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# Praying for the Kingdom

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Scripture Passage Matthew 6:9

Vancouver Chinese Baptist Church Vancouver, Canada



If you asked many people, some Christians, some not, what was the central message of Jesus, what did he come to teach us, I think the most common answer would be he came to tell us to love one another.

Someone might even quote John 13:34.

**34 "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.**

That sound so right and is pretty hard to challenge. What could be wrong with that? How can you disagree with that? Love was certainly a major aspect of the teaching and ministry of Jesus.

But if we read the message of Jesus carefully, I hope to convince you that this is not his primary message. The primary message of Jesus was about the kingdom of God.

Let me give you a few verses to convince you that this was in fact the principle message of Jesus.

**Matthew 5: I tell you that unless your righteousness exceeds that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law – you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven.**

**Matthew 6:33**

**Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness...**

Many of the parables of Jesus are parables of the kingdom. We will look at some of them some weeks ahead.

Jesus talked about the necessity of being born again to see the kingdom of God. We will call this Kingdom qualifications.

Then as we move out beyond the earthly ministry of Jesus.

**Acts 1:3 – Jesus appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke to them about the kingdom of God.**

**Acts 19:8 – Paul in Ephesus – it says – he argued persuasively about the kingdom of God.**

**Colossians 1:13 – He has rescued us from the domain of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of his son whom he loves.**

Our conclusion must be that the kingdom of God was the most important thing Jesus came to declare.

If we do not think in terms of the kingdom of God, we are out of step with the teaching of Jesus.

**LET'S START BY DEFINING THE KINGDOM.**

What is the kingdom of God?

Prior to about 1890 in North America, there was a greater kingdom consciousness or kingdom thinking that there is now.

The kingdom is the fusion of three main ideas: a trilogy of thought.

1. **Social action.** Faith at work. Christians had an active kingdom mindset which bore fruit in many social ministries and cultural reform.
2. **Evangelistic zeal.** Calling people to Christ.
3. **Prophetic hope.** Looking ahead TO His return.

Then this cohesive understanding of the kingdom began to disintegrate, a polarization set in and a vital biblical balance was lost.

Those who were concerned about social action secularized the meaning of the kingdom, separated it from its evangelistic emphasis and defined the Gospel primary in terms of social action—issues of justice.

In reaction, evangelicals spiritualized the message of the kingdom, seeing it only in terms of personal salvation.

Others looked ahead to seeing the kingdom that was to come in prophetic hope. The kingdom became only a future reality.

But the result was that the meaning of the kingdom was fragmented. Justice became separated from the gospel and vice versa.

I sense that we are starting to see some recovery of this trinity of the kingdom: social action, the gospel, and prophetic hope coming together again.

### **BUT, WHAT EXACTLY IS THE KINGDOM?**

The kingdom is not primarily a place, rather it is the rule of God over his people. The kingdom is a reality wherever God is invited to come and rule.

It is both present and also future. It is here now and it is still to come. IT operates on two time levels. Here and now and also to come. Like a woman who is pregnant, she is having a baby and she will have a baby.

It is both earthly and heavenly.

It is hidden and it is visible.

It is physical and it is spiritual.

It is both individual and also communal.

The task of the church is to live out the truth of the kingdom, to declare the message of the kingdom, to call people into the kingdom, to train people for kingdom living, to live like a kingdom community.

We are called to be sons and daughters of the kingdom because we are sons and daughters of the king. The question is more than, do you believe in Jesus. The more important question is are you in the kingdom and is the kingdom in you?

Personal salvation is at the centre of the kingdom, but the kingdom also calls people to think about the poor, about the environment, about injustice because all of this and more are part of the dominion of the King!

The church is to be the kingdom community, intended by God to be a living organic microcosm of what the kingdom reality is all about until the kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdoms of our Lord and Christ and he shall reign forever and ever.

We begin this series by looking at the prayer Jesus taught us to pray – Our Father...

One day the followers of Jesus asked him one of the most important questions they could ever have asked him. They said, Lord teach us to pray.

Jesus replies by first telling them how not to pray

**5. "And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full.**

God is not impressed with any kind of hypocrisy, what looks good only on the outside.

6 But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

7 And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words.

God is not impressed by long prayers!

