

## ***“The World’s Greatest Prayer—The Kingdom”***

We started a series on the Lord’s Prayer last week. This is important stuff. Because in this prayer that Jesus taught there is some deep stuff about God, about our connection to God, about life. Last week we looked at the beginning of this prayer and how Jesus is trying to convey the closeness of God, the personal side of the connection he wants to have with us, and at the same time the holy reverence we should have for God. Today we look at the next part, where Jesus teaches us to pray, **“Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”** Another way of putting it is, **“God, make up there come down here.”** That’s the ultimate way of experiencing God’s closeness. We aren’t to be simply hanging on until heaven, we’re to be ushering heaven into our life today!

But what does Jesus mean when he talks about the kingdom of God? If you had to describe the kingdom of God on earth to somebody, could you do? Most of us would struggle to begin to describe the kingdom of God and what it would look like on earth. And there’s a good reason why: We can barely imagine it! Even trying to think, “What would this earth look like if God’s kingdom were to really come to it?” It boggles the mind.

The good news is, the writers of Scripture spent a lot of time thinking about this. They wrote a lot about it both in the Old Testament and the New Testament. They used images to convey what life would be like under God’s administration.

So, let’s take a few minutes and look at some of those key images from Scripture. Let’s ask the question, “What would it look like if God’s kingdom came, if his will were done on earth as it is in heaven? What would that look like today?”

The Bible talks about what it would look like for God’s kingdom to come in ***the sphere of economics and human need***. John writes in Revelation 7:16 **“Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst” (Revelation 7:16, NIV)**. In others, in the day when God’s kingdom is fully realized never again will people go hungry. Never again will they thirst. Think about what that would look like—the elimination of hunger. No more pictures of little children with swollen bellies, no scarcity. No mothers trying to scrounge around for enough food so that her baby could survive another day. No more organizations to feed the children. No more need for World Vision or UNICEF or food banks. That’s what it looks like when up there comes down here.

But it’s not just the end of poverty. Scripture writers wrote about the overflow of abundance that would happen in God’s kingdom. Amos wrote: **“‘The days are coming,’ declares the LORD, ‘when the reaper will be overtaken by the plowman and the planter by the one treading grapes. New wine will drip from the mountains and flow from all the hills.’” (Amos 9:13)** In other words, the one that plants and the one that harvests bump into each other because the earth is so fertile and there’s such abundance. *“New wine will drip from the mountains and flow from all the hills.”* That doesn’t mean that there’s literally going to be Chardonnay in the Rockies. It’s an image of abundance, of God’s abundance.

Maybe today we’d say it like this: “Every day the stock market will end a little higher than the day before. The bull will dwell on Wall Street forever; the bear will visit it no more. The Federal Reserve will never have to raise interest rates again. Little children in the Sudan will have carpeted bedrooms, and private baths, and a free nutritious all-you-can eat buffet just minutes away. The jobless rate will go down to zero and stay there, and everybody will love what they do.” That’s one image of heaven on earth.

Then there’s ***the sphere of world politics***, which in our history is mostly the story of human conflict. There’s the ongoing strife in the Middle East, North Korea joining the nuclear club, warring in Africa, and the list goes on. Isaiah 2:4 says, **“He will judge between the nations and will settle disputes for many peoples. They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore” (Isaiah 2:4)**. No more fighting, no more hatred. They won’t have any use for swords so they’ll turn them into farm equipment. One writer putting this in modern terms said, “Intercontinental ballistic missile silos will be converted into training tanks for inner-city kids to learn scuba diving in.” And there will be peace. There will be no such thing as enemies.

Isaiah 11:6 says, **“The wolf will live with the lamb.... The infant will play near the hole of the cobra, and the young child put his hand into the viper’s nest. They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain” (Isaiah 11:6).** John Ortberg’s translation of that is that the dog will make peace with the rabbit, and the cat will be no more!

