

## **THE REFORMED WITNESS HOUR**

January 31, 2010 May God's Kingdom Come!

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Dear Radio Friends,

Several weeks ago we began to look at the subject of prayer, using Jesus' model prayer from Matthew 6 and Luke 11 that we commonly call the Lord's Prayer. Today we are going to consider the second petition, in which Jesus teaches us to pray, "Thy kingdom come."

Immediately you will notice that this is another petition that concerns God. He receives the focus here. We are praying here for the establishment and the coming of the kingdom of God. How important this is. We should not come to God asking Him to help us to establish our own little kingdom here on earth. Our prayers are to be God-focused. The purpose of prayer is not so that we can get what we want and have our desires met. In prayer, our desires should be brought into line with God, who He is, and what He desires.

And that, I think, is the main thing that Jesus teaches us in this model prayer. This prayer is comprised of six petitions, three of which focus on God (His name, His kingdom, and His will), and only one of which has to do with our physical, earthly needs.

Jesus teaches us in the second petition to pray, "Thy kingdom come." When you pray those words, what do you mean by kingdom? And when do we expect that this kingdom will come?

In our day there are a number of different answers given to these questions. And so we want to answer them very carefully and clearly from the word of God. We want to know what Jesus means when He speaks of the kingdom and its coming.

Today, there are many who teach that in answer to this petition, we should expect at some time in the future the establishment of a kingdom here on this earth in which Christian principles, laws, and practices will dominate. And at the head of that kingdom, ruling that kingdom, will either be Christ Himself or a powerful group of Christian politicians and leaders.

Now today I do not want to burst anyone's bubble, but the truth is that whenever the Bible speaks of the kingdom of God, the kingdom of Christ, or the kingdom of heaven, it never refers to a future kingdom here on this earth. And, let me add this, if that is the way you understand this petition, you are going to be very disappointed, because God has never promised that kind of kingdom in answer to this prayer.

There is another way to understand this petition. I want today to show that it is biblical, and that there is no disappointment or waiting for God to answer this petition.

When Jesus speaks of the kingdom in Scripture, He refers to the rule of the sovereign God in the hearts of His elect people by the power of the Holy Spirit, who is Himself God, and by His word, which is alive and powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword. And the coming of this

kingdom is not merely future. The kingdom comes whenever and wherever there is a positive response of faith or obedience to the word of God.

So, this is what I am saying. If you today believe the gospel of Jesus Christ, if you today trust in Him for forgiveness and salvation, if you today repent of your sins and desire to serve God in obedience to His word, then God has and God is answering this petition today in your life. And if you think about that, that is a glorious and a wonderful thing. We are not waiting for something great to happen in the future. No, the great power of God has already come to us in our hearts by the gospel of grace. In our hearts God, by the mighty power of the Holy Spirit in the wonder work of regeneration, has overcome and replaced our sinful hearts with a new heart that desires after and seeks God. That is a great victory over sin. In conversion, God turns our hearts away from the world towards Himself. He makes us after the image of Jesus Christ. He fills us with a spiritual hatred of and resistance to the devil. By His powerful word, He gives us victory over temptation in our life.

You see, the enemies that we fight as Christians are not simply physical. They are not enemies of flesh and blood. But, as Paul tells us in Ephesians 6, we wrestle against spiritual enemies that war against the soul. We wrestle against principalities and powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this present world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Our adversary is the devil and his evil spiritual influences.

I want you to understand this. It is very important. If we lose this focus and begin to think of the kingdom in an external, earthly way, then we will lose a true understanding of what sin is and its power. The real battle for the kingdom of God is in our hearts and in those moments of temptation to sin. The weapon with which we are to fight is the word of God. If our focus in the battle for the kingdom of God becomes external, we will begin to lose the battle against sin in our souls.

Now, in case you object to this understanding of the kingdom, let me mention a few things that Jesus Himself says about the kingdom of God and its character.

First, I want you to think about Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, recorded in Matthew 5-7. Those are beautiful chapters in the Bible. In this sermon, Jesus' topic is the kingdom, and in it He describes the nature of the kingdom and the character of the citizens of the kingdom as spiritual. He says, "Blessed are the poor in spirit.....blessed are they that mourn.....blessed are the meek.....blessed are the peacemakers.....blessed are ye when men shall revile you and persecute you." This is Jesus' description of the Christian in this world. The Christian is not one who pushes for earthly recognition and advancement. He is meek. He hungers and thirsts after righteousness. And his lot is this: that he is persecuted for righteousness' sake. His weapons are not weapons of physical warfare or politics, but of kindness, self-sacrifice, forgiveness, and humility.

I could mention also Jesus' parables, which are His descriptions of the mysteries of the kingdom of God. Over and over Jesus says, "The kingdom of heaven is like unto....." and then He compares it to certain different things. What received the emphasis in all Jesus' parables is the power of the word of God. Think of the parable, for example, of the different kinds of soil. The

sower is Jesus. The different kinds of soil are the hearts of men. The seed that is sown is the word of God. Where that word has power, it brings forth fruit. And Jesus says, "That's what the kingdom of God is like." The kingdom does not come by might or by power, but by the Spirit and the word.

Then, also, Jesus Himself says in Luke 17:20, "The kingdom of God cometh not with observation." It is not something that can be quantified and measured in earthly terms. It is not something that you will observe and perceive with your physical senses. It is not like the mighty armies of Alexander the Great, or like the size of the Roman Empire under the Caesars. It is not something that you will observe with your eyes, as are the great kingdoms of this world. But Jesus says, in the next verse, "the kingdom of God is within you." God's power is at work in your heart to conquer sin. This is the kingdom of God.

