

Praying for Reign: *Your Kingdom; Your Will*

Mark 1:14-20; Matthew 6:9-10

Most people seem to think that there are things that need to be changed in our world – and things that need to be changed in our lives. I can hardly believe how many books, articles and videos there are that tell us how to take control and to change things in this world. Most of them rightly tell us not to blame everything else in the world for all our problems. That kind of “victim’s mentality” rarely seems to change anything. However, the ways experts tell us to change things also seem to be hopelessly inadequate. Most of them tell us to take full control of our own lives – to set our own goals and to go for them with all our gusto and strength.

But, that doesn’t seem to work either. Either we find that we hit a brick wall in our endeavors – the money runs out, our health fails, the boss’s son gets the promotion, etc.

Or, we get what we strive for and discover it isn’t all we expected it to be. It’s like Tom Brady on *60 Minutes* after Brady had married a supermodel and won his third Super Bowl ring, “*Why do I have three Super Bowl rings and still think there’s something greater out there for me? I mean, maybe a lot of people would say, ‘Hey man, this is what is. I reached my goal, my dream, my life.’ I think, ‘God, it’s got to be more than this.’ I mean this isn’t, this can’t be what it’s all cracked up to be ...* (Tom Brady, *60 Minutes*).

Or, let’s face it: Sometimes we’re our own problem. We find we can’t even change our own exercise or eating patterns. We get started on something but find we’re a bit like rubber bands, i.e., we can be stretched out to a certain point but then we snap back to where we were. As Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn said, “*Human nature changes not much faster than the geological formations of the earth.*” And, that’s not very fast, is it.

Today, we will see that, from the moment Jesus launched his ministry, he let people know he had come to change things – and that includes changing our lives. He declared, “*The time has come. The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe the good news* (Mk 1:14-15)!”

The coming of the kingdom of God into this world was the central message of Jesus’s life. He taught about it, told stories about it and, today, we see that he taught his followers to pray for it. He said, “When you pray, pray like this... Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” What does

it mean to pray like that? Let's think in our time together about the two key phrases in this part of Jesus's prayer:

Phrase 1: "Your Kingdom Come."

Church people talk about "the kingdom" all the time: we talk about "kingdom activities" and "kingdom community" and "kingdom ministry." In short, "kingdom" is probably one of the most commonly used words in the vocabulary of people in churches like ours. But, I imagine that if we took a survey asking us at LAC to define what the kingdom of God is, many of us would be hard pressed to do it? Could you tell a co-worker or neighbor who never goes to church what Christians mean when we talk about "the kingdom of God?"

So, let me try. I think the most important thing I can say about the kingdom of God is that the basic meaning of the word *kingdom* in the Bible is the word *reign* — R-E-I-G-N — i.e., to be in control over or to rule over. When Jesus said he had come to bring the kingdom of God, he meant that God is going to reign over something. Over what? The kingdom of God means that God is in the midst of a process to take full control of all things that are his. Of course, that includes everything in all creation. Jesus said that he came to inaugurate God's full reign over all things and to make things the way they should be. In other words, Jesus was saying the opposite of what Jack Welch said, "Control your own destiny or someone else will." Jesus says, "You need someone to control your destiny — and I've come to bring him into your life."

When Jesus taught people to pray, "Your kingdom come", he did so at a point in history when two lines of the Bible's teaching intersect. The first is what literature teachers call a descending line or an "I-shaped plot." Human beings, made in God's image, began our journey in the world in close fellowship with God in the Garden of Eden (Gen 2), a place that is the example of what things are like when God is fully in charge. Genesis 2 is a prototype of the kingdom of God. In the Garden of Eden, all relationships were healthy, caring and good — and the most important thing was that God was there and people were in right relationship to him.

