

Ps 93:1,2
Hy 1A
Ps 97:1,5,6
Hy 32:1,2,3
Ps 2:1,2; Hy 47:3
Luke 9:1-6
Isaiah 52:1-12
Lord's Day 48

Yarrow, February 13, 2011

Beloved Congregation of the Lord Jesus Christ!

We all do a fair bit of talking with other people. Very obviously, our conversations are loaded with the bits and pieces of daily living. In fact, we can't even imagine it to be otherwise; try to have a conversation that has nothing to do with daily life....

The child of God is allowed to talk with his Father in heaven – and that's called prayer. What's the child of God to talk to God about? Just as conversation with parents and children and friends has the aroma of real life, so conversation with God has the aroma of real life. That point comes out so clearly in the second petition. It can't, of course, be otherwise – for the gospel impacts daily life profoundly.

I summarise the sermon with this theme:

IN LIFE'S BATTLES THE DISCIPLES MUST ASK GOD TO MAKE HIS KINGDOM COME.

1. The Context of this Petition
2. The Promise behind this Petition
3. The Answer to this Petition.

1. The Context of this Petition

Jesus' twelve disciples were common folk, feet-on-the-ground people who battled with the bits and pieces of daily life in the same way as we do. They'd been called from their jobs to follow that Rabbi from Nazareth, and in the providence of God they did so.

After they had listened to their Rabbi's instruction for some time, Jesus sent them out to do particular work on their own. That's Luke 9:1,2: "He gave them power and authority to drive out all demons and to cure diseases, and He sent them out to preach the kingdom of God and to heal the sick." We can see it happening: the disciples walk from village to village somewhere in Galilee to fulfill this mandate (cf vs 6). And amazing things happened at their command....

But put colour, beloved, to those amazing things. Tell me: what was it, brothers and sisters, that the disciples saw and heard and smelled as they walked the roads of Galilee and talked about the kingdom of God? I put to you that in many ways they saw the same things we still see today. Yonder an old man, bent with age; he keeps saying 'Eh??' By the shop on the street corner a couple of louts just hanging around, up to nothing good. From a house on the side street the wailing that belongs to a funeral. Around the corner are a number of bricklayers sweating on a new house for somebody, putting in long hours to feed their own families. Daily, normal stuff.... But yonder are a couple of soldiers,

Romans – and that’s offensive to any pious Jew, for was the promise of God in the Old Testament not that He had made His people Israel the first of the nations?? True, God’s people had gone into exile, but was the promise of the prophets not that God would restore Israel to its position of prestige and leadership in the world? To be subjected to foreigners: that got under the skin of any pious Jew....

As these disciples move from village to village and see the bits and pieces that make up daily life, they must –said Jesus–speak about the ‘kingdom of God’. What, congregation, do you think Peter’s and James’ and Matthew’s talks or sermons about the kingdom of God sounded like?? What did they say? What did they understand with the phrase?

The disciples, we need to know, had been listening to Jesus’ instruction for some time before He sent them out on their own. And Jesus’ instruction in turn had been built on God’s Old Testament revelation; He taught nothing ultimately new.

The kingdom of God? God in the beginning, says Genesis 1, “created the heavens and the earth” (1:1). The heavens form the dwelling of Almighty God, where He is enthroned in majesty. The earth, on the other hand, is the place God has assigned to man as his home and habitation. Yet earth is not divorced from heaven, for Almighty God is so sovereign that on earth “leaf and blade, rain and drought, fruitful and barren years, food and drink, riches and poverty, indeed, all things come not by chance but by His fatherly hand” (Lord’s Day 10). This God is King over all creation, so that the entire world is *His kingdom* (cf Ps 93,99).

