

Lord's Prayer

Thy Kingdom Come

The widow in Huck Finn said, "Huck, you need to pray. And if you pray in faith, believing, God will give you your request." Huck did pray but God did not grant him his request. So, Huck Finn gave up on God. He concluded that prayer and Christianity do not work.

C. S. Lewis, reflecting on Huck Finn's experience, concludes that there are several passages of Scripture that are for advanced level prayers only. He cites Mark 11: 23, 24 as one of those advanced passages. It's the text that says, "I tell you the truth, if anyone says to this mountain, go throw yourself into the sea and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says will happen, it will be done for him. Therefore, I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it and it will be yours." CS Lewis goes on to say that the misunderstanding of that text and so many texts like it have led many Christians to the point where they have become frustrated in their prayer life. Like Huck Finn many have concluded if God is not going keep His prayer promise why should I pray at all?

Paul could have felt that way. In Romans 15:30-32, the Apostle Paul gives the only personal prayer list that he ever gives in the New Testament. In that text, he writes, "I urge you, brothers, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by

the love of the Spirit to join me in my struggle by praying to God for me." He has three prayer requests.

1. "THAT I MAY BE RESCUED FROM THE UNBELIEVERS IN JUDEA."

Paul prayed this prayer, asked folks to pray for him, and then he went to Judea, and he was arrested and sent to Rome where he was imprisoned. Then he was released only to be imprisoned in Rome a second time where he ultimately died. So, like Huck Finn this prayer did not work for Paul.

2. "THAT MY SERVICE IN JERUSALEM MAY BE ACCEPTABLE TO THE SAINTS THERE."

We know that the Apostle Paul was collecting money for Christians in Jerusalem who had suffered under the great famine about 50 AD. Paul went to many churches, took offerings, then he brought the offerings back to the Church of Jerusalem to help the poor affected by the famine. His prayer request is that everyone will have the right idea about why he was collecting all this money. But in 2 Corinthians, Paul lets us know that there are many in the Church who were convinced that Paul was not all that righteous in his collection of the money. In fact, there were some Christians who said, that Paul was just in the ministry for the money. Some thought Paul was skimming off the top. So, from 2 Corinthians, we see that Paul's 2nd prayer request wasn't answered exactly the way Paul

I had just pulled a series of practical jokes on my roommate and came back to my room to learn that he had been at his desk praying for 45 minutes. I stood in the doorway as I watched my roommate, Dieter Wolski, continue to pray for another 45 minutes as he was on his knees with his hands folded and his head down. There were tears streaming down his face as he prayed. And after he prayed for an hour and a half in that kind of posture, he hyperventilated. I had to call the school nurse who gave him a brown paper bag. He held it up to his mouth until his breathing returned to normal. After the nurse left, I asked, "Dieter, what were you praying about for an hour and a half with such fervency that tears were streaming on your face, and you hyperventilated?"

He said, "George, when the buckets of water that you put in the closet came down on me and my new suit, I became angry. But quickly God convicted me that my anger was sin. So, I've been praying for the last hour and a half that God would make me more like Jesus Christ."

I don't know if you've ever

been in the presence of a true prayer warrior. I certainly was in the presence of one that day. And it reminded me of Luke 11, where we see for the second time in Scripture that Jesus taught his disciples to pray. In this setting, the disciples of Jesus Christ saw Jesus praying from some distance, much like I was witnessing Dieter at a distance praying. By the way he prayed, they could say, "there is something about the prayer life of the Master we don't match." So, they said, "Jesus, teach us to pray. We want the power and the relationship and the fervency that we see in your prayer life."

Conservative New Testament scholars agree that in Luke 11 Jesus teaches them the Lord's Prayer for the second time. We can look at this and say from the disciples' perspective, "time out, Master, we know the words. You've given us this prayer before." And by implication that Jesus is saying, "you may know the words, but you still don't know the meaning or the significance of prayer."

So, Jesus reinforces his desire for his disciples to pray according to a particular pattern. Furthermore, clearly the Lord knows his followers will struggle in our prayer life. He knows that on occasion we will pray and not get what God is doing.

The Apostle Paul, according to Galatians 4:14, had a

Paul says, 4 "Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! 5 Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. 6 Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. 7 And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Philippians 4:4-7

Was Paul just going to tough it out here? Is he merely assuming a stoic stance and in effect saying, "I didn't get what I asked of God, but I'm not going to complain about it. I'm just going to stick it out."