Next is the ***sphere of security***. Scripture writers say in the kingdom of God there will be no more fear. John puts it like this in Revelation 21: **“On no day will its gates ever be shut, for there will be no night there” (Revelation 21:25).** Now in biblical times, of course, there wasn’t electricity. Night was a time of vulnerability, a time when crimes were committed, a time of fear. The city gates would be shut to protect the people from marauders and intruders. But the Bible says that in the kingdom of God, those days will be over. No more locked doors; no gated communities; no security systems; no combinations. You will never lose your keys because there won’t be any keys!

Another sphere the kingdom of God will redeem is ***the sphere of family life***. The Old and New Testaments talk about the hearts of the fathers turning to their children and the hearts of the children turning to their fathers. No more separations, no more divorce, no more affairs, no abuse, no neglect, no unloved or unwanted child. Members of a household will stay up late at night thinking of ways to serve each other. Kids will demand that their little brother get the bigger piece of cake. People will turn on Jerry Springer to watch shows with titles like, “My Spouse Secretly Loves Me Twice as Much as I Thought He Did.”

And then the most beautiful words of all about the kingdom, from Revelation 21:3–4, ***the sphere of God’s presence***: **“And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away’” (Revelation 21:3–4, TNIV).**

Think about those words. God will wipe every tear from their eyes. No more death, or grieving, or crying, or pain. Anybody want to live in a world like that? No more Kleenex; no more funeral homes. We will turn caskets into toy chests. Hearsees will be converted to sports utility vehicles with names like “Eternal Voyager” and “Jeep Grand Resurrection.”

And every day you will be home with God, never separated by sin. And, think about this: you will see the living God. No more doubt, no more questions, no more wondering “why?” You will see and look into the very face of God. And your every thought will be a prayer, and your every prayer will be a conversation with God. And God himself will wipe every tear from your eye, and then he’ll remove the tear ducts, and he’ll simply point his finger and sadness and sorrow will be vaporized and there will be nothing but overwhelming joy.

That’s what it would look like if God’s kingdom were to come to earth. And for you and me to understand about it, and want it, is a very important thing. But if you’re like me, a part of you wonders, “Can that really happen? Is it possible that this earth can be redeemed? Will the day ever come when God’s will is done fully? Is this real or is it just wishful thinking?”

Well, you need to know Jesus’ whole message was about the reality of this kingdom. That’s his gospel—his good news. When Mark summarizes the gospel that Jesus proclaimed he puts it like this: **“After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. ‘The time has come,’ he said. ‘The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!’” (Mark 1:14–15, NIV).**

When Jesus says the kingdom of God is near, he’s not saying it’s getting kind of close. He’s saying it’s within our grasp, it’s available now. Jesus brought it with him in his flesh and blood and released it to the world in his Holy Spirit. Then he says to the people of his day, and to you and me, that it’s *now possible* for human beings to live in the presence and power of God. And not only did Jesus come bringing the kingdom of God, but he told his followers to devote their lives to this project.

Sometimes people pray the Star Trek prayer to Scottie: “Beam me up.” A lot of people think, “My job is to get my afterlife destination taken care of, then tread water till we all get transported to heaven and God comes back and torches this place.” But Jesus never told anybody to pray, “Get me out of here so I can go up

there.” He never taught that. His prayer, his teaching was, “Your kingdom come, you will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.” “Make up there come down here.” Make things down here run the way they do up there and it begins with us, our ordinary lives.

We start with our body, our mind, our appetites—Your will be done in here, in me. One of my regular prayers is simply, “Lord, be the Lord over my appetites—my appetites for food, for drink, for sex, for material things, for recognition. Be the Lord over all my appetites.” Then that prayer spreads to the office—Your kingdom come in my workplace; Your kingdom come in our family, in our neighborhood, in our church, in our country, in our political system, in our corporations, in our social service agencies.

Oh, and this is important too: As we pray, Your kingdom come, your will be done in all these areas, we don’t just say the words and wait. God invites us to join him in making things down here the way they are up there. And occasionally we get glimpses of that actually happening now and then. Take a look at this video from ESPN. **[ESPN video, “For the Love of the Game”]** Isn’t that cool?