It is true that not everybody in God’s world *acknowledges* God’s kingship. The Scriptures speak of the rebellion of Satan shortly after God completed creating His world. This angel led countless other angels to reject God’s kingship in an effort usurp it and become god himself. It’s obvious that no creature is big enough to overthrow the Creator, but that did not stop Satan from trying. Because of his revolt, rebellion spread also to the human race so that our parents Adam and Eve thumbed their nose against God’s authority in the Garden. The result in turn is that life knows so much pain and brokenness, sweat and toil and sickness and grief and death. What Peter and James and Matthew and the rest saw as they traveled from village to village was nothing less than the bitter fruit of that rebellion of the beginning – the fruit of rejecting God’s kingship....

And now they shall speak of the kingdom of God? They shall tell the people of Galilee in the midst of life’s tears and struggles of a heavenly kingdom? What does that mean?? The disciples, brothers and sisters, can speak of Genesis 1, of how God’s creating the world means He is Lord of lords and King of kings. They can hook into passages as Ps 93 to stress that “the LORD reigns” so that the bits and pieces of daily life as the villagers experience it come from His almighty hand. They can even refer to prophecies as those of Isaiah, where the prophet insists that “the uncircumcised and defiled will not enter [Jerusalem] again” (52:1) – and their hearers may even cheer as they conclude that the Romans shall soon be sent packing and the throne of David be restored and Israel once more be the head of the nations.... But talk is cheap, isn’t it. To preach the kingdom of God is one thing, another is to demonstrate what those words mean, and to prove that the kingdom of God is real.

And prove it they did, congregation! Why is it that Jesus’ instruction to preach about the kingdom of God came complete with “power and authority to drive out all demons”? (cf Luke 9:1). Simple: the evidence that God in heaven was in fact on earth lay in the fact that demons were being cast out. Demons are followers of Satan, that rebel of the beginning. It is Satan first of all who resists God’s kingship, and foments rebellion on earth. That demons are sent packing is evidence plain and simple that God in heaven is supreme on earth, is king – and that’s to say in turn that earth is God’s kingdom, the kingdom of God is here. We understand: this evidence of God’s kingship was so very encouraging for the disciples as well as for those who believed their message. In a time of much

wickedness, in a time when it looks as if Satan is supreme, here was evidence that he was not – and wickedness wasn't either. Exciting times indeed! And the disciples were right in the thick of it, ambassadors of a wonderful message! God's kingdom on earth – can you imagine what that means in the midst of life's tears and sweat, in the midst of the injustice and evils of society!

Just how much things were on a roll becomes clearer from what Luke relates in chap 10. Here Jesus sends out 72 other disciples (vs 1) with the command to "heal the sick ... and tell them, 'The kingdom of God is near you'" (vs 9). The 72 went out and did as Jesus instructed, and came back ecstatic; "Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name!" (vs 17). Notice the connection between the kingdom of God and the demons; the evidence for the kingdom's reality is that demons flee. For demons cannot remain where God exercises His power!

Note well, then, Satan's reaction! Vs 18: "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven." Satan, we need to know, had access to heaven; recall Satan's role in the book of Job (Job 1,2). And recall too the vision of Zechariah where he saw Satan in heaven accusing Joshua the high priest before God's throne (Zech 3). But now Jesus says that Satan left heaven for earth like a streak of lightning, and we can understand why: if the kingdom of God is arising on earth, if demons need to flee before the onslaught of the king of heaven, shall Satan sit by idly to watch his defeat?? Exactly because of the growing presence of God's kingdom on earth Satan fled heaven in a flash to mount the counter-offensive on earth. That counter-offensive on his part would take its toll on the disciples. Yes, the Lord gives the disciples great authority. Vs 19: "I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you." Snakes and scorpions are here symbolic of demons. From the way the Greek is put together, it's clear that the authority Christ gives the disciples to trample the enemy underfoot is an ongoing authority – and that's of course to say that the resistance of the enemy will continue. That resistance will be directed at the disciples themselves; the enemy would love to trip them up, make them powerless to execute Christ's program. And the Saviour knows well how vulnerable the disciples are to that ongoing attack.... That resistance would have the willing assistance of sinners everywhere – for all sinners remain inclined to evil....

