it at work in the "here and now": when a relationship is healed; when someone with an addiction is freed; when the sick are made whole; when someone finds salvation; etc.

2--But we all know that God's kingdom is still not here in its *fullness*: the poor still go hungry; the homeless still seek shelter; and broken relationships with our family, friends, and neighbors still go unreconciled; etc.

3--And so, when we pray "*Thy kingdom come*" we're not so much praying for God to "come down and fix things" as we are praying that *we ourselves* might become *instruments* of His kingdom here on earth -- that God might use *us* to help His kingdom of love, forgiveness and grace become a reality with those around us.

C--So I ask: How are *you* making yourself *available* to be an instrument of God's kingdom? How does (and how can) your life and mine point others to the "Kingdom of God," which is (paradoxically) both "here and now", and still "yet to come"?⁶

--III--

6. The third petition in this Prayer of Jesus is: "**THY WILL BE DONE ON EARTH AS IT IS HEAVEN**" -- but what does it mean to pray that?

A--Well, ancient Judaism often used a literary technique called "*parallelism*" where one phrase in a biblical text would merely restate or clarify a preceding phrase.⁷
(*And this is "proof", of course, that preachers repeating themselves is biblical! HaHa!*)

1--And that's exactly what Jesus is doing here: he's saying that being part of the "*kingdom*" of God means that we follow the "*will*" of God ("***Thy will be done...***")

2--And here again, we're not so much talking about God coming down and forcing us to follow Him, but of us *voluntarily* submitting of our will to His.

B--That's why this phrase was (and still is) such a radical and dangerous one to pray: ...because we're praying for *God's* will to be done -- not *my* will, not the *Pastor's* will, not our President's will, or even the will of the *majority* (God's Kingdom is *not* a democracy).

1--And yet, isn't it usually easier to do what *we* want, and what makes *us* comfortable, and what everybody else is doing, instead of taking time to discern what *God* wants (which might be *outside* our comfort zone, or *against* the will of the majority)?

2--And even when we *are* clear about God's *will*, don't we still often try to carry it out the *way* we want, *when* we want it? ...Meaning that to pray "*Thy will be done*" means to ask not only for God's *will*, but also for God's *way* & God's *time*.

3--So this phrase prompts us to ask ourselves: what area(s) of our lives have we been reluctant to submit to God's will?

C--And let's not forget that all of this ends with "*...on earth as it is in heaven.*" Why end this way? Well, it's because *earth* is where God's will *most* needs to be done.

1--In heaven, God's will is already carried out supremely, perfectly and uncontested. But here on earth... not so much!

2--In other words, praying this phrase challenges us to do what *we* can do to bring about the perfect (heavenly) will of God to bear on the "mess" we call earth. ⁸

--IV--

7. So then, "*Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven...*" fourteen simple words that invite us to consider the "kingdom" and the "will" of God both in us & around us.

A--It's an invitation to ask ourselves the extent to which God's "kingdom" and "will" are done in our own lives, & how *we* can be instruments of bringing these to others, as well.

B--So, I ask again: what area(s) of your life do you need to submit to God's "kingship" and "will"? Is it your work? Your home life? Your marriage or friendships?

C--Wherever and whatever it is, God will bless us as we choose to give ourselves to His "kingdom" and His "will"!

8. [PRAYER]

ENDNOTES:

¹ For example, in Luke 4:43, Jesus says *"I must preach the Kingdom of God for that purpose I am sent."* Obviously, the idea of the "Kingdom" occupies a central and fundamental place in Jesus' understanding of his own mission on earth.

² Bible Scholar R.E. Nixon describes the "kingdom of God" as *"Bringing into human life the eternal reign of God."*

³ Remember that Jesus says in Luke 17:20, *"The Kingdom of God is within you"* and in Mark 1:14, *"The time is fulfilled. The Kingdom of God is at hand."*

⁴ N.T. Wright, Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church.

⁵ Paul says in 1 Corinthians 13:12, *"We see now in a mirror dimly, but then face to face."*

⁶ *"God's kingdom, inaugurated by Jesus, remains an eschatological hope-. Hence, believers should continue to pray for its coming by recognizing God's lordship and accept God's reign in their lives. To pray this second petition is, therefore, to commit ourselves to the service of God as the Lord and to anticipate that the whole creation will someday be restored under God's gracious rule"* (Article *"The Lord's Prayer"* in The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible).

⁷ Two examples are: "God is our refuge and strength -- a very present help in trouble" (Psalm 46:1); and "The Lord is my shepherd--I shall not want"(Ps.23:1). The second phrase merely clarifies the preceding one. That is what is happening in Verse 10 of the Lord's Prayer, as well.

⁸ Relating to this phrase, Drew Haninger says "[Jesus] is very specific in this prayer. He doesn't just pray; *"Let Your will be done anywhere"* because here is no problem with God's will being done in heaven where God's throne is. When God speaks, His will is carried out, but on the earth there is a problem.... In other words, we need to bring God, Who is in the heavens, to the earth. We need to bring the things of God, the feelings of God, the will of God, the desires of God, and the things God wants to do to this earth rather than just let them stay up in heaven where everything is okay and there are no problems" (Taken from a TV broadcast by Drew Haninger called In the Beginning Message #TV0023 found at www.DrewHaninger.com).