Let me suggest to you that is not what Paul is doing in the book of Philippians. We'll get to that. But CS Lewis claims that the reason many times we feel like God has let us down is because we don't understand how to pray. CS Lewis, as I have previously noted, insists most Christians have one petition of the Lord's Prayer down pat. Give me this day my daily bread! That of course, is not even the petition. The fourth petition actually is, "give us this day our daily bread." Lewis concludes before we pray for our friend Paul's daily bread, we need to pray the three preceding petitions. We start by praying, "Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Then we pray, "Thy Kingdom come." Finally, we pray, "thy will be done."

Only after we have prayed those first three petitions, do we pray, "dear God, grant my friend Paul some rest and relaxation in Rome. Deliver him from the unbelievers in Judea and protect him from critics in the church who might misrepresent why he has been collecting money for the poor in Jerusalem."

But you pray the first three prayer requests before you get to that. Thus, if you don't understand the implications of praying "thy Kingdom come," you will be ineffective as a prayer warrior. That's Lewis's contention, and I think CS Lewis is absolutely right. That conclusion begs this question. If praying "thy Kingdom come" is essential to having power as we pray, how exactly is it that the Kingdom

comes? That's my first question. Secondly, what does praying "thy Kingdom come" have to do with power in prayer?

How does the kingdom come?

In the last several years, there has been a resurgence in interest in the Kingdom passages in the New Testament. Those who have led this charge are particularly interested in the passages that decree that the kingdom of God is in some way here and now. That is ½ of the truth. The other truth is that the kingdom is also in the future.

In my preparation for this message, I looked at every single reference to the phrase the "Kingdom of God" and the "Kingdom of heaven" in the New Testament. What follows is my summary of what those passages say about how the Kingdom of God comes into your life and mine. Also, I hope to show how these verses indicate what might be missing when we're frustrated in prayer and feel like God's not answering our prayers the way He should.

IT COMES WHEN WE BECOME A CHRISTIAN (A RULE/REIGN IS NOT A PLACE WITH A CASTLE ETC.)

It is within you

In Luke 17:20 some Pharisees asked Jesus when the Kingdom of God would come. His answer was, "The Kingdom of God does not come in such a way as to be seen. No one will say, 'Look, here it is!' or, 'There it is!'; because the Kingdom of God is within you." Luke 17:21

When we pray thy kingdom come we are saying I long for the kingdom of God to rule and reign in my life.

How does this occur? It starts when I become a Christ follower by inviting the spirit of the living God to come into my life. This, in fact, is the advice Jesus gave to a Pharisee, named Nicodemus.

3 Jesus replied, "Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again."

4 "How can someone be born when they are old?" Nicodemus asked. "Surely they cannot enter a second time into their mother's womb to be born!"

5 Jesus answered, "Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit.

That's how the Kingdom of God begins for each and every one of us in this life. Once the Kingdom of God is within us by this new birth, there ought to be some evidence of that.

IT PRODUCES RIGHTEOUSNESS, PEACE, JOY, AND POWER

Romans 14:17 For God's

Kingdom is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of the righteousness, peace, and joy which the Holy Spirit gives.

1 Corinthians 4:20 For the Kingdom of God is not a matter of words but of power.

Once the Kingdom of God comes into our life by virtue of this new birth, there should be evidence of joy and power and peace in our life. You say, "wait a minute, you just got through saying that the Apostle Paul had these three prayer requests and none of his prayers were answered." Yes, we can make that observation, but I don't think anyone could say there's no evidence of the power of God in Paul's life, or there's no evidence of joy and peace and contentment in the life of Paul.

The confusion we have over Paul's personal prayer life is similar to the struggle many have trying to figure out what the Old Testament book, 2 Kings is about. On the surface we can say 2 Kings must be about some kings. That certainly is part of it, but 2 Kings builds to two climaxes, or maybe better we could say to 2 low points. The first

low point appears in chapter 17 with the destruction of the ten Northern tribes that have been disobedient. The second low point is at the end of the book in chapter 25 with the destruction of the Southern tribes. So, there's two destructions in Second Kings and two capital cities Samaria and Jerusalem that are destroyed.

But the content of this book centers around a very different theme than destruction. Chapters one through eleven aren't focusing on any kings at all, because in these chapters, we meet a man by the name of Elisha 33 times. In Second Kings, Elisha is identified as the "man of God," the Godly man. As Elisha interacts with kings and with individual leaders, in the first eleven chapters, he forms a contrast to what we see happening in the rest of Israel. Because when Elisha shows up, axe heads that were in the bottom of a lake begin to float. The dead are raised from the dead, and there's evidence of the power of God to resist nations. By contrast there's no power evident in the lives of the kings. They would have called themselves believers, but there's no evidence

of righteousness and peace and justice and power in their life.

