



Your Kingdom Come

St. Matthew 6:10

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Two thousand, five hundred, and forty-seven years ago the last Babylonian king, Belshazzar, threw a party. The prophet Daniel tells us that to celebrate his greatness and the greatness of his empire, Belshazzar invited a thousand of his lords to come and drink wine with him. You can imagine how great this king thought he was; consider that it was his father, Nebuchadnezzar, who had built the 90-foot-tall golden statue of himself and commanded everyone to bow down and worship it. And so to show everyone his greatness, Belshazzar not only threw a feast, but ordered that the vessels of gold and silver that his father had taken from the temple in Jerusalem – vessels set apart for God's own use – be brought so that he could drink from them. It was his way of saying he was bigger than God. His father, Nebuchadnezzar, had claimed divinity, the God of the Israelites had humbled him, driving him into the wilderness to live like an animal until he acknowledged that God was sovereign. I'm sure Belshazzar resented that. His treasury would have had sacred items from all sorts of different conquered places, but he specifically chose to bring the things belonging to the God his father had acknowledged as sovereign – it was his way to deliberately thumb his nose at God.

And in the middle of that drunken feast, God's hand suddenly appeared and he wrote on the wall with his finger: "mene, mene, tekel, parsin." The king new this was something bigger than himself. He was scared. He called for all his wise men, his priests, and his magicians to tell him what those words meant. Each of those words described a unit of money. In modern terms, it would be like the hand wrote: "Tooney, Tooney, Looney, and Quarter." Nobody knew what it meant until they called in Daniel. God gave him the wisdom to read the words differently, changing the vowels he told the king the words read: "Number, numbered, weighed, and divide. God has numbered

the days of your kingdom and brought it to an end; he's weighed you in his balances and found you wanting; your kingdom is divided between the Medes and the Persians." And history tells us that that very night while Belshazzar was having his drunken feast, Darius the Mede diverted the Euphrates River, sneaked into Babylon with his army, going under the walls through the dry river channel, and killed Belshazzar and defeated his army. Thus God orchestrated the end of the greatest empire the world had known up to that time. He showed the world very vividly who the real sovereign is in this world.

But that's what we see throughout history. Think of Egypt. Three to four thousand years ago it had a mighty empire. Now it has nothing. Forty years ago it lost a war with tiny Israel. Babylon was once even greater, and yet a couple of years ago her president was found cowering in a hole in the ground, hiding from invaders who had toppled his government and army. Syria, Greece, and Rome aren't drastically different. Many of you, in your lifetimes saw the decline of the British Empire, that a hundred years ago controlled nearly a quarter of the world. In my short lifetime I've seen the fall of the Soviet empire and today we're witnessing the decline of the United States as both a military, economic, and moral superpower. No matter the empire, God has a law that we see played out over and over again throughout history: "Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people" (Proverbs 14:34).

Every kingdom ruled by men has followed the same pattern. God allows a man or a group of men to rise up above others in power, but that triumph sooner or later brings pride, and God removes them, often in a very brutal and bloody end. Men rise and fall, but you see, God reigns over all of human history. God is sovereign, even over those people and places that are in rebellion against him. His kingdom has always and will always prevail. That's why when we talk about the "kingdom of God" it should bring us comfort if we're followers of Christ, because we know that no matter what turmoil happens in our lives and in the world around us, God is sovereign. That's how Jesus had the confidence to tell us to be anxious for nothing. There will *always* be "wars and rumours of wars," but Christ's followers – God's kingdom people – have no reason to fear.

And that's why the second petition in Jesus' prayer is "Your kingdom come." We pray "Your kingdom come" in the knowledge that God is sovereign and always has been. We pray "Your kingdom come" in the knowledge that at the end of the age, Christ will come as victor and judge and consummate his rule. Every knee will bow and every tongue will confess on that day that he is Lord. And we pray "Your kingdom come" in the knowledge that God's kingdom already rules in the hearts of those who have been redeemed by the blood of his Son, Jesus Christ, and in whom his Spirit dwells. When we pray "Your kingdom come," we give voice to our desire that all men and women will come to know what we already know and that they will submit to the rule of Christ in their lives and that they will acknowledge God as sovereign over his Creation.

When God created the world and placed Adam and Eve in it, his desire was to bring into existence a people who would be obedient to himself and who would be in tune with his purposes in history. Think of what God told King David through the prophet Nathan:

Moreover, the LORD declares to you that the LORD will make you a house. When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. (2 Samuel 7:11-12)

It's interesting that David's response was one of humility. But that's how you respond when your desire is for God's kingdom and not your own. You know, Belshazzar didn't build his kingdom – his father did it all. But that didn't stop him from throwing a party to celebrate how great he was. That's what the natural man does. He celebrates himself and he celebrates his own rule. Just like Belshazzar, he's blind to the reality of God's sovereignty over Creation. But David, a man who knew where he truly stood before God, one of the great kings of the ancient world, understood that he was only where he was because God had put him there. And so when God promised him a great kingdom, David responded humbly, acknowledging that if it's going to happen, only God will be able to bring it about. God created this world

and he rules over it – he always has and he always will.

