

## The Lord's Prayer: "Your Kingdom Come" and "Your Will Be Done on Earth"

### Introductory Comments

1. When we pray "Your kingdom come" (and, for that matter, when Jesus did), what is meant? What is the content, mode, and method of this kingdom? How does it differ from the First Century kingdom of Rome? And why do we use such an outdated word? Well, one of the central reasons for maintaining the use of the word "kingdom" where it pertains to God is to show that it clearly, directly, and explicitly opposes all the earthly imperial kingdoms. It intends to present a specific option to the imperialism that has been for so long the normalcy on earth.
2. The English word "kingdom" is the translation of the Hebrew word *malkuth* and the Aramaic *malkutha*. Both of these words emphasize process over person and style of rule over area of control. Hence, a more accurate translation would be the "reigning" of God rather than the "kingdom" of God. When you read "kingdom of God," think "ruling style of God." It imagines how the world would be if the biblical God actually sat on an imperial throne on earth, and established a rule of justice and righteousness over all.
3. Understanding the nature of God's "will" is a challenging task, with a diversity of opinions throughout Christianity. How many times have you heard a minister claim God's "will" after a natural disaster, or when someone gets sick or hurt under circumstances that defy rational explanation? Even concerning the death of Jesus, millions of Christians would not hesitate to say, "Yes, of course, God willed the death of Jesus," who was without sin but who had to be punished in the place of, and as an atonement for, a sinful humanity. But is that true? And where did this idea, this theology of "substitutionary atonement" come from? It was first articulated by Anselm (Archbishop of Canterbury) near the end of the 11<sup>th</sup> Century, and it arose in the time of feudalism and widespread strife (i.e. the First Crusade and the Norman (Viking) invasion of England). How might such a context influence ideas on what "justice" looks like?
4. In today's class, we will examine more closely what we mean by God's "kingdom" and God's "will", in an effort to lend clarity to the words we pray.

Questions, then review today's lines from Lord's Prayer

### Questions for Discussion

1. **When you have prayed "your kingdom come" in the past, what did you mean? Were you thinking God's kingdom here on earth, or a heavenly kingdom in the future?** *In the Old Testament, the faith of the Jewish people*

*was that God was just, in control of the world, and in covenant with Israel to establish justice worldwide. But the experience of the Jewish people was that the world was unjust and under the control of evil, and that Israel received more than its fair share of oppressive violence. Thus, we see a focus on the emergence of God's "kingdom" in what is called the "eschaton" (Gk. for "the end"). The question is, at the "end" of what? One thing that needs to be said emphatically is that it is NOT about the end of the world. Instead, it idealizes an earthly comparison (i.e. David) that approximates what it will be like when God's way happens. The "how" of it was often couched in dramatic imagery of divine intervention that ushered in a new age that was different from this age of evil, war, violence, injustice, and oppression. While many expected a military-style overthrow, within Old Testament prophets like Isaiah and Micah, and through the Gospels in the New Testament, it is clear that the idea of "eschaton" was not about the destruction of the world, but about its transformation into a place of justice and nonviolence, freedom and peace. Consider the famous passage about beating swords into plowshares and sitting at peace under one's own vines (quoted verbatim, mind you, in TWO separate places: Isaiah 2:4 and Micah 4:3-4). Consider also, the worldwide banquet scene, where all are fed and all tears are wiped away by God in Isaiah 25: 6,8. These are the pictures of what God's coming kingdom will look like.*

- 2. In your church upbringing, how have you been taught that God's kingdom would come? Through violence or nonviolence? Was it meant to abolish human violence through divine violence? How does your expectation cohere with your understanding of Jesus' messianic message?**
  
- 3. In our study of Mark's gospel, we saw how Jesus collaborated with humanity to bring about faith and the establishment of God's kingdom. How does this idea of collaboration shift your understanding of "your kingdom come"?** *Throughout the gospels, it is never about God rescuing humanity from what ails them. But just as people have been waiting for God, God has been waiting for us. We expect God's "intervention," but God wants our collaboration. As we learned in Mark's Gospel, God's kingdom is present, but only insofar as we accept it, enter it, live it, and thereby establish it. Jesus never said, "OK, I got this. I'll go do the heavy lifting for you." Instead, he sent his disciples out to do the same work he was doing: heal the sick, eat with the healed, and demonstrate the expansive welcome of God's reality. He didn't say, "I'll go to the cross for you," but, "Take up YOUR cross and follow me." It's not about God's intervention alone, or Jesus doing it for us, but our shared participation that brings about the kingdom.*

4. **In your understanding, what is God's "will"?**
5. **The Parable of the Vineyard in Mark's gospel illustrates that Jesus' death was a consequence of the sin of humanity, and not the punishment of an angry God. Can you think of ways in which sin and its punishment work as "consequence"?** *There are many examples from our own times. In the biblical tradition, one powerful example is the Cain and Abel story (starting in Gen 4). This is the first time "sin" is mentioned in the bible. But when you read what happens to Cain as a result (4:10-13), it is less about divine punishment than human consequence (the earth is considered a living being, and subsequent to Cain's act of murder it reviles him and his efforts). Soon thereafter, Cain establishes the first city (named after his son, Enoch) and there is a continuing escalation of violence – the idea being that murder begets more murder. The consequences of Cain's act were expanding cycles of violence within humanity.*
6. **If God is not seen primarily as the judge and punisher of sin and more as the restorer of justice and harmony, how might this change how and where we see God being active in the world? What do you think you might be asking for when you pray for God's will to be done "on earth as it is in heaven"?**

*\*\*\*For next session, we will cover "Give Us Our Daily Bread" and "Forgive Us Our Debts"*