

Sermon 28, Pray Like This, Pt. 3: Thy Kingdom Come

Scripture reading: Genesis 3; bulletin verse, Col. 1:13

For here also the expression "Thy kingdom come" is not used in such a way as if God were not now reigning. . . . "Come," therefore, is to be understood in the sense of "manifested to men."--Augustine

"They could ask justly enough *your Kingdom come* who proved themselves sons by saying *our Father*: for the inheritance is due to sons."--Thomas Aquinas

Proposition: The Kingdom of God is His reestablishment of His rule by grace over His people here on earth. We need to pray for that!

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Intro

As some of you may know, this is my favorite petition in the Lord's Prayer. I have loved this petition for years. And yet, as a democratic republic which has not had a king in 240 years, the

idea of a “kingdom” is just plain unfamiliar to us. The alleged “kingdom” with which we are most familiar, the United Kingdom of England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland, has not really had major policy directions set by its monarch since 1689. And so, at best in our minds, “kingdom” often means nothing more than “an area ruled by a king.” At worst, it might mean “the dominion of a royal tyrant” to us.

Neither of those is an adequate or even accurate conception of the Kingdom of God. What is the kingdom of God? In order to pray this second petition of the Lord's Prayer, we need to know. And so, most of this sermon will be devoted to explaining what the kingdom of God is and what it means to ask for it to come. The basic thing I want you to take away is this: God's kingdom is His rule over you and me. He is extending that rule, bringing more and more people into greater and greater obedience to Him. When we pray for the kingdom to come, then, we are praying that people will acknowledge and submit to God's rule.

I. Pray Because God Is King

God is king. The OT declares this all the time. Gideon told the Israelites that God was their king. Many Psalms declare, “The Lord reigns!” God is King. Jesus is King of kings and Lord of lords. God is the supreme King, ruling over every other king or ruler. In the context of the Lord's Prayer, of course, we need to remember to take this as a motive for prayer.

But if God is already King, and already rules everything, which He is and He does, then why should we pray for His rule to be extended? What you need to understand in order to understand this petition is that God rules in two different senses. In other words, you must understand the distinction here. Theologians call it the distinction between Christ's mediatorial kingdom and His natural kingdom, or the Kingdom of Grace and the Kingdom of Nature. I think the simplest way to understand it is with the points I've laid out below.

A. God Rules Everything by Providence

First, you must understand that God's providence guides everything to its appointed end. He does whatever He pleases, says Psalm 115. “The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD, Like the rivers of water; He turns it wherever He wishes” (Pro 21:1 NKJ). Many other verses declare that God rules over all, that He directs all things, that everything submits to Him. All of this is His “natural” dominion as God. Because He is God, He is in charge. Everything does exactly as He says. The Devil is God's Devil; in fact, Satan is powerless unless God allows Him to wreak havoc and hurt people and tempt them to sin.

B. Satan Rules Earth and Earthlings with Evil

Yet clearly, Satan does tempt people to sin. He does do many evil things, and he has a lot of evil people and evil demons working for him. How did things get to be like this? How did Satan become so powerful that the Bible actually calls Satan the prince of this world and the ruler of the present evil age and the prince of the power of the air?

1. Satan's Coup in Eden

It all started a long time ago, in a garden in a place called Eden. God Himself planted a garden there, a garden filled with easily domesticable plants for us to use. God created a lot of plants

that are useless for food — but some, like wheat, corn, and sugarcane (the most commonly grown crops on the planet today) are extremely nourishing and have been the foods that keep most people alive.

But Satan, inside the serpent, infiltrated the garden and there tempted our first parents to sin. We just read the account in Genesis 3 a few moments ago.

2. Adam's Failure in Eden

Now, how should Adam have responded to the serpent? Here's what he did: he stood back and let Eve have the conversation. Then he let her be the guinea pig. When she ate the fruit and didn't keel over, he decided that he would try some too.

What should Adam have done? He should have driven the serpent away. He should have refused to even dialogue with Satan. But he listened to the serpent. He ate the fruit. And in so doing, he entered the domain of death. That domain is ruled by Satan in some sense; Hebrews calls him the one who has the power of death.