I believe that the most exciting, life-altering, dangerous prayer a human being can pray might just be, “God, make up there come down here” in every facet of my life. Because that prayer leads you to a place where you ask yourself, “Where do I want to see God’s presence and power break into my world? Where would I specifically, especially, like God to use me to make things down here run the way they do up there?”

Two Sundays ago almost 40 people from Saints Paul’s gathered to help people who could not help themselves. They broke into 6 or 8 teams and went to help people who couldn’t help themselves. Simple but important things like cleaning out gutters, doing yard work, minor repairs in doors, you name it. Making up there come down here.

One of our life groups as adopted a cottage at Turnaround Ranch and they as a group and as individuals are out there regularly to be with the troubled kids that live there. They’ve painted the building, refurnished some of the rooms, brought out birthday, Christmas, Valentine’s Day gifts. From the description of those small group members it is a revolution of love in the lives of those kids, some of whom have seen things, and experienced things that no child or adult should ever see or experience. That small group is making up there, come down here.

You have poured out donations for tornado and flood victims and many of you have helped clear downed trees, and muck out houses, and strip off black mold. You are making up there come down here.

Nancy Hoagland has been cooking meals once a week at Community Clinic so people who might go hungry have a good, nutritious hot meal. She is making up there come down here.

Betty Adams also works down at the Community Clinic as a nurse and doing all kinds of things down there helping people medically that have no other resource for that help. She is making up there come down here.

You see how it works. We pray the prayer, then we take action. We do something. And that may mean facing some difficulties, it will almost certainly mean coming out of your comfort zone. It may even mean that you have to face some suffering and make some sacrifices.

But we pray, “God, may I become the kind of person who does your will from my heart. May your kingdom come to earth in my life. May I be a kingdom bearer. Not just a kingdom pray-er, that too, but also a kingdom bearer in my life.” “God, I want to hear and respond to the gentle whisper of your voice each day. I want to see you revealed in and through the people around me. I want up there to come down here in my life. I want to be close to you.”

So think, where do you experience a passion, a holy discontent, about things down here not running the way they are up there? Is it when you look at people who suffer from poverty or illiteracy or abuse in families? Maybe your heart breaks when you have contact with people who have deep emotional hurts or kids who have no homes or marriages that are falling apart. If you have a holy discontent about something like that all that’s necessary is a single intent: “Lord, where do you want to use me to help things down here run the way they do up there?”

Maybe that has something to do with the homeless in Joplin, what’s going on with City of Refuge and their dislocation, or Watered Gardens not being allowed to buy property to build a recovery center. Maybe God’s calling you to let his voice be heard or to take action directly with the homeless.

It begins by praying, your kingdom come, your will be done, and it gets lived out as we take action, it means getting on the solution side of problems.

And it can happen. Every time you're in conflict with somebody and want to hurt them or gossip about them, or avoid them, but instead you go to them to work out reconciliation and forgiveness—The kingdom is breaking into this world.

Every time you have a chunk of money and decide to give sacrificially to Christ's body, to the poor, hungry, homeless—The kingdom is breaking into this world.

Every time someone has an addiction and wants to partner with God so much that they're willing to stop hiding, acknowledge the truth, and get help from a loving community—The kingdom is breaking into the world.

Every time a workaholic parent decides to stop idolizing their job, rearranges their life to begin to love and care for the little children entrusted to them—The kingdom is breaking into the world.

Every time you love, every time you include someone who's lonely, every time you encourage somebody who's defeated, every time you challenge somebody who's wandering off the path, every time you serve the under-resourced—It's a sign that the kingdom is once more breaking into the world.

And listen carefully: It doesn't matter if your life seems messy to you. It doesn't matter if you don't fully understand how the kingdom works. Jesus came and planted the seed of that kingdom on earth and now he uses you and me to see it grow.

And for today that is the Good News. In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

*I thank Rev. John Ortberg, Senior Pastor of Menlo Park Presbyterian church, for his resources in this message.*