

# Sunday 3rd November 2024 - This Little Light Of Mine: Your Kingdom Come

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Preacher: Dave Moss

[ 0 : 00 ] Good morning. These past weeks we've been looking at how we let our light shine out so that all may learn of the good news of walking in faith with Jesus.

And in the Lord's Prayer we're instructed to pray, Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

The importance of prayer is often trivialized into a process for asking God what we want. And if it doesn't work, many people simply abandon prayer.

In early Christianity emerged inside a dominant Greek culture where the god Zeus, fantastic picture this isn't it, where the god Zeus sat on his throne on high, arbitrarily sending down thunderbolts.

It was not a moral or consistent universe. And at its center was a God who had to be appeased.

The image of Zeus was simply overwritten by many with the image of a Christian God.

[ 1 : 27 ] And many, even today, still believe in this Zeus-like God. And it's a far, far cry from God as Trinity, Father, Son, and Spirit.

But with this Zeus-like image, it's no wonder we get confused about prayer. Often we see God as sitting up there somewhere, waiting to be appeased.

We need to get in his good books, somehow, if he's going to hear any of our prayers. Of course, we have our own idols as well these days, but they're somewhat of a different order.

I don't know if you're aware, but Noel and Liam Gallagher have patched up their differences and have got back together and reformed their Oasis band.

And they're to go on tour next year. There are many disappointed fans, you might be one of them, who haven't managed to get tickets. Tickets are priced at £150 upwards.

[ 2 : 43 ] But such is the demand that many have been selling for much, much more than that into the thousands of pounds. It's a once-in-a-lifetime experience, so it better be worth it.

And Taylor Swift has just completed her tour. And Coldplay, Kylie Minogue and Cliff Richard have all got dates lined up for next year.

Not to be missed either, if you can get the tickets. Imagine, imagine, if Jesus went on tour, who would turn up?

Well, he sort of has. This is the famous painting, The Light of the World, by Holman Hunt. The original, painted in 1854, is in Keeble College, Oxford.

And Holman Hunt painted a second version, which is in Manchester City Art Gallery. And the third, much larger version, painted when Holman Hunt was age 70, is in St. Paul's Cathedral.

[ 3 : 54 ] And from 1905 to 1907, the St. Paul's version went on a world tour. Visiting most of the major towns and cities in Canada, South Africa, New Zealand, and Australia.

It was estimated that four-fifths of the population of Australia saw it. So beat that oasis, okay?

Today, it has been seen by millions of people and is one of the best-known works of its period. And The Light of the World is steeped in metaphor.

Under the painting are the words from Revelation chapter 3. Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person and they with me.

There are actually two lights in the picture. The door, the lantern, which is the light of conscience. And the light around the head of Christ, the light of salvation.

[ 5 : 11 ] The door represents the human soul. It's a lack of a handle. There's no handle on it. The rusty nails and its hinges, all overgrown with ivy, are intended to show that it's never been opened.

And the figure of Christ is asking for permission to enter. It should be noted that in the painting, Christ not only knocks at the door, he is himself the door.

This painting makes the point very powerfully that Jesus comes to shine his light in our hearts. But how often do we simply shut him out?

Have you ever called at a fast food establishment? Many are available. We expect the food to be delivered in exactly that way.

Fast. No questions as to its quality. Or as to where it came from. Or as to its health benefits. Just fast, please.

[ 6 : 23 ] Imagine if you pulled into the driving window and asked for soup aux oignons with croutons, for starters. Roast duck à l'orange with duchesse potatoes and steamed spring vegetables for the main course.

And for dessert, a raspberry frangipan tart with creme fraiche, followed by a selection of cheeses with coffee and mints. You would be laughed at.

Indeed, you would be laughed at. Gourmet food is never fast food. When it comes to prayer, it's all too easy to be at the fast food outlet.