But not only did Adam himself enter the realm of death; he dragged the earth along with him. Thanks to Adam's sin, Eve was subjected to death. You were subjected to death. I was subjected to death. The entire history of planet Earth and the human race, indeed the history of the whole creation, shows the scars from the consequences of Adam's sin. God hung the destiny not just of humanity, but of the whole world, on whether the first man would obey one tiny little command about not eating from a certain good-looking tree. Just as in all the fairy tales there is one thing you must not do, and which if you do do it you will plunge the entire world into horrible catastrophe, so at the heart of history was an event in which the first man did the one thing he was never supposed to do. He pushed the wrong button. He pulled the wrong lever. He offended the wrong God. He sinned against an infinitely perfect God, and he thereby plunged the entire creation into ruin and perdition.

That's why creation has been subjected to futility. That's why the Earth, the sun, moon, and stars groan. Have you ever noticed that life on earth isn't quite satisfying? That things never seem to go just right? That even if everything goes as well as can possibly be expected, it is not as meaningful as it should be? You see, life on Earth has had a dash of pointlessness thrown into it. No matter what you do, where you go, who you see, you experience this futility. God didn't make life totally futile; far from it. But He gave just enough futility to make us realize that this world isn't everything.

Well, Adam ate the fruit. And in so doing, he handed the earth over to Satan. The natural condition of every human being born on this earth is to be born into Satan's kingdom. You see, Satan has a kingdom. It's non-believers. It's everyone who is subject to eternal death. He rules them. Paul calls this kingdom "the domain of darkness" in Col. 1:13. Paul elsewhere spoke of "this present darkness," a phrase Frank Peretti stole for the title of one of his books.

But Satan doesn't have the final word. He is not the ultimate ruler. Everything he does is, in the final analysis, subject to God. But that leads to the second way in which God is king:

C. God Is Re-Conquering the Earth by Grace

God is reconquering the Earth. He is taking back what Satan took from Him in that coup in Eden so long ago. How is He engaging in this reconquest? Through His human agents.

1. Through Israel

Israel was God's answer to the desolation of sin. When evil had spread on the earth to such a point that God had to confound human language so we could no longer all work together, God called a idolater in Ur named Abram. He promised to bless the world through this man.

Ultimately, the promise was that He would stop Satan's rule in its tracks. The promise was that through Abram and his descendants, God would bless all the families of the earth. God would send something good to them. Israel was supposed to show the nations how to live. Israel was supposed to be a Satan-free place, a nation that showed Earth's other nations that they didn't need to sacrifice their children to demons, that they didn't need to worship idols, that they didn't need to hate and murder and conquer and slaughter. Israel was supposed to bless all the nations. But Israel by and large ended up being just like the other nations. The Jews since the exile have been far more distinctive than they were before the exile took place.

2. Through Christ

But God knew all along that Israel would not be able to conquer Satan. That's why He was planning all along to send a special Israelite, one who would be the true agent of blessing to all Earth's families. This Israelite, of course, was none other than Jesus of Nazareth, born of Mary, conceived by the Holy Spirit, the true Son of God.

How did Jesus begin to reclaim territory from Satan? By dying. Death is Satan's ultimate weapon. Death is the worst he can do. And he did it to Jesus, in one sense. At least, Jesus let him do it. Jesus submitted to death, voluntarily giving up His spirit. After Jesus had died for our sins, Satan had no more claim on either us or Him.

You see, God is not interested in reconquering the world through brute force. After Adam ate that fruit, God could have said, 'Time out. Satan, you're going to hell. Adam, you're going to hell too. I'm going to start over.' But God didn't do that! He is bound and determined to play by the rules. They are rules He wrote, and they are rules He keeps. One rule was that the wages of sin is death. Satan being in charge of death, he kept power over everyone who rightfully deserves to die. In God's providence, not only we but animals and plants die too, all because of Adam's sin. And so Satan has power over us and the whole creation.

But another of God's rules is that once you have suffered your punishment, and done everything right, then you're a free man. Death has no more claim on you. Jesus suffered the punishment and did everything required — not for Himself, but for us. And so Satan's power was broken at Golgotha. Though crucifying the perfect Son of God was the most horrific thing Satan ever did, it was also the stupidest. That is how God beat him — all by the rules of the game, or the rules of the universe. C.S. Lewis called it "the deeper magic from before the dawn of time." Redeemed humanity, God's elect, suffered and obeyed perfectly in the person of their

head, Jesus Christ — just as fallen humanity, Satan's prize, sinned and fell totally in the person of their head, Adam.

