

eDevotions for Growing Christians

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THY KINGDOM COME

Matthew 6:9-13

⁹*This, then, is how you should pray: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Thy name, ¹⁰Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven."*

Introduction

How many times have we prayed this model prayer, given by our Lord to his disciples? And how many times have we repeated the words but given very little thought to the meaning? More specifically, do we really understand what we are asking for when we repeat "Thy kingdom come"? Most likely, if we are thinking at all about the content, we're thinking of God's kingdom in a general sense and not in the sense of the specific context in which the Lord gave this model for prayer. What we mean by wanting the kingdom of God in a general sense, is for peace and godliness to prevail on this earth, rather than selfish indulgence, violence and war. The Bible certainly does refer to the kingdom of God in this general sense when it presents the kingdom of God in its overall aspect. Consider the following examples:

The Lord Jesus asked us to "*seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things [basic needs] will be added unto you*" (Matthew 6:33). In 1 Thessalonians 2:12 we are exhorted to "*live lives worthy of God, who calls you into His kingdom and glory.*" Making the kingdom of God a priority in our lives is not easy or automatic, as we read in Acts 14:22, "*We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God.*" The apostle Paul referred to the kingdom of God in its overall aspect when he wrote, "*for the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit*" (Romans 14:17).

The subject of the kingdom of God is a major topic in the Bible. It certainly involves extensive study of the Scriptures to appreciate the full scope of this important topic, as well as to understand the specific context of the request "Thy kingdom come" in the Lord's prayer.

The Broad Meaning of the Kingdom of God

In its widest sense, the kingdom of God can be defined simply as the realm where God rules. God's sovereign rule is universal in scope. Within its bounds are included all beings and all things and all times in the universe from eternity to eternity, because everything has always been and always will be under the sovereign rule and control of God. Even the domain of Satan is not outside the limits of God's rule. This evil domain of darkness is permitted to exist

at the present time within the boundaries of God's sovereign rule. Why? Because in the overall plans and purposes of God, there is eternal reward for the faithful believer who is victorious in spiritual warfare. Furthermore, God is glorified as Satan is foiled again and again in his futile attempts to take over God's kingdom.

In the end, Satan's domain and all those who are in it will be eternally consigned to hell, which was prepared specifically for Satan and his evil angels (Matthew 25:41). And forever "*every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father*" (Philippians 2:10-11). The sovereign rule of God has been and will be from eternity to eternity.

Although the evil domain of Satan exists at the present time within the boundaries of God's sovereign rule, it is not part of the kingdom of God, and its subjects are not citizens of the kingdom of God. They are **within** the kingdom boundaries, but they are not **in** the kingdom. The following illustration should be helpful. The prisoners at Guantanamo Bay are not in or part of the "kingdom" of the United States, but the whole operation is within the rule and sovereign control of the United States.

The Spheres of Church, Kingdom and Family

When we become believers and are born again, we enter three new spheres of life. We become **sons** in the family of God (John 1:11-12), we become **saints** in the Church of God (Philippians 1:1; 1 Corinthians 1:2 & 14:33), and we become **servants** in the kingdom of God (John 8:36; Colossians 1:13). Obviously there is some overlap of these three spheres, but they are not synonymous, and they should be kept distinct from one another in our thinking, as they are distinguished in Scripture. For purposes of this essay, we can think of three concentric spheres. Consider the inner sphere as the sphere of the Church, which is the worldwide body of Christ. All believers in Jesus Christ as Savior are saints in the one true Church, because all believers have been declared righteous before God (Romans 3:22; 1 Corinthians 5:21).

Think of the second sphere as the family of God, which, like the first sphere, includes only true believers as sons of God. But it is a larger sphere than the Church, because

it includes believers of all time---not just believers of the Church Age (the time frame from Pentecost to the rapture). Notice, by the way, that the Church continues to be kept distinct from other perfected believers, even in the heavenly Jerusalem of the eternal future. "*You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, to the church of the first-born whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the judge of all men, to the spirits of righteous men made perfect...*" (Hebrews 12:22-23).

Consider the third sphere as the kingdom of God, in which believers are servants. It is the largest of all the spheres, because at the present time it includes not only true servants of the Lord but professing servants as well. It includes all of present Christendom---both the true and the false. This fact helps us to understand and interpret why there are weeds, foolish virgins, bad fish, and unfaithful servants in our Lord's parables of the kingdom.

But what about the Lord's statement to Nicodemus in John 3:3, "*I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again.*" And didn't the Lord tell His disciples in Luke 18:17, "*I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it*"? How can there be unbelievers in the sphere of the kingdom in view of these clear statements by our Lord? Answer: Only true believers are actually **in** the kingdom of God. Those who profess to be believers, are included within the sphere of the kingdom temporarily, but are not true citizens of the kingdom. Another helpful illustration would be persons who have entered our country illegally. They may **say** they are citizens, and they may look and act like citizens. They may enjoy the benefits of our society and even be of helpful service. They would be included in the population of the country, **but** they are not true citizens.

