

Reporting for Duty Matthew 6:10

Last week, I mentioned that to pray to God, "hallowed be your name" could sound something like pleading for a ball to be round. God's Name, all that can be known of Him, is already holy. The only variable is how will we, individually and collectively, treat God's Name as He continues to establish His rule on the earth? In the same way, there is something you ought to know about this next petition:

... your kingdom come,
your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. – Matthew 6:10

God's kingdom IS coming to earth. In numerous respects, it is already here. His will is going to come to pass. The most basic "given" of everything that can be called "a given" is that God will have His way! That's one of the perks of being God. So, what is this petition really about whenever a disciple prays it? If God's will is going to be done with or without him, what is he praying for that is not already a done deal?

I gave you a hint when I framed the question? Will God's will on earth be done *with* or *without* us? Will we serve as hands and feet in the Body of Christ, or will we just be along for the ride? To pray, "your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven" is to pray, "Here I am Lord, reporting for duty." The constitutional right to utter this prayer in an American school or at a football game means far less to a disciple than the heavenly obligation to know what he's getting himself into.

Only once in human history has God's kingdom ever reigned perfectly on the earth. In the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve had a pristine marital arrangement. Adam never had to hear about all the other men she could have married. Eve never had to hear about how well his mother cooked. But, then came the Fall and ever since, tension has existed between the kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of man.

As I suggested before, familiarity can desensitize us to the profound implications of this prayer. It was never primarily intended as a song to be sung, a limerick to be learned or a church liturgy to be recited. Jesus gave it to His disciples to guide their prayers. When one prays, "hallowed be your name," he prays, "I will set Your Name apart from every other name. Now, when he prays, "your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven," the disciple must grasp that he is doing nothing less than binding himself to the King's will.

Martin Luther called *The Lord's Prayer*, "the greatest martyr" because it is so often tortured and abused. When you pray this prayer, do you process its petitions and bind yourself to them? Does "your kingdom come, Your will be done" mean, "May doing Your will becomes the natural state of my being?"

As individual disciples, we do not have the power to do much to bring such a majestic petition to pass on a cosmic or eternal scale, but we can authentically and fully surrender ourselves to the King.

I. Your Kingdom Come

A. What is the Kingdom of Heaven?

Matthew refers to a "kingdom of heaven." Mark, Luke and John call it the "kingdom of God." Simply put, this kingdom is wherever God rules, which means that to try to define it as "here" or "there" is tricky. This kingdom exists in eternity, the realm of God, but since we are created beings, bound by the limitations of linear time, we can only grasp the kingdom in terms of past, present and future. Jesus spoke of "Abraham, Isaac, Jacob" as having a place in the kingdom of heaven. He spoke often of the kingdom when He spoke of the end of the current age. And, in response to a question from the Pharisees, He taught that the kingdom was already present.

The Old Testament saints looked forward to a king from God who would bring justice to the earth and crush those who harm God's people. This would commence the kingdom of God. This king would reestablish David's throne. God would gather His scattered people and establish a new covenant with them that would have the power to transform their hearts. All these Old Testament expectations were fulfilled in Jesus, but seldom according to popular expectations of the day.

For many in Jesus' day, this expected king from God would have one simple agenda; kill the occupying Romans and set up a second Golden Age of Israel like the one ruled by Solomon. A few understood that God's kingdom must have spiritual dimensions, so the fact that the King Himself was born into humble circumstances in tiny Bethlehem did not keep an old man named Simeon from recognizing the infant Jesus as "the consolation of Israel." This King would secure His kingdom on a cross. He would expand it into the world through His church until a time when He would return to the earth to establish His kingdom in its fullness.