By undergoing death, Jesus defeated both death and the Devil. By rising again, He proved that death's claim was finished and thus that Satan's was as well. Everything from the resurrection onward is simply the process of mopping up Satan's forces.

3. Through Us

How does God reconquer through us? It's simple. He takes us from Satan's kingdom. It's a war of attrition, and Satan is losing. God simply requisitions Satan's subjects and by a process called "conversion" or "salvation" makes them His subjects. That's right: if you're a Christian this morning, you're an ex-citizen of Satan's realm. You're now a citizen of God's kingdom.

In fact, not only did God deliver us from Satan's kingdom; He also calls us to work against Satan's kingdom. How is God building His Kingdom? Through our prayers. Through our obedience. Through our establishment of kingdom values in our homes and workplaces. That's how. In fact, the rest of this sermon will be about how God is building His Kingdom, and what exactly that looks like.

D. God Calls This Reconquest His "Kingdom"

Because that's what God calls His reconquest of planet Earth. He calls it His Kingdom. God's Kingdom is the rescue project, defeating Satan and driving back his dominion by rescuing his subjects.

II. Pray Because God Is Building His Kingdom

So God's kingdom is His rescue project, delivering people from the dominion of Satan. Do you pray in light of that fact? Do your prayers orbit around the hallowing of God's name and the coming of His kingdom? Have you ever thought before of His kingdom as His righteous rule delivering us from the evil power of Satan?

We know that things change, at least a little, based on who's president. Most of us have seen the Bush administration, the Obama administration, and other administrations. But do you want to see the Jesus administration? It sounds like a pipe dream, I know. But it's not. That's what the Kingdom of God is: ultimately, it's the Jesus administration. It's the time when everything will be governed by the Lord Jesus Christ exactly as it ought to be. No Satan. No loose ends. No crazy terrorists. No weeds. As far as the curse is found, the Jesus administration will set everything right. Tolkien portrayed the coming of the kingdom by talking about the return of the King. But Earth under Christ's personal rule will be better by far than Middle Earth under Aragorn's rule ever was or ever could be.

So how is God building His kingdom? Well, in two ways. He's building it in depth and in width. He's building it in scope and in power. He's building extensively and intensively.

A. Extensively

The "extensive" part is the outward growth of the Kingdom. This is the kingdom growing in size, spreading to cover more and more people. We see this in two primary ways.

1. The Propagation of the Gospel

The first is what we call evangelism. This is the gospel being preached and people believing it. Every time someone believes in Jesus, every time someone comes out of Satan's kingdom into God's kingdom, the kingdom grows. This is how we can see the extension of the kingdom.

a) To Jews

We have two primary groups in this world. The first is the Jews. They were the original recipients of God's revelation, but most of them have been hardened and are hardened against the gospel. Nonetheless, the New Testament encourages us to hope and pray for their conversion. Their cutting off has been life for the rest of the world, and so their full inclusion will be an even greater blessing! When we see Jews believing in large numbers, then we will indeed know that the kingdom of God is near.

b) To Gentiles

The kingdom of God must be preached to Gentiles too. That is most of us, perhaps all of us in this room. I am not Jewish by birth. Somebody came to Germany and Sweden long ago and told my ancestors the good news of Jesus Christ. For as many generations back as can be traced, on both sides, my ancestors were Christians. Some of you can tell that same story. Others of you are the first believers you know of in your family lines. Regardless, brothers and sisters, every one of us here is a testament to the extension, the growth, the coming of the kingdom of God!

Do you long to see Jews and Gentiles converted? How much? Seriously, brothers and sisters, this is the "biggest market," if you will. This is where the church has the most upside. We want people in China to come to know Jesus. Those one and a half billion people need to come under Christ's dominion. Do you want Jesus to reign in China? Do you want those people who have suffered for centuries under unjust, tyrannical, evil governments to experience the freedom and joy of a supremely good ruler? And if so, what are you doing about it? Are you even praying for the extension of Christ's kingdom to Jews and Gentiles? How many times have you shared the good news in the last week? Month? Year? What are you waiting for? How much better do you have to know someone before you can talk about Jesus? How well do you have to know someone before you can bring up Trump or Hillary?

