

The Lord's Prayer

(Luke 11:1-4 and Matthew 6:9-13)

"Your kingdom come"

In this brief petition is contained one of the most comprehensive requests ever made by mortal man. Thousands have repeated the simple phrase thoughtlessly, and thousands who have pronounced the words with all the reverence possible for them, have had very limited ideas of what they were asking for. Someone has well written:—

"Your kingdom come; and day by day
We lift our hands to God, and pray;
But who has ever duly weighed
The meaning of those words he said?"

Let us try to weigh the meaning of the words, that we may utter them more intelligently. It is certain that if we know the full meaning of the petition, we shall not lightly make use of it.

First, we will notice that the Lord's prayer shows the kingdom to be still future. That prayer is for all Christians; it is a model for us, just as much as it was for the personal followers of Christ. We are to pray for the kingdom of God to come; but that would be out of place if the kingdom were already set up. That it was not set up in the days of Christ's first advent, is shown by the question which His disciples asked as they stood upon the Mount of Olives, just before He was taken out of their sight. Said they, "Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6). Christ did not say, "It has already been restored," but "It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority" (v. 7). That is, It is not for the disciples to know when the kingdom will come; but they are to pray for it; if they knew that the time for the kingdom were fixed, it would be useless to pray for it. That God has not made known the time of the coming kingdom, is shown by the statement that he has put it "in His own authority." He is not under obligations to set up the kingdom at any specified time, for he has not appointed any; it is all within His own power.

Many people have the idea that "the kingdom of Christ and God" (Eph. 5:5), is a spiritual kingdom, that it is simply the reign of the Spirit in the hearts of believers. It is true that the gospel plan is termed a kingdom, as in Col. 1:13 and Rev. 1:9; but that kingdom,—the kingdom of grace,—began as soon as man fell, as soon as he had need of "the grace of God that brings salvation" (Titus 2:11); but the kingdom referred to in the Lord's prayer is, as we have seen, still future; consequently that kingdom cannot be the gospel. Moreover, the apostle James says: "Listen, my beloved brethren: has God not chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him?" (James 2:5). Here he speaks of a kingdom that is promised to those who love the Lord,—a kingdom of which they are heirs through faith. It is this kingdom for whose coming we are to pray.

What Is the Kingdom?

When Adam was created, he was made king of the earth, as is shown by these words: "So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. Then God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth" (Gen. 1:27–28). This dominion was forfeited by the fall, and the world passed into the hands of the one who had conquered Adam,—Satan,—who is now "god of this world." Not that God has no control over the earth; for even when He gave the dominion to Adam, He did not relinquish any part of His own universal dominion; but Satan took as much of the dominion as was given to Adam. He is not able, however, to go beyond the bounds which God sets for him. (See Job 1:12, 2:6).

When David was king over Israel, God promised him that his throne should be "established forever" (2 Sam. 7:16). This promise was often repeated, and God said, "My covenant I will not break, nor alter the word that has gone out of My lips. Once I have sworn by My holiness; I will not lie to David: his seed shall endure forever, And his throne as the sun before Me; it shall be established forever like the moon, even like the faithful witness in the sky" (Ps. 89:34–37). Yet notwithstanding this promise, it was not long before the whole kingdom of Israel was overthrown, and the people were taken into captivity; and although many of the people were afterward allowed to return to their own land, the kingdom was never restored. The kings who afterward reigned in Jerusalem were simply the creatures of the Roman power, which controlled Judea and all the rest of the civilized world.

But David himself, it seems, never expected that his throne should be established forever with earthly monarchs upon it. He understood that Christ was the one referred to, who should rule over the kingdom. So Peter, after quoting David's words in Ps. 16:8-11, said: "Men and brethren, let me speak freely to you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. Therefore, being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that of the fruit of his body, according to the flesh, He would raise up the Christ to sit on his throne, he, foreseeing this, spoke concerning the resurrection of the Christ, that His soul was not left in Hades, nor did His flesh see corruption" (Acts 2:29–31).

Christ, then, is the one who is to "restore again the kingdom to Israel." It is to be a literal kingdom for He is to sit upon the throne of David. When the angel Gabriel announced to Mary that she should be the mother of Jesus, he said: "He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end" (Luke 1:32–33). The coming kingdom must, therefore be as literal a kingdom as was that of David.