What is it that Elisha was getting that they weren't? What is this contrast between Elisha and all these Kings all about? Well, it's about priorities, because as we look at the kings in 2 Kings and say, "Why did that judgment come in Chapter 17? And why does the judgment come in Chapter 25?" We can sum it up with one phrase. It's the economy, stupid. It was all about the money. It was all about material well-being. It was all about celebrating "Black Friday," the festival of the high priest of this world. Their prayer would have been "give me this day my daily bread."

Furthermore, Jesus urges us to avoid praying. Many New Testament scholars observe that the verses that follow the Lord's Prayer are in effect a commentary on the Lord's Prayer. So, as we continue after the Lord's Prayer, verses 19 through 24 are a commentary on the first three petitions "hallowed be thy name," "thy Kingdom come," "thy will be done." Notice what Jesus says in commenting on those thoughts. "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on Earth, where moth and rust destroy, where thieves break in and steal, but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, where thieves are not breaking in and stealing. For where your treasure is, there, your heart will be also. The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are good, your whole body will be full of light. If your eyes are bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness? No one can serve two Masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he'll be devoted to one and despise

the other. You cannot serve both God and money."

So, Jesus Christ, having given the Lord's Prayer, says, now there's a fundamental problem I expect that believers are going to have. The fundamental problem is the struggle between a concern about money and a concern about the true God and master. Their eyes are going to be darkened and they're not going to have a godly perspective. They're going to be frustrated wondering what's going on in their life. They may be frustrated even as they pray because they're saying, "God, I asked for money and I asked for help and I asked for a great job and you didn't give it to me. So God, why bother to pray anymore?"

Furthermore, notice verse 25 and following of chapter six seems to be a commentary on the fourth petition. "Give us this day our daily bread," because in these verses Jesus advises we're not to worry about food. God knows about the food you need. He knows about the clothes you need. As God takes care of the sparrow, and the lilies of the valley, He will take care of you.

Chapter seven seems to be a commentary on the fifth petition. The fifth petition obviously has to do with our trespasses. Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. What do we read in chapter seven? Do not judge or you too will be judged in the same way you judge others.

7:6 is the most confusing part of this commentary. It seems to relate to the last petition: Deliver us from the evil one. Don't lead us into temptation. But even if you fail to see an

obvious connection with the sixth petition it seems pretty obvious that these other verses are clearly connected to the Lord's Prayer. They are a running commentary on the Lord's Prayer. Given that, notice how this whole section ends.

7:7 "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. 8 For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.

Thus, when we pray, there should be power in our prayer life, there should be this righteousness and joy and peace in our prayer life. We should be able to say that if we really understand what prayer is all about, that people can look at me and they can look at you and say, there goes a man of God, there goes a woman of God. Axe heads float. When men and women of God come around, there will be evidence of power to move nations.

We have come full circle then. Why didn't Paul's personal prayer work? What is it that the Philippians were not getting? Why is it so often

we don't get those things for which we pray? We find ourselves frustrated when we're standing on these promises, and it doesn't seem like God keeps his promise to us?

What does our praying have to do with God's kingdom coming?

That thought leads to my second conclusion about how the Kingdom of God comes in the New Testament. It doesn't just come when we become Christians or when we are born from above. There ought to be some evidence that we're not serving two Masters. My life verse is Mathew 6:33, "But seek first His kingdom and righteousness and all these things will be given to you as well."

Many of us know that verse but what does that verse have to do with my prayer life?

Joan and I bought our first house in Iowa City. We lived there for seven years, until God called us out to Littleton, Colorado. In the Iowa City area at that time, most

people would sell their homes through the University of Iowa system. You could bypass going through a realtor that way. Because it was such a transient community, you could list your house for sale on the university paper and save yourself a lot of money and sell your house fairly readily. I'm a researcher. I love to do research. So, I did research on the homes that had sold in our neighborhood, what they'd listed for, what they had sold for. We visited about 30 or 40 homes that were for sale just to get a feel of the condition of the homes that were for sale in our neighborhood and what they were asking. From this research, I felt we knew the fair market value of our house. Finally, Joan and I determined a number that would be the minimum price we would accept for our house. We also established our "hallelujah" goal. We wrote our ad. The day before the ad came out, I was with my running partner, Thom McCumber who asked, "how much are you going to sell the house for?" I told him our asking price. He said, I think maybe Terry and I might be interested in buying your home. I said, really?