But, almost immediately, the stubborn self-will of the original couple, Adam and Eve, led them to want to take over, "to be like God", and they disobeyed his one moral command. They wanted to have the "kingdom of Adam and Eve." That messed up everything. They were forced to leave paradise. Those generations that followed them continued to live self-directed lives. What began as the sin of just two people in Genesis 3 continued with unbridled collective

selfishness and sin. This continued from generation to generation of people “doing what is right in their own eyes” and with the effects of self-determination being deeply ingrained in the hearts of human beings and the systems of our world. What you and I have been born into is a world with a lot of competing “kingdoms” in this world, that, as Jesus said in John 10, “steal, kill and destroy our lives.” Addictions. Dishonesty. Unfaithful relationships. Obsession with materialism. When God is not the God of our lives, we open our lives to all sorts of other “kingdoms”.

So, that first line in the Bible is very clear: It is a descending line of people living lives for self with no real knowledge of God. So, even there is much good in this world, we all know there is a lot of evil and misery too.

This is where the second line of the Bible enters in, i.e., the kingdom of God breaking into this world filled with other kingdoms. Even as most of us in our world generally try to find a meaningful life in all sorts of things, we fall short of finding it. All the while, since Jesus came, the opportunity to live a different life, one that is alive to God, has been made available through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. Yes, through faith in Jesus, God is ready to come into your life and he has the power to change things. That change is a matter of growth. It doesn't happen in as fast as we want it to happen. Jesus said again and again that the kingdom of God is like a seed that is planted. At first, it can hardly be seen, like a seed in the soil. But, it begins to bud. Then, it will grow - - and ultimately, it will arrive in its fullness and it will be beautiful.

For John the Baptist, it didn't happen as fast as he thought it should so he sent messengers to Jesus to find out if he was really the Messiah come to bring the kingdom of God. Jesus said, *“Go back and report to John what you have seen and heard: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor (Lk 7:22-23).”*

Jesus came to bring the kingdom of God, the power of God himself, into your life and into our world. There's hope for change even for people like we are. And when the kingdom of God comes in its fullness, everything will be made right. The prophet John tells us about what it will be like when the kingdom of God comes in its fullness:

God himself will be with his people and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away. He who was seated on the throne said, “I am making everything new (Rev 21:3-5)!”

Don't you ever long for that kind of world? With all that in mind, Jesus told us to pray, "Father in heaven, your kingdom come." When you pray that way, your prayers will be like these:

- When you see your son or daughter walking away from God and becoming addicted to opioids, cutting or gambling, you will agonize and your heart cry deep-down will be, "Your kingdom come."
- When your Dad has walked out on your Mom and you hurt and groan that life shouldn't be this way, you will cry out in prayer, "Father in heaven, your kingdom come!"
- When you've just gotten the diagnosis, "Terminal cancer" and you feel that you have so much more to live for and that this isn't fair, you really are screaming, "Father in heaven, this cannot be the end of everything. There must be something beyond death. May your kingdom come!"
- When, in the midst of all the political discussions, you discover that your friend has learned that she is undocumented and may be sent away from her life-long home, something inside you will say, "This isn't right!" And, you will pray, "Lord, your kingdom come!"

Anytime there an injustice that can neither be tolerated nor eradicated, a shooting of children in a school, a drunk hit-and-run driver who had three previous DUIs hitting and killing your brother, a child born with brain disease or any other wrong that you know needs to be righted, what you long for is the kingdom of God. Whether you know it or not, your heart crying out, "God, your kingdom come!"

Pastor Helmut Thielicke, a renowned pastor in Stuttgart, Germany was preaching a series on the Lord's Prayer just like this one as the allies were bombing his city in World War II. His church sanctuary had been destroyed with only the small chapel left. In that crowded chapel, he told his people to continue to pray, "Thy kingdom come" in the midst of all that was transpiring. He knew, as Scripture teaches, that all this was not the end of things for a day would come with no more pain, no more war, and no more death. He said, *"In this world filled with death, in this empire of ruins and shell-torn fields we pray: 'Thy kingdom come!'. We pray it more fervently than ever."* It takes genuine faith to pray like this – faith that God will complete his kingdom.

