

Our Father: The Necessity and Wonder of Prayer
Part Four – Your Kingdom Come

March 2, 2025
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Matthew 6:10

Called to the Table

By inserting the clause ‘your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven’ Jesus is reminding us of the seriousness of prayer. Yes, prayer is bringing our requests like a child tugging on the sleeve of our Father. But prayer is also something akin to being called into the war room of heaven to strategize. Prayers is also reporting to our King as His stewards and under-rulers.

The ‘kingdom clause’ of the Lord’s Prayer teaches us:

Prayer is a powerful place we participate in and are formed by God’s good government.

I. The Kingdom

If Jesus preached a ‘sermon series’ while walking around on earth, the title of that series would be ‘The Kingdom of Heaven’ or ‘The Kingdom of God’ (they are used interchangeably). However, many of us don’t have any idea what ‘the Kingdom’ means.

Jesus’ Jewish audience would have. In the period before Jesus came, Jewish people ended their synagogue meetings praying the ‘Kaddish’. The prayer included these words:

"May God let his kingship rule in your lifetime and in your days and in the whole lifetime of the house of Israel, speedily and soon."

When Jesus starts His ministry, He declares:

“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.” (Matthew 4:17)

Jesus saw His coming as the inauguration of God’s kingdom, which as the Kaddish insinuates, is the inauguration of God’s *kingship* on earth as it is in heaven.

Jesus saw His coming as the inauguration of God’s good government.

Of course, God was already reigning ‘in heaven’—God’s invisible space that overlaps with earth. But Jesus saw His ministry as the beginning of an invasion of God’s space with our space.

We will explore the characteristics of the kingdom in what follows.

II. Praying the Kingdom

By praying ‘your kingdom come’ we are affirming that prayer is a powerful place where we participate in and are formed by God’s Kingdom.

a. Power

God asking us to pray for the kingdom to come may feel strange. Bringing about His Kingdom is what God has been doing ever since the Fall. Isn’t asking Him to bring His kingdom like asking a cow to make milk? It’s his nature.

Some approach prayer as if it's real goal is just changing us. It's an exercise designed to get us thinking differently but doesn't affect God's sovereign will. While this is a mystery beyond the scope of this sermon, the trouble with this is that most people who think this way pray very timidly.

"God, if you wouldn't mind, and if it's in your will, and I won't be mad if you don't, could you..."

But prayer in scripture is in the *imperative*. It is almost like a command: "God, do this. God, do that."

Jesus tells us to continue to pray that way. He uses the phrase 'shameless audacity' to describe the way we should pray in Luke 11. He describes a man who has company coming and no food to feed them. So, he goes to a friend and knocks on the door late at night. The friend tells him to get lost.

But he keeps knocking.

Jesus says:

⁸ I tell you, even though he will not get up and give you the bread [or, er, deer] because of friendship, yet because of your shameless audacity he will surely get up and give you as much as you need.

Then Jesus finishes:

⁹ "So, I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. ¹⁰ For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.

Prayer does something, Jesus says. It's those who knock who get the door opened, those who ask, receive, those who seek, find.

And this is very important when we think of the places, we'd like to see the kingdom come—war, economic injustice, poor government decision making. We often feel powerless in the face of these things, but Jesus and the Scriptures present prayer as powerful.

An important revelation about prayer comes from Revelation 8:3-4:

³ Another angel, who had a golden censer, came and stood at the altar. He was given much incense to offer, with the prayers of all God's people, on the golden altar in front of the throne. ⁴ The smoke of the incense, together with the prayers of God's people, went up before God from the angel's hand.

⁵ Then the angel took the censer [again, the censer filled with our prayers], filled it with fire from the altar, and hurled it on the earth; and there came peals of thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightning and an earthquake.

Our prayers are ammunition in the stockpile of heaven. God may not always answer in our timeframe. But Revelation is saying a day is coming when our prayers will be unleashed upon the earth.

An eighty-year-old missionary who had worked in the underground church in China in the 20th century was home in North America and bedridden. A friend asked, "aren't you sad you can't be in China continuing your work?"

The missionary responded:

"When I pray, all China shakes."

Jesus' teachings, the vision in Revelation, the mere fact that the largest book in the Bible is prayers—the Psalms. All this points to the reality that prayer is *powerful*. So, of course God wants us to pray about the most important thing, the establishment of His kingdom.

Which means that prayer is a response to the things that trouble us, to the things that scare us. Prayer is something we are called to do. Often more than prayer, yes. But *never* less than prayer.

Because prayer is a *powerful* way we participate in and are formed by God's good government.

b. Participation

Jesus also tells us to pray for the kingdom to come because God wants us to participate in bringing His kingdom. To participate in His good government.

In the legends of King Arthur, his knights sit at a Round Table. This is because, in ancient times, tables demonstrated your class, position and power. They had heads and cabooses. Even Jesus points to this (Luke 14:8).

