

Thy Kingdom Come

Week 2 Pray Like This

By Brian Thomas

Morning. Good morning, Horizons. Great to see you today and thank you for being here. My name is Brian Thomas. I am the worship leader here at Horizons. I get to be part of the music and the team that leads the music every week. Pastor Mandy invited me to bring the message, today.

We are starting a series called Pray Like This and we're going through the Lord's Prayer, just kind of line by line, going through it and trying to unpack it to see how can we how can we do what Jesus taught us to do, not only to pray this prayer, but to live as people who are living this out every day of our lives?

Today we're going to focus on the part of the prayer that says, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Now, before we get into it, I just want to invite us to, let's just pray the prayer together, like Jesus taught us to pray.

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.

Jesus said, pray like this. Your kingdom come; your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Why do we pray? Have you ever stopped to ask yourself that question? Why do we pray? Okay. Prayer is not about saying the right words like some kind of incantation. Not. It's not about saying the right words so that we can convince God to do what we want him to do. Prayer is not about twisting the divine arm to coerce God to do what we want him to do.

Prayer is not an act of persuasion. It's not an act of manipulation. I'm convinced that prayer is primarily an act of alignment. Prayer is about aligning our hearts with God's heart. It's about learning to see the world as he sees it. Learning to see others as God sees them. Learning even to see ourselves the way that God sees us.

This phrase your kingdom come; your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. This phrase shows us exactly how God sees the world. See, Jesus teaches us to pray like this because God really does want to bring his kingdom here. Think about that. God desires to bring his kingdom here. Now, growing up, I was, I was taught a version of Christianity that says God has more or less given up on improving the world as we know it.

That this world is the domain of Satan. It is completely wicked, and the only hope is to believe in Jesus so that you can go to heaven when you die. It was very much like centered on, I'll fly away, you know, when I die. Hallelujah by my, fly away. So, it was this idea that God is just waiting for things down here to get so bad that then he's going to melt everything down and start over again. That sounds like great news.

I have, over the last almost 30 years, been in this process of trying to understand my faith in a more accurate way. What I've learned is that Jesus teaches us that God is not waiting for some future cataclysm. God is already at work. God is even today establishing his kingdom among us.

In Luke chapter 17 it says, one day the Pharisees asked Jesus, when will the kingdom of God come? Now that's an interesting question, especially coming from the Pharisees. You may not be super familiar with the Pharisees since they were a very specific religious political sect that lived 2000 years ago, and they haven't existed for almost 2000 years. But this question that the Pharisees bring to Jesus, because they were in fact a very dominant cultural and political and religious force in Jesus day. In fact, they were Jesus primary enemies. Not that Jesus hated them, but they hated him.

When the Pharisees come and they say, when will the kingdom of God come? See, they are approaching this question from this, this, this, this thought that the kingdom of God actually revolves around them. They thought that the kingdom of God actually dovetailed with their own political and religious agenda. What was their political religious agenda? They wanted to drive out the Romans. They wanted to, make Israel great again. They wanted to bring back the glory days of Israel. They wanted to impose strict moralistic laws on society.

But Jesus replied, the kingdom of God can't be detected by visible signs. You won't be able to say, here it is, or it's over there, for the kingdom of God is already among you. See, the Pharisees looked around and they saw that they, their lives were dominated by a foreign power. The Romans, the Roman Empire was very much dominating religious, their lives at that time.

They looked around and they saw things that things weren't the way that they wanted them to be. So, they assumed that God was not working among them. They assumed that the kingdom of God was not present. But Jesus said, the kingdom of God is already here. It's among you. God isn't waiting for something in the future. God is already at work bringing his kingdom to pass among you.

Here's the reality. Jesus was communicating to them and that we need to get ahold of today. Is that God's kingdom is bigger than you. It's bigger than me. It is. God's kingdom is bigger than us. God's kingdom is bigger than a political party. It's bigger than a religious denomination. God's kingdom is bigger than the United States of America.

