

## Why Pray for World Evangelization?

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Jesus prayed, "Our Father, in heaven, your kingdom come..." How long since you have prayed for the Kingdom of God to come? I want us to be people who pray differently than we have before. How do we pray now? For what do we pray? I could say it a dozen different ways but basically most Americans pray, "Our Father in heaven, my kingdom come." Most of our time spent in prayer, what little there is, is consumed with seeking God's blessing on our agendas and imploring him to do for us what we perceive is in our best interest.

What are we missing? We are missing the single most important subject ever prayed for. When God teaches us to pray and calls us to pray, what prayer more than any other is on the lips of those who obey Him? In this one phrase Jesus captures our greatest need and what ought to be our most heartfelt request - "Oh God, your kingdom come - Father, God, bring about the fullness of your kingdom.

In a book published before the Iron Curtain came down, before the dismantling of the Soviet Union, Dick Eastman told the story of Mark Geppert. In 1986 Mark knew he was being led by God to go to the Soviet Union and do nothing but pray for the two weeks he was there. He knew with specificity which cities God wanted him to go to and the last four days he knew he was to spend in Kiev, the closest large city to a small village where a nuclear power plant was located.

"On the morning of the last day of his prayer journey, April 25, 1986, Mark went to the square in the center of Kiev and began to pray under a large statue of Lenin. He prayed in 15-minute segments, each marked by the chiming of the huge city clock on the square. During the 15-minute period just before noon, he felt God saying that in answer to his prayers and the prayers of thousands of others through the years something was going to happen that would shake the Soviet Union and open the way for more freedom. Mark said I felt the freedom to thank God in advance for what he would do and I shook my fist at the face of the statue of Lenin and said with feeling - "Lenin - you're history." Mark went on to say that in my joy I asked God for some confirmation that something significant indeed was going to happen. For all four days that he had been praying in that city square, the city clock had chimed without fail on the hour except this day - at 12 noon the clock was totally silent.

We now know that just minutes after noon on that day, the first mistake was made at that nuclear plant - a mistake that led to the disaster one day later that we now refer to simply as "Chernobyl". Now remember that deadly Chernobyl nuclear accident AND Mark Geppert's prayers for God to open up the Soviet Union to the Gospel happened before the Iron Curtain fell.

Dick Eastman who told this story in his book, "Love on its knees" said that five years later the Washington Post had a story in which they argued, that the Chernobyl explosion "is increasingly seen as the culminating moment in the collapse of " of the Soviet Union. Were Mark Geppert's prayers coincidental? Could it be that God acted in response to his prayers and the prayers of others? Could prayer make such a difference? Mikhail Gorbachev became Time's "Man of the Year" and he also won a Pulitzer prize for "peace". But what was at the root of the change - diplomacy or

prayer?

What did Mark Geppert believe that would cause him to give two weeks and hours every day praying for the people of the Soviet Union? Look with me please in your Bible at ACTS 4. The Apostle Peter and the others had taken the command of their Lord very seriously and they were witnessing to his death and resurrection - proclaiming that by faith in Jesus people could be saved. The same people who had beheaded John the Baptist and crucified the Lord Jesus now arrested these disciples and warned them never again to speak or teach in the name of Jesus. Beginning at verse 23 notice that after Peter and John reported to the other believers what had happened "they all raised their voices in prayer to God." And in verse 29 we read, "Now consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness." What did these disciples believe that would cause them to pray and then act with such great boldness? What did these people believe that we so easily forget?

Here's the main thesis of my message: God will build his kingdom on the prayers of His people! More precisely God will build his Kingdom and the prayers of his people are a primary means God will use to do so.

What did Jesus believe that would cause him to pray: "Our Father in heaven...Your Kingdom come!" I want us to look two issues demonstrated and taught in this phrase by our Lord.

The first issue is the coming Kingdom of God and the second issue is that prayer is one of God's primary means to bring about that Kingdom. Before you hear my next statement I want you to hear my preface: I believe in the sovereignty of God. God's will, will be done. Nothing, not even our disobedience, is stronger than God or can thwart the plans, the eternal purposes, of almighty God. I believe in the sovereignty of God as much as John Calvin did. Now my statement: "If God's people do not pray God's Kingdom will not come." I already stated that positively "God will build His Kingdom on the prayers of his people" but I wanted to turn it around to catch your attention: If God's people do not pray, God's kingdom will not come. I do not believe Jesus' prayer was an idle one. Jesus' prayer was not a statement of fact like the first phrase, "Holy is your name" - No, the second phrase was a petition - "Oh, Father bring about your kingdom!" When Jesus prayed these words, what do you think he was asking for? When he added the next phrase "Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven" what do you suppose he was requesting? What did he mean? Jesus had in his mind's eye a vision, a picture of what will be. He saw the Kingdom of God - God reigning supreme in all the world. What too often is our picture of the future? We look around and see Islam growing faster than any other world religion. We see billions of people committed to Hinduism and Buddhism and the other "isms" of the world. We see western nations, including our own, which once built their laws and their common morality on a Judeo-Christian basis now slipping quickly, seemingly inexorably, toward a society in which good is called evil and evil is called good. We look ahead, and without God-given vision, we see little or no hope. But WHAT DID JESUS SEE IN THE FUTURE?