For now, the invisible dimensions of the kingdom are its most important dimensions. In the church in Rome, an argument over what meat a Christian should or should not consume was undermining peace and unity. Believe it or not, that was an emotional and contentious big deal. The Apostle Paul wanted these believers to grasp that God's rule in His kingdom is about more significant issues than winning some silly, pseudo-religious church dispute:

... ¹⁷For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit ... – Romans 14:17

Still, a time will come when the kingdom of God will be conspicuous in every conceivable way:

"The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever." – Revelation 11:15

B. This Kingdom Is Quietly Breaking into a Loudly Degenerating World

The current world order is under God's judgment. It is in a state of perpetual decay. God made man a creature of free will. He does not directly restrain him from behaving badly. He warns him, but, ultimately He honors that free will. Paul wrote that a point comes when God gives people over to the wickedness they crave. He gives idolaters over to their idolatry, sexual deviants over to their immorality and rebels against Him over to the awful consequences of their rebellion. Then, he adds:

... ²⁹They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips, ³⁰slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents; ³¹they are senseless, faithless, heartless, ruthless ... – Romans 1:29-31

Was Paul describing first-century Rome or twentieth-century Any Town, USA? It's a little hard to tell. Modern man has been turned over to many vices. People celebrate their misbehavior under the guise of "freedom" and "rights" when, in fact, they are completely shackled to behaviors over which they have lost control. They jabber on about "being free." In reality, they are in total bondage.

How can God's kingdom penetrate a world order arrogantly in rebellion against Him? We need to go back to the first mention of the "kingdom of heaven" in Matthew, even before Jesus began His public ministry. John the Baptist appeared and preached, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near" (3:2). Don't you think it's rather obvious today that in our obsession to build bigger churches and claim "success," the message of repentance is being soft-peddled? Even within the household of faith, has not the natural aversion to the idea of repentance retarded many in their growth into the deeper things of God?

In this blaspheming age, it is hard to see God's kingdom breaking through. Even a herald of the kingdom like John the Baptist can be shaken by the world's ferocity. John introduced Jesus as Israel's Deliverer. When he baptized Him, heaven opened, the Spirit descended in the form of a dove upon Jesus and the Father spoke. But later, when in prison and the bad guys seemed to be winning, John reeled in his confidence that the kingdom was really on its way. He sent a message to Jesus:

... "Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?"

⁴Jesus replied, "Go back and report to John what you hear and see: ⁵The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor" - Matthew 11:3-5

Beneath the din of this fallen world's rebellion, Jesus is at always work, steadily building His kingdom.

II. Your Will Be Done

A. God's Will Sustains a Kingdom Citizen

"My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work." - John 4:34

Jesus used a word for "food" that described a main course. Some translations render it "bread," others, "meat." Among the poor, the primary feature of most meals was bread, but at a special feast, it was meat. In other words, Jesus directs our attention to the essence of a meal, not the basket of rolls the waitress brings to the table at your favorite steakhouse. Simple or fancy, a meal is identified by its main course. At Thanksgiving, we have "turkey and all the trimmings," not "cranberry sauce and the other stuff." Who would refer to a juicy, 16 oz. rib-eye just the way he likes it as "a baked potato dinner"? To Christ, the Father's will was not a peripheral issue. It was the heart of the matter.

Too often our lives revolve around a feast of self-will and personal agenda. To assuage a guilty conscience or just to lead a well-balanced life, a man may serve God in some token capacity. "My food is to do the will of him who sent me" means that Christ was sustained in His spiritual being by obeying His Father. His nature was to feast upon knowing and doing the will God.

Jesus also said, "Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4). Clearly, there is a link between feasting on God's Word and feasting on His will. As sinners, we tend to seek meaning and happiness through self-will, but it is by the Word of God that our sinful natures are recreated. Through the Word, we are transformed by the renewing of our minds so that we are able to test and approve what God's will is. Not every Bible lesson we endure seems memorable and life-changing at the time, but we cannot remember every meal we've eaten either. Still, the cumulative effect of meals and sermons has been to nourish us.

B. ... On Earth as It Is in Heaven

In November 1975, seventy-five convicts began to dig a tunnel to other side of the wall of Saltillo Prison in northern Mexico. On April 18, 1976, guided by pure genius, they tunneled up right through the floor of the very courtroom in which many of them had been sentenced. The schemes of men can backfire. This is why Jesus teaches His disciples to crave the will of God.

To pray that God's will be done on earth as it is done in heaven is to concede that such may not be the case right now. In heaven, the angels worship Christ as God's firstborn (Hebrews 1:6). "Firstborn" conveys the idea of preeminence over everything. In heaven, the angels always see their Father's face (Matthew 18:10). In Isaiah's vision in the temple, the seraphim surrounding God's throne sing:

"Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty;
the whole earth is full of his glory." – Isaiah 6:3

What are we getting ourselves into when we pray "your will be done on earth as it is in heaven"? Is this not a prayer that the disciple will honor and obey God with every breath and every deed? Is it not to pray, "Father, I confess the need to more ardently seek Your face, to learn Your will and to do it"?

