



Sunday, April 26, 2020

“Whose Will Be Done?”

Prayer as Jesus Taught Us “After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.” Matthew 6:8-9 [Jesus] withdrew from them about a stone’s throw, knelt down, and prayed. He said, “Father, if it’s your will, take this cup of suffering away from me. However, not my will but your will must be done.” Luke 22:41-42

“Here comes the kingdom of heaven!”

MONDAY 4.27.2020 Matthew 3:1-2, 4:17-23

Matthew recapped both John the Baptizer’s and Jesus’ preaching with the words, “Change your hearts and lives! Here comes the kingdom of heaven!” Translators often render the Greek behind “Change your hearts and lives” as “repent,” but we sometimes miss the point of that word. “This is a call not merely for us to feel sorry for our sins or even just to accept forgiveness for them, but to choose a different and wiser course of living.” *

- Matthew said Jesus prayed, “Bring in your kingdom so that your will is done on earth as it’s done in heaven.” (Matthew 6:10) That was one idea, not two. “The Hebrew tended to say everything...in one way, and then in another way which repeated, amplified or explained the first way.... “Thy kingdom come —Thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven.” The second petition explains and amplifies...the first....To be in the Kingdom is to obey the will of God.” ** How did this part of Jesus’ prayer clarify why Jesus’ kingdom preaching began with “Change your hearts and lives”?

*Jesus began his public preaching ministry talking about the Kingdom of God. How was it different to proclaim, “Here comes the kingdom of heaven!” (literally, “the Kingdom of heaven has come near”) than to say, “God’s kingdom will come someday”? In what ways is God’s kingship a current reality in your life, not just a distant future hope?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, “bring in your kingdom, so that your will is done on earth as it’s done in heaven.” Please do that in my everyday life, Lord. Amen. * Ben Witherington III and Darlene Hyatt, study note on Matthew 4:17 in *The Renovare Spiritual Formation Bible*. HarperSanFrancisco, 2005, p. 1799. ** William Barclay, *The Gospel of Matthew: Volume 1. The Daily Study Bible series*, Rev. ed. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1975, pp. 211-212.

The promise of the Messiah’s kingdom

TUESDAY 4.28.2020 Psalm 145:11-13; Isaiah 9:2-7

God’s kingdom was not a new idea when Jesus preached it. Psalm 145 described the hope and power of God’s kingdom. Israelites first believed God’s promise was about human kings descended from David (cf. 2 Samuel 7:12-16). Isaiah’s vision ran deeper. He said light would pierce the world’s darkness, peace be so universal that people would burn all blood-soaked garments, and hope, justice and righteousness would reign. Exile and foreign rule harshly cut short David’s line. But Christians saw Jesus as the ultimate, eternal Son of David (cf. Matthew 1:1, 21:9) who could uniquely fulfill all God had promised.

* The psalmist and Isaiah wrote in the context of Israel as a distinct earthly nation. What do you see in their Old Testament promises about God's kingdom that might have helped people understand Jesus' Kingdom message? What parts might have led people to expect something different than Jesus meant when he talked about the Kingdom?

- "The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned," Isaiah wrote. Yet even after he met Jesus, Paul could say, "Now we see a reflection in a mirror....now I see partially" (1 Corinthians 13:12). In what ways has Jesus already brought light into your dark world? In what ways are you waiting in hope for the full brilliance of God's light?

Prayer: Lord, so much in our world, globally and locally, tugs me toward hopelessness. Renew and reinforce my ability to live in the light and the hope of your glorious kingdom. Amen.

Jesus Christ: the king of the kingdom

WEDNESDAY 4.29.2020 2 Corinthians 4:5-7; Colossians 2:6-7

In the Roman Empire, "Lord" was in no way a harmless or casual word. To preach Jesus Christ "as Lord" meant denying the Empire's religious as well as political claim that Caesar was "Lord." To invite people to "live in Christ Jesus the Lord" was to invite them to risk their social standing, and sometimes their very life, by committing to Jesus as the supreme ruler in their heart. Both Rome and Christians knew that in any kingdom, there can only be one Lord.

* Paul said, "We don't preach about ourselves." As scholar N. T. Wright put it, "Paul is very concerned that the Corinthians might have supposed he regarded himself as the head of the organization. He is simply a servant, a porter, a secretary, an assistant: he is merely someone who introduces people to the top man. He is one of the Messiah's office staff." * What helps you resist the urge to try to impress people with your own good reputation or deeds, rather than introducing them to your Lord?

- Paul urged his readers to "overflow with thanksgiving." It seems that all people have a natural tendency toward either a "glass half full" or "glass half empty" temperament. For most of us, that can vary from day to day, depending on what happens to us. Which is your more natural inclination? What do you have to thank God for, even on the difficult days? What challenges make it hard for you to "overflow with thanksgiving"?

Prayer: King Jesus, come and rule over every part of my mind, my heart, my life. Keep showing me the corners where I'm holding back, wanting to choose my will over yours. Amen. * N. T. Wright, Paul for Everyone: 2 Corinthians. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004, p. 40.