After he talked to Terry, he called me that day and he said, "I have talked to Terry. I've also talked to my dad, who's going to give us some money for a down payment. And here is the amount that we feel we can comfortably give. I'd like to give you more, George, but this is all I think I can give."

The number he gave me was our Hallelujah goal. Joan and I were ecstatic praising Jesus until the next day when the ad came out. The ad was out for 1 hour when somebody called and asked to see the house. They saw the house and on the spot they offered us full price, which was now \$1,000 more than Tom had offered. Later that day, someone else came to the house. They went through the house and on the spot they offered us \$1,000 more than full price or \$2,000 more than Thom's offer. Now we had a problem. I reminded Joan that we hadn't signed any contract with Thom and Terry. We just kind of talked and he gave me this number. Now we've got these two offers, one full price and another \$1,000 more than full price. What do you think we should do? That was supposed to be a rhetorical question.

Joan said, "you know what we should do. We need to sell the house to the McCumber's for the exact amount that Thom offered. "This is God's house. God has blessed us. We have prayed about having a ministry opportunity in our neighborhood, and we've had neighborhood Bible studies in our home for several years. As a result, some of our friends have come to faith in Christ and some of our neighbors have deeper relationship with Jesus. Tom and Terry clearly will carry on the ministry!"

Joan asked her rhetorical question, "isn't this what we have been praying for?" I said, "but \$2,000, sweetheart, what about the money?" She was resolute in her conviction that it was not about the money at all. It was about the Kingdom. It's taken me two Masters degrees and work on two doctorates to get to the point where my theology is anywhere near Joan's.

The next several days I wrestled with the principles we see in Matthew 6. Eventually I sensed the Spirit of God saying to me, "George, whose Kingdom matters to you now? You can stand up on Sunday morning and say, God provides all our needs. You can recite your life verse about seeking first the kingdom of God. But whose kingdom really matters to you? Ultimately, conviction of God's word and a Godly wife, we did sell that house to Tom McCumber and his wife, Terry, for the amount that he had originally offered. They did carry on the ministry to our neighbors, encouraging them in their Christian walk and influencing them toward Jesus.

I can say as an afterthought, we've owned a few homes after that. God has blessed us with the sale of every single home we've ever had. He didn't have to do that because God doesn't tell me that He's going to make us wealthy or healthy or give us great favor, but He has blessed us. So, God's Kingdom comes when we make God's priorities, our priorities.

We have seen there's a sense in which the Kingdom is here and now. We should experience the power of God when we pray now. We have power to impact neighbors, and fellow workers for Christ. In addition to that, however, there are a lot of verses in the

New Testament that emphasize that the Kingdom of God is about to come.

For example, Luke 21:31. "Even so, when you see these things happening, you know that the kingdom of God is near." Or 1 Corinthians 15:24. "Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power."

So the Kingdom of God is yet to come. We can accept that. But how does that impact the way we pray when we're rotting in a Roman jail? My grandfather, George Burton Kenworthy, gave me an appreciation of the significance of praying "thy Kingdom come." When I first started out in ministry I was in my twenties and the only pastor at the Iowa City Church at that time. My grandfather used to come and listen to me preach. He would sit down on my right in the front row. My grandfather was a Free Methodist, which is to say, when he got excited about something I was sharing from the pulpit, he would bellow out "Amen!" Of course, that freaked out the people in the church. I kind of liked it. There were times

when my grandfather was present that our congregational songs would focus on heaven or the second coming of Jesus Christ. One time, I'd noticed my grandfather in the front row weeping. He couldn't sing. He was having his own God moment.

After the service, I sked my grandfather, "why were you weeping?" Then, he told me a story that he had shared only with a select number of folks. When my grandfather was in his thirties he contracted pneumonia. He got such a severe case of pneumonia that the doctors told my grandmother and family members that my grandfather wasn't going to make it. "He's going to die." My grandfather told me while he was lying in a hospital room dying, his spirit left his body and traveled to the corner of the room. There he met Jesus. As he met Jesus, he begged Jesus to allow him to return to his body and live for the sake of his wife and his family. Jesus touched him, my grandfather said, and his spirit returned to his body. Subsequently, the doctors announced that George was miraculously healed. I'm a skeptic by nature, and I've read Raymond A. Moody's

book, *Life After Life* and Maurice Rollin's book, *Beyond Death's Doors* and I still am a skeptic about stories of folks who have had experiences like what my grandfather shared with me. But this was my grandfather's story! I can add the Apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians 5 tells us that when we die, our spirit is going to leave our body and we're going to go be with Jesus. That was my grandfather's experience in his 30s. But when he was his 80s, he heard songs about the second coming of Jesus or about heaven, and he wept because he couldn't wait to go to heaven.

