

Resurrection Life: Praying God's Kingdom

Matthew 6:5-13; Luke 11:1-4; Ephesians 2:19

Psalm 46:1, 7, 23:1-2; Mark 1:14-15; Daniel 2:44, 7:14; Luke 9:1-2

1. The Kingdom to be?

- Matthew 24:26-27; Acts 1:7-8

- not really.

2. The Kingdom in this world?

- Matthew 4:15-16; Psalm 122:6

- sort of.

3. The Kingdom in us.

*- Luke 17:20-21; Matthew 25:31-46; John 6:38; Luke 19:10; Acts 1:7-8;
Matthew 28:19-20*

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I recently picked up a copy of a book I've been looking forward to reading for some time - it's called Out of Many, One: Portraits of America's Immigrants, by George W. Bush. After he left office, he's pursued many policy initiatives for the public good, but he also took up painting portraits. The book is a compilation of portraits of some of his favorite immigrants and their stories, which are really remarkable – both for what they endured to come to America and for the contributions they've made since arriving here. I've just started reading, and already the stories are very inspirational. It gives a renewed sense of hope in our nation. In the introduction, President Bush quotes President Ronald Reagan's final speech at the White House, which had a portion devoted to immigrants: "This, I believe, is one of the most important sources of America's greatness...We lead the world because, unique among nations, we draw our people – our strength – from every country and every corner of the world. And by doing so, we continuously renew and enrich our nation," Reagan referred to our country as a "shining city upon a hill" – a beacon of hope in a world of shadow.¹

It's no wonder then, that many people in the US place their certificate of naturalization among their most valued possessions – the moment when they became US citizens. Before becoming citizens, they live in the US, but they are not full citizens. They don't fully benefit like citizens do. But then everything changes when they become citizens. This is even *more* true when we become citizens of the Kingdom of God – when we begin living resurrection lives.

The Apostle Paul tells us in Ephesians 2:19 that:

"Now you are no longer strangers and foreigners. You are citizens along with all of God's holy people. You are members of God's family."
(Ephesians 2:19, nlt)

Praise God! When you come to Christ, you are no longer a stranger or foreigner. You have resurrection life! You have the full blessing and protection of the kingdom of Christ. You are no longer undocumented. You no longer need to fret over where you belong or how to survive.

At baptism, you renounced your old citizenship and swore allegiance to Jesus, and you were given a naturalization certificate. You are now part of the new humanity: you are no longer strangers and foreigners. Once a citizen of a different kingdom, your ruler was your vices, addictions, and fears. Your ruler was the prince of this world. That is what you left behind when you were baptized and chose to submit

¹ Ibid, pg 9-10

yourself to Jesus as your new King.² That's why baptism is so important – it represents your association with Jesus Christ's death and resurrection. You now live a resurrection life.

We are in the fourth of our series on Resurrection Life, and we are exploring what resurrection life is, what it looks like, and how we can have it and live in it. Today, I want us to realize that living the resurrection life means that we will pray for, live in, and pursue the Kingdom of God.

This is the very thing that Jesus taught us that we ought to always pray for, in that great teaching example of prayer that we call "the Lord's Prayer." That's really a misnomer; it ought to be called "The disciple's prayer" because Jesus gave it to *us* to teach *us* how to pray and what to pray for. So, in order to get the context of the verse that we want to focus in on today, I'd like to read that passage that is found in both Matthew's and Luke's gospels. I've combined the two so we get the full picture. Let's honor the word of God by standing together as I read it to us. Thank you. This is what the Scripture tells us:

One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he finished, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples." He said to them, "This, then, is how you should pray:

'Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. (for yours is the Kingdom, the power, and the glory forever). Amen.'"²(Matthew 6:5-13, Luke 11:1-4, niv)

Thank you for standing. May God bless his word to our hearts. You may be seated. How many times have we recited those words: "Your Kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven," and yet do we really know what we are praying for? That prayer has everything to do with living a resurrection life.

In order to best understand how important this part of the prayer is, I need to give you some background information about what it means.