So while the true Church and family of God, which are composed only of true believers, are an essential part of the kingdom of God, they are not synonymous with the kingdom of God. The Bible does not blur the distinction between these three spheres. For example, Scripture never refers to the Lord Jesus as "King of the Church" or "King of the family." He is the **Head** of the Church, which is His body;

He is the **Father** of the family and He is the rightful **King** of the kingdom of God. Those who believe the gospel and become true citizens of the kingdom of God are delivered from Satan's "domain of darkness and brought into the kingdom of God's beloved Son" (Colossians 1:13).

The Specific Context of "Thy Kingdom Come"

Has the request in the Lord's Prayer, "Thy kingdom come," been realized or fulfilled yet? The answer is both Yes and No! **Yes**, in reference to the fact that God rules now in the hearts of all true believers on this earth. **No**, in reference to the specific context in which the Lord's Prayer was given. What was that specific context? Historically, it was given prior to our Lord's rejection by the nation of Israel as their prophesied Messiah as recorded in Matthew 6 and Luke 11. The message that Jesus preached in the early part of His ministry was the same message that John the Baptist proclaimed: "The kingdom of heaven is at hand!" (See Matthew 3:1-2 and Matthew 4:17.) **This** was the everlasting kingdom that the Old Testament prophets had predicted would come when the Messiah arrived. (See Daniel 2:44 and Daniel 7:13-14, for example.) **This** was the earthly kingdom of peace in which the throne of David would be reestablished in Jerusalem and a literal descendant of David would rule as king. (See Isaiah 11:1-9; Jeremiah 33:10-26 and Amos 9:11-15, for example.) **This** was the kingdom that was being offered specifically to the nation of Israel, and **only** to the nation of Israel. It was not even offered to the Samaritans. We see this in both Matthew 10 and Luke 10, where the Lord sent out his disciples and 70 others to preach the message that the kingdom "is at hand" (Matthew 10:7) and the kingdom "has come near" (Luke 10:9). **This** was the kingdom in which God's will would be done "on earth, as it is in heaven," and thus the term, "the kingdom of heaven." **This** was the kingdom to which the Lord referred in His model prayer for His Jewish disciples when He said, "Thy kingdom come" in Matthew 6:10.

The question, of course, was whether or not God's King would be received by the nation of Israel. Unfortunately, the nation of Israel rejected her King and thus refused to receive the kingdom that was "near" and "at hand." The "point of no return" for the nation is set forth clearly in Matthew 12, when the religious leaders of Israel decisively rejected the King by attributing His wonderful miracles to the power of Satan. This was unforgivable!

As a result of Israel's rejection of her King and the kingdom, a definite shift is noted in our Lord's ministry. The Lord's preaching shifted in emphasis in three definite ways:

1. He began to speak about His coming death and resurrection.

"From that time, Jesus began to show His disciples that he must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised up on the third day" (Matthew 16:21).

Notice that it was "from that time" the Lord "began" to speak of His coming death and resurrection. There was no specific reference to His passion and resurrection in the early part of His ministry, when the kingdom was being offered to Israel.

2. He announced that the church would be formed

"I also say unto you that...upon this rock I will build My church..." (Matthew 6:18).

When the Lord Jesus said, "I will build My church" (future tense), it is clear that the "church" is distinct from the "kingdom." The church is not synonymous with the kingdom that was offered to and rejected by the nation of Israel. Notice, too, that the church is not the "new Israel," but is a completely new and separate entity---the body and bride of Christ. (See Ephesians 5:25-32.)

3. He revealed that the kingdom would be postponed.

"Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a nation producing the fruit of it" (Matthew 21:43).

"Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were unwilling. Behold, your house is left to you desolate! For I say to you, from now on you will not see Me until you say, 'Blessed is He who comes in the Name of the LORD!'" (Matthew 23:37-39).

The "nation" to whom the kingdom would be given is not the church (which is not a nation), but the "nation" refers to the restored nation of Israel in the future, according to Romans 11. It is the "all Israel" of Romans 11:26 ("And so all Israel will be saved..."). At that future time, all the kingdom prophecies of the Old Testament, which were not fulfilled because the kingdom was rejected, will be fulfilled. When the Lord returns and establishes His kingdom that has been postponed, blessing will not only be upon restored Israel, but on all the nations of the earth as well. (See Isaiah 66:18-19.)

So the earthly kingdom of the Messiah---the kingdom that was predicted and promised in the Old Testament, and presented by the Lord in His early ministry, and prayed for by the disciples in the request "Thy kingdom come"---that kingdom was rejected by Israel at the first coming of Christ, when Israel refused to

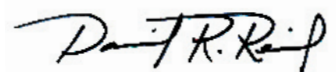
acknowledge her Messiah and King. But that earthly messianic kingdom will come! It will be established at the second coming of Christ. It has not been eliminated from God's sovereign plans and program, and it is not being "fulfilled spiritually" in the church. That kingdom has only been postponed until the nation of Israel turns back to the Messiah she once rejected. (See Zechariah 12:9-10.)