Jesus believed the promise made to Abraham that through Abraham's descendants "all the peoples of the world would be blessed". Jesus believed the prediction of the Psalms where it is written in many places and many ways that "all the

nations, all the peoples of the world would be blessed in the Messiah and would bless the Messiah. Jesus knew the prophecy of Isaiah that "all nations would flow unto the mountain of the house of the Lord." And of Jeremiah who added his prediction "That all nations would be gathered to the name of the Lord and walk no more after the evil imaginations of their hearts."

Jesus knew of Daniel's words where he spoke of God allowing earthly governments to extend their conquest over great parts of the earth. In Dan 2 he used the pictures of great images of gold, silver, brass, iron and clay to represent those earthly powers that would succeed each other in ruling the known world. But then he spoke of a "stone" that would become greater and greater and finally fill the whole earth. This last and greatest kingdom would smash all other kingdoms and rule supreme over all the earth.

Likewise in Dan 7 he uses the picture of four great beasts rising out of the sea and each more powerful than the former devouring the one before until Daniel saw last of all, one like the "Son of man" appear - the messiah - who would displace all other authorities and would rule a kingdom over all peoples, nations and languages forever.

Scores of times in the Old Testament that future is foreseen. The New Testament likewise informs us of what the future looks like: In John 12 Jesus said, "If I be lifted up (referring to his crucifixion on the cross) I will draw all men to myself." Jesus is the one who said in Matthew 24:14 "This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached to all nations and then the end shall come." It was the Spirit of God who gave the apostle John a picture of the future when he wrote, "I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language standing before the throne...They cried out with a loud voice: Salvation belong to our God who sits on the throne and to the Lamb" - the Messiah.

And in the book of Hebrews we read where God the Father will say to God the Son, quoting from his own words in the Old Testament: "Your throne O God will last forever and ever." Jesus prayed "Your Kingdom come" because Jesus saw the future when the whole earth would be filled with His glory - when every knee would bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

There may be many years between now and then, there may be much suffering among God's people, there may even be a great tribulation, but the fullness of the Kingdom of God is coming - What was predicted in the Old Testament and what Jesus died and rose again to bring about will come to be. In that day the Yeltzens, the Majors, the Husseins and the Clintons, the presidents, the premieres, the kings, and the chairmen will not matter - The King of kings, the Lord of Lords will reign here on this earth. Jesus said "I will build by church and the gates of hell will not overcome it." There is coming a day when Jesus shall reign where'er the sun his successive journeys run"

And how will that fullness of the Kingdom come about? How will that for which Jesus prayed come to be? God has given to His Church the mandate of "world evangelization - This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all nations and then the end will come." World Evangelization is how God has ordained that the fullness of the Kingdom shall come about. That Kingdom that Jesus envisions, that all Scripture describes, is brought to pass by the people of God reaching out to the all the peoples of the earth with the good news of Jesus.

Look at Amos 9:11-12. "In that day I will restore David's fallen tent. I will repair its broken places, restore its ruins, and build it as it used to be, so that they may possess the remnant of Edom and all the nations that bear my name, declares the Lord, who will do these things."

Next look at Acts 15:15-19. "The words of the prophets are in agreement with this, as it is written: 'After this I will return and rebuild David's fallen tent. Its ruins I will rebuild, and I will restore it, that the remnant of men may seek the Lord, and all the Gentiles who bear my name says, the Lord, who does these things that have been known for ages.' It is my judgment, therefore, that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God." Do you see how Peter says that Old Testament prophecy is being fulfilled? Through the bringing of the Gentiles into the family of God.

Every witnessing New Testament believer and every New Testament missionary knew exactly what they were doing - They were helping to bring about the completion of the Kingdom of God. It is that to which we are called by God. To us is given the privilege to be God's means to bring about the completion of the His Kingdom - the universal rule of the Lord Jesus over all the earth. Our witnessing, our missionary outreach to the peoples of the world is part of that grand plan of God - God's kingdom will come!

But that brings me back to of my earlier statement: "If God's people do not pray God's Kingdom will not come." I make that statement first of all on the authority of Jesus' own prayer: "Our Father in heaven...your kingdom come." Why would Jesus pray such a prayer and why would he teach his disciples to pray such a prayer if it was unnecessary? He would not! Jesus knew that prayer is the means God has ordained whereby he will choose to act. James said it bluntly, "You do not have because you do not ask God!" And as we will see from just a few examples, out of hundreds in the Bible, what we are to ask for is the advancement and completion of the Kingdom of God.

