

Hallowed be your name

2—May your kingdom come!

The coming of God's kingdom is important to Jesus. He has been sent into the world to fulfil prophecies about God's reign in the world. He wants it to be our desire too and says we should seek the kingdom above all else.

This prayer comes down to the question, 'Whose world do I want to live in? The world I make, or the world God makes?' If God's kingdom 'comes', we have a world run according to his design, by his powerful presence and arriving at his goal. The alternative is the one engineered by Satan, and then chosen by this world—being our own authority and judge.

In one sense, the whole Bible is the story of the interplay between God and Satan. God sets up a family or a kingdom where people can live with justice, peace and hope. And then, by Satan's wiles, people choose to live in their own way and run into conflict with God himself.

So, what incentives has God given us to pray this prayer, and how will God answer it? We could say that the kingdom comes in three ways.

The kingdom comes comprehensively

It really does demean God if we imagine that what we have in this world is all he can do. He called his creation 'very good' (Genesis 1:31), but it's not very good at the moment. There's still so much around us—and in us—that's not good: conflict, suffering, meanness, lies, injustice, and death.

God has promised that his kingdom will come. For example, '... They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain, for the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea' (Isaiah 11:9). Peace at last! Because the Father is King.

Then, God's Servant will 'bring justice to the nations... He will not falter or be discouraged till he established justice in the earth. In his law, the islands will put their hope' (Isa. 42:1-4). This servant is sent 'to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom to the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour ...' (Isa. 61:1-3).

This theme goes on into the New Testament. Jesus comes to inaugurate the kingdom, but he also has in mind its finale. Explaining his parable of the weeds he says, 'The field is the world... The harvest is the end of the age....' Angels will 'weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. They will throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Whoever has ears, let them hear' (Matthew 13:41-43).

Imagine a world where everyone loves the Father and does what he asks. Everyone knows they are loved by God and don't need to justify themselves. And they serve their neighbours with the same care they give to themselves. There is no more crying, sickness, pain or death (Revelation 21:3-5).

And we will be changed. ‘Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God’ (1 Corinthians 15:50). Mortality must be replaced with immortality. Death isn’t God’s idea of a good future!

God makes it abundantly clear that he will have the world the way he made it to be. His kingdom is about nothing less than an entirely renewed creation.

We pray for this to come (2 Pet. 3:12-13; Rev. 22:20), not because it is in doubt but because we can’t help but long for it, and God is pleased to hear our prayers and give us, not just what he plans but what we have desired.

The kingdom comes truly

Jesus has told people who have seen his miracles or heard his teaching that the kingdom has ‘come to you’ or ‘is among you’ (Luke 11:20; 17:20-21). He is the King appointed by his Father and is exercising his authority.

If you are a leper and Jesus heals you, you know God is in charge! If your life has been taken over by demons and Jesus delivers you, you know God is in charge! If you listen to Jesus teaching, you may be persuaded that God is in charge. And Jesus says at this time, ‘I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven’ (Luke 10:18). So, something is happening.

But none of Christ’s kindly demonstration of power and authority creates a kingdom people. Before long, the nation God prepared to receive his King conspires to have him executed—and succeeds. It doesn’t look as though he is in charge of anything!

But Jesus has always been looking forward to his main task. He has come to destroy the works of the devil (1 John 3:8). The devil has been keeping us subservient by accusing. So, if Jesus cannot erase our guilt, he will never have willing subjects of the Father. Our basic position has been keeping God at a distance—or nonexistent. The shame and culpability of this is enormous—whether we recognise it or not. What will Jesus do to erase this, and so, to establish the kingdom of his Father?

One example may show what I mean. Two thieves are being crucified with Jesus. They throw insults at him. But something about these events brings a change to one of them. Does he hear Jesus say, ‘Father forgive them because they don’t know what they are doing’? Does he come to the end of his own resistance?

Here is what he says, first to the other thief, and then, to Jesus. ‘Don’t you fear God, since you are under the same sentence. We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong’.

And then he says, ‘Jesus, remember me when you come into your *kingdom*.’ He believes the ‘accusation’ posted on Jesus’ cross. And Jesus replies, ‘I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise’ (Luke 23:40-43). He is dying, but his reign is about to launch.

Our aversion to God’s reign is real. Even if we sit in a church and do good deeds, it doesn’t come naturally to prefer God’s reign to our own. But if we can see a man who has done nothing wrong pray for our forgiveness, and if we can see through all the cultural confusion to recognise that Jesus is God’s reigning King, and especially, if we have come to the end of our resources, we will want to have his help as well! ‘Remember me too!’

You can't have willing subjects if people are odds with the King and avoiding a showdown. Jesus, as God's promised deliverer removes our guilt by bearing it himself.

Then God authenticates this launching of his kingdom by raising Jesus from the dead. Being killed looks weak, but there is nothing weak about rising from the dead. He is 'declared with power to be the Son of God by the resurrection from the dead' (Romans 1:4). And there is nothing weak about people who are justified through his blood!

The kingdom comes now

After Christ is raised, he continues to speak about the kingdom (Acts 1:3) and the disciples ask about it 'coming' (Acts 1:6). They are told to wait for the Spirit and that they will be witnesses. All that follows in the outworking of that.

What is clear in this outworking is that Christ is reigning as King. He does not work by human might or power but by the Spirit (Zech. 4:6). From heaven, he now conducts all God's affairs (Matthew 28:18; Revelation 1:4-6). He commands that his good news be announced in all the world. This is the exercise of his power (Romans 1:16). This is why the kingdom is often called 'the kingdom of Christ' (Ephesians 5:5). He is going to reign until the end and then hand his completed handiwork to the Father (1 Corinthians 15:24-28).

This reign of Christ cannot be seen. We embrace it by faith. But it is far from insubstantial! Believers are transferred out of the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of the Son of God's love (Colossians 1:13).

We were controlled by the world, our own passions, and, through these things, the devil himself. Now we recognise the powers of the age to come (Hebrews 6:5). Love lives, not because we are nice people but because Jesus has taken us into the kingdom where his Father's love rules everything.

Christians around the world are persecuted because they believe in a gracious but absolute authority of the Christ appointed by the Father to rule. He is their truth, their justification, their delight. Human rulers want to claim this place and are jealous of a rival (Matthew 27:18).

The church responds as those who know they are in a kingdom of love. They pray like the early church did: 'Sovereign Lord...you made the heaven and the earth and the sea, and everything in them. ... Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against the Lord and against his Anointed One. ... Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness' (from Acts 4:24-31). They are living in the powers of the kingdom.

Our prayers are not a mere whimper but a sharing in the authority now given to Christ. We work and pray to 'take every thought captive to Christ' (2 Corinthians 10:5). God gives us the pleasure of sharing with him in his kingdom's coming. He responds to our prayers. So well may we say, 'Bring it on!'