

The School of Prayer

Part 4 – A Prayer of Treason

Matthew 6:9-13

Rev. Jeff Chapman ~ January 28, 2024 ~ Faith Presbyterian Church



“Pray then in this way:

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.

¹⁰**Your kingdom come.**

Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

¹¹**Give us this day our daily bread.**

¹²**And forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.**

¹³**And do not bring us to the time of trial,
but rescue us from the evil one.”** (Matthew 6:9-13, NRSV)



In the Gospels we read that Jesus was constantly going up into the hills around Galilee to pray to his Father, often early in the morning and sometimes all night. Ever wonder what it was he was praying about? I imagine it was this prayer or some form of it, his prayer, the prayer he invites us to pray with him. This means that when we pray as Jesus teaches us here to pray, we are learning to pray with Jesus and like Jesus.

I want to encourage you to keep setting aside time each day to pray the Lord’s Prayer in one form or another. In his time, Martin Luther suggested that all followers of Jesus should pray the Lord’s Prayer three times a day – in the morning, the evening, and at the table. He saw this repetition as a way not only to memorize the prayer, but to internalize its patterns and priorities so that whenever we pray at other times during the day, our hearts and minds would be rightly stirred and directed.¹ Let’s similarly continue to pray Jesus’ prayer here until it becomes second nature in the ways it informs our ongoing conversation with God.

In our journey through the Lord’s Prayer to this point, we have explored how Jesus teaches us to approach God, as Father, *our* Father, our Father who is *in the heavens*. We approach in the confidence of beloved sons and daughters, but also with the humility of absolutely dependent creatures. Last week we carefully considered the request Jesus tells us should be at the top of the list of things we ask for from God, that his name would be hallowed. We pray that God would not only make his

name famous, but deeply revered in all the world. We ask for this first because we know that life only prospers when we are all properly oriented in this way. This first petition then flows naturally into the second. As God’s name is hallowed in all the world, we pray that God’s kingdom would then come into all the world.

Let’s break down this petition of “Your Kingdom come” by first defining the world ‘kingdom’. When my son, Noel, was a little boy he received a toy castle as Christmas gift one year. It was quite impressive, the sort of toy I would have loved as kid. To be honest, I revived a bit of my boyhood imagination with that castle, playing right along with my six-year-old son. It had a drawbridge, towers, colorful flags, cannons, a dungeon, and a whole collection of black and silver knights. When Noel played with this castle, he was the king over his own little kingdom. He could arrange things so that the black knights stormed the castle, overthrew the silver knights, and left the place in a pile of rubble. The next day, depending on his mood and imagination, he could make the silver knights into the bad guys. He could capture one of his sister’s Polly Pocket dolls, throw her into the dungeon, and leave her there to rot. If it was his desire, he could even make it so that the black knights and the silver knights both lived in harmony together, side by side, and formed a peaceful, agrarian society. I never actually saw him do that, but it was his prerogative.

The point is, this was Noel’s little kingdom. In reality, as a six-year-old boy he was sovereign ruler over very little of what happened in the world around him, even over what happened in his own house. But when it came to his toy castle, he was king. He was the master. He made the decisions. He had dominion.

In English, and in our time, we tend to use the word ‘kingdom’ to describe a physical place. The kingdom of Saudi Arabia is that piece of land just east of the Red Sea. But the word ‘kingdom’, at least in the biblical sense, is better translated with *activity* in mind, rather than geography. Dallas Willard’s definition has always been my favorite: “Your kingdom is the range of your

¹ Cited by Paul Carter, “How to use the Lord’s Model Prayer”, *The Gospel Coalition*, July 4, 2022. Read article at

<https://ca.thegospelcoalition.org/columns/ad-fontes/how-to-use-the-lords-model-prayer/>

effective will.”² Whatever you have complete say over, that is your kingdom. It’s where *your choice* determines what happens. It’s not just what you *want* to see happen, because we often don’t have control over those outcomes. Your kingdom is about the range of your *effective* will, where in this world you can *make happen* what you want to have happen. Again, for Noel it was the realm of that little toy castle.

