

February 26, 2023
Our Father ... Your Kingdom Come, Your Will Be Done
Matthew 6:5-13

"Our Father in heaven, may your name be kept holy"

"Suppose there was a king who loved a humble maiden. The king was like no other king. Every statesman trembled before his power. No one dared breathe a word against him, for he had the strength to crush all opponents.

"Yet this mighty king was melted by love for a humble maiden. How could he declare his love for her? In an odd sort of way, his very kingliness tied his hands. If he brought her to the palace and crowned her head with jewels and clothed her in royal robes, she would not resist – no one dared resist him. But would she love him? She would say she loved him, of course, but would she truly? Or would she live with him in fear, nursing a private grief for the life she had left behind. Would she be happy at his side? How could he know?"

"If he rode to her forest cottage in his royal carriage, with an armed escort waving bright banners, that too would overwhelm her. He did not want a cringing subject. He wanted an equal. He wanted her to forget he was a mighty king and she a humble maiden and let love bridge the gulf between them. For it is only in love that the unequal can be made equal.

"The king, convinced he could not elevate the maiden without crushing her freedom, resolved to descend. He gave up his throne. He clothed himself as a beggar and approached her cottage inognito, with a worn cloak fluttering loosely about him. It was no mere disguise, but a new identity he took on. He renounced the throne to win her hand."

Søren Kierkegaard told this parable to help us understand the love God has for us. God loves us so much that he became a person in Jesus Christ, renounced the comforts of heaven, in order to win our love. It is incredible to reflect on the love of God for you and me, the love that brought Him from heaven, to live and die for us.

But let's take the parable further. The maiden chooses to love the beggar. As their relationship grows, she discovers who he really is. His willingness to give up everything for her amazes her. Whenever she goes to town, the maiden talks about how wonderful he is. While others grumble about their spouses, she is praising hers publicly. *"What a wonderful marriage she has,"* everyone murmurs. *"I wish I had someone like that!"*

At home it's a different story. He waits for her to speak with him, but she ignores him. She lives as though he isn't even there. Maybe for five minutes when she wakes up or when she falls into bed at night, she thinks of him. When she does talk to him, she talks **at** him, not **with** him. She has a list a mile long of things he should do. Once in a blue moon, when she faces a crisis, she cries out to him. He is always there. But when the crisis passes, he is forgotten again. His heart is breaking.

In public, everything looks great. In private, this lady's life is so busy. She doesn't like it. Her relationship (or lack of it) makes her miserable. But that's just the way it is. You don't have to be a marriage counselor to appreciate that there are problems in their relationship.

Just like the maiden and the king sometimes our relationship with God faces difficulties. In public we may smile like everything is fine, but we sense that there is something wrong. The relationship just isn't working. What we may need to discover again is the relationship that God wants us to have – key to that relationship is communication. Prayer.

As Jesus introduces this familiar prayer, the context is exactly like this lady and the beggar-king. In public, many people looked like good religious people. In fact, their faith was empty. Unsatisfying. There's nothing "real" and "genuine" going on.

The Lord's Prayer is not an incantation which, if we pray it word for word (preferably in old English), does magical things. This is an example prayer. It's an outline, in point form, of the types of things we could pray for. In a relationship with another person, to always say the same exact words, as if they were some magic spell, would be a deadly. The same is true with God. Jesus is helping us understand who we pray to and what we can pray about.

Who do we pray to? God! That's obvious. But who is God? Really? We can SAY all the right things about who God is ... but who do we REALLY believe God is?

Jesus' prayer holds two realities about God in creative tension:

1. He is the one whose name is "hallowed" or "holy." Our God is the Creator of heaven and earth, the one who made galaxies and groundhogs, dark matter. He not only created them, but He sustains them. If we have eyes to see, we see Him at work in countless ways. If He were to step away, it would all fall apart. He is doing great things in our world. Theologians talk about this in terms of "transcendence." God is totally beyond us. We approach Him with awe, wonder, and worship.
2. He is "our Father." If you can, put aside negative associations you have with fathers, and think about this relationship in its purest sense. Jesus often uses the Aramaic, "Abba," which means "Dad." God is your loving Father. You are His child. He knows us inside and out. In a totally safe, open relationship of love, we come as we are, with our hopes, dreams, fears, and failures. We learn from Him. He cares for us, protects us, provides the best for us, and loves us unconditionally. Theologians talk about this in terms of "immanence." God is always with us. We live in close, personal relationship with the God who loves us.

Jesus wants us to know that the great God of creation, active and alive in the world, is also our dear loving Father: He is always near us. He can do great things in and through our lives. And so we talk with – we pray with – God. We share our lives with Him. We listen to His Spirit speaking into our lives.