2. The Strengthening of the Church

Well, the second way in which the Kingdom comes extensively is through the strengthening of the church. This is how Christ extends the power of His Kingdom. Why do I say this? Because the church is a place where Christ rules. We are together here because (a) Jesus pulled us out of the kingdom of darkness and brought us into His kingdom, and (b) because we together confess that Jesus is Lord. In that sense, therefore, we can say that the church is the clearest institutional manifestation of the Kingdom on earth today. We show what a place ruled by Jesus looks like. At least, if we're obedient to Him, we do. We all know about churches that have blown up, crumbled, fallen into heresy, or just plain vanished. That's not a very clear manifestation of the Kingdom of God. But a strong, faithful, obedient church, where everyone actually does what

God says to do, is a great illustration of the way the Kingdom of God works. The more faithful the people, the more a particular church will manifest what the Kingdom really is.

Jesus strengthens the church three ways, extending His Kingdom there.

a) Provision of Officers

This part of His work is mentioned in Ephesians 4. There the apostle tells us that when Jesus ascended (or rose from the dead, depending on how you read the text), He provided officers for the church. The reason this church has a pastor and elders is because Jesus gave them to us. We the people of Harvest Presbyterian Church have received gifts from Jesus. I'm literally God's gift to this congregation. So is Clint. So is Wayne. That doesn't mean that we are called to have a snooty attitude and be really impressed with ourselves; on the contrary, we are given to build up this church. We have a responsibility to Christ and to all of you. We are responsible to help you grow into maturity. We are supposed to make sure that you are becoming more sanctified. We do that by providing spiritual food for you, and by providing for you to worship God. We do it by pulling you aside if you need counsel or reproof. I've benefited tremendously during my life by my elders pulling me aside and saying, "Caleb, you really need to stop doing such-and-such." That is one major way that Christ extends His Kingdom. Every group needs leaders; God provides them personally.

b) Purity of Worship

Secondly, God is building His Kingdom by purifying our worship. Gross worship, vain repetition, unholy people calling on God together — these things are contrary to the spirit of the Kingdom. They do not fit with what people are supposed to do under Christ's rule.

Do you strive to be a pure worshipper? Do you pray for worship? Do you see what we do from 10 to 11:35 on Sunday mornings as a manifestation of the in-breaking Kingdom of God? It is. And it deserves to be treated as such. This worship time is a state ceremony. It is one of God's primary ways of extending His Kingdom. So take it seriously!

c) Peace with the State

Thirdly, Christ's kingdom is extended when it is doing its job and the state is doing its job. Yes, God can also work through state opposition to build His Kingdom. But when the state is at peace with the church, and does things like passing zoning laws that allow churches to build in residential areas, or giving churches tax breaks, or giving ministers visiting privileges in hospitals and prisons, or has ministers pray before city council meetings and sessions of Congress — all of these things are ways that the extension of Christ's kingdom is manifested and accomplished in this world.

Do you pray that we might have peace with the state? That Christ's right to rule, in the church and in the world, would be acknowledged by His people?

B. Intensively: Our Increasing Submission to Christ's Rule(s)

Well, the Kingdom of God also needs to come intensively, in our own hearts and lives. If you are a citizen of the United States, then it behooves you to obey the laws of this nation. If you are a citizen of the Kingdom of Heaven, it behooves you to obey the laws of God. Your citizenship is

in heaven. The more you act like it, the more intensely you live out the laws of the Kingdom, the better citizen you are.

Do you want the Kingdom to come in your obedience? Do you show that by how dedicated you are to obeying God's law?

III. Pray Because God Will Consummate His Kingdom

All of this truth about the Kingdom is brought to us here in Matthew 6 in the context of prayer. *Do you pray for the Kingdom?* And do you look with eager expectation to its final establishment here on earth? You see, the Kingdom will be established extensively and intensively throughout this present age. But at some point, God will bring this age to an end, and He will then consummate His Kingdom. He will do that in two events.

A. Christ's Second Coming

The first of these is Christ's second coming. Are you looking forward to the return of Jesus the Anointed One? When He comes back, He will finalize the establishment of His kingdom. It will be a glorious coming, a powerful coming, an effective coming. None of the adversaries of Jesus will be able to stop it.

Do you pray for the Second Coming? When you read about another terror attack, another cop killed, another crazy person gaining power to do evil things, do you say, "This world is okay. I don't see any reason why we can't keep living here for another millennium or so?" Or do you say, "Come, Lord Jesus!"? What is it that you want? A decent earthly life? Personal peace and prosperity? Or do you long for Christ to be glorified in putting everything right at last, forever and ever?

