

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the one who announced God's Kingdom on earth, Jesus Christ our Savior and Lord, amen.

This is our second of four weeks where our theme is the Lord's Prayer. Last week I talked about addressing God as Father. This week we're looking at the petition where we ask for God's kingdom to come. We follow that up by asking that God's will be done on earth as it is in heaven. That's a mighty big ask, would you agree? For God's kingdom to rule over all the earth... First of all, we acknowledge there are two arenas. The earthly arena where we live and the heavenly arena where God sits on his throne and where his will is accomplished perfectly. In this petition we're asking for the same reign of God, that keeps heaven perfect, to come to earth and fix everything here that's broken. Again, I say, that's a mighty big ask...

I mean what would happen to all those good and faithful Hindu people or all the adherents to the Islamic faith... Not to mention our Jewish brothers and sisters. Would God's kingdom include even the atheists? When I think about God's Kingdom coming on a macro scale, like macroeconomics, I get confused and a bit frustrated. So, I prefer to begin by asking myself what the coming of the Kingdom of God looks like on a much smaller scale, like in my own life. I've thought about this quite a lot over the past week and really over the years. Here's some of the things I've come up with...

The kingdom of God in my life has been a constant influence to push my attitudes, convictions, and beliefs and my behavior in a certain direction. I'm really happy that I grew up before the internet age. Nowadays everything you think, do, or say is recorded for posterity and can be recalled as easily as a Google search. I confess that I was a jerk in my younger years. In junior high school I was in the group of kids who made fun of everyone who was different from us. We made cruel jokes about those we thought were gay. Back then homosexuality was a taboo and people hid their sexual orientation if they weren't straight. Handicapped kids didn't fair any better. I remember pointing and laughing as they marched by to their special classroom in junior high. For many years I thought God gave me a handicapped daughter out of punishment for my bad behavior. I know now, that's not how God works... If God had anything to do with our daughter's condition, which I doubt, it was to help awaken me to how precious all people are in the eyes of God. So, the first way God's kingdom coming into my life has changed me is that it has made me a much more open and inclusive person who can see past individual differences and look at each person through eyes of faith given to me as a gift by God.

When God opens your eyes of faith, you see His creation from a whole new and different perspective. I still fight tendencies to always put myself first, thinking I'm better than others. When I act in those ways, I run straight up against

God's Kingdom that tells me to humble myself and put others first. Usually just the natural consequences of my bad behavior is enough to get me back where I want to be. I'm pretty certain I'm not the only one who suffers from that affliction. I mean we live in a world that values putting yourself first. It's true no matter what kind of government you live under, either capitalism or communism. You take your pick, they both motivate people to produce out of self-interest. According to the book *Humankind: A Hopeful History*, Rutger Bregman says Capitalism holds the carrot in front of the workers. To get the carrot you work hard. The harder you work the more carrots you get. Communism has the same intention and goal, but uses punishment instead of the carrots. My point is we're all trained, from the time we can understand, that your purpose in life is to produce so you can have a good and comfortable life. Under the kingdom of this world your worth is determined by how much you produce and how much you accumulate. Under the Kingdom of God your value isn't defined by what you produce or how much you earn. Your value is defined by God, Our Father who created you, by Jesus Christ who endured torture and spilled his precious blood for you, and by the Holy Spirit who lives inside of you, who enlightens you, and calls you always to be closer to God.

I wonder what the earthly arena could look like if we all truly treated one another as equals, as people of value, as beloved family members. I wonder what the human race could do if all people were valued and loved. It doesn't take much

research to see we're far from that utopian goal. Police see criminals as sub-human and more and more today some people see police in the same way. When we lose the ability to see others as equal human beings, it becomes easy to hurt, maim, and even kill them. In the past decade our society seems to be moving in the wrong direction. I'm no sociologist or scientist, but my observations and intuition tell me, the Kingdom of God is just a little further away today than it was just 10 years ago. What can we do to stem this backward slide? God's people can pray! When we say the Lord's Prayer don't just gloss over words you've repeated since you were a child. Remember your own catechism and what you were taught these words mean. When we come to those precious words Thy Kingdom Come stop and really ask yourself what that means to you. Then approach the creator of both arenas, heaven and earth, and ask God to bring His Kingdom into your life. Ask God to open your eyes of faith to see everyone as your equal, worthy of God's love and worthy of your love. Ask God to help you treat those others as you would want to be treated yourself. Pray for the rioters who pillage, loot, and burn. Ask God to enter their hearts and turn them to love, but first look inward. Find compassion for those you thought you could never find common ground. Ask God to open your eyes of faith to see them as God sees them.

Thy Kingdom Come. It is a big ask of God. We're often content to ask for less. We come before God in prayer with a bag full of requests—promotions, pay

raises, the car needs a new transmission, and tuition bills are due and student loan payments aren't going to pay themselves... I typically say my prayers as casually as ordering a burger at MiCkie Dees: "I'll have one solved problem and two blessings, cut the hassles, please."

Is that how we've been taught to pray? In prayer we come before the King of kings and Lord of lords. We've just folded our hands and bowed our heads out of reverence for God's holiness. Now, do we open our mouths with the topic of transmissions, bills, promotions, and pay raises? It's not that our wants and desires don't matter to God, but I wonder if we stay down here in the weeds because we're afraid to ask for the really big and important stuff that will change our world. The pay raise is still wanted and the promotion is still desired, but is that the best place to start with God?

Jesus tells how to begin. "When you pray, pray like this. Father, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come." It's pretty simple, but such a big ask... When you say, "Thy kingdom come," you are inviting the Messiah himself to walk into your world. Come, my King! Take your throne in our land. Be present in my heart. Be present in my office where I work. Come into my marriage, to those I love the most. Be Lord of my family, my fears, and my doubts. This is no feeble request; it's a bold appeal for God to occupy every corner, every inch, every nook and cranny of your life. It's a big ask! Who are you to ask so much of God? Who

are you to ask God to take control of your world? Well, you are his child, his beloved child, to start with... You are the one Jesus was willing to die for. So, go ahead, ask boldly. Let us come boldly to the very throne of God and stay there to receive his mercy and to find grace to help us in our times of need, but let us begin by inviting God's Kingdom to rule over our world and our lives.

May God's Kingdom come and may God's will be done in your life as it is in heaven. May God open your eyes of faith to see how you can help bring God's Kingdom just a little bit closer. May we all be bold enough to ask for the big stuff, like peace on earth especially between people of different backgrounds and ideologies. May that peace on earth start right here with us. Amen.