Yes, you and I can be part of his kingdom, but it doesn't revolve around us. It doesn't revolve around our political ideologies. Anybody who claims that it does has more in common with the Pharisees than they do with Jesus Christ. The kingdom of God, by definition, stands over and above the kingdoms of this world. The Kingdom of God stands apart from the kingdoms of kings and tyrants and presidents and politicians.

The kingdom of God is not defined by rivers and mountain ranges. It's not bounded by oceans or seas. It's not. It doesn't have geopolitical boundaries that define the defined countries and states and cities. The Kingdom of God is not defined by nationality, by race or gender. It's not owned by a political party or any political ideology. It's not the kingdom of Republicans and Democrats.

It's not the Kingdom of the United States, or the European Union, or Russia or Ukraine or China. It's the Kingdom of God. It's a spiritual kingdom. It's an everlasting kingdom. It's a kingdom whose citizens come from every nation, every tribe, every language. It is a kingdom without borders. Oh, man, I feel that you feel that. That's beautiful.

God is at work building his kingdom among us. But see, Jesus teaches us to pray like this. Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. He teaches us to pray like this because we are really, really good at usurping God's kingdom. Usurping? Yes, I said usurping. That's not a word you hear every day, is it?

What do I mean by usurping God's kingdom? I mean that I'm talking about the ways that we replace God's kingdom with kingdoms of our own making.

Let me give you an example from church history. 200 years after the death of the last apostle, the church had spread dramatically throughout the Roman Empire, and although a significant percentage of the population had either converted to Christianity or were born into Christian families, Christianity was actually still an illegal religion in the Roman Empire. The primary tension that existed between Christianity and the Roman Empire was this fundamental, basic creed of Christianity that says Jesus is Lord.

At that time, that was viewed as subversive because the Roman Empire also had a creed which said, Caesar is Lord. And so here comes this. This upstart religion and says, no, no, no, Caesar isn't Lord. Jesus is Lord. And so there was this, this tension, this, this conflict between Christianity and the Roman Empire. And the Roman emperors were very after, well, certainly from the time of Nero, possibly even before then, very aggressively trying to stamp out this, this upstart religion, because they viewed it as a threat.

So consequently, there were periods of terrible persecution. Christians were publicly executed in the games of the Colosseum in Rome. They were literally forced underground for their gatherings and their worship. So they would actually go into the catacombs, which was this labyrinth of tombs underneath the city. And that's where they would gather to worship. Christians at that time were truly an oppressed people.

During this time, the Emperor Diocletian established a system of governing known as the tetrarch. Is everybody still awake? I'm just going to pause right here just to see. Does anybody need to go out and get a cup of coffee? I know I find this, like, fascinating and I love this, but nobody, go to sleep on me like this is there is a real point.

I have a real point that I'm getting to here. Okay, so, Diocletian established the Tetrarch. He basically is a four way power sharing agreement. Okay. And so, Diocletian, divided the empire between East and West. You can see, like, at that time, the empire was vast. I mean, it spanned from modern day, Great Britain. All the way into Asia. Really? Well, well past, you know, modern day turkey. This vast empire.

Diocletian said, let's divide it between east and west and this there's this four-way power sharing agreement. Diocletian was Augustus over the east. That's the purple part. Maximian was the Augustus over the West. Then they had appointed successors who also ruled portions of the government, so of the Empire and so, Konstantinos Constantius I struggle with these, Roman names. But Constantius was Caesar or like a co-ruler with Maximian and Constantius ruled over, what's modern day Great Britain and France now? This four-way power sharing agreement worked great until Constantius, the guy that's ruling over the yellow part until he died.

The Tetrarch was never intended to be like a familial thing where it was passed down from father to son. But he appointed his son, Constantine, to follow in his stead. Upon his death, Constantine was unilaterally declared by his army to be Augustus over the entire empire. Okay. How do you think that set with the others?

Like. Oh, cool. Cool. Yeah. This guy we we've never met; he's going to be over everything. So, what happened next was, Maximian, who was Augustus over the East, retired and appointed his son to be Caesar. And so, what? What ensued is there was a lot of fighting. People were killed. People were murdered, you know, normal, like Roman Empire stuff.

