

Your Kingdom Come

9 "In this manner, therefore, pray: 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 this day our daily bread. 12 And forgive us our debts, As we forgive our debtors. 13 And do not lead us into temptation, But deliver us from the evil one. For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen. (Matt. 6:9-13)

My father worked for many years at one of South Africa's universities, and by the end of his career was the Head of Department for what was then called the Language Practice. The role of his department was to take the course material written by professors, and re-write it so that it was actually readable, comprehensible and grammatical English. He used to tell me how professors would often be expert in their fields, but have no idea how to choose the right words to communicate.

My father was a stickler for correct words. Once or twice he edited a speech I did for school, and I remember being all irritable and upset because he found so many mistakes. There was red-pen everywhere. I had some growing up to do before I really valued the importance of the right word in the right place.

Now, as a pastor, I see that words and definitions are essential, not just to good communication, but to life. In theology, a wrong definition may be the difference between being in the faith and being out of it. In the fourth century, the debate was over one Greek word: whether Jesus was *homoousious*: the same essence with the Father, or *homoiousous*, of similar essence with the Father. The difference was one letter of the alphabet – the Greek iota. But hinging on the one Greek iota was a world of difference: whether Jesus was and is fully God, or whether Jesus was a divine creature.

Words matter. Definitions matter.

One such word that needs precise definition and careful handling is the word *kingdom*. It's a very common word in the Bible, 333 occurrences in the NKJV. The phrase *kingdom of God* is the most used phrase in the New Testament.

When you have a word used often, the danger is that its meaning becomes fluid and the definition vague. Soon, you find people using the word *kingdom* for all kinds of things. You will hear Christians talking about “using kingdom principles” or “labouring for the kingdom”. Some writers speak about “kingdom living”. But because they don't precisely define “kingdom”, they get to smuggle in all kinds of ideas, and pass them off as God's will. One man tells you the kingdom is includes caring for nature, so 'kingdom living' means Christians must protect the environment and become eco-warriors. Another man says the kingdom is social equality, so bringing in the kingdom means a social Gospel, social welfare, re-distributing wealth.

A few years ago a popular song by Jack Hayford was “Majesty, Worship His Majesty”. Many Christians happily sang his lyrics, “Majesty, kingdom authority, flows from His throne unto His own”, but they may not have known what Jack Hayford meant by kingdom authority. Jack Hayford meant that Jesus has given believers authority to cast out disease and demons, and take over the world for Jesus. Plenty of false prosperity Gospel teachers use the word *kingdom* to promote the idea that King's kids should live like royalty.

So today, as we come to the third petition of the Lord's Prayer, *your kingdom come*, it won't do to have a vague idea of what the kingdom is. To pray, “your kingdom come”, but not really know what kingdom refers to, is to end up praying a cliché – a word overused until it is empty of

meaning.

And as we've been seeing, each of the petitions of the Lord's Prayer is really a concentrated, compact form of an idea that can be expanded into something larger and longer than one line. *Our Father in Heaven* can be turned into a prayer about our relationship with God. *Hallowed be Your name* can become a prayer for God's glory, for God to be the priority.

So, if we want to intelligently pray 'your kingdom come' it is imperative that we firstly understand what the kingdom of God refers to. Second, we need to understand in what way the kingdom arrives. Third we need to know what we are asking when we ask for it to come.

So let's begin by understanding what kingdom of God refers to in the Bible.

I. The Meaning of Kingdom of God

The difficulty in understanding what the Bible means by kingdom is that it is sometimes used in ways that are very different. In one place, Jesus says, the kingdom is within you, in other places, He says the kingdom will be in Israel. In one place He seems to say the kingdom is already present, in another place He says it is future. In some places it seems to mean a place, in other places it seems to mean salvation.

Here's how we can summarise the biblical data. What Scripture teaches is that the kingdom is used in two distinct senses. The first way refers to God's universal, eternal rule over all things. The second refers to an earthly, historical rule over the world through a King.

Let me show you the Scriptural evidence for that. Here are five attributes of the universal kingdom.

