

“God, Your Kingdom Come”

(but not too soon and not too much)

Matthew 6:10a

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Matthew 6:9-10

"This, then, is how you should pray:

"Our Father in heaven,  
hallowed be your name,

**your kingdom come,**

your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us today our daily bread.

Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. '

We look today at the second petition in what we call “The Lord’s Prayer: God, make your kingdom come!

Over and over again through the centuries, leaders have called their followers to alter history by their actions.

In a multitude of variations the call is the same, “Come, help change the world!”

- By it, Alexander the Great called an army together to conquer the world.
- By it Islam pushed from the deserts of the Middle East to the very thrones of Europe.
- By it the Crusaders called the masses to march to Jerusalem.
- By it Lenin roused a nation to overthrow a tyrant.
- By it John Kennedy called many of America’s best and brightest to join the Peace Corps.

Why is this appeal so effective in every culture and every generation?

Ask any, except the morally blind, and you will get the same answer: **“Because the world needs radical change!”**

Unless they are sidetracked by apathy, hopelessness, or greed, people want to see the world changed.

Especially young people want to see it changed.

They've not yet become cynical.

Some of our own high school students are in the inner city of Denver this weekend, among other things, befriending and giving to the homeless.

You may know enough about the "homeless" situation in Denver to consider that naïve but you can't deny the altruism that tugs at the hearts of young people – a desire to change things.

We can't be aware of what is happening in our world without wanting to do something about it.

I read, in the last two weeks, of a mother here in Denver who, after repeatedly abusing her son, struck the 2- year-old in the face, nearly killing him, because he wet his pants.

I felt sadness, anger, rage, and a desire to punish.

I felt a desire to defend, to keep it from ever happening again – to him or any other child.

Somebody do something!  
Something has to change!

Three days ago I saw the picture of a young Palestinian man's dead and bloodied body hanging upside down like a battered piñata – executed by his own people for collaborating with the Israelis.

That young man was somebody's son, somebody's brother, and somebody's friend.

Day after day we are shown the tragic results of this intractable, impossible cycle of revenge in the Middle East.

Something has to change!

In South African civil-rights leader Nelson Mandela's autobiography, The Long Walk to Freedom, he describes standing near a post office in Pretoria, South Africa with a friend of his.

A white man approached and, as was customary all over the country, ordered Nelson's friend to go into the post office to get something for him.

To not do it could mean a state-sanctioned beating and to do it meant the further shrinking of one's spirit.

That kind of discrimination and abuse of souls goes on all over our world.

Like some of you, I get up close to a lot of pain every week, if not every day.

I hear it in the voices of those who speak of what is happening in their lives.

I see it in the faces of children who are so often the victims of the evil choices of their parents.

- Should I show it to you in the graphic pictures of slaughter in Israel, Afghanistan, or Sudan?
- Should I show it to you in the nearly silent weeping of a five-year-old girl whose daddy left her when he left her mother?
- Should I show it to you in the crushed spirit of a heroin addicted 10 year old boy sitting in an alley off east Colfax, who has never known anything but real poverty and has never even imagined anything else existed for him?
- Should I play for you the audio recordings of a thousand conversations that have taken place this past week in pastors', doctors', counselors' offices all over this city and let you listen to the tragic stories?

What do we do with that reality? Something has to change!  
How do we respond?

Two responses seem to dominate: Flight or Fight.

The "flight" is a refusal to think about it, a turning away from it in pain or apathy, or a sense of helplessness in being able to do anything about it.

We are tempted to take a "head in the sand", "as long as it doesn't touch me or mine", approach.

And some of this "flight" approach has been adopted by Christians – a "save all the souls we can as the ship of this world sinks" and a hope that Jesus comes soon to end all of this.

Another response is “fight” – a determination to change the world.

This is a “roll up the sleeves”, “get our hands dirty”, “change the system” method.

Most every ideology of the centuries has been an attempt to bring about change – to introduce peace, prosperity and happiness into the human experience.

I think Marx, Engles, Lenin, Mao and a host of others adopted forms of communism to bring about a change.

The utopian enterprises of the past were attempts to reduce the suffering of humanity and bring about a lasting difference.