Think about some of the themes in the *Sermon on the Mount* where this prayer appears. Jesus taught that while the Law of Moses forbade murder, the higher law of the kingdom forbids hatred. Where the Law forbade adultery, kingdom law forbids leering. Where the Law forbade breaking solemn oaths, kingdom law forbids all the shenanigans we play with words in order to deceive and mislead. He addressed these things because sinful people, when given a line from God, tend to live just as close to the edge of that line as they can without actually crossing it.

Is that how heaven's angels expend intellectual energy? Do they ask, "How close can we live to the line without crossing it?" Are shades of gray their favorite colors? Will human beings play such games when God's kingdom is fully established on earth? Then, why do we find living close to the line so attractive now? To pray, "Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven" means, "Help me, Father, to live like a citizen of Your kingdom here and now."

III. Is This Two Petitions or One?

A. What Is a King without a Following?

Some Bible students treat "your kingdom come" and "your will be done" as two distinct petitions. I cannot quite separate them in my mind, so I fall in line with those who treat the verse as a parallelism, a common technique in Jewish literature where a writer says things twice; in this case, once generally and, then, in a way that amplifies the thought. In other words, Jesus defines the "coming of the kingdom of heaven to earth." It is when God's will is done here as it is there.

One man defines God's kingdom by the church's moral, evangelistic and social impact in the world right now. Another defines it as the future reward of the saints. Because it is of an eternal nature, no description of the kingdom of heaven that defines it in terms of linear time can do it justice. Jesus simplifies the concept as best as it can be simplified. The kingdom of God is where God rules.

B. Our Passion for God's Kingdom Will Color Our Passion for God's Will

Eventually, most Christians pray to the Father, "your will be done," but is the spirit by which they pray always what God wants to hear? Some pray in defeated resignation. They have lived by their wits. They have taken moral and ethical shortcuts to achieve their whims. They pray for God's will because they have painfully discovered that there is little point to expect anything else. They may as well pray, "Lord, I couldn't whip You so I guess I'll join You - Thy will be done."

Some pray, "your will be done," with a hint of resentment. They don't recognize their own failings as God's call to a better way. All they can see is that since God is bigger, He must always win. This is a distorted picture of God as Someone Who's only program is to prove His muscle to men.

Jesus intended this prayer for the growing disciple, a person who prays, "Thy will be done," because he is learning to trust that this is always the best thing that can happen. The Lord's plans could take that disciple the way of testing, hardship, even persecution. But, this child of God understands that his hope rests in the hand of the Father. In essence, he is inviting God to reshape his own will.

What a trusting prayer. "Let my will be lost in Yours. I don't know what that might entail. I don't need to know. You are wise and loving in Your dealings with me. You are perfect in Your sovereign plan for bringing Your kingdom to earth." Jesus would model the spirit behind this prayer. In Gethsemane, the night before He died, He asked God to deliver Him from His horrifying assignment. If the Father had a Plan B that did not involve a cross, the Son was all ears. He literally sweated blood.

But then, Jesus prayed, "Yet not as I will, but as you will" (Matthew 26:39). An angel came to minister to Him. That night in the garden, the Father gave the Son a renewed vision of the joyous outcome that rested on the other side of bearing the temporally gruesome ordeal of a cross. Salvation from sin would be secured. Hebrews tells us this as the author also calls all believers to imitate the self-surrender modeled by Jesus:

... ²Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. ³Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

– Hebrews 12:2, 3

This prayer, Jesus' teachings and, especially, Gethsemane teach us that the kingdom of heaven advances one step forward every time self-will die and God's will becomes alive in us. The joy on the other side of self-denial is often hard to keep in focus. A profound petition such as "your kingdom come, your will be done ..." is simple as asking God to help the disciple to see his own path of self-denial, his own cross, his own Gethsemane, as the only sure path to ultimate and eternal joy.

There are many nuances to kingdom of heaven I have not addressed. We should pray for God to move in all dimensions, but I have only touched upon the one area where a disciple has the most control. The first inroad of God's kingdom into this world must be He fully secures the stronghold of your heart.