1. *The universal, eternal kingdom has always been.* The LORD is King forever and ever; The nations have perished out of His land. (Ps. 10:16)
2. *This kingdom is not located anywhere on Earth, because it is universal in scope.* The LORD has established His throne in heaven, And His kingdom rules over all. (Ps. 103:1)
3. *The Triune God rules this kingdom directly, without any mediator.* **Psa 83:18** That they may know that You, whose name alone is the LORD, Are the Most High over all the earth.
4. *This universal kingdom is already present.* 10 The LORD sat *enthroned* at the Flood, And the LORD sits as King forever. 1 (Ps. 29:1)
5. *This kingdom involves no covenant, no agreement between God and man. It is an unconditional rule over all things.* For His dominion is an everlasting dominion, And His kingdom is from generation to generation. 35 All the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing; He does according to His will in the army of heaven And among the inhabitants of the earth. No one can restrain His hand Or say to Him, "What have You done?" (Dan. 4:34-35)

But then we find a second, very distinct form of kingdom in the Scriptures. This is sometimes called the mediatorial kingdom, because it is a kingdom through a mediator. Let me contrast the five attributes of the universal kingdom, with the five attributes of the mediatorial kingdom.

First, instead of being eternal, this kingdom begins at a certain time. 44 "And in the days of these kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever. (Dan. 2:44)

Second, instead of being universal, this kingdom is local and centred in a particular place.

23 Then the moon will be disgraced And the sun ashamed; For the LORD of hosts will reign On Mount Zion

and in Jerusalem And before His elders, gloriously. (Isa. 24:23)

Third, instead of being ruled directly by the Triune God, the kingdom is ruled through a mediator.

4 He who sits in the heavens shall laugh; The Lord shall hold them in derision. 5 Then He shall speak to them in His wrath, And distress them in His deep displeasure: 6 "Yet I have set My King On My holy hill of Zion." (Ps. 2:4-6)

Fourth, instead of being a present reality, it is spoken of as a future hope.

9 And the LORD shall be King over all the earth. In that day it shall be-- "The LORD is one," And His name one. (Zech. 14:9)

Fifth, instead of being completely unconditional, the kingdom is established with a covenant.

27 Also I will make him My firstborn, The highest of the kings of the earth. 28 My mercy I will keep for him forever, And My covenant shall stand firm with him. 29 His seed also I will make to endure forever, And his throne as the days of heaven. (Ps. 89:27-29)

Now think about, the Lord's Prayer, think about the request, your kingdom come. Which of these kingdoms are we praying for? Are we praying for an unconditional, universal, eternal, already present kingdom? Or are we praying for a conditional, earthly, time-space, future kingdom? It must be the second one. It makes no sense to pray for a kingdom already present, already universal, that has always been and always will be.

But it *does* make sense to pray for God to bring His eternal rule into time and space, to rule through His Messiah on the Earth, and change the world from misery to mirth.

What's wrong with the world? You say, it's the poverty and lack of material goods. No it isn't. It's the way the strong and the rich oppress the weak and the poor. No it isn't. It's the lack of education that makes men ignorant and desperate. No, it isn't. It's the inequality between men and women, between black and white, between rich and poor. No it isn't. It's corruption in government. No it isn't.

All of those things are symptoms of the disease, but not the disease itself. What is the disease the world has? The disease the world has is treason. The world rejects its rightful king. The world refuses to submit to God's rule through His appointed, anointed One. The problem with the world is that the King of the Universe is not being acknowledged as King of the World. Crime, poverty, disease, corruption, oppression is the result of living in a fallen world that rejects the only One who can save them from their fallenness.

Psalm 2 actually describes the attitude of the world towards God's mediatorial king.

Why do the nations rage, And the people plot a vain thing?

2 The kings of the earth set themselves, And the rulers take counsel together, Against the LORD and against His Anointed, *saying*, 3 "Let us break Their bonds in pieces And cast away Their cords from us." 4 He who sits in the heavens shall laugh; The Lord shall hold them in derision. 5 Then He shall speak to them in His wrath, And distress them in His deep displeasure: 6 "Yet I have set My King On My holy hill of Zion."

7 "I will declare the decree: The LORD has said to Me, 'You are My Son, Today I have begotten You. 8 Ask of Me, and I will give You The nations for Your inheritance, And the ends of the earth for Your possession. (Ps. 2:1-8)

God has always desired to take His universal, eternal rule, and mediate it to the world through a Man. This God's great program, His great plan for the world. And man has consistently rejected His rule. Adam rejected his role as mediatorial king. God chose one man, Abraham, so as to make of him a nation of kings.

Israel failed as a nation of kings. They sought a king like the Gentile nations, and God gave them

Saul. After they had been chastened, He gave them a king after His own heart – David. King David's royal line fails. In Ezekiel, we read of the Shekinah glory departing from the Temple, as it seems the earthly kingdom of Israel is ending.

But then Messiah does come to Israel. He announces the rule and reign of God is now imminent, in His own person. And He offers Himself firstly to Israel alone. But what did Israel largely do? They rejected Him. They wanted the realm of Israel restored to independence, but they did not want to personal reign of the regent, Jesus. So they, along with the Romans, killed Him. There is actually a special term for that: it is known as regicide: to kill the king.

