

# Kingdom Come

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 26 April 2020

Preacher: Rev. Thomas Hinson

[ 0 : 0 0 ] regardless of your situation, and I don't say that lightly. I know that many of you are facing hardship, or you're sick, or you're losing loved ones, or you've lost your job.

But regardless of your situation, the single most important thing that we can do is to pray. Now, I know that seems like an overstatement, but it's not.

If you ask anybody who has a deep, habitual life of prayer, they will tell you the same thing, that prayer shapes everything else. Prayer shapes how we think.

Prayer shapes how we deal with our emotions. Prayer shapes what we care about. It shapes what we love. Prayer shapes how we see ourselves, how we see God.

Prayer shapes how we live. So if you want to be strong, if you want to be resilient, if you want to be kind, if you want to be gentle, if you want to be the kind of person who is useful to other people, it all starts with prayer.

[ 1 : 0 9 ] Prayer shapes everything else. So the question that we've been asking is, how do we pray in a way that shapes everything else? And to answer that question, we've been looking at the Lord's Prayer, which is, of course, the prayer that Jesus gave to his disciples to teach them how to pray.

So in a way, the Lord's Prayer is the prayer that is meant to shape our prayers that then shape everything else about our lives. So this is why it matters so much.

And last week, we looked at the opening of this prayer, our Father who is in heaven, hallowed be your name, and we talked about what it means to have God as Father, the fatherhood of God.

Well, this week we're looking at the next line of the prayer, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. And if last week was about the fatherhood of God, this week is about the kingdom of God.

It's about God's purposes in the world and what it means for us to be a part of those purposes. And so we're going to be looking at three things about this prayer, this specific part of the prayer.

[ 2 : 1 7 ] First, we're going to see the meaning of this prayer. And then we're going to see a problem that arises when we pray this prayer. So the problem with this prayer. And then lastly, we're going to see the answer to this prayer.

So the meaning of the prayer, the problem of this prayer, and then the answer to this prayer.

Speaking of which, let's pray as we open God's Word. Lord, we thank you for your Word, and we thank you for the ways that you are able to go beyond ink printed on paper.

That because your Holy Spirit is with us, you can open your Word. And that through this written Word, we can come face to face with your living Word. And Lord, it's in His name and with the hopes of answering or understanding His prayer that we pray.

Amen. Amen. So first of all, we want to ask the question of what this prayer means. Because I think many of us, including me, you can grow up and spend years praying this prayer in a kind of rote fashion, but never really dig into its meaning.

So what does this actually mean? Well, I don't know anyone who doesn't long for a better world. It doesn't matter if you're religious or irreligious. It doesn't matter if you're Christian or not. But no one I know, no one I know thinks that this world is the best that things will ever be.

[ 3 : 3 8 ] Everybody I know at least hopes, if they don't think it's realistic, they hope for a better world. Right? Everybody I know hates the fact that there are viruses that can kill people, that can shut down entire economies.

Everyone I know longs for this world to be better in one way or another. Some people long for more justice in the world. Some people long for better race relations in the world.

Some people long to see an end to poverty. Some people long for more sustainable practices that will lead to a healthier environment. But everybody I know longs for some kind of betterment of the

world that we live in.

And even though we disagree on the politics and the issues and the solutions, no matter what your t-shirt says, whether it says, Make America Great Again, whether it says Me Too, whether it says Black Lives Matter, regardless of what your t-shirt says, Deep down, we all share a common longing for a better world.

And I think this is one of the reasons why Christianity is so unique when it comes to suffering. Because Buddhism says essentially that suffering is an illusion.

[ 4 : 54 ] Hinduism and some of the Eastern religions say that suffering is a punishment for sins we have committed in a past life. Religions like Islam say that suffering is a punishment for sins that we have committed in this life.

Secular humanism says that suffering is essentially random and meaningless. It is just a bad roll of the dice. But only Christianity says that suffering was not part of God's original plan for the world. That the world that God created was filled with goodness and beauty and truth. And the fact that there is suffering and evil means that something has gone terribly wrong.

But what this means is that all of our feelings that we share, all of our hatred of suffering and all of our longing for a better world, the Lord's Prayer tells us, Christianity tells us, that those feelings are right.

That your gut instinct is right. That we are right to hate suffering. We're right to long for a world free from suffering. And God hates it too. And more than that, God is doing something about it.

[ 6 : 05 ] And that's what it means to pray for God's kingdom to come and God's will to be done on earth as it is in heaven. We're not just talking at this point about new policies.

We're not just talking about social reform. We're not just talking about a new administration. To pray this prayer is to pray for a total revolution. It's to pray for a new world.

We are praying for the great promise that runs all the way through Scripture to be fulfilled. And that is that the heavens and the earth would be joined together as one.

