

CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

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Series: The Lord's Prayer
Number: 4
Text: Matthew 6:10
Date: May 12, 2013 a.m.

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The Lord's Prayer: The Second Petition

We are living in a heightened era of what the late Greg L. Bahnsen has described as “newspaper exegesis,” that is, reading the Bible through the lens of current events. “The newspaper has no prerogative to challenge God’s word of truth. Nor do those who read newspapers.”¹ Of course, prophetic prognosticators try to convince their supporters that current events are being read in light of the Bible. But this claim has often been made with less than satisfactory results. C-SPAN once interviewed Tim LaHaye, the co-author of the best-selling *Left Behind* series, who confidently stated that the war in Iraq was part of biblical prophecy (and will no doubt boost the sale of his books!)² Those influenced by dispensationalism (like Hal Lindsey and Tim LaHaye), with its untenable doctrine of a pre-tribulational rapture, anticipate the removal of believers from the earth before the great seven-year tribulation period supposedly begins. In this scheme, the primary focus of the church’s involvement in the world shifts to evangelism, since the world will soon be subject to tremendous evil due to the rise of Antichrist and the bowl and trumpet judgments of the Apocalypse. Dispensationalists argue that when Jesus came in His first advent, He brought to the Jews an “offer” of the kingdom, which the Jews subsequently rejected. Jesus, having His plans frustrated by the sovereignty of man, then withdrew His offer of the kingdom until such time as God will remove believing Gentiles from the earth in the Rapture. The kingdom of God has been withdrawn and its arrival awaits our Lord’s return. The millennial age, set up on earth after the return of Christ, will see the kingdom of God manifest in its fullness, as Jesus physically rules the nations with a rod of iron. Thus, the kingdom of God has little or nothing to do with the present age. Instead, the kingdom is seen as arriving in its fullness in the millennial age, and our Lord’s instructions focus entirely upon the kingdom that has been withdrawn coming back in fullness in the future. It should come as no surprise that the particular view of end-times you hold to will have a dramatic effect upon how you understand the relationship between the present reality of the kingdom of God and your own involvement in the world around you.³ The second petition of our Lord’s Prayer is a simple and yet dramatic one: “Thy kingdom come.” Our Lord tells us that we are to pray that God’s kingdom (literally, God’s rule, or reign) come in some sense in which God’s kingdom is not already present. Here, we catch a glimpse of one of the most important, though difficult, concepts in all of Scripture, and that is the kingdom of God and the relationship of this divine kingdom to both the present course of human history and to our Lord’s return in the future. The tension between the present and the future aspects of the kingdom of God is described by Reformed theologians as the tension between the “already,” that is, the present aspects of the kingdom of God, and the “not-yet,” or the future aspects of that same kingdom.⁴

I. THY KINGDOM COME

Notice that it is not a prayer for some kind of blissful, problem-free utopia. It is distinctively God’s kingdom. We must be aware, as Lloyd Jones pointed out, “that there is a logical order in these petitions. They follow one another by a kind of inevitable, divine necessity. We began by asking that the name of God may be hallowed amongst men. But the moment we pray that prayer, we are reminded of the fact that His name is not hallowed thus. At once the question arises, why do not all men bow before the sacred name? Why is not every man on this earth concerned about humbling himself now in the presence of God, and worshipping Him and using every moment in adoring Him and spreading forth His

name? Why not? The answer is, of course, because of sin, because there is another kingdom, the kingdom of Satan, the kingdom of darkness. And there, at once, we are reminded of the very essence of the human problems and the human predicament. Our desire as Christian people is that God's name shall be glorified. But the moment we start with that, we realize that there is this opposition, and we are reminded of the whole biblical teaching about evil. There is another who is 'the god of this world'; there is a kingdom of darkness, a kingdom of evil, and it is opposed to God and His glory and honour. But God has been graciously pleased to reveal from the very dawn of history that He is yet going to establish His kingdom in this world of time, that though Satan has entered in and conquered the world for the time being, and the whole of mankind is under his dominion, His is again going to assert Himself and turn this world and all its kingdoms into His own glorious kingdom."⁵

II. THY KINGDOM COME

"As God is eternally holy, so He eternally reigns in absolute sovereignty. Yet it is appropriate to pray not only 'hallowed be your name,' but also 'your kingdom come.' God's 'kingdom,' or 'reign,' can refer to that aspect of God's sovereignty under which there is life. That kingdom is breaking in under Christ's ministry, but it is not consummated till the end of the age (28:20). To pray 'your kingdom come' is therefore simultaneously to ask that God's saving, royal rule be extended now as people bow in submission to Him and already taste the eschatological blessing of salvation and to cry for the consummation of the kingdom (cf. I Corinthians 16:22; Revelation 11:17; 22:20)."⁶

III. THY KINGDOM COME

"The gospel itself, above all, is the announcement that God's promised rule has now begun in and through the work of Jesus the Messiah (see 3:2; 4:17, 23), so the disciples are thus encouraged to pray that what has begun in the ministry of Jesus, what they have now begun to participate in, may be experienced in all fullness (cf. the prayer *Marana tha*, "our Lord come," in I Corinthians 16:22; cf. Revelation 22:20). The tension between a realized eschatology and future eschatology comes to expression in the mystery of the kingdom elaborated in the parables of chapter 13."⁷