Who would have ever guessed that Communist atheistic Albania, one of the most closed countries in the world would ever be opened to the Gospel? Yet God's people prayed. Pioneer's Missionary, Donnie Scarce, told us that for several years before 1989 hundreds of believers met all over the world praying specifically that God would open that country to the Gospel. And as the Prophet Daniel declared, "Praise be to the name of our God for ever - wisdom and power are his. He changes the times and the seasons; he sets up kings and (HE) deposes them." And Albania is open - The Bolthouses of our church may go.

The New York Times and the U.S. News and World Report may believe it is the political expertise of a State Department professional but even King Nebuchadnezzar of old knew as he said it, "The Most High is sovereign over the kingdoms of men and gives them to anyone he wishes..." We know God must act or the peoples of the world will forever be kept from the Gospel. We also know from 2Cor 4:4 that the "god of this age is blinding the minds of unbelievers so they canNOT see the light of the gospel of the Lord Jesus..." And therefore unless God opens closed minds, unless God opens blind eyes - they will not see. That is why The Apostle Paul in Ephesians 6 says "Pray in the Spirit on all occasions and with all kinds of prayers and requests." He goes on to say to the believers "with that in mind" they should pray for him as well that he may be effective in proclaiming the gospel. With what in mind? What he had said just

previously: "Our struggle is not against flesh and blood but against... the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenlies."

The Bible teaches that there is a spiritual battle taking place in which the demons aligned with Satan are fighting to keep people from the knowing the truth about Jesus Christ. We would be powerless in that battle were it not for the power of God unleashed through prayer. Our efforts at evangelism and world evangelization would be pointless without the immediate intervention of God's Spirit to open doors of access to people and open the minds of people. That is why Paul told the Colossians to "pray that God may open a door for our message". That is why he told the Thessalonians to pray that the message of the Lord may spread rapidly and be honored", that is, received.

Listen to the words of our Lord in Luke 11:13: "If you then know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!" The gift of the Holy Spirit here spoken of is not the presence of the Holy Spirit as the guarantee of our salvation but is the power of the Holy Spirit for ministry. You don't have because you don't ask.

In Ezekial 36:37 God speaks of his mercy on Israel and he says "once again I will yield to the plea of the people of Israel and do this for them." Prayer, the request of his people, is what God says will precede his actions. Listen to Isaiah: "I have posted watchmen on your walls, O Jerusalem; they will never be silent day or night. You who call on the Lord, give yourselves no rest, and give God no rest until he establishes Jerusalem and makes her the praise of the nations." Prayer is ordained by God as the means to move the hands of God.

And in that most often quoted verse from 2Chronicles:

"If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven..." It was in answer to prayer that God delivered his people from Egypt. It was in answer to prayer that the sun stood still over Gibeah.

It was in answer to prayer that God delivered his people from the Assyrians in the days of King Hezekiah. It was in answer to prayer that God restored His people from Babylonian captivity. It was in answer to prayer that Samson in his weakness was enabled to pull down the temple of Dagon.

It was in answer to Jesus' prayer that the Spirit of God descended upon him at his baptism. It was in answer to prayer that the Spirit of God empowered his church at Pentecost. It was in answer to prayer that God raised up a mighty army of missionaries in the late 1700s and early 1800s that took the gospel around the world. I wish I had the time to tell you what God is doing in South Korea, in Argentina, in El Paso, Texas and Juarez, Mexico, - what God is doing in Boulder, Colorado.

Back to my statement "If God's people don't pray God's Kingdom won't come". In Psalm 2 God the Father says to the Son, "Ask of me and I will make the nations your inheritance." Jesus responds to that command and not only asks for the Kingdom of God to come but teaches us to pray the same. Arthur Matthews wrote (Born for the Battle p 14-15):

"Jesus taught his disciples to pray" for the coming of the Kingdom of God.

"The obvious implication is that God has limited (some of) his activities to

responding to the prayers of his people. Unless they pray he will not act. Heaven may will something to happen but heaven waits and encourages earth's initiative to desire that will and then to pray that it happens. "The will of God is not done on earth by an inexorable, juggernaut omnipotence "out there" overriding or ignoring the will of people on earth."

On the contrary, God has willed that his hand be held back while he seeks for a person, an intercessor to plead, "Thy Kingdom come - thy will be done " in this or that specific situation. As God says it in Ezekial, "I looked for a man among them who would...stand before me in the gap on behalf of the land." NO! No one Christian can thwart the will of our sovereign God but it is still true that God has determined that he would act in response to the prayers of his people.

Jesus prayed and he taught us to pray: "Your Kingdom come!" The implications are obvious and the applications are legion.