In this sense, you each have a kingdom. Though limited, there is a range of your effective will. It’s actually part of what makes us human, creatures made in the image of God. By choice, God has made it so that in many ways you have dominion over your life. Nobody can control your thoughts, or your feelings, or your beliefs, or your will. To an extent, we are even sovereign over our own bodies. I have control over the movement of my hand, for example. I can make it into fist and strike you in the face. I can also use it to reach down to you and help you up off the ground. Control over my body is a part of my little kingdom.

With this definition in mind, let’s return to Jesus’ prayer for *God’s* kingdom to come, because we’re not asking God to establish *our* kingdoms, but *his* kingdom. God’s kingdom is the range of God’s effective will, the extent of God’s rule and reign. Put simply, in those places in existence where what happens is what God wants to happen, that is God’s kingdom. As Willard puts it, “The person of God himself and the action of his will are the organizing principles of his kingdom, but everything that obeys those principles, whether by nature or choice, is within his kingdom.” When the sun rises on a partly cloudy morning and creates a brilliant orange and pink tapestry across the eastern sky, nature acting as it was created to act, this is a part of God’s kingdom because this is what God wants to happen. Similarly, when one person chooses to forgive another person who has done harm to her, that is also a part of God’s kingdom because, obviously, God wants people to forgive one another.

The problem here is obvious. The reason Jesus teaches us to pray with him for God’s kingdom to come is because there are many corners in creation where things are not playing out according to God’s good pleasure and will. In other words, there is much in our world that is still outside of the range of God’s effective will. This is not new. It’s been this way since the beginning, when humans made a decision to reject God’s kingdom and create our own kingdoms. That is essentially what we see play out when Adam and Eve listen to evil and eat the forbidden fruit, saying to God, in not so many words, “We are going to make our will,

rather than your will, supreme.” This is emphasized several chapters later when people say to one another **“Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves.”**³ What came to be known as the Tower of Babel became an enduring symbol of our persistent resistance to subjecting ourselves to God’s rule and reign. It was, in essence, an act of treason, an effort to subvert God’s kingdom and set up our own kingdoms in its place, an attempted coup if you will. It was us wanting our names to be hallowed instead of God’s name.

It should not surprise us that Jesus therefore teaches his followers to ask God to restore his kingdom on earth. In fact, Jesus talked about the kingdom of God or the kingdom of heaven all the time. These phrases are mentioned over 125 times in the Gospels, usually on the lips of Jesus. To follow Jesus means to trust him as Savior, but also to submit to him as Lord, essentially getting up off the throne of our lives and inviting him to take a seat instead. As disciples, no longer do we put our desires, our dreams, our wills first. Trusting Jesus that he always knows best, we put his desires first, his dreams, his will. When this happens, then the range of his effective will now includes our own lives, every aspect of our lives.

And this is where the prayer first takes aim, with us. This prayer for God’s kingdom to come is searching and demanding, and always begins with our own hearts. To pray this prayer with sincerity means to pray, “Lord, I’ve spent my life trying to rule as king or queen of my own little kingdom, but I now resign myself to becoming your faithful subject. You lead me. You direct me. You shape me. Not my will, but your will be done.”

So let me ask you, in the past when you have prayed this prayer for God’s kingdom to come, is this what you have prayed? Do you pray as somebody completely ready and willing to let God have his way with you?

Of course, this prayer is not only personal and private, because as followers of Jesus it is never only our own personal lives we are concerned with. Jesus came not only to transform individual human hearts, but also human culture, human society, human institutions, even human governments, and not just humanity but all of the universe! God does not desire to extend his effective will only over spiritual matters, but over all of creation, all the cosmos.

² Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy* (Harper, 1997), 21.