Think of history’s attempts to respond in one way or another:

- Woodrow Wilson’s “League of Nations”,
- Franklin Roosevelt’s “New Deal”,
- John Kennedy’s “Peace Corps”,
- Lyndon Johnson’s “Great Society” and “war on poverty”,
- Ronald Reagan’s “trickle-down economics”,
- And Bill Clinton’s “Nation Building”,

In our desire to address suffering directly there is:

- Amnesty International,
- Doctors without Borders,
- The United Nations Security Council,
- UNICEF
- World Vision,
- Food for the Hungry,
- World Relief,
- Samaritan’s Purse,
- And the Mennonite Central Committee,

We’ve even tried power and negotiation to make the world better:

- There was World War I (“the war to end all wars”),
- The Treaty of Versailles,
- World War II,
- The Korean and Vietnam Wars to keep us safe from Communism.

- The “Cold War”, détente, and “mutually-assured-destruction”,
- The Middle East, Camp David Accords,
- The Gulf War,
- The Bosnian, Dayton Accords,
- the present war against terrorism in Afghanistan and elsewhere,
- And the on-going “drug war”.

So much, for so long - to what end?

Wars still erupt with ever-increasing frequency.

The resulting human suffering continues unabated.

For all of our laws, our prisons, and social programs it seems that pain and despair are deeper and more pervasive with each passing year.

Billions of dollars, millions of lives, untold hours of effort, for what?

Why can't we change it???

Prior to WWII, even many Christians thought everything would gradually get better and better until finally peace and prosperity would be ushered in fully – the kingdom of God on earth would arrive.

But as the evils of Hitler's concentration camps were being discovered one German pastor wrote,

“(Who today) can utter the words “human progress” without getting a flat taste in his mouth? Who can still believe today that we are developing toward a state in which the kingdom of God reigns in the world of nations, in culture, and in the life of the individual? The earth has been plowed too deeply by the curse of war, the streams of blood and tears have swollen all to terribly, injustice and bestiality have become all too cruel and obvious for us to consider such dreams to be anything but bubbles and froth.” (Thielicke 62)

What's to be done?

Jesus came in the midst of just such times.

In our text in Matthew, Jesus was speaking to a broken people – oppressed politically and economically (they were a subjugated people), they were sick, crippled, and many were driven to despair.

They lived at a subsistence level dependent each new day even for their bread.

Jan Lochman wrote, “These were the poor, the failures, both in the economic sense – the hungry and unemployed – and also in the moral and religious sense – the despised and ignored whom the official church and society excluded... There were also the blind, the physically and mentally handicapped, the sick, with their reduced potentialities. There were also the defeated, those who had suffered shipwreck through outer blows or inner failure and collapse. They were all there, the whole human race, all of us with our own special needs.” (Lochman 62)

And what did Jesus claim?

What was he promising in their **and our** messy, painful world?

Jesus came preaching **the good news of the kingdom**.

Matthew 4:23-25 “Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom...”

He said the “good news” was that God’s presence and power had invaded our world and was available to us, individually and corporately – life could be different.

Not only was he preaching “good news” but the Scripture says, he went everywhere

“healing every disease and sickness among the people. News about him spread all over Syria, and people brought to him all who were ill with various diseases, those suffering severe pain, the demon-possessed, those having seizures, and the paralyzed, and he healed them.”

**And all the time, the clear implication was that this was just the tip of the iceberg – that this was, in part, what it means when the “world” of God – “the kingdom of heaven”, “the kingdom of God” - invades our “world.”**

Jesus said in Luke 4:18,19, "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

### **Jesus had come to change the world!**

Has he? Is he? Will he?

Do I dare to believe him? And what do I believe?

Jesus said the Kingdom of God has come!

What am I to understand about that?

What difference does it really make?

Jesus made it very clear that the Kingdom of God is not a realm but a rule.

It is not a place but a power.

It operates in a place, **our lives and our world**, but it is God's sovereign rule operating in our world.

Rutgers wrote, "The kingdom of God in this sense may then be defined as the rule or will of God established in the hearts of (his) people, which rule... is, and progressively increases to be, the operative principle that motivates the Christian's life, gives direction to and determines the purpose of living." (Rutgers in Kuiper's Sermons on the Lord's Prayer 66)

It is God's loving authority in our lives.

Think with me briefly about God's kingdom rule historically:

If we look at Genesis 1 and 2 we see God's kingdom, God's rule exercised fully not only in heaven but on earth.