CONCLUSION: The kingdom of God is not something, which, in the first place, involves nations and peoples and countries. Jesus Christ was the one and only person who ever fully accepted and fully carried out the will of God. *Therefore with Jesus, the kingdom came.* In Him, the kingdom arrived. He incarnates and embodies the kingdom. Jesus not only *proclaimed* the kingdom; He *is* the kingdom demonstrated in human life. He brought to men the message and the manifestation of the kingdom. We must always seek to apply the Bible to our individual lives. *The kingdom of God is something which begins with me.* To speak of the kingdom is not to state a theological doctrine; it is not to institute a political program; it is to confront oneself with a personal challenge in which we either accept or refuse the will of God for us. The Chinese Christian wisely prayed, "Lord, revive Thy Church, beginning with me"; the Christian may equally wisely pray, "Lord, bring in Thy kingdom, beginning with me." The kingdom involves the individual acceptance of the will of God. Therefore, to pray, "Thy kingdom come," is to pray, "Lord, help me to do Your will." This is made even clearer when we look at two parallel New Testament passages. In Mark 9:43, we read, "If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off; it is better for you *to enter into life* maimed than with two hands to go to hell." In Mark 9:47, we read, "If your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out; it is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into hell."⁸ Finally, never forget that this is a prayer and should serve to mold and direct the way we pray. "To pray to that His kingdom may 'come' is to pray both that it may grow, as through the church's witness, people submit to Jesus, and that soon it will be consummated when Jesus returns in glory to take His power and reign."⁹

ENDNOTES

¹ As cited in Gary DeMar's *Last Days Madness: Obsession of the Modern Church* (American Vision, 1999), p. 210.

² When Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait in 1990, a great deal of speculation arose concerning Iraq's role as a modern Babylon, supposedly a fulfillment of prophecies made centuries ago. Dispensationalists like Dallas Seminary professor Charles Dyer published *The Rise of Babylon: Sign of the End Times* (Tyndale, 1991), claiming that it was predicted in Isaiah 13. John Walvoord, the president of Dallas Seminary, produced a sizzler called *Armageddon, Oil, and the Middle East* (Zondervan, revised 1990). Walvoord (who recently passed away) believed, "Saddam Hussein's ambition to destroy Israel motivated his move into Kuwait in August of 1990 as he attempted to set up a power base from which to attack Israel." Walvoord's conclusions are colored by an interpretative system that forces him to see every contemporary event as some fulfillment of some yet to be fulfilled prophecy with Israel as the interpretative key. There are a number of problems with his position. *First*, the attacks on Israel were not made until after the allied forces threatened to force Saddam out of Kuwait. The Iraqis used Israel as a trump card. By attacking Israel, Saddam hoped to force Israel to go on the offensive. Saddam believed that once this happened, the Arab part of the coalition would break away and join with him against the Western aggressors and Israel. Israel was not a consideration until Saddam realized he was backed into a military corner from which he had no chance of escaping. *Second*, Saddam Hussein did not need Kuwait as a "power base from which to attack Israel." Iraq is much closer to Israel than Kuwait. The Scud missiles were launched from western Iraq, not from Kuwait. *Third*, Hussein's invasion of Kuwait was motivated by ancient territorial disputes and economic factors. While some may want to read the prophetic significance into his military venture, there is no justification for doing so. *Fourth*, Saddam's "Babylonian" empire is now in shambles. And, as recent events demonstrated, he is probably dead – or soon will be. This seems to support the secondary *application* – not fulfillment – of Bible prophecy: Saddam was judged like ancient Babylon and Rome. Any attempt to rebuild Babylon will be met with destruction (Isaiah 13:20). cf. DeMar, op. cit. p. 357.

³ Much of the material in this introduction has been adapted from Kim Riddlebarger's article "Thy Kingdom Come" in *Modern Reformation* (July/August 1993), pp. 11-12.

⁴ Anthony A. Hoekema, in his excellent *The Bible and the Future*, sums up the tension between the already and the not-yet when he writes, "We conclude that our entire Christian life is to be lived in the light of the tension between what we already are in Christ and what we hope some day to be. We look back with gratitude to the finished work and decisive victory of Jesus Christ. And we look forward with eager anticipation to the Second Coming of Christ, when He shall usher in the final phase of His glorious kingdom, and shall bring to completion the good work He has begun in us" (p. 75). For a further discussion of the 'already, not-yet' tension, see G.C. Berkouwer's *The Return of Christ* (Eerdmans, 1972), pp. 20-23, 110-15, 121-122, 138-39, and H.N. Ridderbos' *Paul: An Outline of His Theology* (Eerdmans, 1975), pp. 230-31, 249-52, 267-72.

⁵ M. Lloyd-Jones, *Studies in The Sermon on the Mount II* (Eerdmans, 1960), p. 62.

⁶ D.A. Carson, *The Gospel of Matthew: The Expositor's Bible Commentary* (Zondervan, 1984), p. 170.

⁷ Donald Hagner, *Matthew 1-13: Word Biblical Commentary* (Word, 1993), p. 149.

⁸ This section adapted from Wm. Barclay's *The Beatitudes and the Lord's Prayer for Everyman* (Harper and Row, 1964), p. 194.

⁹ J.R.W. Stott, *Christian Counter-Culture: The Message of the Sermon on the Mount* (IVP, 1978), p. 147.