³ Genesis 11:4. This and all other biblical citations are from the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV).

It's been said that human culture describes what people in our world do unthinkingly. Our culture is us doing what comes naturally. In our American culture, for instance, it is natural to think first of yourself as an individual, rather as a part of a larger community. It's natural to believe that material things, and technology, and medicine can solve all your problems. It's becoming more and more natural in our culture to segregate ourselves into tribes of like-minded others and oppose those who think differently than we do. It's natural to honor celebrity and wealth more than anonymity and a simple life. It's natural to look to our political leaders as the great saviors of our time, the ones who can make all things great again. But in these and many others ways, what we are doing and thinking naturally is outside the range of God's effective will and therefore in opposition to his kingdom. This is not how God wants us to think or live. God wants our hearts subject to his rule and reign, but he also wants whole human cultures subjected as well.

You see, Jesus is teaching us here to pray that life would be different in so many ways. People in the Middle East hating and destroying one another is outside God's kingdom. People living on the streets in our own city is also outside of God's kingdom, along with countless people dying in Africa because they don't have clean water, and epidemic numbers of people dying right here in America because of drug addiction or violence.

In the evangelical tradition I grew up in, I was taught that alignment with God's kingdom was mostly about what happened in my private heart, that the primary goal of my life was to give God my heart so that he might save me and eventually make me like him in heaven someday. Others who grew up in a more progressive tradition may have been taught that alignment with God's kingdom was instead mostly about social justice, about us working to fix what was broken all around us in this world. What we need to understand is that it is not either/or, but both/and. Yes, Jesus is teaching us each human heart needs to align with God's will, but he is also teaching us that human governments, institutions, cultures, and economies also need to be radically transformed and renewed.

We are now into another presidential election cycle. Lord help us. I suspect that in the months to come we are going to watch countless people all around us demonstrate that they believe our future absolutely depends on electing the right person. This will make

some people willing to do whatever it takes to get their person elected. With this in mind, I was struck this week by a verse in Psalm 146, which a group of us were studying.

**Do not put your trust in princes,
in mortals, in whom there is no help.
When their breath departs, they return to the
earth;
on that very day their plans perish.⁴**

You might want to print out this verse and stick it somewhere you will read it regularly, at least until November 5th has passed. Joe Biden. Donald Trump. Vladimir Putin. Benjamin Netanyahu. Name your leader. When these men die, their plans will die with them. Do you realize this? So our ultimate hope is never placed with human leaders, no matter how much influence they seem to wield in the moment. This doesn't mean that their actions now are inconsequential. Nobody's actions are inconsequential! And of course, we should engage as best we can in the political process and use whatever influence we may have to see the best people placed in positions of leadership. But we should never do so motivated by fear that if the wrong people find their way into power everything is lost. Don't we know that even the worst leaders will have absolutely zero influence on thwarting the ultimate outcome God has planned for our world?

In a way, this makes praying this part of the Lord's Prayer an act of treason.⁵ That word 'treason' gets thrown around a lot today, but essentially treason is the act of seeking to overthrow a current kingdom so that another one might be established in its place. You might say that Jesus is teaching his followers here to ask God for the overthrow the kingdom of this world, and for the subsequent establishment of a new kingdom in its place.

Don't misunderstand me, I'm not talking about overthrowing the U.S. government, or any human government for that matter. There is a far more powerful and long-entrenched government in this world, a spiritual government which is led by the most evil leader of all. Jesus addresses him as the evil one later in his prayer, and teaches us to ask God to protect us from his influence. As Paul made clear in Ephesians 6:12, our **"struggle is not against blood and flesh but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places."** In every corner of the cosmos where evil still has sway,

⁴ Psalm 146:3-4

⁵ I'm borrowing this idea from Erik Raymond, "What Does It Mean to Pray 'Thy Kingdom Come'?", *The Gospel Coalition*, August 1, 2018. Read the

whether that be the private recesses of an individual human heart, or the very public systems and structures of societies and governments, we are praying for the king of this world to be overthrown by the King of heaven, that the range of God's effective rule would extend all the way to the gates of hell and beyond.