First, Jesus doubly emphasizes this part about Kingdom come, and he does it in a way that would have been obvious to those listening but not so much to us. Jesus is emphasizing here the priority of Kingdom come by using something called "parallelism." This was a common Jewish way of saying something twice to show its importance. If you read the Psalms you'll see that it's all over those. Let me give you some examples. In Psalm 46:1 it says:

- (a) God is our refuge and strength;
- (b) an ever-present help in trouble. (Psalm 46:1)

Do you see how the second part parallels the first but explains it more completely? Later in verse 7 of that same Psalm you'll see:

² Rev. Eduardo Davila, Sermon: "The Church as a New Humanity," SoundCloud.com (2-10-20)

- (a) the Lord almighty is with us;
- (b) the God of Jacob is our fortress. (Psalm 46:7, niv)

Here's a more familiar example from Psalm 23:1-2:

- (a) The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing.
- (b) He makes me lie down in green pastures, He leads me beside quiet waters. (Psalm 23:1-2, niv)

You can see that happening in this part of the prayer:

- (a) Your Kingdom come,
- (b) Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

“Kingdom come” is paralleled to explain that it means God’s will is done here on earth – just like it is in heaven. Why am I pointing this out to you? Because it tells us what we are to live in and pray for, and what we are *not* to pray for. It tells us the priority we’re praying for when we ask for the Kingdom of God to exist on earth like it does in heaven.

Jesus spoke of the Kingdom of God no less than 127 times; the only word he used more than that was . . . “Abba” (Father). So the Kingdom come is very important to Jesus, and he wants to make sure we pray for this and live in it.

Jesus announced the beginning of his ministry with the word “kingdom.” First he was inaugurated at his baptism by the Holy Spirit descending on him. Then he was led into a time of severe testing by the Devil in the wilderness. Then the Bible says Jesus began his ministry this way:

Jesus came into Galilee announcing God’s good news, saying:

“Now is the time! Here comes God’s kingdom! Change your hearts and lives, and trust this good news!” (Mark 1:14-15, ceb)

The term is used in the Old Testament indirectly whenever it declares and describes that God rules all the nations of the earth, and whenever God describes how he wants his people, the Jews, to live and treat each other and others. The prophets described the Kingdom of God in all their references to God’s plan that he would rule over and provide for the Jews and for all people. The actual term is used by the young prophet Daniel as a description of God’s kingdom – a kingdom that would be greater than all other earthly kingdoms and will outlast them all (Daniel 2:44). Daniel would go on to describe Jesus as the king of that kingdom (Daniel 7:14).

In the New Testament, you’ll see Matthew use the phrase Kingdom of Heaven, while the other Gospels use the term “Kingdom of God.” Here’s why: the Gospel originated from God’s people, the Jews, right? But the Gospel is not only for the Jews, is it? No, it is for everyone! Well, Matthew’s gospel was written so that the Jews would have the Gospel and to encourage the Jewish Christians. But the Jews felt it was not appropriate to refer to God by name because his name was too holy, so Matthew substituted the word “heaven” for “God.” The other gospels were written so that the Gentiles – everyone who is not a Jew – could hear the Gospel and to encourage Gentile Christians. The Gentiles needed to know that this wasn’t a

kingdom of some Roman god, but the Kingdom of THE God, Yahweh. So the phrases “Kingdom of God” and “Kingdom of Heaven” mean the same thing.

As Jesus’ ministry began, the term “Kingdom of God” is used to describe the embodiment of his teaching; everything that Jesus taught was to describe what living in the Kingdom of God is like for us – what resurrection life looks like for us in the way we think, the choices we make, and the way we act and treat others. The Kingdom of God is the central feature of Jesus’ proclamation. In fact, it was the whole point of the disciples’ message, too. Luke describes how Jesus sent the twelve disciples out (later to be apostles, right?) – when he sent them out to preach, they were specifically told to proclaim the arrival and the reality of the Kingdom of God:

“When Jesus had called the Twelve together, he gave them power and authority to drive out all demons and to cure diseases, and he sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal the sick.” (Luke 9:1-2, niv)

So when we pray the way Jesus told us to; when we ask for God’s Kingdom to come, what is it we’re asking for? The first thought that comes to mind is, is it...

