

LORD, TEACH US TO PRAY
“The Kingdom for Which We Long”
Matthew 13:31-33, 44-52

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We've a story to tell to the nations,
That shall set their hearts to the right.
A story of truth and mercy,
A story of peace and light.
For the darkness shall turn to dawning,
And dawning to noonday bright.
And Christ's great kingdom shall come on earth,
A kingdom of love and light.

Do you believe that?

We come to the second petition in the Lord's Prayer this morning and it may take the greatest faith and the greatest imagination of all that we are taught to pray. So we pray “Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.” Have we any idea what we are praying when we ask for the kingdom of God to come and the will of God to be done? Come with me as we try to unpack this petition of the Lord's prayer.

THY KINGDOM COME

A kingdom is a territory, a nation, a state, a domain. So I belong to the kingdom of earth, in the United States of America, among the Volunteers of Tennessee, in the County of Williamson, at Sandy Olds' domain.

A kingdom is also a sovereignty, an authority, a reign, a rule. I used to keep a little plaque on my home desk which said: “If you are looking for someone with a little authority, I have as little as anyone.”

The kingdom of God is the reign of God over human hearts and society as a whole. There are some things about the kingdom of God that you and I ought to know.

The kingdom of God is Present. The Kingdom of God is here and now. John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness. His sermon, much shorter than the one I will give to you today, said simply this, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.”

When Jesus heard that John was in prison, Jesus took up the preaching mission of John the Baptist. His sermon was exactly the same. “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.”

When Jesus assembled his disciples he sent them out to preach the Good News. The sermon was exactly the same. "Repent for the kingdom of heaven is near." This kingdom, said Jesus, may be as small as a mustard seed, or as quiet as yeast in bread, but powerful things come in small packages and don't necessarily make a lot of noise. We do not create the kingdom of God, we only claim it. We do not build the kingdom of God, we only bow to the King of kings and the Lord of lords.

One day a seminary professor approached Jesus and asked "Of all the commandments, which is the most important?" Immediately the professor gives his own answer. "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength and your neighbor as your self." Jesus said, "Good, very good. You are not far from the kingdom of God."

In the name of Jesus of Nazareth, I need to say to somebody here today, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." You are close to a purposeful life, nearly a better person, almost a person of faith. O, that you may look within and become altogether a committed Christian today. At the citadel of your soul may you crown him King of all. We do not enter the kingdom of God in crowds. We come as individuals. The kingdom of God is here in this room as well as other places around the world.

The kingdom of God is Priceless. It is the most valuable discovery you can make in your life.

Abraham Lincoln was rummaging around in an old barrel outside his store when he came across a couple of old books. They were Blackstone's Commentaries. Lincoln read them and became a lawyer. Then he became President of the United States and led this country through one of its most troubled times. "It all started," said Lincoln, "when I found those old books."

Jesus said the kingdom of God is like a man plowing a field. He doesn't own the field. He's just tending the ground. But the old plow uncovers a buried treasure that changes the man forever. It was more important than any other find he had ever made in his life. So he sold everything in order to possess that one piece of land. The kingdom of God is that important.

The kingdom of God, said Jesus, is like a merchant shopping for fine pearls. As he shuffles through the market with a sack full of his own pearls, he discovers a pearl worth more than everything he owns. So sacrificing his entire inventory, he purchases the one pearl of great value. Jesus said, "The kingdom of God is like that."

The kingdom of God is costly, but it's worth it. Jesus never hesitates to ask for our all. I guess that's our problem with religion in the long run, isn't it? If we could give him the leftovers, if we could give him a little bit of devotion here and there, if we could give him a little bit of attention, a little part of our lives, a little

section of our days, it would be okay to have a tinge of religion. But there is something about the Christ who dares to come to us in the midst of our own lives and say, 'I want it all. I want all of you.'

Let me tell you today, it's worth the price. The kingdom of God cannot come until our kingdom goes. Somewhere down in the depths of our hearts this morning, every person sitting in this room will make a decision. Will I go out to build my own kingdom or will I go out to embrace the kingdom of God? What do you need to give up, let go of, turn loose, surrender, in order to experience the fullness of God in your soul?

The kingdom of God is Partial. I know, I just said a few moments ago that it is here and now. But I need to also tell you that it is *out there* and *not yet*. And those who have eyes to see can embrace what is yet to be and yet to come. That is our understanding of the kingdom.