Christ dies on the cross, rises again. And just before He ascends, His disciples ask him,

6 Therefore, when they had come together, they asked Him, saying, "Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" 7 And He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority. (Acts 1:6-7)

So that leads us to the second question:

II. How Does the Kingdom Come?

Now if you have read somewhat on Christian doctrine, you may know that Christians disagree on how God is going to bring this actual kingdom. Broadly, there are three positions out there.

The first is known as amillennialism. As the name suggests, amillennialists do not believe there will be an earthly millennium (1000 year) kingdom of Christ on the Earth. They believe the church is now the spiritual kingdom of Christ. One day, when Christ returns, He will put an end to all sin, and bring in the New Heavens and the New Earth. I believe amillennialism suffers from a tendency to read the Bible backwards, reading back into the promises to Israel what they see in the church, and spiritualising those promises.

The second is known as postmillennialism. This view believes that the Gospel is going to steadily conquer the world. The world will eventually be mostly dominated by Christianity in the areas of culture, law, economics, politics. After this Golden Age of a Christianised world, Jesus will return. In essence, He won't set up His kingdom, as much as He will step into it.

Charles Spurgeon sums up a good response to postmillennialism. He says, "Paul does not paint the future with rose-colour: he is no smoothtongued prophet of a golden age, into which this dull earth may be imagined to be glowing. There are sanguine brethren who are looking forward to everything growing better and better and better, until, at the last this present age ripens into a millennium. They will not be able to sustain their hopes, for Scripture gives them no solid basis to rest upon. We who believe that there will be no millennial reign without the King, and who expect no rule of righteousness except from the appearing of the righteous Lord, are nearer the mark. Apart from the second Advent of our Lord, the world is more likely to sink into pandemonium than to rise into a millennium. A divine interposition seems to me the hope set before us in Scripture, and, indeed, to be the only hope adequate to the situation. We look to the darkening down of things; the state of mankind, however improved politically, may yet grow worse and worse spiritually."

The third position on the earthly, historical kingdom, is known as premillennialism.

Premillennialism says that whatever happens in the world for good or bad, we are not presently the kingdom, nor will we usher in the kingdom. Instead, God will use us for His purposes, but it is only the return of the King on a white horse that will bring in the mediatorial kingdom. Jesus comes before, or pre-, the millennium, which is taken to be a literal 1000 years.

I am a convinced premillennialist, for at least two reasons. One, it allows me to read the Bible forwards, not backwards. You can see revelation unfolding progressively, without having to read

the end into the beginning. Second, premillennialism allows the Old Testament promises to Israel to mean more than they originally understood, but never less. In other words, when the prophets read that God would bless Israel with a new covenant and gather them from all nations, it can't mean less than that. But it can mean more, and we see how New Testament revelation informs and fills out how that might happen. It's my view that some amillennial and postmillennial interpretations end up interpreting the Old Testament in ways that the fulfillment seems decidedly less than what an O.T. Israelite would have understood.

And I think premillennialism explains history. Man keeps rejecting the kingdom. God gives Adam the role of king, and Adam fails. God calls Israel to be a nation of kings and priests, and they keep failing, they keep rejecting God.

In other words, we believe the universal, cosmic kingdom is here, and the church is a part of that. But there is also a future kingdom, ruled by the Messiah, on the Earth. That kingdom is still coming. That will be the day we see the world's politics, and economics, and jurisprudence fixed.

III. The Meaning of “Your Kingdom Come”

So when we pray “your kingdom come”, what are we praying for? Lord, please return to the Earth. Come again. Let your program for the world come to pass. Let your purposes, your plan for the human race come to be. Come and put an end to injustice, oppression, abuse, corruption, violence, exploitation, crime, war. Put an end to disease, and deformity, and demonic control. Put an end to deception and false religion. Put an end to a world suffering under the weight of its own rebellion, a world in which the rightful king is rejected.

Now when we studied “hallowed be your name”, we saw that when we pray that, we are praying for God's priority. We are getting into the posture of humility, and saying, You are first, your Name is most important, your glory is uppermost. Here we are doing something very similar. We are saying, Your program for the world is what the world needs. Your kingdom and plan, not my kingdom and plan is what the world needs. Fix the world, and fix life by imposing your rule, not by fixing the world to accommodate me.

