

Teach Us To Pray: Your Kingdom Come

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Something about this world haunts every one of our hearts—both Christian and non-Christian alike. All of us recognize that this world is not what it should be. We all realize that things aren't right. Why is that? Where does this pervasive sense that things ought to be different come from? Why do we think people shouldn't lie to other people or steal catalytic converters or cheat at boardgames?

Aren't these traits just evolutionary byproducts? And, if they are, then doesn't that simply justify the behaviors? It certainly wouldn't condemn them.

The biblical answer is a historical one. It tells us that the world wasn't created for these—that you weren't created for these. Scripture tells us that there was a time when we weren't like this—that there was a time when we didn't lie to one another or steal from one another or cheat one another. It reminds us that we have a history of perfect relationship with God and with each other, which was all squandered away through the sinful choice of our first father and mother. And, it tells us that we follow in their footsteps each and every day—whenever we lie or steal catalytic converters or cheat at boardgames.

So, these echoes of Eden haunt us, each and every one of us, because we know in the depths of our hearts that we were created for something better than this world. We were created to make better choices than we do. We were created for God.

Today, we'll see how Jesus teaches us to pray about this.

Matthew 6:9-13

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
¹⁰ **your kingdom come,**
your will be done,

on earth as it is in heaven.

¹¹ Give us today our daily bread.

¹² And forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.

¹³ And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from the evil one.

[For, yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.]

To really engage with these lines—“...your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven”—we’ll need to consider **how** we should pray these words and, also, **when** we should expect an answer.

1. How should we pray this?

When Jesus taught his Jewish disciples to pray this, they were being oppressed and ruled by the Romans. Probably every single one of them had prayed something like this on his or her own. They would have prayed for Yahweh’s kingdom to come so that Rome’s kingdom would go. They would’ve prayed for the Messiah to come and reign, because they wanted Caesar dethroned.

These disciples knew oppression intimately and, therefore, *longed* for liberty from their oppressors. They prayed—*Lord, let the freedom of your kingdom come. Let the justice of your will be done...immediately!*

Now, we could discuss how their perceptions of the Lord’s coming kingdom were flawed. How, perhaps, many Israelites were a bit pharisaical and self-righteous in their thinking—as if they knew precisely what the Lord’s standard of holiness was and as if they certainly measured up to it. We could talk in detail about all the flaws in their thinking—how it was too nationalistic for example.

Yet, the point I want to make isn’t about their flaws but about their strengths!

No matter how flawed their thinking about the coming kingdom of God was, there’s no doubt that they were zealous for it. They longed for it. They prayed for it. They dreamed of it.

But do you?! If you’re a Christian, do you long for God’s kingdom to come?! Do you long for God’s will to be done, on earth as it is in heaven?!

I have been with pastors who—when the subject of Christ’s return comes up—hesitate to celebrate that glorious day. Maybe they’re concerned about the judgment. Maybe they’re disturbed by the biblical images of upheaval. Or, maybe, they’re too in love with this present world to rejoice at the prospect of God’s reign fully come on earth as it is in heaven. *These are pastors! These are shepherds!* These are people

who are to help God's people know how to pray and hope and celebrate in alignment with the word of God.

Should believers be apathetic about the coming kingdom? Scripture says, *No!* Listen to how the Bible says we should think about God's kingdom come.

For this is what the Sovereign Lord says: I myself will search for my sheep and look after them.... I will rescue them from all the places where they were scattered on a day of clouds and darkness. I will bring them out from the nations and gather them from the countries, and I will bring them into their own land. I will pasture them on the mountains of Israel, in the ravines and in all the settlements in the land. I will tend them in a good pasture, and the mountain heights of Israel will be their grazing land. There they will lie down in good grazing land, and there they will feed in a rich pasture..... I myself will tend my sheep and have them lie down.... I will search for the lost and bring back the strays. I will bind up the injured and strengthen the weak.... I will shepherd the flock with justice (Ezekiel 34:11-16).

Listen! Your watchmen lift up their voices; / together they shout for joy. / When the Lord returns to Zion, / they will see it with their own eyes. / Burst into songs of joy together, / you ruins of Jerusalem, / for the Lord has comforted his people, / he has redeemed Jerusalem (Isaiah 52:8-9).

But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body (Philippians 3:20-21).

For believers, there should be nothing more exciting, wonderful, and glorious than the full and final coming of God's kingdom at Christ's return. That's why John closes the last chapter of the last book in the Bible by encouraging Christians to pray: "Come Lord Jesus!" (Revelation 22:20).

Yet, many of us are too comfortable to pray this prayer with any real honesty. We love our weekends too much. We love our vacations too much. We love this life despite all its sin and injustice. Like the rich young man who came to Jesus for help, we love our possessions and our pleasures more than we love the prospect of being in Christ's kingdom (Matthew 19:16-22).

And, it's precisely in these moments when a fair amount of pain and suffering can become a true blessing for us. It is in the moments when we're high on wealth and prosperity that it's good to be made poor—to *remember that this isn't our home!*

I don't know if you recall me telling you about Tim who lived in Harrisburg. He was a friend and a congregant. He had significant limitations after a heart attack and kidney failure. His wife Cindy had to take care of his most basic physical needs after he was eventually released from the hospital. Yet, despite these inconveniences, Tim and Cindy were some of the most joyous and faithful people I have ever known. Those trials transformed them and made their faith shine. And, through all that pain, more than anything else, Tim longed for God's kingdom—for its sweet restoration and its full healing and its incomparable joy.