And that God himself would be the king of this world. And that as king, he would put everything right again. Revelation, the last book in the Bible, talks about King Jesus one day wiping away every tear from every eye as everything is made new.

That's what we're praying for when we pray for the coming of the kingdom. And what that means for life is it means that God's will will be enacted in every sphere of life.

[ 7 : 12 ] God's will will be done on earth as it is in heaven. So as the laws of physics govern the cosmos and bring order to chaos and make it possible for life to flourish, so we pray in this prayer that God's will would govern our lives.

That it would govern us spiritually and emotionally and politically and economically and socially and vocationally.

That God's will would be enacted in every sphere of life. And that it would make possible the flourishing of human life and society.

So that's what this prayer is all about. That's what it means. But of course there's a problem. There's a problem that arises when we pray this prayer.

This prayer asks for God's will to be done on earth as it is in heaven. Well, there's only one place on earth where God's will is not done.

[ 8 : 17 ] And that's in the human heart. It's the human heart. The problem with this prayer is us. We're the biggest obstacle to this prayer's fulfillment.

And I'm not just talking about us in general. I'm talking about myself. I mean, I'm happy to pray for God's will to be done out there. I'm very happy to pray that God's will would be done in those lives or in that person's life.

But when it comes to me, when it comes to the decisions that I make about how I spend my time and how I spend my money and how I treat people and what I prioritize, when it comes to those things, not so much.

You know, my experience has been that with my lips I can pray, Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done. But in the same instant, in my life, what I'm really saying is, My kingdom come.

My will be done on earth. And that's a huge problem. And to make matters more complicated, it's very easy to justify this kind of posture when the kingdom of God, frankly, doesn't seem very relevant or realistic, given our present circumstances.

[ 9 : 37 ] Life on the ground is incredibly hard. And you asked specifically in this situation, how can we pray about something like the kingdom of God in the midst of a global pandemic?

You know, and how can we do that with a straight face? How can we think about something like the kingdom of God when people are sick and dying, when the economy is shut down and so many people are unemployed?

It seems like a kind of escapism, a kind of pie-in-the-sky optimism. You know, frankly, it feels like wishful thinking. And so I think a lot of people in times like this can say, well, that's just escapism. That's just fantasy. We need to be realistic. We need realistic solutions. And there's a lot of disillusionment out there. And, you know, I think this must have been how John the Baptist felt while he was sitting in prison awaiting his execution.

The passage that we read a little while ago from Matthew chapter 11 is kind of like a case study of everything that we're talking about. The local ruler at the time, Herod Antipas, it was kind of widely known that he had gone and seduced the wife of his brother.

[ 10 : 47 ] And then he ended up leaving his wife and convincing her to leave his brother. And then he married her. And this was a scandal. And John the Baptist was a bold prophet.

And he was courageous. And so he publicly rebuked Herod for this and called him to repent. And, you know, imagine that kind of thing happening. And yet he publicly confronts Herod and confronts the wrongness of what he's done.

And, of course, Herod responds in kind by throwing John in prison. And, of course, John is in prison. And yet John's hope and the entire message of his ministry was that God's Messiah was coming.

That's what John preached. And that was the source of his hope. And John believed that when this Messiah came that he would finally bring justice. That he would finally defeat all of God's enemies. That he would overthrow the Romans. That he would restore Israel as a nation state. And John believed that if this Messiah came and brought justice, that surely he would be on the right side of that justice.

[ 11 : 53 ] And so surely the Messiah would bring corrupt leaders like Herod down. And surely this Messiah would vindicate and set free people like John. Because John had taken a stand for justice.

And John believed that Jesus was the Messiah. But the longer John sits in prison, the more disillusionment begins to creep in.

The more questions begin to arise in his heart. And Jesus is out there healing people and helping people and proclaiming good news.

But where's the justice? Where's the revolution? When is Jesus going to lay the axe at the root of the tree? That was one of John's favorite sermons to preach.

But when is all of that going to happen? And of course the most vexing question of all. Jesus is out there doing all of these good things. But why is he not storming the gate and setting John free?

[ 12 : 53 ] Why is he leaving John in prison? So you can imagine all of these questions swirling around in John's head. So John sends some of his disciples to find Jesus and to ask him, Are you the one who is to come?

Or should we be looking for somebody else? What do you do when you have all of these hopes about who God is and what God is able to do in your life?

What do you do when those things don't happen? What do you do when God doesn't do what you hope he will do? What do you do when your life doesn't look like you thought it would look?

What do you do when a global pandemic destroys your plans? Or means that you lose your job? You lose your financial security? Maybe you lose a loved one.