In the year 312, Constantine marched on Rome, where Maxentius, who was Maximilian's son was ruling in Rome, and Constantine marches on Rome. Now, here's what happened. The day before the big battle, Constantine claimed to have a vision in which the Greek letters Chi and rho appeared above the sun.

He heard this voice that said, in this sign, conquer, have you heard this? Do you remember hearing this from history and all this? So, Constantine sees this vision. He says, and this Christian symbol, Chi rho are the first two letters of the Greek word Christos. It was a Christian symbol.

Constantine says he sees this Christian symbol above the sun, and he hears this, hears this, this voice. It says, in this sign conquer. Legend says that, that Constantine had all of his soldiers paint that Chi rho, that Christian symbol, the symbol from the illegal religion painted on their shields. They go into battle and Maxentius comes out of Rome, and they meet at the Milvian Bridge.

A mural painted by, one of Raphael's understudies is depicting the Vatican Castle and the battle of Milvian Bridge. What happened was Constantine slaughtered the army of Maxentius. A lot of them drowned in the river. They fished Maxentius body out of the river. Then, they cut off his head and carried the head all around to say, hey, look who's dead.

Now this battle is portrayed with Constantine right there in the middle on a white horse and the golden robes and the crown. He's portrayed as a messianic figure. He's portrayed as a savior. They have the angels above fighting this battle as if this is God's battle that's being fought.

Now, here's what happened. Constantine legalized Christianity. He brought Christians up, literally out of the shadows. He gave them political power. There was certainly this sigh of relief. There was relief that was brought to the Christian community. But what happened from that day forward was there was also political entanglement that happened.

You're going to find a lot of different views across the Christian spectrum of how people view this. Some people view Constantine as a hero, as a saint. The Christianity that I believe and no says no. That was not a great victory for the kingdom of God that day. This is not the kingdom of God. This is Constantine's kingdom.

What Constantine did is best symbolized by his imperial standard, that he came before the end of his life to, to use. It's called the Laba rum. And Constantine's a great imperial standard. I think I've got a picture of it here is it is this combination of Christian symbolism. As you see the Cairo at the very top, there, it's a combination of Christian symbolism fused with Roman militarism.

It's an unholy marriage. And it was this corrupted version of Christianity that would eventually launch the Crusades, holy wars that were waged across Europe, genocide against specific peoples, genocide against the Arabs living in and modern-day Israel.

Now, it would be awesome if these tendencies to gravitate towards powerful and violent men were simply a thing of the past, but they are still with us today. In America, there's a significant number of Christians, brothers and sisters, who have been seduced by the allure of Christian nationalism. This is a belief that the way that God's kingdom is going to come and God's will is going to be done is actually through the political machinations of powerful and violent men.

And a significant segment of American Christianity has been hijacked by the promise of political and cultural dominance.

But with Christian nationalism, politics do not become the servant of the church. It's the church that becomes a tool in the hands of politicians. Political and cultural dominance has never been and will never be the way of Jesus. Jesus was offered that when he was on earth, and he rejected that type of kingdom because he knew that was never going to be the way of the kingdom of God.

Power and force by violence was not the way of the kingdom of God then, and it's not the way of the kingdom of God now. Christianity that is domineering, violent, and politically motivated is not the faith that was handed down to us by the apostles. And whenever the church is seduced by power and violence, it becomes just another kingdom of wicked men.

Now it might sound to you like I am. I'm recommending that we disengage from the political process. That's not what I'm saying. Okay, please don't misunderstand me. November 5th is coming. I'm not suggesting that we disengage from the political process. I think you should vote. Okay. Vote. Red vote. Blue vote. Green vote. Purple vote. Okay. Vote according to your conscience.

But don't mistake what happens at the ballot for the kingdom of God. It's not the same thing. Don't mistake what happens in Washington DC or even here in Lincoln, Nebraska for the Kingdom of God. It's not the same thing.