A list from a pop-down menu expecting fast service. And then perhaps complaining when it's not to our liking. If we're not careful, prayer can become a one-way attempt to influence this other whom we call God.

Who should God listen to? Is it the person asking for their team to win? Or the person asking for the opposing side to win?

[ 7 : 42 ] Or should he listen to the farmer praying for rain? Or the person or the holiday maker praying for sunshine? Prayer is often complex.

Wide-ranging. And can take time. Let's take a look at a time when Jesus was praying in the Garden of Gethsemane. Just before he's arrested and deserted by his disciples.

My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message. That all of them may be one, Father. Just as you are in me and I am in you.

May they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one.

I in them and you in me. I in them and you in me, so that they may be brought to complete unity.

Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them, even as you have loved me.

[ 8 : 51 ] Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world.

Righteous Father, though the world does not know you, I know you, and they know that you have sent me. I have made you known to them and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them.

Amidst the chaos and confusion of Jesus' last hours in the Garden of Gethsemane, we find Jesus praying.

Jesus is talking about you here. It's you. He's praying for all of his disciples, those who are there with him and those who are to come in future generations.

Jesus is praying that the message of who God is and of his love will be passed on. If you think about it, this prayer carries on being answered day after day, generation after generation.

[ 10 : 07 ] We wouldn't know anything about the good news if it hadn't been passed on through each and every generation. But what is Jesus praying for as he thinks about you and me and all his other followers in this and every generation?

Well, it isn't really about us here at St. John's alone. He's praying for all his followers will be one. One founded on the teaching of the apostles.

He longed that we should be one, united in a walk of faith the whole world over. I'm sure you'd agree that Christians across the generations seem to have made a complete mess of that and continue to do so.

With many divisions and differences of opinion. We have much still to pray and work for. But this unity is not wishful thinking.

It must mirror the unity between the father and the son. We are to live in that unity. Just as the father is in the son and the son is in the father.

[ 11 : 28 ] This is how all people will know you are my disciples if you have love one for another. The world will see a new kind of human community united across all traditional barriers of race,

language, custom, gender or class.

It's easy to see how this has become so distorted. Many Christians live in their own carefully constructed little worlds.

They only know and mix with people who share the same tradition, the same language, the same race or the same custom as themselves.

We see then that Jesus' prayer for us has not yet been fully answered. We're called to pray and work towards that unity that Jesus prayed for.

If we are one in faith, there could be no final reason why we may not be one also in the way we live our lives in the community where we find ourselves.

[12:37] We are not left to go on with it either, just to get on with it as Jesus comes alongside us in the person of the Holy Spirit if we simply ask.

Of times we can be too busy with fast food prayers that we never even consider there may be further, more complete menu. Of times we simply leave Jesus outside the door, gently knocking and waiting to be let in.

The weeds and brambles grow, but somehow the light still shines. When we pray, we enter a different kind of reality.

We're entering into a relationship in a loving, trusting way. We often don't know what to pray or even how.

Yet prayer happens within us and through us. If we are in the Spirit, then our prayers will reflect the fruit of the Spirit through love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

[13:59] Prayer is first of all God's prayer. We often end our prayers with, in the name of Jesus Christ. Because as you stand there as Christ in the Spirit, addressing the Father, the prayer is flowing through you.

You are part of a much bigger relationship. It's making yourself a part of a living community, a part of love, a part of the communion that is already happening.

For some unbelievable reason, God allows us to matter. And our prayers to matter.

Prayer becomes more of a merging than a manipulating. More about relationship than taking a particular stand.

When we pray, we seek to rest in God and not in particular outcomes. I'll repeat that. When we pray, we seek to rest in God and not in particular outcomes.

[15:14] Often our prayers, our prayer life can be restricted by our view or our understanding of God. Many people's understanding of God is limited to that far-off Zeus-like figure to whom they make requests from time to time.

If our understanding of God is the same as it was 10 years ago, then we're not growing. And prayer often just becomes a routine.