But when Jesus came to earth and started his ministry here, the kingdom of God came in another sense and was much closer. In Christ the kingdom came to be among human beings. That's how Jesus could say, "The kingdom of God is among you." And at Pentecost he sent his Spirit who now lives and works in the lives of those who follow Christ. At Pentecost the kingdom of God came even closer. That's how St. Paul could travel the world "preaching the kingdom of God" and talking about it as the new life we live of "righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit" (Romans 14:17). God's kingdom comes today whenever and wherever his righteousness, his peace, and his joy transform a life and bring the fullness of spiritual blessing. As his Church, as the Body of Christ, we his people make up his kingdom. We are his people and he is our Lord.

But Jesus warns us: don't expect it to get any easier. Some Christians have thought that eventually the entire world will be converted to the Gospel and that God's kingdom will take over that way. But Jesus pretty much tells us the exact opposite. He made it clear that much of the world would never be converted and that the children of the devil would be here until the end – even in the Church! He taught that his kingdom will only come in its totality at the end of time, and that even then it will only be established by his power – men will always be fighting against Jesus and the good news of the Gospel. In Matthew 13 Jesus gives a string of seven parables – parables of the kingdom – beginning with the sower who went out to scatter seed and ending with the parable of the dragnet. Those parables give us a preview of the Church's history.

In the first one, the parable of the sower, Jesus tells us about a man who went out to sow his seed. Some of it fell on hard ground where the birds ate it; some fell into shallow soil and started to grow, but the heat of the summer sun made it wilt and die; some fell in the thorns, which choked and killed it; and some fell on the good soil where it grew, thrived, and reproduced itself. Jesus explained to his disciples that in the story, the seed was the Word of his kingdom and that the Word would have different effects in the lives of

those who would hear it preached. Sometimes the Word falls on deaf ears or on hard hearts so that it isn't really heard at all; sometimes the devil and his demons snatch it away. Some people hear the Word and receive it, but they don't truly understand. It's a novelty and eventually they lose interest, especially in the face of persecution and especially when they're called on to make sacrifices for the Gospel. This is what I fear the modern Church has become. We've put so much focus on being like the world in order to attract the world, that we have churches full of people with a "what's in it for me" attitude. Their only interest is in what God can do for them. And the minute the Word calls them to give instead of take, the minute it points out their sin, or the minute it calls for self-sacrifice, they're gone. If you come to God with a "What's in it for me?" attitude, you can never truly pray, "Your kingdom come," because you're still living life as your own king. And a church made up of this kind of people is never going to get anywhere because they haven't made Christ their Lord – they haven't submitted to his rule and to his sovereignty. Sadly, this kind of seed seems to dominate today's church in our part of the world – people who call themselves Christians, but have never truly made Christ their Lord, never truly committed themselves to him and to his rule. Jesus warns: not all the seed that's scattered will end up bearing fruit. In fact, in all those types of ground and soil, its only in one that the seed does what it's supposed to do.

Jesus really drives his point home in the second parable – the parable of the wheat and the tares. We read this just a couple of weeks ago in our Gospel. A man goes out and sows good seed, but in the night his enemy comes along and scatters weed seed throughout the field. Both the wheat and the weeds grew up together in the field. Some of the plants were wheat and the others looked a lot like wheat, but were worthless as food. As Jesus tells the story, the man's workers asked if he wanted them to pull the weeds, but the man told them not to – in pulling the weeds, they'd end up pulling a lot of the wheat too. Instead, the man told them to let the weeds grow with the wheat, then at harvest everything would be cut and sorted. The grain would go to the granary and the weeds would be burned.

Jesus explained to them that the man's field represents the visible church, the wheat represents those who belong to him, and the weeds represent the children of the devil. In other words, according to Jesus, there will always be people in the Church who imitate God's children – who look like us, and talk like us, and even do a pretty good job of acting like us. His point is that this is what we need to expect until the end of the age. This is why the Church has an obligation to preach the Gospel, even when we think that everyone here has already accepted it. It's also why the Church has the duty to hold her members accountable for their actions. If you're not acting like a follower of Christ, it might well be because you aren't *really* one of his people and you need a wakeup call from the Church to get your attention.