Doing God's will—from the inside out

THURSDAY 4.30.2020 Jeremiah 31:31-34; Romans 14:4-18

How, in a broken world like ours, could even Jesus pray with a straight face for God's will to be "done on earth as it's done in heaven"? (He modeled that prayer for us, of course, as he faced the agony of crucifixion: "not my will but your will must be done"—Luke 22:41-42.) The prophet Jeremiah and the apostle Paul both saw that the ultimate hope of that, for individuals and communities, lay in people who chose to serve that Jesus as Lord, as King. They trusted that only Jesus' forgiving, loving presence could transform people from the inside out.

- In Romans 14, Paul addressed Christian house churches who were highly critical of each other's different opinions about non-essential faith practices. He asked pointedly, "Who are you to judge someone else's servants?" A shared commitment to Jesus as Lord means we are not "Lord" over one another's lives. When do you believe Paul's counsel to "stop judging each other" was more vital to people on both sides of an issue than proving they were right about that issue?

* “When God and Israel start over, God’s word (‘Instructions,’ Jeremiah 31:33) will be ‘engraved’ on the hearts of the people. Everyone will know God and receive God’s forgiveness. In the Lord’s Prayer, we ask God to let us start over and we promise that we will let others start over with us.” * Why would God’s forgiving mercy change how a person lives? How has your gratitude for God’s forgiving mercy in Jesus moved you toward living God’s will, living as God wants you to live?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, engrave your instructions on my heart. Remind me that those instructions include not passing judgments on servants who answer to you, not me. Amen. * Cynthia M. Campbell, study note on “Starting Over” in The CEB Women’s Bible. Nashville: Common English Bible, 2016, p. 1001.

Live as children of light

FRIDAY 4.31.2020 Ephesians 5:8-13

The apostles John and Paul both used the spiritual contrast of “darkness” with “light.” The contrast grew from the typical human reaction to physical light. People who want to do wrong, or something they are ashamed for others to know about, usually choose to do those things in darkness if they can. Ephesians was sure that, living in both God’s grace and God’s power, Christ-followers can be at peace with the prospect of God’s light exposing “everything.”

- What are some thoughts or acts in which God has moved you from darkness to light? (The question applies even if you’ve always been a Christian.) How can recalling those past advances give you hope and trust for God’s leading in the future? Doing God’s will on earth as it is in heaven starts with our individual lives. Have you ever intentionally “tested” parts of your life, as verse 10 suggested, to discern light from darkness? What is one change you will make in your life to live more fully as a “child of the light”?

- Verse 8 did not say, as we might expect, something like “You belong to the light.” It used a stronger phrase: “Now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light.” What is the source of the light that shines from your life in your best moments? Can you recall one or more times when you realized Christ’s light shining through you had brightened another life?

Prayer: God, creator of light, keep illuminating the darkest corners of my life. Keep guiding me as I test habits and practices, seeking to live every day as a child of your light. Amen.

WE are Jesus’ kingdom

SATURDAY 9.1.18 Revelation 1:4-6; 1 Peter 2:9-10 In Exodus 19:6,

Moses received this message for Israel: “You will be a kingdom of priests for me and a holy nation.” 1 Peter 2 and Revelation 1 applied very similar language to all of Christ’s followers. Unlike most human kingdoms, a set of lines on a map do not define God’s Kingdom. It consists of all people who love and serve God, including you. Praying for the coming of the Kingdom is not a wispy, wistful dream of an idealized future. It is a claim of our true citizenship here and now, a way of bowing to God as our true king, and an expression of our confidence that the day will come when God’s reign reaches every corner of our world.

- As children of God, we are not just isolated individuals—we are a “kingdom,” a community where God reigns. How are you growing with other Christians in your active service to God’s Kingdom and will, as well as in knowledge? Pastor and professor Paul Scherer once ended a sermon with this parable: “A youth once sought eagerly for the court of King Arthur. At the ancient gateway, an old man stood. ‘Dare you?’ the old man asked sharply. ‘Past this arch, our royal lord will lay vows on you which it were a shame not to be bound by, yet the which no man can keep.’ What if we could

answer, things being as they are, 'Sir, write my name down!'" * Are you up for the privilege and challenge of being a citizen, a representative, of God's Kingdom each day?

Prayer: Lord, let your Kingdom come within me, and then through me as I interact with the people around me. Let me live in ways that truly make the coming of your Kingdom "good news." Amen.

Family Activity: People usually have good intentions to pray, but sometimes we get busy and forget. For the next week, use an object to remind each of you to pray for one another, for your community and for the world.

For example, on Monday, draw a happy face on the back of each person's hand. On Tuesday, place a small rock in each person's pocket. Wednesday, tie a piece of string around each person's pinkie finger. When you see or touch the object, pray. Come up with your own ideas as a family for the rest of the days. Each evening, check in to see how each person included prayer in their day. Remind each other that prayer is part of being and bringing God's kingdom on Earth. * Paul Scherer, *The Word God Sent*. New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1965, p. 214.