What do you do in times like this? You know, it's very easy when you're experiencing this kind of disillusionment to look at God and say, You know, God didn't give me what I wanted.

[ 14 : 01 ] Why should I care about what he wants? And so I think in times like this, it's very easy to walk away. It's very easy to say, I don't care about God's will being done. I want to take matters into my own hands from here on out.

So what's the answer to this? How do we resolve this? How do we pray this prayer and mean it? And moreover, what does the answer to this prayer actually look like? Well, look at how Jesus responds to John.

He tells John's disciples, he says, Go and tell John what you hear and see. The blind receive their sight. The lame walk. Lepers are cleansed.

And the deaf hear. And the dead are raised up. And the poor have good news preached to them. In other words, Jesus is saying, Look, all of the prophecies about the Messiah, places like Isaiah chapter 35 or Isaiah chapter 61, all of those prophecies are being fulfilled right in your midst. The kingdom is here. It's happening right now. But then Jesus says something very interesting in verse 6. He says, And blessed is the one who is not offended by me.

[15:10] And you know that word offended, the Greek word is actually the word scandalizo, from which we get scandalized. Blessed is the one who is not scandalized by me. In other words, Jesus says, Blessed are those who do not fall away, who don't abandon the faith, when the kingdom doesn't look like they expected.

When the king doesn't look like they expected. When I don't match their expectations. That's what Jesus is saying. Blessed is the one who hangs in there. Even when the kingdom defies all of their expectations.

Even when I defy all of their expectations. Helmut Thielicke was a German pastor in Stuttgart during World War II. And the air raids were happening in 1944, right when he was there pastoring his people.

And on one particular morning, they met in a church, but they had to meet in the choir, because the church itself had been destroyed because of the bombing. It was in ruins. And up until this point, many people thought of the coming of the kingdom of God kind of like a gradual evolutionary process.

It would be the gradual Christianization of the world. More and more people coming to faith. Things getting better and better and better. Until at some point, we would reach perfection.

[16:29] And the kingdom would have come. And the world wars crushed that naivety out of people. And left many people filled with disillusionment.

And led to even nihilism. And Thielicke is in the midst of this. And he's trying to pastor his people. And he feels called to preach on the Lord's Prayer.

And there's a collection of his sermons during that time that I have in this book. And on this particular morning, in this particular choir of this destroyed church, he decides to preach on the line that we're looking at this morning.

Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. And he's looking out on his people's faces. And all he sees is exhaustion and despair and hopelessness.

And he knows that people feel enormous disillusionment about the kingdom of God. And so here's what he says. We know very well that we must not think of this mysterious growth of God's kingdom.

[17:33] It really is a mystery as a kind of evolutionary development. He says, No, the coming of the kingdom of God takes place in a totally different way. In, with, and under the world's anguish and distress, in, with, and under the hail of bombs and mass murders, God is building his kingdom.

And you can imagine him saying that and the kind of incredulity on people's faces. How can you possibly say that in a time like this? And he acknowledges the kingdom is a mystery.

This is why Jesus, one of the reasons why Jesus taught about the kingdom using so many parables, because it's a, it's a mysterious reality. And yet here's what, here's what he goes on to say. The kingdom of God is where Jesus Christ is.

But Jesus Christ always lingers in the darkest places in the world. How can you have the audacity to look around and look at the bombs falling, look at this desolation, or look at something like this pandemic?

How can you have the audacity to say, even in the midst of all of this suffering, the kingdom of God is here? Well, that's the answer. Because the kingdom is wherever Jesus Christ is. And where you're going to find Jesus is in the darkest places of the world.

[18:50] That Jesus is there with the people who are looking at their destroyed city. Jesus is closest to people who are most hopeless. Jesus is closest to the person who is on a ventilator fighting for their life.

Jesus is closest to the people who are struggling to figure out how they're going to pay their bills. Who are trying to figure out what they're going to do now that they've lost their job. That's where Jesus draws near. Jesus is to be found in the darkest places of the world.

And where he is, the kingdom is. That's his answer. And so the kingdom of God always defies our expectations.

If you look at John the Baptist, he was expecting a political revolution. He was expecting for Jesus to storm the gates and set him free. If you look at the people in the 19th century coming into the early 20th century, they were expecting the Christianization of the world.

That things would just get better and better and better until we reach perfection. And the kingdom defied their expectations. And I say this because I know that you and I, we both have expectations of how we think the kingdom should look.

[ 19 : 56 ] Or what we think Jesus should do. We all carry those expectations into our relationship with God. And the kingdom consistently defies those expectations. And yet the one thing that we know for certain is this.

That the kingdom of God is where Jesus Christ is. And as Jesus said to John, Blessed is the one who is not scandalized by him. So now, how do we draw all this together?