We believe, by the way, that this overthrow is inevitable. The entire Old Testament leaned forward to its initiation. A beachhead was established at Christmas, when the King snuck through the backdoor into the world in the most inconspicuous way. At the cross and the empty tomb, the overthrow shifted into full gear. This is why the New Testament always speaks of God's kingdom as something that has drawn near. Jesus' entire public ministry was launched with this proclamation, "**The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.**"⁶ In fact, you might say that what we saw at Christ's resurrection was a foretaste of what God ultimately intends to do with all of creation, which is take what is lifeless and temporary, and resurrect it into something that is permanently infused with abundant and eternal life. Not only human souls, but human bodies as well, along with all of creation, new heavens and new earth.

We have a beautiful picture of this finished work in Revelation 21, where John shares the climax of the vision he received from the Lord, the picture of the end of time when Christ returns:

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.⁷

Do you understand what it is we have been promised here by a God who always keeps his promises? The kingdom of heaven is not some distant location to which we will one day be snatched up to go and live, something to be accepted now in this life so that it can be enjoyed later in some other life way out there somewhere. No! The kingdom of heaven is coming to earth *now*, God's space and reality invading our space and reality in real time. This will continue to happen until heaven and earth are finally and forever married, unified, integrated. We are praying for this to happen at a time in history which the church has referred to as a time between the 'already' and the 'not yet'. The kingdom has *already* come into the world, and is at the same time *not yet* fully arrived. Someday, when Christ

returns, it will come in all its fullness. That is the day for which we pray. This prayer is essentially a prayer asking Jesus to come back and finish what he started.

Are you willing to pray this prayer? Are you eager to plead with Jesus to come back and set all things right? Do you want Jesus to come back today? If we're honest, some of us don't. And we have our reasons. Some of us feel like we have more to this life that we'd like to live. I'm enjoying life these days. I want to see my kids grow up. I want to enjoy my grandkids someday. I've got a lot left on my bucket list. Jesus come back, but not quite yet.

Others of us are glad to know that some future day we will be a part of heaven. It's beats the alternative. Still, we aren't quite sure it will live up to its billing. Think of some of the images of heaven you've been given along the way that make eternity seem like one never-ending church service in the clouds. I like coming to worship, but on and on into eternity!? Frankly, for many of us this life now seems a lot more enjoyable and exciting than what we imagine the life to come will be like.

Once we rightly understand God's coming kingdom, however, we come to realize that when we enter into its fullness someday we will never find ourselves with even one hint of nostalgia for the "good old days". If you could spend five minutes with God in the kingdom reality he has in store for you one day, there is nothing on your bucket list you would want to come back to accomplish, nothing about this life you would ever miss again. In God's coming kingdom, every good joy and delight of this life will be amplified beyond our imagination, while every hardship and sorrow will be erased forever. In fact, the only reason we ought to want Christ to delay in coming is the only reason Christ actually delays in coming. Writing to those in his day who wondered why it was taking Jesus so long to come back, Peter wrote, "**The Lord is not slow about his promise, as some think of slowness, but is patient with you, not wanting any to perish but all to come to repentance.**"⁸ Each of us knows far too many people who have still, to this point, rejected Christ. We know that when he returns, the opportunity for repentance will have passed by as the time for final judgment will have arrived. And so as we pray for God's kingdom to come, we also pray for widespread repentance before that day arrives. And repentance certainly is the proper response to the reality of God's coming kingdom.

