

# Thy Kingdom come

6 July 2008

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Ps. 24: 4, 5

Ps. 97: 4

Hymn 15: 3, 4

Ps. 2: 1 – 4

Hymn 47: 2, 3, 4, 9

Scripture reading: Mt. 13: 44 – 52; 1 Cor.15: 20 – 28

Text: LD 48

Beloved Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ,

What did our Lord Jesus command us when He commanded us to pray for the coming of the kingdom? What **is** the kingdom? And **how** does it come?

When we speak about the kingdom of God we deal with a controversial issue, not because the concept of “the kingdom” is something that is in itself uncertain or unclear, but simply because a lot of confusion comes through ignorance. And therefore the importance of these questions:

What **is** the kingdom? And **how** does it come?

In order to pray for the coming of the kingdom, we need to know what we are praying for. As we will now deal with the second petition in the Lord's

Prayer, "Your kingdom come", we will therefore start the explanation of this petition with a description of the kingdom itself.

The theme will be...

## Praying for the coming of the kingdom

We will note...

1. Which kingdom is meant
2. How the kingdom comes
3. The command to seek the kingdom

In the first place we note...

### Which kingdom is meant

The expression "the kingdom of God" has a very specific meaning in Scripture. While God, as Lord and King, rules over all of creation, not all of creation is part of His kingdom. Although God has authority and power over all of creation, not all of creation is included in His kingdom. The kingdom of God does not include the sinful and unbelieving world. No, the kingdom of God is His new creation in Christ.

The unbeliever does not belong to the kingdom of God or to the kingdom of heaven. Only through Christ do we enter this kingdom. Whenever Scripture speaks of the kingdom of God it deals with the gospel. The gospel of the kingdom is that we, who by nature does not belong to the kingdom of God, may enter this kingdom through faith in Christ. Christ Himself is the priestly King of this kingdom. And therefore the coming of the kingdom is identified with the coming of Christ in His **office** as the Christ.

It means that "the kingdom of God" comes only through God's salvation in Christ. Through Christ God gathers a church for Himself in the midst of a

hostile world. The coming of the kingdom is therefore a conquest in which the kingdom of God stands over against the kingdom of darkness. In the coming of the kingdom, Christ is portrayed as a warrior conquering the enemy and destroying the works of the devil.

Through the saving power of Christ His kingdom expands over all the earth, till finally – at His second coming – the whole earth will indeed be cleansed and restored to be His kingdom when all who are in Christ will joyfully serve and obey Him as their King.

To enter the kingdom of God is to enter eternal life. And although we are already through faith heirs of this kingdom, it will only be on the day of Christ's second coming that we will enter the full glory of this kingdom.

Now, brothers and sisters, in the history of this world the coming of the kingdom can be distinguished in two stages: the old covenant and the new covenant. In the old covenant Christ was promised, in the new covenant He has come. And when He – the Messiah, the anointed King – has come, it may rightly be said that His kingdom has come. But it has not yet come in its final glory. We look forward to His second coming which will be the final consummation of His kingdom. In its final glory the kingdom of God is not yet present, but is yet to come.

Now, when we pray for the coming of the kingdom, we find ourselves in the second vase of the history of this world: the kingdom of God **has** come, and through the preaching of the gospel it is expanding over all the earth until Christ will return on the clouds of heaven in great power and glory. Thus the kingdom **has** come, **is** presently coming, and **will** come. And so we pray for two things. First of all we pray for the growth and expansion of the kingdom in this world. Secondly we pray for the world to come – the new heavens and the new earth where righteousness dwells. We pray for the coming of that day when God in one moment, in the twinkling of an eye, will make all things new and holy and perfect. With longing eyes we press forward towards that day when we will see Christ as He is, and will be like unto His image, when God will be all in all.

Now, all of this is called the gospel of the kingdom.

John the Baptist announces that the kingdom of heaven is near. And when Christ starts His preaching on earth He announces the same: the kingdom of heaven is near. And all His preaching is summarised as “the gospel of the kingdom”. But did you note how this gospel of the kingdom is introduced? Neither John the Baptist nor our Lord Jesus introduces the gospel of the kingdom as if it is a new teaching. No, without any introductory explanation the expression “kingdom” and “kingdom of God” and “kingdom of heaven” is used as if everyone knew the meaning of this expression. And never does anyone ask Him: Lord, what do you mean when you say that the kingdom is near? Or: What is this kingdom? No, everyone knew what He was talking about!

How so?

They knew what He was talking about because He was simply announcing the fulfilment of what God's people have been waiting for! For many ages they have been waiting for this kingdom to come; and now it has come! They were expecting the Messiah and His kingdom. For the believing Jew this was all his expectation! When the Messiah comes then Israel will be delivered and restored! And how they longed for this kingdom to come!

The gospel, the good news, is that this kingdom has come!

It is the well-known kingdom that has been promised long before. The Son of David has come, the Messiah who will reign on the throne of David forever, and over the house of Jacob.

This kingdom was already described by Moses. Although God rules over all creation, He became in a special, redemptive sense the King of Israel. He became their King by virtue of the covenant, and made Israel a kingdom of priests.