Similarly, Paul when he was closer to 80 than he was to 30, tells his Philippian friends "for me to live is Christ and to die is gain." Like my grandfather he couldn't wait to go the heaven. How can Paul say that? How can he say to die is gain?

The Philippian Church clearly thought that God had let Paul down, particularly as he prayed. It's obvious that is not Paul's perspective at all. In Philippians chapter one, he lets us know there are some people who are preaching out of envy and spite,

hoping to make Paul's life miserable. You can say, "there's more evidence that God had let Paul down." But if you look at Paul's response to that, Paul says, "what do I care, as long as the Kingdom of God is preached." Do you see what he's doing? He is putting the kingdom before his personal comfort. Furthermore, the Apostle Paul also in chapter one, lets us know that what has happened to him, in his words, "happened for the advancement of the Gospel of the Kingdom of God."

As he was in this Roman jail, he was on house arrest, and he was chained by the wrist to a different member of the Praetorian Guard. That's the Royal guard in Rome, some 6000 soldiers. The guard was changed every 4 hours. And as Paul writes the letter back to the Philippians, he's able to say that by the time he writes this letter, he has been able to talk to every single member of the Praetorian Guard about the Kingdom of God. And he's seen God do the work in their heart and life. If you're understanding with me, Paul's perspective in the Book of Philippians, Paul can say, "Yeah, I did at one point pray, give us this day our daily bread. My prayer list is in Romans 15. But I've been praying before I get to that fourth petition, hallowed be thy name, thy Kingdom come, thy will be done. And because that's the priority of my life, in this Roman jail, I can say, cool plan, God. I thought I needed to come to Rome for some rest and relaxation, but the priority of my life is the advancement of the Kingdom. I would have never dreamed that by being in jail I could have the opportunity to influence one of the most prestigious groups in Rome. Thank you, Jesus."

That's Paul's perspective. Thank you, Jesus.

It's not a matter of being stoic. It's not a matter of just toughing it out for Paul. He can say God's Kingdom was coming in his life. He was seeing it coming in power. And so, he had peace and joy and satisfaction that sometimes eludes the Huck Finn prayers in the Church. I look at this and I then have to say to you and me, "Has God let us down? He's never promised that life would be easy. He doesn't guarantee that any of us are going to enjoy rest and relaxation."

If you're a Kingdom thinking person, we can't be assured that we can move to a town and make lots of money and enjoy great health. Read what James says in James 4:13, but we do know it's God's will for us to experience his Kingdom. We don't know it's God's will for the Kingdom of God to impact us powerfully and for us to be Kingdom people and to impact neighbors and friends and relatives for Christ. If we are praying, "hallowed be thy name, thy Kingdom come, thy will be done," we should be able to expect that, like Elisha, we can be recognized as men and women of God who experience power in our lives when we pray.

At a time when his friends thought that Paul had to be miserable, Paul wrote to them about the joy that he had no matter what the circumstances, because he had come to the point where he was able to say, for me to live is Christ and to die is gain. Which leads me to ask myself, "Whose Kingdom are you living for today?"

So then, if we are praying "thy Kingdom come" how will that change the way we pray?

1. We will make sure that our eternal destiny

is sure by knowing the kingdom of God has entered our life by virtue of our inviting Jesus Christ into our life. If that has happened, your neighbors and friends should see there is something different about you. Like Elisha's friends, they should see evidence of the power of God in your life. Is that true? Have you confessed that you are a sinner in need of a Savior? Do you believe that Jesus' death on the cross is your only means of salvation? Have you prayed a prayer of faith and invited the resurrected Jesus

to enter into your life as your Lord and Savior? Do that and you have taken the first step toward praying "thy kingdom come."

2. Once we have entered our own relationship with Jesus, we should long for everyone we know to come to know him too. That is why Paul was ultimately ok with the fact that none of his personal prayer requests were answered. God had a better plan to use Paul in an astounding way to bring others to faith. Do you pray that way? Do you ask

God to use you each day to influence at least one person toward Jesus? Do you pray for opportunities to advance the kingdom? If you don't, you are likely like Huck Finn to be frustrated that prayer does not work. But if you do, be assured that God wants you to advance His kingdom so He may not always give you rest and relaxation, but he always desires to use you to lead someone to Him. Pray that way and you will not have to wait long to see the power of God in your life!