And what does it mean for us right now? Well, I'll tell you this. And I'm speaking from personal experience here. If you're a Christian long enough, you will face disillusionment. It's just a part of the deal.

Disillusionment is unavoidable. And I know that some of you may be listening and maybe you're not Christians. And maybe some of you used to be Christians. And then maybe you experienced disillusionment.

God let you down. And maybe you decided that it wasn't worth it anymore. And you walked away. But the point I want to make is this. Disillusionment, as painful as it can be, is ultimately a good thing.

[ 21 : 04 ] Because disillusionment literally means to be freed from an illusion. To be set free from an illusion. And often when we feel disillusioned with God, it's because our vision of God, our idea of God, is simply too small.

And then we encounter a situation that requires that we let go of that small-minded vision of God and embrace a much larger vision of God. And so disillusionment is an opportunity for us to be freed from that illusion of a small God.

And it opens us up to encounter the living God face-to-face. And He is far bigger and far more complex than anything that we can possibly understand or even imagine.

And the only sure way we know that we are looking at the real God and seeing the kingdom clearly is when we keep our attention focused on Jesus Christ.

When we keep our eyes trained on Him. You know, we refer to this prayer as the Lord's Prayer, not only because Jesus prayed it, not only because He taught us to pray it, but it's also because Jesus fulfills it.

[ 22 : 17 ] Jesus is the fulfillment of the Lord's Prayer. You know, this prayer calls us to surrender our wills to God, to say to God, Your will be done. But as we alluded to before, this is always going to be a battle for us.

I mean, and I'm again, speaking from personal experience, I can sit in this chair right here and I can pray, Your kingdom come, Your will be done. And I can mean it in my heart, but by the time I'm standing up, I'm already ready to take it all back.

And that's simply what it means to be a human being with hearts like ours. We lose that battle all the time. That's what got us into this whole mess to begin with in the kind of world that we live in. But the point is, and the good news of the gospel is, that Jesus Christ also fought this battle, but He won. Where we failed, He succeeded. In the Garden of Gethsemane, knowing that He was about to be arrested, knowing that He was going to be put on trial, knowing that He was going to be humiliated and tortured and ultimately executed like a criminal, like a rebel, Jesus fell to His knees, sweating droplets of blood because He was so filled with despair.

And He prayed to His Father, My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me. Nevertheless, not My will, but Thy will be done.

[ 23 : 41 ] He succeeded where we fail. And what we see happening there is Jesus' willingness to surrender Himself to do what we never could have done.

And because He did this, and because of His death, and because of His resurrection, this prayer has already been answered. God's kingdom has come. God's will is being done in the world right now.

And the only thing that will ever carry you through your disillusionment and despair, the only thing that will ever soften your heart enough so that you can say to God, Your will be done in my life and

mean it, the only thing that will ever bring you to that place is if you see and realize that Jesus Christ, when we didn't know Him, when we were living apart from Him, when we denied His very existence, that Jesus Christ looked at us and loved us so much that He was willing to surrender Himself fully to God's plan to adopt us and make us His children.

And when that love pierces your heart, it softens it. And then you can come before the Lord and say, truly, with honesty, I want Your will to be done in my life.

Because someone who loves me that much, I would rather You be in control of my life than me. It's in better hands when it's in Your hands. And then Jesus goes on to say this about those who come to Him in faith.

[ 25 : 12 ] Those people who come to Him and surrender themselves to Him, they become people of the kingdom. And here's what Jesus says about kingdom people later on in chapter 11 in Matthew. He says, Among those born of women, there has arisen no one greater than John the Baptist, and yet one who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

And what He means by that is that people of the kingdom, people like us who know Jesus Christ, who have been saved through His death and resurrection, that we are experiencing realities in the kingdom that John never even could have imagined.

That we actually have the presence and the power of God inside us, which means that wherever we are, the kingdom is. That we can be and bring the kingdom wherever we go.

And friends, that's why we've been, that's why it matters so much that we are not only making sure that our needs are met, but that we are loving the neighbors and the people around us.

That's why we're doing things like making sure we can establish a COVID-19 relief fund to try to help as many people as possible. This is why we are doing things like seeing people in our community who are making masks and donating them to people who need them.

[ 26 : 24 ] It's why these things matter. It's because these are signs that point to the fact that the kingdom of God is here. They're evidence of the kingdom and they point to the true king, Jesus Christ. And so this week I encourage you, I strongly encourage you to bring all of your anxiety, all of your despair, all of your disillusionment, to bring all of that to the Lord and to pray these words, to pray to God, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

And even if that's a struggle for you to say, know that you don't need to solve this yourself, that it's because Jesus Christ did that we have hope. Before I close in prayer, I'd also...