The LORD spoke to Israel and said:

“...if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be...to Me a kingdom of priests...” – Ex. 19: 5, 6.

Right from the start of Israel's history God is called their King – Deut. 33: 5.  
(When Israel, many years later, asked Samuel to anoint a king over them, the Lord told Samuel that with this request for an earthly king, Israel was rejecting God's reign over them – 1 Sam.8: 7)

Now, the LORD exercised His kingship in Israel by the giving and administration of His law. Yet, Israel transgressed the law, and so – because of their sin – went into slavery again. They had to serve their enemies and even went into captivity. But the LORD would stay faithful to His covenant. He would again deliver and restore Israel. And so He promised them an eternal King who will reign on the throne of David forever: the Messiah. Through this King all the promises of the covenant would find their fulfilment! When this King comes God would create new heavens and a new earth where righteousness dwells, and God will make His dwelling among men.

It starts with a promise to David that one of his sons will be an everlasting king:

“...I will establish him in My house and in My kingdom forever; and His throne shall be established forever” – 1 Chron.17: 14.

In that text Israel is called God's house and God's kingdom, and the promised Messiah will reign in God's kingdom forever.

The LORD reveals this promise further by the prophet Isaiah:

“For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government shall be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end, upon the throne of David and over his kingdom, to order it and to establish it with judgment and justice from that time forward, even forever...” – Isaiah 9: 6, 7.

This King will be the Prince of Peace. When He comes...

“The infant will play near the hole of the cobra, and the young child shall put his hand into the viper's nest. They will neither harm nor destroy on all My holy mountain, for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea” – Isaiah 11: 8, 9.

When this Prince of Peace comes, Paradise will be restored.

This everlasting kingdom of righteousness and peace would be given to the Son of Man. The prophet Daniel saw the coming of this King:

“...behold, One like the Son of Man, coming with the clouds of heaven! He came to the Ancient of Days, and they brought Him near before Him. Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations and languages should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and His kingdom the one which shall not be destroyed” – Dan. 7: 13, 14.

And not only will the Son of Man receive the kingdom, but His kingdom will also be a gift to His people:

“...the saints of the Most High shall receive the kingdom, and possess the kingdom forever...” – Dan.7: 18

And so the promise of the Messiah and His kingdom continued until, finally, the angel could announce His birth to Mary:

“...behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name Jesus. 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: 31 – 33.

Brothers and sisters, when Christ starts His preaching on earth, He proclaims the gospel of this kingdom. **He** is the Christ, the King of Israel.

After His ascension into heaven to take His seat on the throne of God, the apostle Peter preaches and says:

“...let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ” – Acts 2: 36.

“...Now salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ have come...” – Rev.12: 10.

The coming of Christ was indeed the coming of God's kingdom.

Now, while the Messiah was said to be King of Israel, it becomes clear in the New Testament that the true Israel includes all nations. Christ will be King of His church. And those who will enter His kingdom will come from east and west, from every tribe and tongue and nation. And in the New Testament it becomes even more clear that this is no earthly kingdom, but: the kingdom of heaven.

Brothers and sisters, we understand then that the kingdom of God will be the ultimate fulfilment of both the old and the new covenant. When Christ

commands us to pray for the coming of the kingdom, He commands us to pray for the fulfilment of all God's promises.

But how will the promise of the covenant be fulfilled? How does the kingdom of God come? What should we pray for when we pray "Your kingdom come"?

We note that in the second place...

## **How the kingdom comes**

We noted already that the kingdom is coming in two stages. The coming of the kingdom is a present reality, and a future event. As a present reality the kingdom is gradually growing and expanding. As a future event, the coming of the kingdom will be no gradual event, but a sudden renewal of all things on the day of Christ's coming. Now, both the present reality and the future event are called by Scripture the coming of the kingdom.

These two aspects of the coming of the kingdom – present and future – are combined in the great kingdom parables of our Lord.

"...The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground, and should sleep by night and rise by day, and the seed should sprout and grow, he himself does not know how. For the earth yields crops by itself: first the blade, then the head, after that the full grain in the head. But when the grain ripens, immediately he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come" – Mark 4: 26 – 29.

There, as in many of the parables, you have the present and the future coming of the kingdom together. The gradual growth of the kingdom is compared to vegetable life, and then there is also the future aspect: the day of the harvest. But the gradual growth and the day of the harvest belongs together as part of the same process. And so we may speak of the organic coming of the kingdom and the eschatological coming of the kingdom. The organic coming of the kingdom is a gradual process. The eschatological coming of the kingdom is the day when Christ will appear on the clouds of heaven.

First of all we are praying for the growth of God's kingdom now in this world, and at the same time we are praying for Christ's second coming on the clouds of heaven.

Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly! (Rev.22: 20).

We also have to make another distinction: the visible and the invisible aspects of the coming of the kingdom.