1. The Kingdom to be?

I think many of us who have been believers in Jesus for a while assume that this phrase means we are praying for the second coming of Christ and for heaven to arrive. *That* idea of the Kingdom of God has been a hugely popular subject throughout this most recent era of Christianity. Everyone wants to know when we will be facing the “end times,” and every generation thinks that they are in it.

About twenty years ago there was a very popular book series called *Left Behind*. It even resulted in some really terribly made Christian movies. How many of you read any of those books or saw any of the movies? How many of you read them all? Me too. Listen: those books are a fictional account of a factual event. What is the factual event? We know *for sure* that Jesus will come back one day. That’s it. Other than that, the rest is pretty sketchy, biblically speaking. Even though the topic is talked about a lot in pop culture Christianity, there’s really very little in Scripture to back up people’s events and timelines. So don’t put too much stock in those books and stories.

For those of us who are older, do you remember the hype in 1999 about Y2K – about the turning of the millennia to the year 2000? We were warned to stockpile food and water and supplies because we might face worldwide computer shutdowns and world chaos. So much for those predictions.

I remember in 1988 a former NASA scientist, Edgar Whisenant, published a book called, “88 reasons why the rapture will happen in 1988.” The rapture is the theory that Christians will be snatched out of this evil world. It was supposed to happen either September 11, 12, or 13 in 1988. When those days came and went he published a *more* accurate book saying that the rapture would occur before May 14, 1989. Either he was wrong or he was right and you and I are still here . . .

Of course, in the 1970s Hal Lindsey wrote his book, *The Late Great Planet Earth*, saying that the world would end in thermonuclear war within *one* generation of 1948—the year that modern Israel became a nation. Here we are now 33 years *past* that deadline – *two* generations later.

And believe it or not, just this week I received in the mail this pamphlet, put out by a cult church in Ohio, declaring “The End is Here!” and in it, it declares that the end of the world will be in April of 2033. I guess they weren’t smart enough to pick the exact day, so they predicted it would happen sometime in the entire month.

Is this what Jesus taught us to pray for? Well, if Jesus wanted us to focus on this, then why did He warn us about it by saying:

“So if someone tells you the Messiah has returned and is out in the desert, don’t bother to go and look. Or, that he is hiding at a certain place, don’t believe it! For as the lightning flashes across the sky from east to west, so shall my coming be, when I, the Messiah, return.” (Matthew 24:26-27, tlb)

And when the disciples asked Jesus after his resurrection from the dead if he would now set up his Kingdom on earth, Jesus said:

“You don’t get to know the time. Timing is the Father’s business. What you’ll get is the Holy Spirit. And when the Holy Spirit comes on you, you will be able to be my witnesses...” (Act 1:7-8, tmt)

If Jesus’ attitude about the end times was essentially “YOU are not allowed to know the times and dates so don’t get all worked up about it,” why would we think that he tells us to focus our prayers on it? Is *this* what we are supposed to pray about when we pray “your kingdom come”? Let me give you the answer in highly theological words:

- ***not really.***

Not so much! Listen, Jesus *is* returning. And God the Father has already established that event and the times and dates. Jesus’ return *is* going to happen—your prayers won’t speed it up and your sin won’t slow it down (or vice-versa). We might long for it or we might dread it, but the second coming *will* happen. We don’t know when, but *resurrection living means we are ready for it at any moment.*

So if Kingdom come is *not* the kingdom to be, maybe instead we are supposed to pray for:

2. The Kingdom *in this world?*

You know, if there ever was a time in this world that we needed Kingdom of God priorities, it is today! With the political and societal hatred in our nation right now, with the mob mentality and cancel culture and demagoguery of Twitter and Facebook, with the seismic shift in cultural values and morals and the proliferation of addictions like drugs and pornography that feed human trafficking, with the global pandemic that has seen the death of over 3 million worldwide (probably more, but nations like China and others are accused of lying about their numbers),

with the rise of power in China and return of power in Russia, with the nuclear capabilities of rogue dictatorships like North Korea and Iran, with the ongoing threat of radical Islamic fundamentalism and terrorism...well, *now* would be a great time get the nations to start prioritizing God's purposes.