And, just over three weeks ago on Christmas day, Tim fully realized that wish. Christ called him home. And, there were doubtlessly tears shed at his funeral service; nevertheless, there was also a great celebration, because Tim was no longer shackled by a failing body or the concerns of this sinful world. He was finally with the Lord. He's fully in God's kingdom. And, when Jesus comes, Tim will come too.

Friends, the Lord often uses the pains and disappointments of this fallen world to grow our affection and longing for his coming kingdom—to help us learn to pray with honesty and energy: “Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.” Jesus calls us to love something better than this fallen life.

In *The Weight of Glory*, C. S. Lewis puts our dilemma this way.

It would seem that Our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.¹

Friends, do you want to increase your desire for the coming kingdom of God? Do you want to long for his will to be done progressively in your life and this world? Then, meditate upon the nature of his kingdom and will as it's revealed in Scripture.

¹ C. S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory*, 26.

D. A. Carson points out that—“...if we are praying that God’s will be done on earth, [then] we are committing ourselves to learn all we can about his will.”²

But, let me add something to that. Don’t just go about unlocking Bible facts without simultaneously unlocking your imagination. *That’s real biblical study!*

Meditate upon the beauty of God’s ways. Dream of Christ’s infinite kingdom. Allow the truths of Scripture to sanctify your imagination. Then, set it loose to fly around the awesome coming realities of our Lord’s infinitely perfect, forever reign. That’s true Bible study. And, that will transform your affections.

Well, let’s move briefly to our final question.

2. When should we expect this?

The biblical answer is that we should expect the Lord’s kingdom to come now, but not fully now; we should expect it to be already here, but not yet entirely here. That is until Christ comes again. When he returns, he’ll conquer all enemy territory, all this sinful world, and extend his reign over every square inch of creation.

Yet, in reality, that invasion has begun. It started in Bethlehem at Jesus’ birth. And, it continues to spread across the globe today. The Lord’s kingdom has broken into this fallen world. God’s kingdom has broken into us, if we follow Jesus Christ. Believers are the resistance—the insurgents—operating in enemy occupied territory while they work and wait for their final liberation from sin and death.

For a moment, think about the French occupation by the Nazis during WWII. During that war, there were always pockets of resistance—little places where France was (in a sense) still France, little places where Nazi rule was defied. And, over time, those pockets grew in strength. More citizens resisted. Then, the invasion took place. And, the resistance grew fourfold. Larger areas were liberated. The D-Day invasion broke the back of the enemy. For the resistance forces, it was simply a matter of time until their liberation was completed—until their enemy was defeated.

*Victory was **already certain** though **not yet fully realized!***

So, what do you think the resistance fighters did? Did they sit back and wait? Did they kick their feet up and pray—*Come allied forces?! Not at all. They worked for their freedom all the more diligently. They enlisted hundreds of thousands more*

² D. A. Carson, *Jesus’s Sermon on the Mount and His Confrontation with the World*, 87.

in their cause—French citizens who now believed that freedom was really possible. And, as they worked together, their cause advanced.

The invasion progressed more rapidly. Freedom came to them more quickly. And, finally, on August 26, 1944, the German commander signed a formal surrender and Charles de Gaulle led the resistance forces in a victory parade through the streets of a liberated Paris. The French had their freedom again.

Friends, Christ's coming kingdom will be an unstoppable liberating invasion. And, we are like those resistance fighters in France after the invasion of Normandy. We know our enemy's power has been broken. We know the victory is ours in Christ. And, we know that one day our Lord will sweep through this pocket of enemy terrain bringing his eternal kingdom of justice and joy with him.

So, then, what do we do? Do we kickback and relax and just wait for that day? Do we quietly submit to the enemy until Christ arrives?

No. We pray—"Jesus, may your kingdom come, and may your will be done, on this earth (*and in this heart!*) as it is in heaven." We pray that prayer with energy, with passion, and with confidence. And, then, we begin battling against oppression wherever we find it.

- We fight our sin nature. By the power of the Spirit, we expand God's kingdom in ourselves—rooting out greed and lust and hate and deceit as we find it.
- We fight alongside others. We love our Christian brothers and sisters enough to patiently counsel and pray and weep with them in the midst of their struggle against temptation and sin.
- We fight against evil systems. We look out at all the brokenness and injustice in this world around us, and we wage war. We advocate for the invisibles—the poor, the widows, the orphans, and the aliens among us.

And, as we do all this, we never stop praying, "Come Lord Jesus!"

Friends, you have a real taste of the kingdom already. You have experienced, through faith in Jesus, the forgiveness of your sins. They are fully forgiven right now

and forever. And, not merely forgiven, but eclipsed by the holiness that's now yours in Christ Jesus.

You have restored relationship with the Creator of the universe through faith in Christ Jesus. You're not just on speaking terms again. You get to call him Father. You are an heir in the family of God.

I could go on. There's so much we already experience of the kingdom of God as believers. Yet, these things are just a shadow of what's to come. Amen.