So it's easy for me to stand here and say, listen, Christian nationalism doesn't represent the true kingdom of God, but that's not enough, okay? Because we must embrace a journey of continuously becoming true citizens of the Kingdom of God. This prayer, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Okay, this is and again, knowledge meant that things are not completely as they should be.

It is a cry for the redemption of the earth. It's a prayer that is rooted in the soil of a planet groaning for redemption. Your kingdom come; your will be done on Earth. This is not simply a cry for redemption. It's also a prayer of surrender. It's a prayer that says, in the part of the world where I have influence, let me live as a citizen of your kingdom.

Let me live fully surrendered to your will so that your kingdom can flourish in my life. Because God is currently building his kingdom here. Okay? And so, when I pray this way, I'm saying, God, let me live. Surrender to your will, to your will, so that your kingdom can flourish in my life, in my family, and in my community.

See, to truly pray like Jesus is not simply to repeat the words that he taught us to pray. Okay, so when we say the Lord's Prayer together, yes, we're praying like Jesus. But it's more than that to pray like Jesus is not simply to say the words, but to do the works that he did. We pray like Jesus when we stand up for the rights of the poor.

When we choose love. In a world full of hate. When we comfort the brokenhearted. When we work to right the injustices committed against the vulnerable and marginalized of our society, we are praying like Jesus. See the Kingdom of God. Is a kingdom that belongs to the poor, not the powerful.

It's where those who mourn find comfort, not more grief. Where the meek, not the domineering, end up the winners. Where those who long for justice are vindicated. Where mercy is rewarded, not despised.

Where those who are honest and pure hold an audience with the King of the universe. The Kingdom of God belongs not to those who make war, but to those who make peace. It belongs not to the oppressor, not to the powerful, but to the persecuted.

And maybe you're thinking, Brian, where does the Bible say that? Matthew chapter five, verses three two through ten. We call them the Beatitudes. If you read them, I encourage you to read that and notice what the bookends of the beatitude are, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. First line, last line, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Jesus in the beatitude is not just talking about people that are happy. He's talking about what the kingdom of God looks like.

And this is the reality that Jesus calls us to pray for. This is the reality that he calls us to work for, to live out every day of our lives.

I say Amen. So be it. Do it. Lord. Our father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Now, in just a moment, the band is going to play a song that you probably never heard before. I apologize for that. I asked David to lead this song today.

It's called Stars and Stripes. It's by a band called Common Hymnal. It was written last year as a response to Christian nationalism, and I asked David to sing this song today because it captures, I think, where we are in America and in the heart that we should have, in today's environment. And so even though you don't know the song, I encourage you to try to sing along, read the words, close your eyes, listen, do whatever you need to do, but let it sink into your soul, because there's a better way to follow Jesus than the one that dominates the headlines. It does require us to surrender our kingdom, the kingdoms that we can build. But let us commit to be true citizens of God's kingdom on earth, here and now, as it is in heaven. Amen.

STARS AND STRIPES

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VERSE 1

Washed in the blood

But we've bought into fear

Have we traded the kingdom, Jesus

For something down here?

And the monuments built

For staking our claims

Let them all pass away

Until only you remain

VERSE 2

There are boots on the ground

The enforcers of peace

And, in this sign, you will conquer all

From sea to shining sea

Holy wars we have waged

In the name of our Lord

Make the feet meant for washing

Turn and run 'way from your word

CHORUS

Lord of our fathers

Where do we go from here

We need your grace again
Lord, in our weakness
Your strength will persevere
Forever and ever amen

BRIDGE

May the stars that you ignite
And the stripes upon your back
Be the banner that is written on our hearts
May your kingdom overtake
All the ones that we have made
Be on earth as is in heaven

Thanks so much for joining us. For worship this week. If you're carrying something with you or if something got stirred up in your heart this morning that you want to pray for and pray with somebody about, we have a prayer team we would love to pray with you and come alongside you in that. Message us at 402-512-5700

May you live this week as a true citizen of God's Kingdom. Amen.