We end up being passive and feel if we don't organize things ourselves, then nothing will happen. If we want people to hear the good news, then we must organize it.

He has no hands but our hands, we're sometimes told. What a load of nonsense. Whose hands made the sun rise this morning?

Whose breath guides us to think and to love and to pray? Through God's grace, we've been given the Holy Spirit to enable us to work for Jesus. But God does not need us to perform.

[16:16] God invites us. Yes, invites us to be a part of his kingdom come. To work alongside as partners. When Jesus appears to his followers after the resurrection, they're understandably surprised.

But they're not left simply being surprised. They're invited, invited to continue to work in sharing the good news. And not all by themselves, but in partnership.

Ephesians chapter 5 tells us that everything exposed to the light itself becomes light. In prayer, we merely keep returning the divine gaze and we become its reflection.

Almost in spite of ourselves. Prayer is just an umbrella word for all our faith journeys and practices.

Prayer allows us to experience faith, hope and love within ourselves.

Prayer is definitely not a technique for getting things. Or a pious exercise that somehow makes God happy. It's not a requirement for getting into heaven.

[17:33] Prayer is knowing God's grace in our lives. Prayer is practicing heaven now. Bringing the light of God into our daily lives.

And indeed into the lives of others. Prayer in the end is about the gracious love of the Father surrounding Jesus. This same love surrounds all Jesus' people.

This love makes Jesus present to us. And indeed throughout the whole world. When we pray, we bring people to the person of Jesus.

So that they may be surrounded with his love. Prayer brings us into the presence of God. If we accept that prayer is about the love of the Father surrounding Jesus.

This same love surrounds all Jesus' people. This love makes Jesus present to us. And indeed throughout the whole world. Prayer enables us to live through all life's obstacles with God by our side.

[ 18 : 53 ] As he holds and sustains us. Your kingdom come. Your will be done. On earth as it is in heaven. There are so many ways to pray.

And it's easy to follow a tried routine and get in a rut. I'm going to leave you with just two little thoughts. There are many, but just two.

Have a go at praying in a different way. Perhaps light a candle or a tea light. And just be quiet. And watch. Few words, if any, are necessary.

Just be aware that you're coming to God to be in his presence. For myself, I find that using written prayers that other people have carefully prayed and written down is a good way to take me beyond myself and the limitations of my own words and approaches.

Here's some examples. There are so, so many. Here are some examples that I found helpful. So, this is the first one. Liturgy is for Hope. It's a recent publication.

[ 20 : 10 ] And what it does is take verses from the Bible and arranges them into prayers. Just about for every situation you could possibly think of. So, that's one thing you could look at.

Another one is... Another one is... There are two volumes of this, actually, and other versions. This is a Celtic daily prayer. Pretty weighty tome.

And there are all sorts of prayers, again, for all sorts of different situations in life. With Bible references. That's really helpful. They're not long, these things. They're quite manageable.

And if you want something a little bit more trendy, then a bad Christian's book of prayers is really good. It's an honest take on prayer.

And you can have a look at that. And as I say, there are many, many other things. But I do encourage you to have a go at something a bit different. And to end, I'm going to take a prayer from the Bad Christian's book of prayers.

[ 21 : 11 ] And I'll read it to you. And we perhaps can close this bit with that prayer. So, grace changes everything. Oh God, my entire life is grace.

I arrived with empty hands. And when I leave, my hands will still be empty. Everything is grace. Is gift.

Is undeserved. Is overwhelming. In my stronger moments, I think I can take on the world. Can mold it to my fancy.

And sometimes it works. But the best bits are pure grace. When I perceive, as if for the first time, how dependent I am on friends, on people, I do not know, on a world that offers itself to me, asking little in return.

Infinite goodness. A merited favor. Boundless beauty. Grace. The only name I truly know you by.

[ 22 : 27 ] Amen.