

“The Prayer: Thy Kingdom Come” (24 Jan 2021)

Matthew 6:5-8, 10

A Sermon by Rev. Bob Kells

This morning we continue our sermon series on the Lord’s Prayer. We began, last week, with the opening address in the prayer: “Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.”

- These words help us to know God as the one who is like a father to us, one who is good and wants the very best for us.
- These words tell us God is in heaven so that we know how utterly different God is from us, from what God has created; at the same time, we believe this God is also close to us, nearby, present with us. Christians hold that Jesus was sent by God to be Emmanuel, which means “God with us.” God desires to be close to us because God loves us.
- These opening words also tell us God’s name—the Divine name—is unique, consecrated, unlike any other name under heaven. God’s name is holy.

Thy kingdom come.

Now that we’ve been introduced, we come to the part of the prayer where we begin to ask God for something; and we begin with the curious request for God’s kingdom to come. What does it mean to pray: “Thy kingdom come?” It would probably help if we begin with what Jesus meant by kingdom. The kingdom of heaven (or of God, they are the same) was central to Jesus’ preaching and teaching.

The world kingdom appears 149 times in the New Testament; in Matthew alone, it is used 51 times.¹

Say the word “kingdom” and most of us will think of a geographic area like, for instance, the United Kingdom. Officially, it is The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland; it is made up of England, Wales, Scotland, and the northern part of the island of Ireland; and it is ruled over by a monarch—Queen Elizabeth II.

When Jesus spoke about the kingdom of God (or the kingdom of heaven, they both carry the same meaning) he was not thinking primarily about an earthly piece of ground. For one, Jesus made it clear to Pontius Pilate (of all people) that his kingdom was not of this earth (John 19:36). For another, Jesus makes clear that the kingdom of God (or heaven) is where God’s ways, God’s laws, are followed; and the place where that occurs is in the human heart. As Jesus began his ministry, he told his followers to “Repent, for the kingdom for heaven has come near” (Matthew 3:2 & 4:17). To repent is to have a change of heart.

The way we can make sense of this is to look at the word in Greek that is translated as “kingdom.” The primary meaning of *basileia* is an activity like “reign” or “rule” or “dominion.”

- God’s coming kingdom is not one that supplants all earthly kingdoms by force of arms—the usual way we think of one kingdom overthrowing another and capturing territory
- God’s kingdom takes hold in human hearts, overthrowing the sin that resides there, remaking us as a people of God’s love, mercy, and forgiveness.

We get some pictures of the kingdom in the Bible:

- The kingdom comes through the Messiah, God’s anointed one, sent to redeem and recover the lost. “See, the Lord God comes with might, and his arm rules for him...He will feed his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms, and carry them in his bosom, and gently lead the other sheep” (Isaiah 40:10-11).



¹ C. Clifton Black, *The Lord’s Prayer, in Interpretation, Resources for the Use of Scripture in the Church*, (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2018), 108.

- It is a kingdom where God’s reign brings peace: “The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them. The cow and bear shall graze, their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox...They will not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain; for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea” (Isaiah 11:6-7, 9).
- And everyone will have what they need: “But they shall all sit under their own vines and under their own fig trees, and no one shall make them afraid; for the mouth of the Lord of hosts has spoken” (Micah 4:4). This was an image adopted by poet Amanda Gorman in her poem for the inauguration of President Biden. It comes from the prophet Micah and paints a picture of complete security and provision for all the needs of life. It is a picture of the Jewish idea of *shalom*, peace, in all its dimensions.

The *basileia* (or reign) described by these word-pictures is one of redeeming and restoring what was taken away by sin through grace and forgiveness.

Wesley Hill, a professor of biblical studies and author of a book on The Lord’s Prayer describes what it means to pray “Thy kingdom come” with this paraphrase:

“Father, make Your healing reign more and more tangible and visible in our world. Let Your rule assert itself ever more concretely in the places where sickness and evil still seem to have the upper hand.”²

Praying “thy kingdom come” is to ask for God’s reign to come into the world, to change human hearts by the grace of God through faith in Jesus Christ.



Thy will be done.

Thy will be done may be one of the riskiest, most radical, and dangerous prayers we can pray. When we ask that God’s will be done, we ask God to help us abandon all our own priorities and agendas and invite God to make His priorities ours. Just how dangerous this prayer can be is illustrated by two examples:

- Mary, the mother of Jesus, was presented with God’s will in this way: “And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus....The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God” (Luke 1:31, 35).
- Jesus, praying in the Garden of Gethsemane on the eve of his trial, prayed: “My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet not what I want but what you want” (Matthew 26:39).

Talk about your risk-taking prayer! And yet, this is vital to God’s coming kingdom because the kingdom will only come when God’s will is done.

When presented with God’s will, our initial response might be the natural “fight or flight” response when human beings are threatened.

- Moses presented an example of the former as he fought against God’s choosing him to lead Israel out of Egypt.
- Jonah is an example of the latter: He tried to run away from God rather than preach repentance to the wicked enemy city of Nineveh.

In both cases, God eventually got His way.

Praying for God’s will to be done requires obedience to God.