It was a large impressive waiting room furnished with the finest of chairs and stocked with the latest magazines. On this particular day the place was full of people waiting to see one of three doctors. In one corner of that room, an elderly lady sat crying. At first she wept privately, but as the hopes and fears of all her years flooded her soul, she began weeping openly. Most people pretended not to notice, politely hiding behind newspapers and magazines. There was, however, a little kid playing with his toys in a chair beside his mother. When the toddler saw the lady crying, he slid down from his chair, laid down his toys, walked over to the lady and, touching her on the knee, said, "It's all right, it's all right, everything is going to be all right." The lady smiled. The hope of people of faith is that it's going to be all right even when it seems to be all wrong.

The kingdom of God is both now and not yet. Someday Kleenexes will be discontinued and funeral homes will go out of business. Caskets will be converted into toy chests. Someday the darkness will turn to dawning and night will be no more. Someday God will reign as King of kings and Lord of lords. Happy are those who by faith know that it is going to be all right even when it is all wrong.

The kingdom of God, said Jesus, is like a dragnet of fish from the lake. Some are fit to eat and others need to be thrown away. But for now they remain mixed—the good and the bad, the beautiful and the ugly, the tasty and the terrible, the helpful and the horrible. Lord, give us faith to know it's going to be all right even when it feels all wrong.

THY WILL BE DONE ON EARTH AS IT IS IN HEAVEN

The two petitions are really one. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. The kingdom of God comes when the will of God is done on earth as it is in heaven. The things, Good Lord, that we pray for, give us the courage to work for. Do you want to know the secret of fruitful life?

Find where God is—that is where you need to be.

Find what God is doing in this world—that is what you need to be doing.

The will of God can be known. It's not as much mystery as we would like for it to be. It's not as secret and hidden as we often think that it is. The will of God can be known, it can be found.

Mark Twain said, "It's not the parts of the Bible that I don't understand which bother me, it's the parts I do understand."

It is the will of God for there to be peace on earth. Long before the time of Jesus, Isaiah prophesied of a day when nations would turn their military weapons into farming tools and people would train for war no more.

It is the will of God that children be cared for. We make that promise Sunday after Sunday in this place. *Let the children come to me and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the Kingdom of God.* As long as there is one child in the world who suffers, you and I, who believe in God's kingdom, have work to do.

It is the will of God that no one perish, no, not one.

It is the will of God that we love one another.

It is the will of God that we forgive one another as God in Christ has forgiven us.

It is the will of God that we serve one another as Christ served us.

It is the will of God that we are good stewards of all creation.

It is the will of God that the lost be found.

It is the will of God that the least be helped.

What part of God's will don't you understand? Don't we have work to do? If we care enough to pray the prayer, then don't we have a responsibility to embrace the will of God? It can be found.

The Will of God can be Followed. There is a plaque at the place where I go to pray and play. It was given to me a very long time ago by my mother. "The will of God will never lead you where the grace of God will not keep you." You can build your life on that principle. I believe it with all my heart.

As I went back this week to that tiny country church where I was raised to first love Jesus, I thought how God had guided my life much better than I ever could. I thought about kneeling at that little altar, saying, "I'll go where you want me to go dear Lord, over mountain, or plain or sea. I'll say what you want me to say

dear Lord, I'll be what you want me to be." I had no idea then where life would lead me, or God would guide me.

Through the years I have found one thing true—God will not always place you where you want to be, but he will always send you where you need to be. Blessed are those who are willing to follow him all the way.

Have you ever thought about what God could do if today you were to say, "Here I am Lord, fully, totally, completely, unreservedly, and immediately available to do whatever you ask." The will of God can be followed. Are you willing to go with him all the way?

The will of God creates family where there is liberty and justice for all. Jesus said, "*Whoever does God's will is my brother, and sister, and mother*" (Mark 35:25). He transformed the kingdom of God into the 'kin-dom' of God.

In Christ there is no east nor west
In him no south nor north,
But one great fellowship of love
Throughout the whole wide earth.

It's not by might, not by power, not by domination, not by control, but by the Spirit of God that all humanity will find community.

I want to leave you with a question today. What on earth are you doing for Heaven's sake?