When the kingdom of God is called the kingdom of heaven, the expression "kingdom of heaven" makes clear that it is no earthly kingdom; it is not of this world. Its origin and power is from God in heaven. And therefore, since the kingdom comes through the power of God's Spirit, its coming has an invisible spiritual aspect.

"...unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (Jh.3: 3)

"...My kingdom is not of this world...My kingdom is not from here...Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice" – John 18: 36, 37.

Jesus also said:

"...The kingdom of God does not come with visible signs...the kingdom of God is within you" – Luke 17: 20, 21.

However, the kingdom of God is not altogether invisible. The kingdom of God becomes visible in this world as much as it can be seen in the gathering of the church, and in the life and organisation of the church. The growth of the church is not only an invisible working of the Spirit in the hearts of individuals; it also becomes visible in the gathering of the congregation of Christ, and in all her members as citizens of the kingdom – renewed unto a life of obedience, for all to see, and thus bringing glory to God.

There is therefore a visible and an invisible aspect to the kingdom, but it is one and the same kingdom. When we pray "Your kingdom come", we pray for the work of God in the hearts of men, but we also pray for the fruit which becomes visible in a new life of obedience. We also pray for the gathering of the church, and that the Lord may sustain and preserve her in this world. And finally the eschatological coming of the kingdom will be visible to all when Christ appears on the clouds of heaven.

Brothers and sisters, when we pray for the coming of the kingdom, now in this world and also for its consummation on the day of Christ's appearance, our prayer includes positively the spread of the gospel, the growth and expansion of the church, but also negatively to destroy the work of the devil. And thus we pray:

“(Our Father in heaven) ...Destroy the works of the devil, every power that rises itself against Thee, and every conspiracy against Thy holy Word...” – Lord’s Day 48.

Together with the apostle Paul we say:

“...even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed” – Gal. 1: 8.

And together with David we pray:

“Do I not hate them, O LORD, who hate You? And do I not loathe those who rise up against You? I hate them with perfect hatred; I count them my enemies” – Ps.139: 21, 22.

Christ is pictured to us as a warrior conquering the enemy. And when we pray for the coming of His kingdom, we pray that He may destroy His enemies and crush them as a potter’s vessel.

In dealing with the coming of the kingdom we noted so far the two stages in which the kingdom comes, also its invisible and visible aspects, and also that the coming of the kingdom is a conquest – the kingdom of God standing over against the kingdom of Satan. Now, all these things are important to know, but understanding all this, we have not yet come to the heart of the matter. The coming of the kingdom is the coming of God Himself. He is the King of the kingdom, and the consummation of His kingdom will be when He will be all in all.

“...Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever...”

The kingdom is centered in God Himself, even in the glory of His being. To seek the kingdom of God is to seek God Himself. We note that in the third place...

## **The command to seek the kingdom**

Because the kingdom is centered in God Himself and in His glory, it is presented by our Lord Jesus as the highest purpose of our life to seek the kingdom of God. Now, if the coming of the kingdom was anything less than the coming of the fullness of God’s glory, yes, if the coming of the kingdom was anything less than the coming of God Himself, it would have been idolatry to seek it with all our heart and soul as the highest purpose of our life.

But since the kingdom of God is about God Himself, His dominion and His glory, therefore we are commanded to seek it with all our heart and with all our strength.

When the scribe said to Jesus that to love God with all our heart and with all our understanding, and with all our soul, and with all our strength, and to love ones neighbour as oneself, is more than all the all the burnt offerings and sacrifices, then Jesus said to him: "You are not far from the kingdom of God" – Mark 12: 33.

Because: that is the heart of the kingdom! That is the summary of the law and the prophets.

In this kingdom, God stands in the centre, and all things are directed to the hallowing of His name. And therefore, when Christ speaks of the task which the Father has given Him to do, He summarises His entire ministry on earth with the words:

"I have glorified You on the earth..." – John 17: 4.

Now, when the Lord instructs His disciples to seek first of all the kingdom of God and His righteousness (Mt.6: 33), then He does not add righteousness as something that has to be sought in addition to the kingdom. No, with the word "righteousness" He gives a more precise specification of what the kingdom of God consist in. God, and His righteousness, is the norm to which all must conform. God must reign supremely, not only by the submission of all things to Himself, but also by filling all with the reflected glory of His own holiness. That will be the consummation of the kingdom when He will be all in all.

Brothers and sisters, are you partaking in this kingdom and in this conquest? Do you cause the coming of the kingdom by your prayers? Has the coming of the kingdom become the sole purpose of your life? Are you seeking it with all your heart and soul and mind and with all your strength? Are all your actions directed to this end?

Through Christ our only desire has become this: to glorify God. That was the first petition: "Hallowed be Your name". And from this one desire to seek the glory of God in all that we do, yes, from this one desire, flows also the second petition: "Your kingdom come".

"(Our Father in heaven)...So rule us by Your Word and Spirit that more and more we submit to You. Preserve and increase Your church. Destroy the works of the devil, every power that rises itself against You,

and every conspiracy against Your holy Word. Do all this until the fullness of Your kingdom comes, wherein You shall be all in all" (LD 48).

Amen.