Three things will keep you from praying for the second coming (as Thomas Watson listed them in *A Body of Divinity*).

First is a lack of salvation. If you have never been converted, then you don't long to see Christ's kingdom consummated. You can't long to see Him victorious over all evil because you are part of the problem. You are part of the evil. If you have no longing for the second coming, is it because you are unconverted?

Second is a love of this world. If you are enamored of the things this world has to offer, such that you need and desire nothing beyond them, then you will have no appetite for the Kingdom of Heaven to be established. "They have found paradise, they are in their kingdom already; this is their heaven, and they desire to hear of no other; they are of his mind who said, If he might keep his cardinalship in Paris, he would give up his part in paradise."

Third is a failure to keep God's law. If you are living in sin and unwilling to part with your favorite sin, then you cannot desire that God would return and judge you. Can a criminal really long for the day of his trial if he knows that a just punishment will infallibly be meted out to him?

Examine your hearts, brothers and sisters. Do you long for Jesus to come? I saw recently a couple of overdue mothers writing back and forth to each other on Facebook, and one

(Elizabeth Keil) said, "I always try to think of how longing for a child to be born is similar to how we do/ought to long for Christ's return."

Do you long for Christ's return the same way an overdue mother desperately hopes and prays that that baby will come?

B. Our Reigning with Him Forever

The other facet of the consummation of Christ's Kingdom is our reigning with Him forever. We will sit on thrones and judge the nations. We will be part of His reign! Dan 7:18 "But the saints of the Highest One will receive the kingdom and possess the kingdom forever, for all ages to come." What will that look like? I have no idea. But I know that God has promised that part of the consummation of the Kingdom will be your vindication and coronation. Do you want to reign with Jesus Christ? Do you want to be in charge of something in Heaven itself?

Few of us have exercised huge amounts of power over lots of people. But the promise of God is clear: in Heaven, you will reign.

Do you pray for this? Do you ask for the day when you will reign with Christ? And does this promise comfort you? Right now, we don't reign. Evil men and women rule our country and most of the other countries of the world. We don't see Christians lauded and applauded for being Christians. We see Christians persecuted for being Christians.

Are you on the bottom of a power relationship? Even if you aren't persecuted as a Christian in any of your close personal relationships, you are on the bottom end of a power relationship with an entire culture, almost an entire civilization, hell-bent on destroying itself and anyone who opposes its wickedness. And that's where this message about reigning with Christ hits home. The last really will be first, and the first last. Those who are on top of the world will someday be under Christ's feet. And if you are united to Christ, then they will be under yours too. "You shall tread upon the lion and the cobra, The young lion and the serpent you shall trample underfoot" (Psa 91:13 NKJ). "And the God of peace will crush Satan under your feet shortly" (Rom 16:20 NKJ). Do you believe these promises? Do you sincerely trust that a day is coming when the faculties at Harvard and Yale, the bureaucrats at the EPA, the President of the United States and the mayor of New York City will be brought under the dominion of Jesus Christ? If you do, it will determine your attitude toward them. You will not need to fear them. You will not need to feel inadequate around them. You will not need to be defensive or small-minded about them. Jesus Christ is Lord, and He is Lord of Harvard and Yale and New York City too. Christ rules in San Francisco and Mecca and Salt Lake City and every other capital of heresy and ungodliness. Someday, that rule will be perfected. And you will be on the winning side.

Do you believe this? How much? How confidently? How sure are you that Jesus is Lord? No amount of certainty is excessive. You can't be too sure. I promise.

IV. Pray Because Only God Can Bring In the Kingdom

Well, now you know what the kingdom of God is, and now you know that it is growing in both extent and intensity, spreading out to cover the whole world. Christ is taking back dominion from

Satan. He's doing it according to the rules of warfare, but He's doing it. And He invites you to participate with Him in it by praying, by living according to the laws of the kingdom, and by evangelizing to bring other people into the Kingdom.

So do you pray for the Kingdom to come? Do you long for the Kingdom to come? Do you anticipate the Kingdom's coming in its fullness when Jesus returns?

Don't be an enemy of this Kingdom. If you have not entered it, then do so now. Above all, submit to the rule of Jesus. Let Him rescue you from the kingdom of darkness. Obey Him; love Him; seek Him. His Kingdom is coming. Join it. Amen.