I think that the reason we see so much conflict is evidence of the spiritual conflict being waged in the heavenlies over people. The forces of darkness are trying to resist the good news of God's transforming love from making inroads into people groups of the world. The Kingdom of God, which is light, is invading the darkness and we need to pray for God's priorities to prevail. That has always been the case. The world needs our prayers, no doubt about it. So is this what Jesus meant? Is this our priority in prayer? Is this what it means for us to live the resurrection life – for Christians and their morals and values to rule everyone else? To the Jews listening to Jesus, this idea made sense. Many Jews believed that there was no other interpretation of the "Kingdom of God" than that the entire world would be under *Jewish* authority. They always prayed for this. But if you read the gospels you know that Jesus did *not* teach this, in fact, Jesus was opposed to this idea.

From the very beginning, at the arrival of Jesus, this is what the Word of God declared:

"Land of Zebulun! Land of Naphtali! Galilee, where non-Jewish people live! Land along the Mediterranean Sea! Territory east of the Jordan River! The people who are now living in darkness will see a great light. They are now living in a very dark land. But a light will shine on them."
(Matthew 4:15-16, nirv)

Those nations listed are *not* Jewish nations. Jesus came to reach *everyone*, NOT to create a superior race.

Certainly we should pray against oppression and for peace in the world. But are we praying for everyone to be forced to comply exactly with a Christian political structure? Don't get me wrong—I *do* think we should pray for the nations of this world—for the spread of the Gospel and freedom for the oppressed and for all of our missionaries in every nation. We should also pray especially for the peace of Jerusalem (according to Psalm 122:6).

But in the original language of this passage the word used for "Kingdom" is "basileia." The word *does* at times mean a kingdom in a territorial sense, like the Kingdom of Persia or the United Kingdom of England. But it is much more than that. It means something *beyond* borders. So, the answer for this one is

- ***sort of***.

Sorry—there I go again using scholarly jargon, but try to keep up. So if Jesus was not really instructing us to pray for his millennial kingdom, and only sort of referring to his kingdom influence over all the nations of the world, then what for sure did he instruct us to pray for? What is the *real* priority? It is...

3. The Kingdom *in us*.

The Greek word that I just mentioned didn't mean so much territorial kingdoms, as much as about "kingship," or "lordship." *This* is what Jesus meant. That's why the Bible says:

Once, having been asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, Jesus replied:

"The kingdom of God does not come with your careful observation, nor will people say, 'Here it is,' or 'There it is,' because the kingdom of God *is within you.*"³ (Luke 17:20-21, niv)

Let's look back at that prayer: "Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." What *does* that mean? It means that to be in the Kingdom of God is to obey the will of God. So the Kingdom of God is not something that is primarily about end times or nations or countries. It has to do with *us*—you and me as God's people living resurrection lives. *The kingdom of God is about people.* It is about people, whom God loves more than anything, loving each other, caring for each other, looking out for each other. It is about people from every tribe and nation and tongue and color knowing Jesus. It is God's people loving and serving those who don't know Jesus and those who are less fortunate than they are. It is about God's people loving and serving and reaching those who are living below the spiritual poverty level in their lives. It is about caring for those Jesus called "the least of these." (Matthew 25:31-46) *We* are told to declare the Kingdom of God everywhere we go. So what is it that happens in heaven that we want to happen on earth? Resurrection life of the Kingdom of God is this: it's when everyone belongs to God and knows him and has received his love.

So what is God's will for everyone? It is that everyone would know him and know his love. When and how does that happen? That happens on earth when God's people demonstrate it and tell it to each other and to the unsaved around them. *This* is resurrection life.

How can we live that kind of life? It means the submission of my will, my heart, my life to God's kingdom priorities. It's only when *each one of us* makes this decision and commitment and submission—*that* is when the kingdom of God comes. Then the priorities of the Kingdom of God become *my* priorities, and they are lived out in *my* life. The Kingdom of God has come into my world when I start living the Kingdom of God priorities. And what are the kingdom priorities? Jesus said he came to do the will of the Father:

"For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me." (John 6:38, niv)

And what was that will of the Father who sent Jesus? Over and over again, the Bible says that Jesus came to preach the good news, and to seek and to save those who are lost.