If we were to run all the way through Chapter 13, we'd see Jesus' point made over and over again: that as long as the Church exists, it will always be imperfect because of the influence of the world, the flesh, and the devil. The final parable gives the solemn warning: The kingdom of God is like a dragnet thrown into the water by fishermen. It drags and scraped along the bottom catching anything and everything. When they pull it up and haul it ashore they open it to find a lot of good fish, but they also find a lot of bad fish. Remember that the Jewish dietary regulations stipulated that some kinds of fish, not to mention bottom feeders like shellfish weren't to be eaten. So the fishermen would sort the good and the clean fish and throw back the unclean, the shrimp, the prawns, the lobsters, the crabs, and the catfish. Jesus paints a vivid picture to explain what that means in spiritual terms: At the end of the age God's harvest will be brought before him and he's going to pick out the good fish, he's going to pick out the wheat – he's going to pick out those who have been made righteous through the death of the Lord Jesus Christ and he will gather them home. The rest will be thrown in the fiery furnace where "there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." You see, we might tend to think of those whom God rejects as being more like old boots or tires caught in the dragnet; they don't even look like fish. Or we think of them as rocks in the wheat field; no one's going to mistake them for wheat. But Jesus talks about those being cast out, and says that in many respects they look just like the good fish

or look just like the wheat. Again, there are a lot of people who call themselves Christians, but they've never truly made Christ their Lord. They still live for themselves. They may say the right things, but by their actions, by their lack of fruit, they prove their true state. They're willing to give up an hour or two on Sunday, but they live the rest of the week for themselves. They may say that Christ is their redeemer, but their lives aren't truly characterised by the fruit of the Spirit, by love, joy, and peace. They may recite the Creed every Sunday, but during the week they cheat their boss, they act like a jerk, or they fail to meet their obligations to their wives and children. They come and sing praises on Sunday to a God they spend no time with the rest of the week and whose Holy Word they know nothing of because the only time they crack it open is for a few minutes in church.

And yet, God is gracious and loving. He "desireth not the death of a sinner, but rather that he may turn from his wickedness and live." He ushered in his kingdom with the coming of his Son, Jesus Christ, and when he gave his people the gift of the Holy Spirit. But he hasn't consummated it yet. Even the Canaanites, an evil and wicked people if ever there was one, God gave four hundred years to repent before he came in judgement and wiped them out. He gave them a chance: to turn to him or to prove just how much they deserved his wrath and punishment. And God has done the same thing again. He's giving sinful men and women a chance to repent and turn to him. But his patience is not eternal in that sense. We have his promise that one day this two kingdom situation will come to an end. When his kingdom came, it marked the beginning of the end for the kingdom of the world, and when he returns God's kingdom will be fully and totally realised.

Jesus himself taught this. He told his disciples that there was not only to be a spiritual kingdom through this church age; he also told them that there would one day be a literal, physical, future kingdom too. In another parable he compared himself to a nobleman who went away to a far country to receive a kingdom and would then come back. In the meantime, though, that nobleman left gifts in the care of his servants, charging them to be faithful and to be ready to give a good accounting

when he returned. At another time, *after* his resurrection, the disciples asked him, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom of Israel?" (Acts 1:6). You see, they were still thinking he was the earthy Messiah who would drive out the Romans and restore the glory days of David and Solomon to Israel. Jesus answered them and said, "It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:7-8)

When we pray, "Your kingdom come," we acknowledge that God's kingdom is here, but we also acknowledge that he's still giving sinners a chance to change their loyalties. But we know time is short. When we pray, "Your kingdom come," we remind ourselves that the work of the kingdom is to be witnesses of our Saviour and Lord. That we're called to carry the message of God's rule through Christ to our community, to our nation, and to our world.

In conclusion, let me say again, God is using this present age to call out a people for himself. He's taking people of every kind and every state and every condition from every part of the world and he's turning them into men and women in whom Jesus Christ *is present and in whom his character can be seen*. But we also know that his kingdom will come fully in power in the personal rule of the Lord Jesus Christ at the end of history. The time is short. Each of us needs to ask: "Is Jesus Christ truly my Lord? Am I truly committed to him as my sovereign? Am I living as a citizen of his kingdom, loving and following his commands, and making his priorities my priorities? Or am I still living in my own kingdom? And we need to remember that as citizen of the kingdom of God, we represent it, we bear witness of the true king, in a world full of men and women who have rejected him and are blind to his sovereignty. We need to ask what we're doing to win their souls for God and for his kingdom. Jesus commands us to go out and share the Good News, but he tells us even more emphatically, that the faith we profess with our lips has to be backed up by the way we live – by our making Jesus our Lord, not just our Saviour, by making his

priorities our priorities, by knowing and keeping his Word, and by bearing the fruit of the Spirit.

Please pray with me: Our Father in Heaven, we know that we are called to hallow and honour your holy name. We pray now that we would do that by humbly submitting ourselves to your sovereignty, that we would acknowledge your only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ as our Lord and Master, not just as one who redeems. Work in us by the power of your Spirit, to give us a desire for you, to give us a desire to make your priorities our priorities, and give us the grace to be living witness of your kingdom. We ask this through our Lord, Jesus Christ. Amen.