All earthly creation, the stars and sun to plant life, animals and humans (Adam and Eve) lived in the sphere of God's gracious rule.

God was king and his creatures were his willing subjects.

Then in rebellion against God's authority, humanity, in our first parents Adam and Eve, threw off God's grace and went its own way.

Karl Barth wrote that the tragic results of the Fall have a paradoxical aspect:

“Parallel to the history of man’s emancipation from God there runs that of the emancipation of his own possibilities of life from himself: the history of the overpowering of (Man’s) desires,... by the power...of (Man’s) ability” (Barth Christian Life 214)

We were given the ability to reject God, to be “emancipated” from him, and we did, and in so doing we lost, we were “emancipated” from the possibilities of life as God intended.

Jan Lochman wrote, “Like Goethe’s sorcerer’s apprentice, man becomes the victim of the lordless powers that he conjures up but can no longer control, which have come to lord it over him.” (Lochman 59)

“There is nothing more terrible than the man who is left to himself” (Thielicke Our Heavenly Father 58)

We have **not** created a world that brings greater peace and joy but a world that increasingly threatens our very existence.

**Since the Fall of humanity in the Garden of Eden, God’s perfect rule has been exercised only in heaven.**

Throughout the OT period from Abraham to John the Baptist – the promise was that the King himself would come to our world and reestablish his kingdom.

And though the king would come through the lineage of one family – namely through Abraham and Israel, the kingdom would be available to all people.

The gestation period was over 2000 years but **the king finally came** – at exactly the right time, “the fullness of time” God said.

And in Jesus, that kingdom rule once again invaded earth.

- That’s why **John the Baptist** was called a “forerunner” (one who runs before the coming king and announces his arrival) and said **the kingdom of heaven was at hand.**
- That is why **Jesus** said he came preaching **good news of the kingdom.**

- That's why Jesus did the signs and wonders he did to prove to those who would listen and watch that the kingdom has come and is coming in even greater influence.
- That's why he died and rose again so that the power of sin to blind and control would be broken, releasing those who trust in Jesus to enter that kingdom and serve the risen king.

The King has come bringing his kingdom.

There are two misconceptions about the kingdom of God:

One: We can understand the kingdom of God as **only future** – the coming “kingdom” when Jesus comes again.

In such thinking we are tempted to think that the Kingdom of God has nothing to do with this real world in which we live but is applicable only to our hearts.

In such thinking we relegate the “kingdom” only to the future.

The second misconception is to reduce the kingdom of God to **only here and now.**

**More specifically to reduce it to the Christianizing of secular institutions in modern society** – to attempt to make the institutions of school, state and commerce, Christian.

(Was this also the short-sightedness of Cromwell's rule in England and is it the short-sightedness of the Reconstructionists and the religious right of today?

Are we trying to force God's “kingdom” on the world?)

One author wrote, “(This) method of bringing about the kingdom is one of social reformation; they approach humanity from the outside; the agency is machinery.”

(Rutgers in Kuipers Sermons on the Lord's Prayer 72)

Believing that the machinery of social reform will make the world better by our programs.

NO, the kingdom of God is not **only** future, though God's gracious rule will only be universally embraced at the end of the age.

**But neither is the kingdom of God simply our best efforts at making life on earth better through political or social programs or even by force.**

Jesus said to the ruler and military leader, Pilate, in John 18:37 "My kingdom is not of (or like) this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But my kingdom is from another place."

Jesus said his kingdom was not about swords and programs.  
His kingdom is unseen but every bit as real.

It is one of regeneration, of conversion.

This approach is from the inside; the agency is not human social programs but the effective work of the Holy Spirit in the individual hearts of people

And Jesus' merit is applied to us and we are progressively shaped to be like Jesus. (Rutgers in Kuipers Sermons on the Lord's Prayer 72)

**By God's Spirit we are increasingly convinced of the gracious will of God for our lives and we yield to his love.**

God doesn't take us by force but woos us to himself.

And one life at a time – the kingdom of God comes.

Jesus told us his kingdom works a wholly different way from the kingdoms and methods of the world:

Matthew 13:31-33 "He told them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field. Though it is the smallest of all your seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and perch in its branches. He told them still another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into a large amount of flour until it worked all through the dough."

It appears so insignificant but it is so powerful and will be pervasive.

And it changes individuals, families, churches,  
communities and even countries.

