

THY KINGDOM COME
Matthew 6: 10, 26, 36-39

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After years of Biblical research, especially the prophetic books of Daniel, Ezekiel and Revelation, William Miller came to a startlingly important conclusion. The world would come to an end on October 22, 1844. Christ would return to the earth, take His followers to heaven and purify the rest of the world with an all-consuming fire. Miller even went so far as to publish a book describing his findings. At first no one paid a lot of attention to what he was saying, but gradually he gathered around himself a following of between 50 and 100,000 people, especially after the appearance of a comet that blazed across the noontime sky in the spring of 1844. All across central and eastern Massachusetts, people began to prepare for the coming of Christ. They gave away their belongings, sometimes even their homes and their farms and said goodbye to their unbelieving friends. Then on the evening of October 22, they prepared themselves for Christ's return. Donning long white robes, multitudes climbed Mount Wachusett so that they would be the first to greet the Lord. Others who couldn't make it to the mountain did the next best thing. They climbed up into the branches of the apple trees growing in their orchards.

Of course, as we all know, Christ did not return on October 22, 1844 and neither has He returned on any of the other days that have been suggested since then. Nevertheless, there has always been and continues to be a great deal of interest as to when Christ will return and establish His kingdom upon the face of the earth. Even His disciples were consumed by the desire to know when He would return. One day during that last week in Jesus' life on earth, He told His disciples that one day the beautiful temple in Jerusalem was going to be completely destroyed. They could hardly wait to ask Him, "Tell us when this will happen, and what will be the sign of Your coming and of the end of the age." (Matthew 24:3)

The same curiosity, I am sure, awakens within our own minds and hearts from time to time when we pray, "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth, even as it is in heaven." Just take a look at the world around us today. It is becoming a much less pleasant and even dangerous place in which to live. There's the war in Ukraine, which could easily escalate into a much more serious conflict, the growing conflict in Israel and then there's the rising power and influence of communist China. When was the last time you bought an appliance for your home without finding these words printed on the packing box, "made in China"? And how about the rising violence in our cities and the fact that many of them are becoming

filthy and even uninhabitable places in which to live. I don't know about you, but sometimes, down deep in my heart, I just want to cry out, "O Lord, please come and take charge of this world in which we live. We human beings have made a mess out of everything. We have destroyed your beautiful creation and we are continuing to harm and hurt one another." Don't you wish sometimes that this verse of Scripture could and indeed would become a reality, "The kingdom of this world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ, and He will reign forever and ever" (Revelation 11:15).

Well, that day most surely will come to pass and perhaps sooner than we think. But in the meantime, what does this part of the Lord's Prayer mean right here and now when we pray, "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth even as it is in heaven." I wrestled with that very question for several days until I sensed the Lord telling me to share three things with you. First of all, when we pray this part of the Lord's prayer, we're asking God to continue doing what He did when He sent His Son into our world. In the gospel of Mark we are told that after John the Baptist was thrown into prison, Jesus began preaching in Galilee. What was His message, "The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe the good news." (Mark 1:15) Jesus said that the kingdom of God was at hand, nearby, close to them. He said that for one very simple reason. The bringer of that kingdom was standing before them. He was the one who would establish the rule and the reign of God upon the face of the earth. He was the one who would bring peace among men and peace between men and their God. His words and His deeds would have a transforming impact upon the history of humanity, beginning even with His birth.

The year was 1914 and all along the western front British and French forces were facing the onslaught of Germany. World War 1 had quickly turned into trench warfare, each side burrowing into the ground to escape the continuous gunfire that raged above them. Between the enemy lines there was a "no man's land" that no one dared to enter. Then on Christmas Eve something marvelous, even miraculous took place. The Germans began singing Christmas carols and the British and French joined in with their own favorites. Unannounced and officially forbidden, men from both sides climbed out of their trenches and met in the scarred landscape of "no man's land." They shared holiday greetings with one another, exchanged small gifts and presents and enjoyed each other's company. For one whole evening and most of the next day, Christmas Day, there was no warfare across vast stretches of the Western Front. There was peace among the combatants. For a brief moment in time, the soldiers on those battlefields stepped into the Kingdom of God at the behest of a heavenly child born in Bethlehem.