Then he gives them and us a template for prayer, a pattern to follow which we know as the Lord's Prayer. It begins:

Our Father in heaven

Hallowed – or holy – be your name.

Then he goes on, **YOUR KINGDOM COME**, and as Hebrew often does, he repeats the same idea using other words. The second phrase expands and explains the first phrase, what praying for the kingdom to come means is, **MAY YOUR WILL BE DONE ON EARTH AS IT IS DONE ON HEAVEN.**

You know those packages that come with warning labels, telling us that something is toxic, or poisonous, or may explode, whitewashing story.

The warning is, do we really know what we are praying for. Are we really ready and willing for the kingdom to come?

Just before his crucifixion, Jesus stood before Pilate and said, my kingdom is not of this world. He was saying to Pilate, you are operating by the only rules you know, the rules of political power, by the power of the sword, by the power of your title, by the power of Rome behind you. I am operating by a different kingdom, one that Pilate could not see, he could not understand, but which was more powerful than the only one Pilate knew.

What Jesus was confronting Pilate with was the reality that nothing distinguishes the kingdom of this world and the kingdom of God more than their diametrically opposite views of power, where it comes from and how it works.

One kind of power seeks to control people, the other to serve people, one seeks prestige and position because of its celebrity status, the other fills the basin and quietly goes to find a towel.

Even after the resurrection, the disciples still saw the kingdom in political terms, political power.

**Acts 1:6**

6 So when they met together, they asked him, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?"

They were still looking for a political solution to Roman occupation. But the heart of the kingdom is not primarily political. It is spiritual.

In the process of announcing the coming of the kingdom and living out its reality before our eyes, Jesus turned conventional views about power upside down.

So at the heart of this cry for the kingdom, may your kingdom come, must be our willingness to face power and to ask which kind of power we are operating from.

Richard Foster says, the sin in the garden was the sin of power. Lucifer said in *Paradise Lost*, it is better to reign in hell than to serve in heaven. I think we have people in our society today who believe that. They would rather reign in the hell they are constructing than serve God.

So we may pray with deep sincerity, may your kingdom come, but the question we have to ask is, are we willing to align our lives right now with the way things are done in heaven. That is how the cry for the kingdom is explained, may your will be done on earth as it is done in heaven.

Are we ready for the fact that the King, in answering our prayer for the kingdom might turn things upside-down?

Let me unpack several changes in mindset that are vital prerequisites for us to prepare for this kingdom prayer.

We prepare for the kingdom to come in us as we move from an attitude of democracy to a mindset of theocracy.

We need some definitions.

**Democracy** – government and rule by the people, where the people vote and choose their leaders. If you don't like what they do, you vote them out.

**Monarchy** – the rule of the king.

**Theocracy** – Where God is king and where God rules.

The confusion we face is that we live and operate in a democracy. We vote the government in. We can also vote them out. The government can be brought down. Laws can be changed. Pressure can be exerted by sheer force of numbers to change decisions.

One example, some years in Vancouver. Some 1500 supporters of a man who was being deported from Canada protested his deportation, blocked the expulsion from Canada at Vancouver airport and to prevent further chaos, the emigration officials backed off. An editorial in one of our newspapers asks, Did democracy win or lose?

But when we pray, may your will be done on earth as it is done on heaven, we need to realize that heaven is not a democracy. It is a theocracy. It operates fully and solely under the rule of God. God is King!

The angels did not convene a conference and vote on creation. When it should happen, who should do it, which color the sky should be, should there be a committee to discuss whether grass be green or purple, where should we put the mountains, should Scotland be made more picturesque than anywhere else, things like that.

Heaven is a theocracy. God acts as King, always and in everything. His word is done and his word is final.

The angels did not meet to discuss options and possible strategies to save the world from the mess it was in, that flowed from the heart of God.

The timing of this final appearance of Jesus, the decisive apocalypse in which he returns is not even discussed with the son who is the key player in that final comic drama, God alone holds the key to that date.

Our honest struggle and difficulty is, we breathe the air of our culture so much that we bring our understanding of political democracy into our spiritual lives and so we act like spiritual democrats. We assume we have a right to vote on what we are told by the King.