And one person at a time, with God's love, we love people into the Kingdom.

Acts 1:8 "And you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

Witnesses to what?

Witnesses not to a program but to a person – the King and his love for you and for them.

That's God's "social" program.  
That's God's plan to change the world.

I think of the time that has passed since the Garden of Eden and even since the first coming of the Messiah Jesus AND I ASK "How long God?"

Every indication is that humanity is destroying itself.

If your kingdom has come, if you are changing the world, why doesn't it look like it?

Jesus could have asked the same questions!

It had been 2000 years or more since God's promise to Abraham.

Jesus could have looked at the suffering world around him and despaired of ever seeing a change.

But instead what did he do, and what did he teach us to do?

Our Father in heaven...your kingdom come."

Jesus was not talking to his followers, he was talking to his Father and ours.

He was not telling us to do something, he is petitioning God to do something.

Leon Morris wrote, "This prayer looks for God to take action, not for us worshipers to bring the kingdom into being – the establishment of the kingdom of God is by God for us, not by us for God." (Leon Morris The

Gospel According to Matthew 145)

God, you do it.

God, make your kingdom come.

God, we need you to act.

God, revive your people, save us from ourselves.

God, bring in the full authority, power and presence of your kingdom rule and let it begin with me!

And let it spread to others.

When Jesus prayed that prayer and when he invites us to pray it, **he invites us to faith** – faith in God.

In that prayer we are saying, “God I know that you and you alone can change this world.

“I know that all our political and social efforts, altruistic as they may be, are weak and fruitless attempts at changing what only you can change.

**And in that prayer we are also laying claim to God’s promise.**

God you can and you will make it happen.

I believe you God.

Make your kingdom come.

Change this world God!

What did Jesus expect as a result of that prayer?

What did he mean when he asked God’s will be done on earth as it is in heaven?

Did he think only of that day when he, Jesus, would come again?

No! He expected the world to change by the power of God.

Oh how often we are tempted to lie in such a prayer.

Truth be told, many of us don’t want God’s kingdom to come, at least not now.

We like the kingdoms we have built.

But when we think that way, we reveal how little we understand the Kingdom of God.

We might think of the “kingdom of God” as only heaven or life after death.

We might even think of it negatively as living now under restrictive and deadening rules.

Oh to think such ways only indicates how little we know of God.

I remember a friend telling me a year or so ago that instead of telling his children that he was taking them to Disney World, he told them he was taking them to this fantastic (albeit make-believe) place in Missouri.

He described the make-believe place in such exciting detail that when they got to Missouri and he told them it didn't exist and told them where they were really going – to Disney World – they didn't want to go.

They had no idea what Disney World was like and they wanted the make-believe place.

We think our vision of the future is superior to God's vision.

We don't trust God's plan for our lives and for the world, so we settle for something so much less than what he wants for us.

On our own and at our best, in spite of all our social programs, we have created a world, **not of greater peace and joy but a world that increasingly threatens our very existence.**

On our own at our worst, we have settled on little islands of distraction in our recreation, and of security in our investment portfolios and insurance policies, but deep inside we know the islands are situated in an ocean of uncertainty.

Jesus came offering so much more.

- We'll settle for a temporary cease-fire in the world when Jesus wants peace.
- We'll settle for humanitarian aid when Jesus wants people to thrive.

- We'll settle for giving homeless people a place to sleep and a meal to eat when Jesus wants them to have a life.
- We'll settle for more welfare, child-care, and counseling for kids when Jesus wants strong marriages and families.
- We'll settle for mind-numbing entertainment or narcotics when Jesus wants people to have joy and purpose.

Is it either/or?

Is it either social programs or gospel?

No, a thousand times, no, but we want to treat more than the symptoms of poverty, illiteracy, hatred, and greed, we want to deal with the disease – the alienation of the human heart from God and each other.

**It isn't that we want too much** when we dream of raising the literacy rate, reducing poverty and increasing the life-expectancy of children, **it is that we want too little.**

We don't dare to dream as large as God's vision.

"Come, change the world" is not a slogan, it is a reality in God's mind and plan.

There is no indication in Scripture that God will settle for a few million people out of billions.

Our Father in heaven, make your kingdom come!

Do it God!

We need you to act.

Do we expect God to do it?

Do we pray that God will do it?