There's a second thing that we are requesting when we pray this part of the Lord's Prayer. We're asking God to continue doing what He has been doing not only through His Son but also through you and me. Yes, that's right. Throughout

Jesus' life and ministry, He was constantly being questioned by those who opposed Him. Listen to what Jesus said when a Pharisee asked Him about when the Kingdom of God would come. Jesus replied, "The kingdom of God does not come with your careful observation, nor will people say, 'Here it is' or 'There it is,' because the kingdom of God is within you." (Luke 17:20-21) In other words, it's not out there, it's in here. It's in your heart. It's in that place within your life that compels you to live and act like Jesus. It's His Spirit at work in your life, the Spirit that He promised He would send to us. Jesus said, "And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Counselor to be with you forever—the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept Him, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him. But you know Him, for He lives with you and will be in you." (John 14:16-17)

Now how does that work? Let me share with you a story, believe it or not, that I read in a literature textbook when I was in high school. It was a story about Albert Schweitzer. Albert Schweitzer was a gifted musician who was born in the late 1800's. He not only played some of the finest pipe organs in Europe, but he also repaired them when they were broken. He was also a respected theologian and the principal of a theological college in Switzerland. However, under the leadership of the Holy Spirit he gave all of that up. He went back to school, became a doctor-of-medicine and went to serve as a medical missionary in Africa. I count it a real privilege to have seen him on TV when he was interviewed by Jack Parr on the Tonight Show. He was still practicing medicine well up into his 80's, even though he was living in rather primitive conditions in the African jungle. He and so many others like him have discovered that the kingdom of God resides within us.

Lastly, there's that third thing that we are requesting when we pray this part of the Lord's Prayer. We're asking God to make us willing to do what He wants us to do instead of what we want to do. I remember a story about an old woman who came to a crossroads. She didn't know which way to go, down the road to the right or down the one to the left. Being rather superstitious, she picked up a stick and decided that it would tell her which way to go. On whichever road it landed would be the direction in which she would continue her journey. She closed her eyes, threw the stick and then opened her eyes to see where it had landed. It had fallen on the road to the right. She picked up the stick and threw it again. The same thing happened. It fell on the road to the right. Over and over again she threw the stick until finally it landed on the left. With a sigh of relief she picked up the bundle of clothing she had been carrying and headed off down the left hand roadway.

Ever thrown sticks until you got them to land where you wanted them to? Of course, you have. We all have. The same is true with regards to doing the will of God. We seek His counsel and if we don't get the answer we want, we do what we wanted to do anyway. That's especially true with the big, tough, difficult decisions in life. Like the decision that Jesus faced in the Garden of Gethsemane. He knew

what He was facing on the morrow. He'd seen crucifixions. He knew what to expect. So that night in the Garden of Gethsemane He prayed, "O my Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless not as I will, but as Thou wilt." (Matthew 26:39) He was looking for and even anxious to take that left hand fork in the road of life. But He knew that the other way, the right way was God's way, even though it would cost Him His life.

Yes, there are times when God asks us to do a hard thing like climbing out of a trench on a battlefield or heading off to do missionary work in a jungle. Or closer to home staying up all night with a dying friend, serving as a host at a homeless shelter, driving hundreds of miles to take a patient to the hospital, visiting that grumpy neighbor across the street, or taking out your wallet and paying for a mother's groceries because the Lord is whispering in your ear, "She doesn't have enough money to pay for all of them." All of these acts of random kindness, including your prayers for the lost and your words of comfort for the grieving, are expressions of a willingness to do the will of God and to usher His kingdom into our world, even when it costs us, even when at times it costs us a great deal.

The same is true for you and me. Years ago there was a discipleship program known as Master Life. It was structured in such a way as to help Christians become more spiritually mature in their walk with the Lord. One of the illustrations in the workbook featured a circle with a chair on the inside of it. The circle represented a person's life and the chair was a throne, the place where decisions were made. The question at the bottom of the illustration was this, "Who sits on the throne of your life?" There were and there always are only two choices. We can sit on the throne of our lives and call all the shots, or we can step aside from that throne and let Jesus take our place. It's all about listening to the voice of His Spirit within us and following the example of the life that He lived before us.

So when we pray, "Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done," what are we asking God to do? For sure we're asking Him to change our world so that it will more nearly resemble His kingdom in heaven. But perhaps there's something else that we are also requesting. We're saying, "O Lord, let me be a part of Your kingdom's work here on earth, even if it's only a little part of what You are doing." And then there's one more additional request, "Give me, O Lord, a willing heart to do what You've asked me to do, even when I don't want to do it." This is the kind of prayer that God desires for us to pray when we say, "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done one earth, even as it is in heaven."