C.S. Lewis once pointed out that if the kingdom came today, we might not like it. He speculated what would happen if we were confronted with a perfectly Christian society: “Each of us would like some bits of it, but I am afraid very few of us would like the whole thing. That is just what you would expect if Christianity is the total plan for the human machine. We have all departed from that total plan in different ways, and each of us wants to make out that his own modification of the original plan is the plan itself. You will find this again and again about anything that is really Christian: Everyone is attracted by bits of it and wants to pick out those bits and leave the rest. That is why we do not get much further: and that is why people who are fighting for quite opposite things can say they are fighting for Christianity.”

But that is what we are praying for. We are saying, “Lord, we don't even know all that it will be for you to impose your perfect rule in the world. But we want it. We don't want our own rule. We don't want our own kingdoms. Our world is a mess. Come and bring your complete rule to the world. It won't be convenient or comfortable for us, but we want your rule and reign.

So, how does this translate into prayer? We are asking for God's mediatorial kingdom on Earth to come, but how does that become prayer?

First, we are praying for the spread of the Gospel.

Jesus predicts that during the time of the Tribulation, the Gospel will be preached to all nations, and then He will return.

"And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come. (Matt. 24:14)

Likewise Peter tells us that when people doubt that Christ is returning, it is not that God is slack concerning His promise. Instead, He gives the reason.

9 The Lord is not slack concerning *His* promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance. (2 Pet. 3:9)

In other words, God is giving people a chance to be saved. So every prayer for the Gospel to spread, for missions, for church planting is a prayer for God's kingdom to come. Lord, save as many people as you have appointed for this church age, so that the kingdom may come.

This also means we are praying that we would represent the kingdom properly. The church is not the promised kingdom. It is not our role to usher in the kingdom, or create the kingdom, or build the kingdom. "From 127 mentions in the Gospels, we come to a near silence from Romans to Jude (18 times). The epistles do not use kingdom terminology to describe the church. The kingdom is mostly something 'to be inherited' in the future." – Joel James.

The church is more like an embassy for His coming kingdom. An embassy is a diplomatic outpost on foreign soil. Christians are then ambassadors. 20 Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore *you* on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God. (2 Cor. 5:20)

Ambassadors don't try to conquer the country they're in, or take it over, or do anything of the sort. Ambassadors represent their nation. Christians are kingdom citizens who should represent the king in the rebellious world they find themselves in. Whatever vocation you're in, whether you're a teacher, a programmer, a pilot, a consultant, an auditor, a mother, you can be an ambassador of the kingdom by bringing the Christian perspective, and the Christian ethic, and the Christian way of doing things. You are not ushering the kingdom in when you do it, but you are preparing the world for what it looks like if the kingdom comes. You are witnessing to what the kingdom will one day be like.

Pray, Lord, let me be part of your program today. Let me be a kingdom ambassador at work, at home, in society. Let people see a little bit in me of what it would be like to have Jesus as King.

Second, we pray for His return. You say, why must we pray for His return? The answer is that in Scripture, people pray for what is predicted.

Daniel 9:1 In the first year of Darius the son of Ahasuerus, of the lineage of the Medes, who was made king over the realm of the Chaldeans-- 2 in the first year of his reign I, Daniel, understood by the books the number of the years *specified* by the word of the LORD through Jeremiah the prophet, that He would accomplish seventy years in the desolations of Jerusalem. 3 Then I set my face toward the Lord God to make request by prayer and supplications, with fasting, sackcloth, and ashes. (Dan. 9:1-3)

Praying for a future event is one of the means God ordains for that even to come to pass. So we find in Scripture prayers for the return of Christ. 20 He who testifies to these things says,

"Surely I am coming quickly." Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus! (Rev. 22:20)

O Lord, come! (1 Cor. 16:22)

The psalms are full of songs rejoicing that the Lord is coming to judge the Earth, and set things right. So we take up the song, and the prayer, and say, Lord, come and fix this world. Enthroned your King on Mount Zion. End the suffering we have brought on this world, come and reign and fashion this world as it was meant to be.

This is how Charles Spurgeon prayed it in one of his pastoral prayers: “Let all strive together for the good of all, and so may Thy kingdom come among us. And do Thou prosper all the churches of Jesus Christ. What we ask for ourselves we seek for them. Let missionaries especially be helped by Thy Spirit, and may there come a day in which the minds of men may be better prepared to receive the Gospel, and may Messiah’s Kingdom come to the overthrow of her that sitteth on the Seven Hills and to the eternal waning of Mohammed’s moon, to the overthrow of every idol, that Christ alone may reign. Our whole heart comes out in this. Reign, Immanuel, reign; sit on the high throne; ride on Thy White Horse; and let the armies of heaven follow Thee, conquering and to conquer. Come, Lord Jesus; even so, come quickly. Amen and amen.”