The kingdom is, however, to be different, in that it will be perfect and sinless. Said the prophet, addressing Christ by inspiration; "And you, O tower of the flock, the stronghold of the daughter of Zion, to you shall it come, even the former dominion shall come, the

kingdom of the daughter of Jerusalem" (Micah 4:8). And the Lord himself, in His promise to David, said: "Moreover I will appoint a place for My people Israel, and will plant them, that they may dwell in a place of their own and move no more; nor shall the sons of wickedness oppress them anymore, as previously" (2 Samuel 7:10).

These two texts teach us that the dominion of Christ is to be the same as that given to Adam,—“the first dominion,”—that it will be the earth in its Eden beauty and free from the oppression of sin. And so we read the words of Peter, who, after speaking of the fire which shall melt the earth, and shall destroy sin and sinners out of it, says, “Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells” (2 Peter 3:13). (This promise is recorded in Isa. 65:17-25. Read those verses, and then read the parallel passage in Amos 9:13-15. Then read Amos 9:11, 12, and you will see that this new heavens and new earth is in the time when the Lord has restored the kingdom to Israel). So we learn that when we pray, “Your kingdom come,” we are simply praying for God to set up His own reign of righteousness in the earth made new.

Setting Up the Kingdom

But let not the subject be dismissed with this simple statement of the truth. Around the fulfillment of this promise cluster the grandest and most tremendously important events. That kingdom is ushered in by the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, as Paul indicates in his charge to Timothy: “I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom: Preach the word!” (2 Tim. 4:1, 2). This kingdom Christ receives before He returns to earth; for He Himself compared Himself and kingdom to a certain nobleman that “went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom and to return” (Luke 19:11, 12). See the account of His receiving this kingdom, in Dan. 7:13, 14. So it is, that when Christ comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, He will be sitting upon the throne of His glory, and to the righteous He will say: “Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world” (Matthew 25:31–34). This again shows that the kingdom which the saints are to inherit is the dominion of the new earth.

In this kingdom righteousness, and that alone shall dwell. (2 Pet. 3:13). The prophet says of that time: “Also your people shall all be righteous; they shall inherit the land forever, the branch of My planting, the work of My hands, that I may be glorified” (Isa. 60:21). Read the verses preceding this one, and then read the twenty-first chapter of Revelation, the last verse of which says: “But there shall by no means enter it anything that defiles, or causes an abomination or a lie, but only those who are written in the Lamb’s Book of Life” (Rev. 21:27).

This state of righteousness will not be brought about by the conversion of all men, for we read that as the end approaches “lawlessness will abound” (Matt. 24:12) and that “evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse” (2 Tim. 3:13); and that in the days when the Son of Man shall be revealed, it shall be as it was in the days of Noah and of

Lot. (Matt. 24:37-39; Luke 17:26-30). So when God gives to Christ the heathen for this inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth, for a possession, the first thing He does is to rule them with a rod of iron and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel. (See Ps. 2:8, 9). Says the prophet: "Behold, the day of the Lord comes, cruel, with both wrath and fierce anger, to lay the land desolate; and He will destroy its sinners from it" (Isa. 13:9). And we also read that "when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, when He comes, in that Day, to be glorified in His saints and to be admired among all those who believe, because our testimony among you was believed" (2 Thess. 1:7-10).

Thus we learn that to pray, "Your kingdom come," is to pray for the coming of the Lord to destroy the wicked, and to cleanse the earth of everything that defiles, and to give immortality to His people. God is no respecter of persons. Whosoever shall not be found written in the book of life shall be cast into the lake of fire. (Rev. 20:15). It will avail nothing that men have said, "Lord, Lord,"—that they have prayed earnestly, even praying for the kingdom of God to come, if in that day any defilement is found in them, they will be cast into the lake of fire. Who is there, then, that realizing what the kingdom of God is, who alone can inherit it, and what will be the fate of those who are unfit,—can pray, "Your kingdom come," and still cherish sin in his heart? How carefully and blameless we must live if we are able to unite, in saying, "Even so, come, Lord Jesus!" (Rev. 22:20).

The Signs of the Times, (March 10, 1887).

"AFTER THIS MANNER PRAY" - "WHEN YOU PRAY, SAY"