Why I tell you this?? Because the disciples, congregation, asked Jesus to teach them to pray, and Jesus' instruction includes this second petition: "Your kingdom come." That's Jesus' explicit command to the disciples; Yes, they may pray, may speak to the Father in heaven, but your conversation with Him needs to include a plea that He make His kingdom come. That is, the disciples are to speak with God about the brokenness and the sicknesses and the demons and the injustices that continue to plague human existence and make life so miserable. Yet the way they are to speak to God about that brokenness is not that the Lord please take the sickness away and take the evil spirits of the world around the disciples away and deliver them from Roman oppression so that Israel can do its own thing; rather, they are speak about the sicknesses and brokenness in the light of the kingdom of God – and ask God to make that kingdom come.

That brings us to our second point,

2. The Promise behind this Petition

Time and again throughout the Old Testament, congregation, the Lord God had given promises about His sovereignty, His kingship. On the day that Adam and Eve fell into sin, the Lord spoke to Satan in the hearing of the woman with these words, "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; He will crush your head, and you will strike His heel" (Genesis 3:15). Those words speak of conflict, of the sort of thing a king does in response to rebels. The outcome of the conflict is plain; the seed of the woman will crush the seed of the serpent. We understand the

prophecy; the Lord God will ensure that His authority and power is ultimately supreme on earth. In the final analysis the Son of God will destroy Satan. That final battle, however, would not happen for many years yet, and meanwhile the bitter fruits of the fall into sin will characterize this life. Even God's people-by-covenant would experience the hurts and pains that come with the fall; life is broken, there is sickness, there are evil spirits, there is death, there is injustice, there are foreign oppressors and so much more....

In the midst of that brokenness comes also the prophecy of Isaiah 52. For reasons of His own, the Lord God tells Zion to "awake" from its slumber and put on garments of splendour –why?– because "the uncircumcised and defiled will not enter the city again" (vs 1). In context, that's a reference to the Babylonian empire that dominated Jerusalem. Why can the Lord say it won't happen again? It's because He's king supreme, and He's forcing His authority upon earth. Powers of darkness must roll back in the face of His greater power. As the passage continues, the Lord speaks about how the exile happened, how His people were sold for nothing but shall be redeemed without money (vs 3), how they were oppressed by the Egyptians and then by the Assyrians, and now are oppressed by another power that mocks God's name (vss 4ff). Then we get the wonderful words of vs 7: "How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say in Zion, 'Your God reigns!'" And suddenly it strikes us: that's the stuff of the second petition!

"Your God reigns": that's to say that the Lord is King and He's extending His influence so that His people are no longer oppressed, His people can put on garments of splendour (in place of being slaves). For people in oppression, that's glorious news! It'll happen –vs 8– "when the LORD returns to Zion"; who then can wait?! He's coming, the watchmen see Him approaching, and so the ruins of Jerusalem must "burst into songs of joy together" (vs 9). And lest Isaiah's readers misunderstand, the prophet repeats it in vs 10, "The LORD will lay bare His holy arm in the sight of all the nations" – and we recognize here again something of the power of our God! This is the cry of vs 7: "Your God reigns!"

It is, congregation, because of promises as these that the disciples may herald the coming of the kingdom of God! "Your God reigns," they may tell the folks of Galilee; "God is fulfilling the promises of old!" In Jesus Christ He is coming, is here already, and the evidence lies in the submission of the demons to the disciples' commands – and so there's reason for the Jews to be excited. As this kingdom grows, the bitter effects of sin –be it exile and oppression, be it sickness and sin– will be taken away; how wonderful this kingdom!

Then it's true: the disciples see opposition to this kingdom. There are those who don't believe.... And they are themselves so weak.... Shall they pray? What shall they pray?? They must, says Jesus, *pray God's own promises into reality!* Lord, you have promised –we read it in Isaiah 52– that You reign, that You will lay bare Your mighty arm, that Your people will be oppressed no more. Lord, do what you have said! Be Lord in my life, be King in my community, be sovereign in our land! To say it with the words of the Catechism: "Destroy the works of the devil, every power that raises itself against You, and every conspiracy against Your holy Word." Do that, Lord, in relation to the sin and rebellion that remains in myself and in my neighbours and across the nation; "rule us by Your Word and Spirit that more and more we submit to You." In so doing, "preserve and increase Your church." And keep doing this, Lord, "until the fullness of Your kingdom comes, wherein You will be all in all."