Jesus told his disciples: “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven” (Matthew 7:21). Obedience to God’s law of love is what’s needed for God’s kingdom to come. Mary demonstrated this obedience and gave life to the Giver of New Life. Jesus was obedient as well and it led to his suffering and death. But this suffering was the only way

² Wesley Hill, *The Lord’s Prayer: A Guide to Praying to Our Father*, (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2019), 35.

for God's will to bring about redemption for God's good, but broken, Creation; the only way for heaven to come on earth.

On earth as it is in heaven.

I have to confess this is probably my favorite part of the Lord's Prayer. Those of you who've worshipped at Weller before know I use this phrase a lot, usually in the time of our offering prayer. After asking God to bless our offerings and put them to use to make disciples and bring healing to the world, I frequently close by saying: "That it may be on earth as it is in heaven."

When we pray this, we are asking that God's will, not ours, be fully implemented on planet earth. Now, this may seem a bit confusing; after all, didn't Jesus talk about the kingdom of God as already here, already in existence on earth, a present reality, and coming close to us in his own person? The short answer is...yes, Jesus did speak of the kingdom of God in all these ways. But there is also a future component of the kingdom that Jesus spoke about, a sense in which the kingdom is not yet here, not in its fullness.

- At the Last Supper, Jesus is having a final Passover meal with his disciples before his betrayal and arrest.

He tells the disciples: "I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; for I tell you, I will not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God" (Luke 22:15-16).

- It is also self-evident, when we look at the world around us, that all is not peace and light.

Sin and Death were defeated by Jesus on the Cross, but the last fading vestiges are still with us. Theologians talk about this as the "already but not yet" nature of the kingdom of God. The kingdom (or reign) of God is a past, present, and future reality.

- The reign of God came close in a very distinct way through the life, death, and Resurrection of Jesus Christ.
- It is present with the followers of Jesus who are empowered by the Holy Spirit to live the kingdom of God life in the here and now.
- And it will come in its fullness when Christ returns to earth.

Already, the kingdom is here; but it has not yet come in its fullness.

Probably the best picture we get of this is from the Book of Revelation in God's consummating act of Re-Creation:

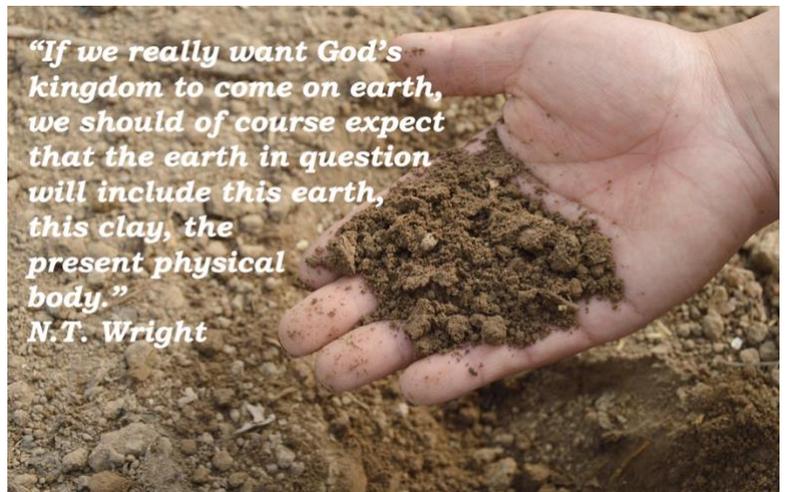
Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away...And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying,

'See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away' (Revelation 21:1-4).

This is how it will be when God's reign comes fully on earth. This is what we are praying for when we pray "on earth as it is in heaven."

And make no mistake: We are part and parcel of God's plan for redeeming and reconciling earth and heaven. It began with Jesus, but the story continues through us, through our repentance, by our reconciliation with God through Jesus, and our continuing to pray for God's kingdom to come and God's will to be done. Biblical scholar and prolific author N.T. Wright said of our role in this:

"If we really want God's kingdom to come on earth, we should of course expect that the earth in question will



include this earth, this clay, the present physical body.”³

How do we make this a reality? We begin with prayer, and we do the things that draw us closer to God. John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, called these things the “means of grace”: prayer, worship, sacraments, study. But we also need to do the same work Jesus did: helping, healing, visiting, giving, reconciling. We cannot do this on our own. But by the grace of God through Jesus Christ and the Church, the community of believers Jesus gave us, we can become agents of God’s healing grace in and for the world.

I want to close by asking us to make a commitment to pray. I invite us to make the Lord’s Prayer a feature of our daily prayer lives. Over the next three weeks—the remainder of this series—pray the Lord’s Prayer at least once a day, twice if you can manage it. Early followers of Jesus prayed this prayer three times a day, at morning, noon, and night. That would be even better: Let’s pray the way the early Church prayed. See how God speaks to you through the prayer, how God draws you closer, and how God transforms you by the power of the Holy Spirit to become an agent of healing and reconciliation for God. All this so that ***it may be on earth as it is in heaven***.

In the name of Jesus. Amen.

If you want to know more:

C. Clifton Black, *The Lord’s Prayer, Interpretation Resources for the Use of Scripture in the Church*, (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2018).

Wesley Hill, *The Lord’s Prayer, A Guide to Praying to Our Father*, (Christian Essentials), (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2020).

N.T. Wright, *The Lord & His Prayer*, (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996).

³ N.T. Wright, *The Lord & His Prayer*, (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996), 33.