But when we pray, your kingdom come, there is a paradigm shift in us that needs to take place. We are asking for God's will to be known, for God's rule to be made clear and implicit in our prayer we are saying, whatever it is, whenever it is clear, no matter what it asks, whatever the King wants, I will do.

The power that flows from the kingdom, really from the King, lies in our willingness to acknowledge the word of the king and then our obedience to go and do it.

Our idea of democracy can also create a struggle in the corporate sense for us in a church like VCBC. Let me ask you to listen carefully, do not mishear me or misquote me on this.

We are a congregational church, that means we are not governed by a single person (such as a pope, or sometimes in an evangelical church. It may take the persona of a strong charismatic personality or a strong autocratic leader). Nor are we ruled by a bishop, nor by a group of appointed leaders, in some churches often called elders. When you become a member of VCBC, you may vote at business meetings. Members vote on such things like property, finances, key pastoral appointments, church direction. In that sense we say we are democratic.

But we need to handle this idea carefully. Our democracy is not to be a mere copy the secular political process but with a different agenda, where we vote people in and out depending on how we like them. It is not a democracy in which we have a personality contest for the best pastor, rather it is a spiritual democracy in which each member as a believer in the Body of Christ can come and together in prayer seek the will of God for us. Our democracy is our way to seek and find theocracy, which is the will of God among us. The church is actually a Christocracy – where Christ rules.

When we pray, may your kingdom come, we are defining ourselves as a Christocracy. We are saying, in this place and among us, God is King! Christ rules! We are not here to vote on that. We are not here to debate that. We just declare that the way things are done in heaven. This is how they will be done here on earth among us.

The power of the kingdom is the result of that kind of prayer.

Let me out this idea another way, another prerequisite.

We prepare for the kingdom to come in us as we move from an attitude of self-centredness to a mindset of servanthood.

The many choices we have in our society breed an attitude of consumerism in us.

That is fine when we go shopping for groceries or cars, but consumerism is not fine when it comes to matters of the heart and the spirit.

Our easy drift towards self-centredness brings us to church with the primary question being, what have you got for me. I acknowledge that we do have legitimate needs for our family, children, our own interests, but when we bring our consumerism to church, we end up little more than church shoppers rather than followers of Jesus. The better question is, what do you bring to Jesus and to the common good of the church?

Remember what we are praying, may your kingdom come, may your will be done on earth as it is done in heaven.

When we cry your kingdom come, our lives must be moving towards a mind-set of servanthood. This will prepare us for the kingdom.

God is willing to trust kingdom power to people who will use it wisely and towards the goal of helping people, not serving their own ends and purposes. If VCBC is serious about praying, Father, your kingdom come, the prior question we must be able to ask ourselves and answer before God is this, are we willing to use the power of the kingdom to meet the needs of people, to use it beyond ourselves and our own needs, to use it to serve God on earth as one day we will serve Him in heaven? Then and only then, God may be willing to release his power.

We can put this kingdom prayer a final way.

We prepare for the kingdom to come in us as we move from an attitude of rights to a mindset of responsibility.

Here once again, we breathe too deeply of the air in our culture. The deadly virus of selfishness suffocates us.

There is hardly a day goes past when someone in one context or another does not make an appeal for their rights.

Some of the appeals may well be valid. If a car comes through a red light and hits me and I have witnesses to that fact, I have rights. That is fine.

But again our struggle is, we bring this whole conversation and the language of rights into our understanding of Christianity and the living out of our faith and we end up with an impoverished and anemic sense of what being a Christian is all about.

I wonder if any of us truly understand the depth of what was really taking place in us when we bowed our knee to accept Jesus. When we went under the waters of baptism and in that visible, undeniable act of confession, we said **JESUS IS LORD**, people watched us. Perhaps they sang, but at the moment we gave up our rights, we surrendered ownership of our lives. We laid ourselves down at the foot of the cross.

We anticipate this event one day.

**9 Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name,**

**10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,**

**11 and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.**

One day, we will all bow our knees and we will declare in worship, Jesus Christ is Lord. So praying your kingdom come is making that declaration here and now. It is living in that priority here and now.

Are we ready to pray let your kingdom come? Let it be done here on earth, here among us as it is done right now in heaven.

We come to this table as a kingdom community, praying for the kingdom to come, asking for Christ to rule. We give up selfishness at this table. We give up an attitude of rights.