Arthur's table is round because, though he's still king and has final say, he wants to hear from his knights.

Jesus' model prayer is calling us to the Round Table of heaven.

We are God's children, but He doesn't want us to stay children. God has given us to the world to rule and reign as His under-rulers. Prayer is not just childlike requests to a Father. Dallas Willard once said:

"Prayer...is...*intelligent conversation about matters of mutual concern*."¹

Jesus demonstrates in His own life that prayer is this kind of mutual conversation. He asks His Father to take the cup from Him but knows that His Father's will is more important than His comfort (Matt. 26:39). He tells Simon Peter that Satan wants to sift the disciples and destroy them. But Jesus comforts Simon by saying:

But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers." (Luke 22:32)

He prays for unity among His followers in John 17:6-19.

We see that for Jesus, prayer was a place He participated in God's good government. He ruled with His Father *through prayer*. Paul tells us in Romans 8:34 that Jesus *continues to intercede for us before the Father*.

We are called to engage the way Jesus engaged.

In some ways, we are like Cabinet Ministers reporting to the Prime Minister. We are saying "Lord, here's what's going on in my corner of responsibility. Here are the things I'm concerned about. Here's what I think we should do."

And sometimes God does what we say. Sometimes He does something better. Sometimes He says not yet. Sometimes He tells us what to do.

Prayer is a powerful way we *participate in* and are formed by God's good government.

¹ Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy*, pg. 194

c. Formation

Prayer is a place where God forms us with His good government.

The third clause of the Lord's Prayer calls us to let Jesus' teaching of the Kingdom shape our praying.

Some features of the Kingdom:

- The Kingdom is Already and Not Yet:
 - Like the allies at D-day, Jesus won a decisive victory in his life, death and resurrection. The kingdom has come through Him. However, not all have surrendered to the reality of His victory and won't until He comes again. So when we pray for the kingdom we are praying for more to surrender to Jesus' kingdom and for Jesus to come again and finalize His kingdom.
- The Kingdom is Hidden, Widespread, Seeking and Growing:
 - Matthew 13 is full of parables about the kingdom that demonstrate the kingdom is often not visible, but widespread. That the kingdom seeks those we don't expect it to and is dispersed among the kingdoms of the world. That the kingdom grows. Praying the kingdom often means asking God to show us where He is working.
- The Kingdom is not Propelled by Fleshly Strength
 - Flesh as a master metaphor in the Bible refers to the ways we mortals try to deny our vulnerability through violence, virility, and empire building.² Jesus' kingdom celebrates weakness as strength and sees the crucified one as King.

If we are not praying 'your kingdom come' we are in grave danger of limiting our perspective to a materialistic and secular one. Too many Christians express perspectives that align with political parties and ideologies and the culprit is a lack of prayer.

What if we prayed about the issues in the world before engaging in them?

When we read or hear about something concerning, Jesus is inviting us to crawl into our Father's lap—the Father who is the King of the Universe—and ask Him: Dad, what do you think?

Because prayer is a powerful place we participate in and are *formed by* God's good government.

III. How to Pray the Kingdom

The Lord's Prayer is often used as a framework for praying. Consider the following:

"Our Father in Heaven": Meditate on the Father near and ruling on the throne. Perhaps giving Him thanks for the gifts He has given you.

"Keep your name holy": Consider God's reputation, holiness and distinction. Ask that His holiness be upheld.

"Your kingdom come": Pray for 2-3 things in my life, our city and the world that look like God's Kingdom isn't coming in. Tell God what you think. Ask for His help.

When we pray this way, we are invited into an act of Holy Imagination. Not imagination as in 'not real' but imagination as in creative thinking.

² See Peter Leithart, *Delivered from the Elements of the World*, pg. 80-82

We get to think: what would it look like for the kingdom to come in the Gaza strip where innocents are killed? What would it look like for the kingdom to come in our international trade relationships? What is it God is up to, and what is it God cares about, when it comes to these problems?

Called to the Table

Jesus calls us to the communion table because it is a place where we enter a covenant with Him. Communion is a place where we pray with our bodies. We rise and come forward to say: my allegiance is with you Jesus, and with your kingdom.

Discussion Questions

Open Up

What's your tendency when it comes to the big scary things you hear on the news? What do you do when another terrible thing happens?

Dig In

- What is it that keeps us from praying about these 'big scary things' when we pray with each other? What stops you?
- What have you been taught about 'the kingdom' previously? What are you curious about?
- How does Jesus' emphasis on the kingdom—God's rule and reign beginning—change the way you see living your life of faith?
- If you were only going to choose one of the 'big scary things' to bring forward to God for the next week, what would it be? Why?

Pray

Pray about the things going on in the world right now. Ask God's kingdom to come on earth as it is in heaven in these areas. Be specific.