The Mystery Form of the Kingdom

In the meantime, the kingdom of God is in its "mystery" form, based upon what the Lord said to His disciples in Matthew 13:11: "To you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been granted." As used in the New Testament, the word "mystery" doesn't mean something "mysterious" or "inexplicable," but rather something that was concealed in the Old Testament and now revealed in the New Testament. The present form of the kingdom of God, which encompasses all of Christendom (including the true and the false), was not revealed in the Old Testament. It is now revealed in the New Testament, specifically in the parables of the kingdom of heaven, as taught by our Lord in Matthew 13 and 25. Notice that the present "mystery form" of the kingdom of heaven was not presented by the Lord until **after** His offer of the kingdom was rejected by the leaders of the nation of Israel in Matthew 12 (note verses 14, 24, 31-32, 41-45).

In Acts 1:6, following the Lord's resurrection, the disciples asked the Lord, "Is it at this time that You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?" The Lord's answer was, in essence, "No, that time is yet in the future, at a time determined by the Father. In the meantime, with the power of the Holy Spirit, go out and preach the gospel to the whole world." Our responsibility as believers during this present time of the "Church Age" is to present the gospel of God's grace in accordance with the great commission which the Lord gave after His resurrection: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you" (Matthew 28:19-20).

So the kingdom of God, in the specific context of the Lord's Prayer, has not yet been established on this earth---but it will be when the Lord returns! What a marvelous and blessed time that will be! With this proper understanding of what we look forward to in the future, we can certainly pray in the present, "Thy kingdom come."



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Each Sunday morning: Adult classes at Groton (CT) Bible Chapel.

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Wednesday evening: Bible study in our home.

Tuesday: 7:15AM breakfast Bible study for men, Central Baptist Church, Westerly, RI.

Contact us at gcm@growingchristians.org for more information.

Bible Lands Study Tour:

We have 2 Bible lands study tours coming up next month! Our tour to Israel will be May 16-25 (4 openings) and our Greece and Aegean Cruise tour (9 openings) will be May 24-June 2. There is a significant discount for tourists who sign up for both tours. For a brochure go to <http://www.growingchristians.org/Tour2008.pdf>.

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"...I am a 23 year old young lady, Malawian by nationality. I am at Kamuzu College of Nursing receiving a certificate in Midwifery. I would like to get the Devotions for Growing Christians. I knew of this website through Transworld Radio"

From California:

"I was looking for articles on how to be a servant of God. Once here, I started to explore your web pages. Very interesting."

From Nigeria:

"Thanks for your permission to use your materials in teaching the seminary students. I wish to ask if it is possible to get from you the cassette tapes that go along with the study on Hermeneutics."

From Ohio:

"I use this site for my daily devotionals and as a resource for my Bible studies."

From Myanmar:

"Greeting to you in marvelous name of our Lord Jesus Christ who is the same yesterday, today and forever...I would like to thank you for your letter and sending me "eDevotions for Growing Christians." I read it and understand it..."

From Georgia:

"Thanks, Dr. Reid...you start my day with your radio broadcast of "Talks for Growing Christians!..."

Family and Ministry News:

"Talks from Psalms 1-41" is just about to go up on our website. These "Talks" are also available in CD set from our website store.

A new feature is being added to our website. All the "Talks" are being transcribed so that hard copy of each "Talk" will eventually be available. Our good friend, Hope Folk, has started with the 110 "Talks from Genesis" and will move next to the 90 "Talks from John." Quite a project!

Because our last "Family News" consisted entirely pictures of our grandchildren, Dave has had no chance to mention anything about his trip to Myanmar and Singapore, which was at the end of November last year. He taught a Biblical Hermeneutics seminar at a Bible college in Myanmar (Burma) and at a church in Singapore. He had a wonderful time, meeting many new friends as well as teaching and preaching the Word of God. It was a great experience and a wonderful opportunity for him to see first-hand the work of the Lord in that part of Southeast Asia. Thank you for your prayers.

Grandchild News: Callie will be 16 next month, and thus will soon be getting her driver's permit -- hard to believe! Connor (12) is playing ice hockey this spring. They have a new puppy, a tiny Italian greyhound named Olive, who is extremely lively and very cute! Their family enjoyed the warm sun, turquoise sea and snorkeling over spring break in St. Thomas.

Ingrid (11) and Kirsten (9) will be playing in a big cello recital next month. Kirsten continues to enjoy her riding lessons, and Ingrid her piano lessons. Their family spent a few days of spring break at a working farm B&B in Wisconsin, where they bottle-fed baby goats, gathered eggs, played with the dogs, and watched lots of bald eagles while hiking along the Mississippi River bluffs.

Jon (8) is playing in a floor hockey league. He's teaching David (just-turned-5) beginning reading and arithmetic from work sheets Jon makes up at home. David enjoys Legos and monster trucks, and they went to a monster truck show recently -- super excitement! Their family plans a trip to Washington, DC, during April spring break.