³ Italics added

Do you know what Jesus' "purpose statement" is? You should because He told it to us:

"For the Son of Man came to seek and to save those who are lost."
(Luke 19:10, nlt)

So the kingdom priority is to share the good news of God's love through Jesus Christ, in word and in deed, to others who are lost. Folks listen! If you were sleeping up until now, now is the time to wake up and hear this one thing! Living resurrection life means you pray this prayer and you live this prayer as individuals and as a church: to meet the needs of others and to see as many people as possible become followers of Jesus Christ. *THAT* is our priority, and that is what we are praying for. We're not praying for nations, although we can and should. We're not praying for Christ to return and set up his Kingdom—that is going to happen exactly on God's timetable and no amount of prayer can speed it up and no amount of sin can slow it down. We pray to be ready for it today.

Do you remember what Jesus said when his disciples asked him if he was finally going to set up his kingdom? Jesus' response to the question of his second coming was this:

"You don't need to know the time of those events that only the Father controls. But the Holy Spirit will come upon you and give you power. Then you will tell everyone about me. . ." (Acts 1:7-8, niv)

What was the priority? Telling others about God's love in Christ!

You see, this prayer is not about getting God available to us—he already is, thanks to the work of Jesus Christ on the cross. This prayer is about *getting us available to God* so that he can love others through us and introduce people to Jesus through us. So if you pray this prayer, be careful! Because you are making yourself totally available to God to work through you to share the good news with others! *That* is resurrection life!

Tragically, the church of Jesus in America isn't doing this. Let me share some news with you. According to leading researcher George Barna:

98% of the growth in the churches in America is *transfer* growth. That means that when a church shows that it is growing in attendance, 98% of those people have left one church and starting attending another. So 98% of reported growth in a particular church is a zero percent growth in the church as a whole. That means that 2% of the growth is conversion—only 2% of church growth is by new people meeting and accepting Jesus, and not switching from another church in town. Let me ask you, what business could survive on only 2% growth?

And here's *why* those statistics are true: according to research, 95% of *all* Christians will *never* lead another person to Christ in their entire lifetime. That means that 95% of all Christians are barren, 95% of all Christians are sterile, because *we are supposed to reproduce Christians*. Jesus commanded and commissioned us:

“Go, then, to all peoples everywhere and make them my disciples: baptize them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and teach them to obey everything I have commanded you. And I will be with you always, to the end of the age.” (Matthew 28:19-20, gnb)

Until when, by the way? Until Jesus’ second coming.

This is serious business, folks. A church that doesn’t meet needs and reach lost people isn’t praying this prayer of priority, it isn’t obeying God’s Kingdom come, isn’t living resurrection life.

But I’ve got good news for you—it’s not as difficult as you might think. Let me explain: currently, we have around 250 who attend in person worship. That’s down from over 400 before everything shut down. But our online worship – which we didn’t have before – our online church averages around 345. That’s a total close to 600. Now, on average, research says that each person in church has a relationship with about 20 unchurched people. That’s at work, at school, in your neighborhood, whatever. That is what you might call your “circle of care.” You have twenty people that you need to pray this prayer for—that YOU would be the answer to this prayer for them. That means that this church, right now, has a huge circle of influence! If we assumed that some of you know some of the same people, then conservatively, we as a church have a circle of care of about 9,000. All of those people are ready to have someone like you love them and introduce Jesus to them. Now, again according to research, about 10% of those in our circles of influence are ready *RIGHT NOW* to accept Christ. Did you know that? Of every 20 people in your life that don’t know Jesus, two of them are ready *right now* to meet Jesus if you would just introduce them. That means that if we really lived the resurrection life and prayed this prayer and intended for God to answer it through us, West Valley Church would reach 900 people *right now* for Kingdom come.

So we must pray kingdom priorities in our lives and then go live it out and share it. None of us can just sit in here and never go out of here to introduce Jesus to others. It means doing whatever we can to reach out to, serve, and welcome the folks who live in the apartments right next door! We must reach these younger generations.

When you pray this prayer, you are asking God to do everything possible *through you* to meet the needs of others and to reach people who don’t know Jesus. It means sometimes you will have to do things that are uncomfortable. It means sometimes things have to change. But *that* is the coming of God’s Kingdom on earth.

Prayer

Stand with me: Now, in resurrection life, go pray for and live in the Kingdom of God, and always, always, always introduce people to Jesus Christ.