There is another possible ending to the story of the king and the maiden. They have a wonderful relationship, in public and in private. She's always sharing with her beggar-king

husband. She shares with him. And she listens to him. As much as possible, she makes time to spend time with him. Their relationship really is rich and beautiful.

The lady discovers that she is loved unconditionally. Life is good.

Prayer is inviting God to share life with us. It is about honest, open communication. When we get to know the God beyond the universe – our loving heavenly Father – that way, life is good. Jesus is inviting you into THAT kind of a conversation, that kind of prayer, today.

"May your Kingdom come. May your will be done on earth, as it is in heaven"

The prayer Jesus modelled for us is an outline, in point form, of the types of things for which we can pray. Jesus is teaching us about how we can approach – and talk with God – the God of Creation, our loving Father, who is with us every moment of every day.

Jesus goes on to teach us to pray, *"May your kingdom come."* He invites us to pray that the scope of God's influence, the blessing of His power, the effective touch of His glory – His Kingdom – will be expanded. He is risen. God – Father, Son, and Spirit – are alive and at work in our world so it's only natural that we (1) recognize and celebrate who this amazing God is, and then (2) pray that His reign may increase.

What is the "Kingdom of God"? God hasn't established a physical nation like the "United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland" or the "Dominion of Canada." It isn't a political entity. And yet it is no less real. In fact, it may be even more real.

The nature of a kingdom is that a king has power, influence, control over subjects. It's a matter of mutual covenant and responsibility. On the one hand, the king is responsible to protect and provide for his subjects. And, on the other hand, the subjects are loyal to the king and obey his decrees; if they do so, they will prosper. So the Kingdom of God is found wherever, in space or time, His creation and His people are – people who love Him, honour Him, worship Him, and seek to obey His commands. And God, in turn, promises to care for, comfort, and guide His people.

The Kingdom of God has come. *"The kingdom of God,"* Jesus said, *"is within you"* (Luke 17:21). Each one of us who believes in Jesus Christ and loves Him has God's Holy Spirit living in us. We are His people. The Kingdom of God is within us. His kingdom is wherever His people are. And so His Kingdom has existed for the past two millennia and today is spread around the globe in every county. Anywhere there is a person who believes in Jesus as Saviour and seeks to follow Him as Lord, the Kingdom of God is there.

When we pray, *"Your kingdom come,"* we're praying God's influence, the effective reach of His power, the scope of His reign, might grow larger and larger. We are praying that the kingdom of God and Christ be extended into the lives and hearts of more and more people. We are praying that people might come to know and love our Creator, our loving Father, the risen Saviour, the Holy Spirit within us. It's a missionary prayer.

When we pray *"may your kingdom come"* we're praying God's Spirit would touch the hearts and lives of our family and friends. God may very well do that. You may discover some of these characters are interested in talking about Jesus and what faith in Him might mean in their lives. They may ask questions about what you believe. They may want to know more!

There is another sense in which we pray, *"May Your Kingdom come."* God's Kingdom comes in the sense that He lives in those of us who love Him. But His Kingdom will come visibly and universally when Jesus returns. Some day, Jesus will return in glory. We want to encourage, invite and challenge people to put their trust in God.

We also pray, *"May your will be done on earth as it is in heaven."* In heaven, God's will is done – perfectly. And heaven is a wonderful place. Our prayer, then, is not only that God's Kingdom – His influence and reign – grows here on earth. We also pray that His will might be done here on earth, more and more, so that life here might become more and more like life in heaven, too. Our prayer is that His good, pleasing, and perfect will control our lives so much that we live lives that honour Him and that make the world a more "heaven-like" place.

This is a prayer we pray (1) to change our lives, then (2) to change the world through us. We want God's Kingdom – His rule – to come in our lives, and His will to be done in our lives. We also pray that, through us, the world becomes a more heavenly place.

Praying God's will be done – in my life - means at least two things:

1. In areas where the Bible is explicit, it means following His commands. God's commands, as part of His will, are *"good, pleasing, and perfect"* (Romans 12:2). They are there to help us live content lives in a peaceful, just, harmonious society. If all people obeyed God's guidelines, it would be heaven on earth.
2. In other areas, following the will of God means learning to think like Jesus. We are constantly facing new challenges. So Paul, in Romans 12:2, tells we need to pray for, read Scripture around, and think through a God-shaped worldview or mindset. *"Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will."*

God's will is that we allow the Spirit to shape our minds, hearts, and souls so we live more and more like Jesus. Then we live that out. His will is that earth become more and more like heaven. God's Kingdom comes and His will is done ... as we pray with and live with our amazing Creator God, our loving heavenly Father. That's exciting.

"This, then, is how you should pray," Jesus says: *"Our Father who reigns from heaven, holy is your Name. May your kingdom come, may your will be done on earth as it is in heaven."* This is a prayer which can change your life. This is a prayer, which can change the world.