We come to our last point:

3. *The Answer to this Petition*

It's reasonable to assume –though Scripture doesn't say so– that the disciples from now on in fact prayed this second petition, in agreement with Jesus' command. Did the Lord God answer their prayer?

What the eye saw was so disappointing. Luke 11:14: shortly after Jesus taught His disciples to pray the second petition, He was driving out another demon. Some in the crowds responded with amazement while others said, "By Beelzebub, the prince of demons, he is driving out demons" (vs 15). That statement: does that acknowledge God's kingship?? Not at all! In the chapters that follow Luke records more evidence of opposition to Jesus' work. The hostility to His message about the Kingdom of God brought about His arrest, so that Jesus could say to the chief priests and officers of the temple guard, "This is your hour – when darkness reigns" (22:53). The Lord was mocked, crucified, and a sign hung over His head, "This is the King of the Jews" (23:38). He says He's from God, He preaches God's kingdom, but look at what it is! Shall the disciples pray that the Father make His kingdom come?? Shall the disciples continue to trust that the Lord God is making prophecies as Isaiah 52 come to pass?? Does God answer such prayer?? Obviously, praying this second petition is a big waste of time.... For Jesus is killed, dead, buried....

Yet, brothers and sisters, it was precisely in Jesus' arrest and crucifixion that the Lord God was answering this second petition! For on the cross Jesus Christ battled with sin and Satan, yes, atoned for sin and defeated Satan! Says Paul to the Colossians concerning Christ's work on Calvary: "having disarmed the powers and authorities, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross" (2:15). The reference to "powers and authorities" describes the realm of Satan and his demons. But they're disarmed..., and that is why Christ could arise from the dead, ascend into heaven, and receive from God a throne at His right hand. King of kings He now is, and Lord of lords! That's to say: He's king of Canada, master of Chilliwack, the whole world in His total control.

What's the evidence that it is so? The evidence is that people come to faith. As a result of the fall into sin people are driven by hell, by spirits of darkness. But the Lord God delivers sinners from bondage to Satan so that they believe in the gospel of Jesus Christ – and that is the parallel today with the casting out of demons in the days of Jesus Christ. As the disciples long ago preached the good news of the kingdom of God and gave proof of the trueness of that gospel by driving out of demons, so today messengers of the gospel preach the good news of the kingdom of heaven – and the Lord gives proof of the trueness of this gospel by working faith in sinners. Would you wish, then, to see evidence that the kingdom of God is real, that Christ is actually enthroned in today's world? Observe then the church! What else is the church than Christ's work? What else are its members than evidence that Christ has broken Satan's hold on sinners? What else are *you* other than demonstration that Jesus Christ is King, that His kingdom is reality?? Now this church sends out preachers who – do what?? Isaiah 52: they proclaim peace, they bring good news of salvation, they announce that "Your God reigns". That's the ongoing answer of your God, congregation, to the petitions of the church to make God's kingdom come. He answers, and the evidence is right here; you are part of it! See it, beloved, as great encouragement!!

Then it's true that so much evil remains in our town and in country. So we keep on praying, "Father, Your kingdom come." Destroy Satan's ongoing work in Chilliwack and in Canada, give your grace so that more and more people recognize that Yes, our Saviour is Lord of all....

And know this, congregation: the Lord your God hears this petition! True, the manner of answering may be different from what we expect or think it ought to be – even as it was in the disciples' days with the arrest and crucifixion of Jesus Christ. But He answers, makes His kingdom come; I *believe* it.

Already we see the evidence in so many ways. And soon Christ Jesus will return on the clouds of heaven, and then every knee will bow before the King of kings, and all rebels removed from Planet Earth. We long for that day, and therefore continue to pray steadfastly: Father, Your kingdom come!