In his book, *The Divine Conspiracy*, Dallas Willard remembers life as a child in southern Missouri when

⁶ Mark 1:15

⁷ Revelation 21:1-2

⁸ 2nd Peter 3:9

electricity was only available in the form of lightning, and they had more of that than they wanted. But when he was a senior in high school, the Rural Electrification Administration extended power lines into his community and electricity suddenly became readily available to every farm and household. When that happened, a very different way of living presented itself. The relationships of people in that community to fundamental aspects of life – daylight and dark, hot and cold, clean and dirty, work and leisure, preparing food and preserving it – could then be vastly changed for the better. But for that to happen, people had to be willing to adjust to this coming inevitable reality. In his words, “We still had to believe in the electricity and its arrangements, understand them, and take the practical steps involved in *relying* on it...Repent, for electricity is at hand! Turn from your kerosene lamps and lanterns, iceboxes and cellars, scrubboards and rug beaters, women powered sewing machines and radios with dry-cell batteries.”⁹

Part of praying for God’s kingdom to come is believing in faith that it *will come* and, in natural response, repenting ourselves, changing the ways we think to such an extent that our new thinking in turn changes the way we act. Our lives as disciples of Jesus are to be lived in the confidence that God will answer this prayer in his own time and in his own way. Therefore, as we pray for Christ to return and set all things right, we should wake up each day anticipating that since this might be the day we meet him, we want to live our lives in such a way that we are ready to meet him. Jesus told so many tragic parables about people who ignored this coming reality, refused to repent of their own personal kingdom building, and were then tragically caught unprepared on the day of judgment. If we pray this prayer with faith that it will be answered any day, we will not be caught similarly surprised or unprepared.

Finally, remember that just like the hallowing of God’s name is ultimately up to God to accomplish, so is the bringing of heaven to earth. As we pray this prayer, we humbly recognize that on our own we cannot do one single thing to establish God’s kingdom here. If we could, Jesus would not be teaching us here to ask God to do it. The coming of God’s kingdom to earth is neither precipitated by, or hindered by, humanity.

And yet, that doesn’t mean that as we pray this prayer we don’t simultaneously make ourselves available for however God might choose to use us towards this end. Only you can heal this world, Father, but if it is your will, make your church a community of Kingdom-bearers, healed healers, even a living demonstration of the kingdom on earth, that others might see a glimpse

in us what you have in store for the whole world, and then naturally repent themselves and turn to you and become, along with us, co-heirs of what you have promised all your children will one day inherit.

This is our humble prayer. Father God. Our Father. Our Father in the heavens. Make your name hallowed. As you do, come back soon and bring your kingdom, your rule and reign, that everything everywhere finally and forever will come into the range of your effective will, your good and perfect will.

Amen.

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The Next Step

A resource for Life Groups and/or personal application

1. Read the passage from Matthew 6:9-13 again. In the past when you have prayed, “Thy Kingdom come...”, what is it that you have imagined you are asking from God?
2. What is God’s kingdom? How do you define this idea or reality? Describe it as best you can. Do you agree that the Kingdom of God is not just a physical place, but a relationship and a reality? Why or why not?
3. Why can we say (or *can* we say?) that Jesus was (and is) a king, but not a tyrant? What sort of king is Jesus?
4. What are the present day implications of us praying this prayer? Beginning close to home, what is one way your life would look different if Jesus answered this prayer in your life and was established as king over your whole life, if the range of his effective will extended to everything about you?
5. Do you pray as somebody completely ready and willing to let God have his way with you?
6. And what is one way the world around us would look different if Jesus was truly king over all, if the range of his effective will extended to all the cosmos?
7. Do you prayer eagerly and sincerely for Jesus to come back and establish his kingdom as soon as possible? Do you want Jesus to come back today? Why or why not?

⁹ Willard, 30-31

8. Why is it that ultimately it is only God who can establish his kingdom in this world? And if that's true, what is our role in the coming of God's kingdom?

Table to Table: A Question for kids and adults to answer together.



*What is the kingdom of God? What is it like?
Where is it? Why do ask God for it to come?*