And then you remember as well the night of Jesus' death. After Peter, defending Jesus, cuts off Malchus' ear, Jesus says to him, "Put up again thy sword into his place; for all that take the sword shall perish with the sword." And, shortly after this, when Jesus stands before Pontius Pilate and Pilate asks, "Art thou then the king of the Jews?" Jesus' answer is, "My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence." All through His ministry, Jesus emphasized this. His disciples were constantly waiting for and asking about the establishment of an earthly kingdom—even on the day of Jesus' ascension into heaven (Acts 1). They learned that the kingdom comes by the preaching of the gospel into all the world and through the conversion of sinners by the word of God and the power of the Holy Spirit. The kingdom comes in the heart of the sinner when God breaks the power of sin and rules by His grace and word within the child of God.

That means that we are praying this petition whenever we pray for God to give us the strength to live one more day for Him. We are praying this petition when we pray for victory over sin in our lives. We are praying this petition whenever we ask for the fruits of the Holy Spirit and of salvation in our lives.

But then we must remember, too, that this is not only a personal prayer. We are taught by Jesus to pray to our Father which art in heaven. The kingdom of God is not personal, but the kingdom of God includes all of God's people, from the beginning to the end of the world. So we must include others in this petition also. When we pray for faith and obedience and holiness in our children, we are praying for the coming of God's kingdom. When we pray for love and holiness and peace and every other spiritual virtue in the church, we are praying for the coming of the kingdom of God. When God, by His word, converts sinners and gathers His church through the preaching of the gospel, His kingdom comes. And so, we are praying for the coming of God's kingdom when we pray for the preaching of the gospel and missions. When we pray for the salvation of our unbelieving neighbor, when we pray for the overcoming of sin in this world, we are praying for the power of God's kingdom to come.

Now all of this does not mean that there is no brighter and better day coming for us than what we have now. There is a better day coming. And that is the day of the return of Jesus Christ from

heaven. But He will not come to establish an earthly kingdom, but to destroy this earth, along with Satan and all His followers, with fire. Then God's heavenly and spiritual kingdom will be fully realized and perfected. Then all sin will forever be defeated. In that new kingdom, we will be given perfect spiritual bodies. And there we will live and love God perfectly. In that kingdom Jesus Christ will be king, and all will give Him honor and glory.

And so, as to when this prayer is answered, we could say this. This prayer has been answered already in the victory of Jesus Christ at the cross over Satan and sin. When Jesus said, "It is finished," from the cross, He meant that He had finished all His suffering, that all the payment had been made for sin, that Satan had been defeated, that Satan had no right anymore to claim the people of God as his. Jesus, when He said, "It is finished," secured for us our salvation and life eternal.

So it has already been answered. But this petition is being answered as well, progressively, throughout the history of this world in the conversion of sinners and the gathering of the church. Wherever the gospel is preached and sinners believe that gospel and submit to it, the Spirit is at work conquering sin in the hearts of men and women and bringing them under the rule of Jesus Christ.

This prayer is answered today. When you believe the gospel and when you fight against sin, when God gives you victory in your life over sin—that is in answer to this prayer.

This prayer will be answered, fully and perfectly, in the day when Jesus comes again.

Now, I want to finish by pointing to the necessity of our making this petition. We need to pray this petition because we are still at war. If you know yourself and your sinful nature and desires, then you know that you need to keep on praying for the coming of God's kingdom in your heart. Even though in this petition we acknowledge that Jesus Christ has the victory over sin, we also admit that we are still on the battlefield and that the battle is for our hearts. Satan wars against us. Satan wars against the life of Jesus Christ in us.

Perhaps this is a good way to think of it. In June 1944, on D-day, the Allied armies established a beachhead at Normandy. The battle fought that day was the decisive battle of World War II. The Allies never looked back from that day. Hitler knew that. The people living in France, Belgium, the Netherlands, and the other occupied counties knew it too. Just think of what D-day meant to those people of the German occupation. But the war was not over yet. There were still many hard days of waiting, almost a year before the final overthrow of the enemy. And for the Allied soldiers, the fighting was never so intense as after D-day. The enemy was provoked.

Dear Christian friends, today we are on the battlefield after D-day. Christ has already won the decisive battle against the enemy. And what a comfort it is for us to know that Christ has that victory. But V-day, Victory Day, is still in the future. The enemy is still fighting against Christ and the power of the gospel. The enemy has not yet been finally toppled. In personal terms, that means that although the decisive battle has been won at the cross and in our regeneration, you and I are still caught in the midst of a conflict, a great fight. We are still sinners. We wrestle in

hand-to-hand combat with Satan and sin. The enemy has been provoked. The enemy is vicious. He goes about as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. So we need to pray.

And, as we do, we can be confident of the final outcome of this battle. God will answer this prayer. He will give us victory over sin. He will continue the spread of the gospel and the gathering of the church. Jesus Christ Himself will come again to defeat all the power of Satan, the world, and our sin.

So we can pray and fight with great confidence. Christ will have dominion.

Let us pray.

Father in heaven, we thank Thee for Thy Son Jesus Christ who is the King. We thank Thee for the battle that He has won over sin and Satan and the world at the cross. We thank Thee for His power that is at work today in our lives. We thank Thee that the power of the word goes forth conquering and to conquer; not to overcome politics and governments of this world, but to gather a people who submit to Jesus Christ and to Thy word, a people who will someday be gathered as the church triumphant to live and reign forever with Jesus Christ in glory. Help us in the battle today, we pray, against sin. And may Thy kingdom come in us and to the ends of the earth by the preaching of the gospel. For Jesus' sake, Amen.