Jesus said we are to pray with that kind of faith. So, is there anything that is happening in or around you in your world right now that you know in your heart

is not the way it should be. Jesus taught us to pray, in the midst of such times, “Our Father in heaven. Hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come!”

When you pray that, you will find that you will also pray, “And, Father in heaven, may your will be done.”

“Your Will Be Done.”

The phrase translated “may your will be done” literally means “may your will happen.” It’s praying as Jesus prayed just before he was crucified, “Father, if it be possible, may this cup of death pass from me. But, not my will, Father. May your will be done.” When we pray this prayer, we pray something like this, “Father, may your will happen in me, through me and in our world, Lord.”

What this looks like is what we read earlier in Mark 1:14-20. In that story, four Jewish fishermen were out doing what they had always done – and probably the same things their parents and grandparents before them had done. Their lives were directed by family tradition, by their own habits and cultural patterns. So, on a day like every other day, suddenly, this man comes to the shore and tells them to repent and believe in him. They do repent and believe in him. And then, he calls them to change the way they have lived their lives and to follow him wherever he leads. Amazingly, they do it. The Bible says, “*Without delay, they left their father in the fishing boat with the hired hands and followed Jesus.*” Their lives were never the same.

That’s where the work of God starts in your life – in the same way as it began in those four men’s lives. You must turn over to God whatever has been at the center of your life, which is what repentance means. And, I’m sure they had some sins and wrongs in their lives that had to be repented of too. That’s true of us all. Give that all to Jesus in faith. And then believe in him. They did that too. Have you? That’s the beginning of the work of the kingdom of God in your life. That doesn’t mean these men never fished again. We know they did. But, the main decision-making factor in their lives was that they committed to do whatever Jesus called them to do.

What does that look like in our day? Years ago, I played tennis every Thursday morning with a young engineer who had only come to church because his girlfriend wouldn’t go out with him if he didn’t go to church with her. At every changeover, we stopped and talked about this matter of turning from a self-directed life to following Jesus by faith. After many months, he said before we played, “Pastor Greg. I’m in. I believe in Jesus. I want to follow him.”

But, his engineering mind continued to try to figure out how his new faith in Jesus actually changed his day-by-day life. Finally, many months later, he had a breakthrough. I had just preached from 2 Corinthians 5:15 and had said that, when we experience the love of God through faith in Jesus, “*we no longer live for ourselves but for him who died for us and rose again.*” My friend said, “It seems so simple and yet it’s taken me so long to grasp it. Before I followed Jesus, I woke up in the morning and asked myself, ‘What do I want to do today or what do I have to do today?’ Now, each day I get up and pray, ‘Lord, my faith is in you. What would you have me to do today?’” He said, “It’s changing everything.”

He asked me, “Pastor Greg, do you think I’m on the right track?” I said, “What you are doing is exactly what Jesus taught us to do when we pray. You are praying, ‘Our Father in heaven... your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth – including my own life today – as it is in heaven.’ Keep praying that and you will not go wrong.”

This is the way it is when we follow Jesus. It’s happened to so many of us: One day you’re living life in your usual way -- making decisions like everybody else – wondering how you can make the most money or how you can succeed – and then, suddenly, it hits you that God is real, that God knows you, and that the message of Jesus is true. You turn around from how you were living and you follow Jesus. You enter into a relationship with God and you learn to pray. And, what you pray is this, “Father in heaven, I’ve been wanting to control my own life without you. Lord, may your kingdom come. The prayer of my life has been, ‘My will be done.’ No more, Father, no more. Father, here on earth and in my life, may your will be done.” Praying “your kingdom come, your will be done” becomes a way of life for Jesus-followers – or it should become that.

So, right now – whether it’s for the 1st time for you or for the 1000th time -- let’s do as Jesus taught us to pray. Pray with me, “*Our Father in heaven, hallowed by your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven...*”