

## MATT 6.10: YOUR KINGDOM COME

### 1. A REVOLUTIONARY PRAYER

Sunday by Sunday we pray “**Your Kingdom come**”. But what do we mean? What did you have in mind earlier this morning when you prayed “**Your Kingdom come**”? What, if anything, did you expect God to do?

Perhaps two modern paraphrases may help:

- “*May everyone acknowledge and obey you. May your purpose be achieved on earth as in heaven*” (Contemporary Prayers for Public Worship 140).
- Or even better: “*Set the world right; do what’s best – as above, so below*” (Peterson, The Message)

These paraphrases perhaps give a better feel to what Jesus taught his disciples to pray. When we pray for God’s Kingdom to come, we pray for a revolution to take place. We pray for men and women to be removed from their tin-pot thrones, and for God to be king instead.

We pray for an end to suffering, an end to war, an end to oppression, an end to injustice. We pray for a new world – for a new way of living, a new way of doing things. God, invade our earth – set the world to right.

The fact is that “**Your Kingdom come**” is a wildly disturbing prayer.

It’s a revolutionary prayer. Unfortunately its disturbing and revolutionary nature has been lost in our present English versions.

The phrase “**Your Kingdom come**” reminds me of a station announcement: “*The next train to arrive at platform 1 will be the 10.37 for Liverpool Street*”. As the train glides in and out of the station, without upsetting the equilibrium of any onlooker, so the expression “**Your Kingdom come**” evokes the thought of some extra-planetary space object gliding to earth and gently docking somewhere or other.

It doesn’t help that in the English language the word ‘kingdom’ suggests space – it suggests an area ruled by a king or by a queen. The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, for instance, is an area ruled by Queen Elizabeth II. Yes, in normal parlance a ‘kingdom’ is a territory ruled by a king or queen. Unless that king or queen has Hitlerian ambitions, that kingdom is of no threat to anyone.

But all this is so different from God’s Kingdom.

For in Jewish thought – and remember the Bible, both Old & New Testaments, springs from a Jewish context – the word ‘kingdom’ suggests the idea of action rather than area. The Kingdom of God is God in action as King – God ruling. So “**May your Kingdom come**” means ‘God take up the reins of power’ – ‘Bring in the revolution’.

Yes, there are territorial associations, for as the Psalmist put it, “**the world and all that is in it belong to the Lord**” (Ps 24.1).

But the emphasis is on God ruling. Lord, we want to see you moving in power – we long for the day when “**every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father**” (Phil 2.10,11 NRSV).

To pray “**Your Kingdom come**” is a revolutionary prayer.

It is to pray, ‘Lord, set the world to right, may everyone acknowledge and obey you’

## 2. A PRAYER FOR THE KINGDOM TO COME

To use theological jargon, “May your Kingdom come” is an ‘eschatological’ request. We look forward to the ‘*eschaton*’, to the end-time when God will bring in his kingdom and rule in power.

Yes, when we pray ‘**your Kingdom come**’,

- we pray for the day when war will be no more. In the words of the vision shared by Isaiah and Micah, we pray for the day when people “**will hammer their swords into ploughs and their spears into pruning knives**” – when “**everyone will live in peace and nobody will be afraid**” (Micah 4.3)
- Or to take up the vision of the Book of Revelation, we pray for the day when God will wipe away all tears from people’s eyes – for that day when there will be “**no more death, no more grief or crying or pain**” (Rev 21.4)
- Or in the words of an ancient Aramaic prayer quoted by Paul in 1 Cor 16.22, we pray: ‘*Marana tha*’; “**Come Lord Jesus come**” (Rev 22.20)

A century or so ago people in this country and elsewhere thought that the Kingdom of God could be brought in simply by human effort.

Linked with Darwin’s theory of evolution, there was a general expectation that human progress was inevitable – that given the right housing, the right education, the right environment, all would eventually be well.

Many Christians believed this – so too did non-Christians. Indeed, we see this concept present in the thinking of Karl Marx – for the fact is that Marx’ dream of a classless society was simply a secular version of the kingdom of God.

But that myth of the inevitability of human progress was shattered by two world wars. Helmut Thielicke, the great German Lutheran theologian, preaching in Stuttgart the day after the city had been laid waste by American bombs, declared: “*We must not think of the Kingdom of God as a gradual Christianization of the world which will increasingly eliminate evil. Such dreams and delusions, which may have been plausible enough in peaceful times, have vanished in the terrors of our man-made misery*”.

Don’t believe the promises of politicians – don’t believe Gordon Brown, don’t believe David Cameron, Nick Clegg and any other political leader you may care to name. However much they may seek to make our country a fairer society, they will fail. However much they may seek to mend our broken society, they will fail. Utopia will always remain around the corner – until God gets involved and brings about his Kingdom.

For this is what the Kingdom is. It is about God ruling. It is not about our pulling ourselves up by our bootstraps – it is not about bringing in an age of gold by our wisdom and ingenuity. It is only God who can transform our world. And so we pray: “**Your Kingdom come**”.

The good news is that the day will come when the Jesus who came in all humility to Bethlehem will return to this world in all his glory. To quote from the Anglican liturgy: “*Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again*”.

And when he comes, he will restore the Kingdom. As Paul tells the Corinthians: **“Then the end will come; Christ will overcome all spiritual rulers, authorities, and powers, and will hand over the Kingdom to God the Father”** (1 Cor 12:24)

To pray “Your Kingdom come” is to pray for the day “when God shall rule completely over all” (1 Cor 15:28). Lord, bring about the revolution. Set our world to right.

### 3. A PRAYER FOR THE PRESENT KINGDOM TO BE EXTENDED

But we can't leave the petition there. For if we do so, then a distinctive Christian note is allowed to go missing. For Christians have not been the only people to look forward to the coming of the Kingdom of God

Jews too have looked forward to the coming of the Kingdom. This was particularly true in Jesus' day: living under the pagan yoke of the Roman Empire, they longed for the day when God's kingdom. Indeed, they prayed for God's Kingdom to come.

Let me quote to you an ancient Jewish prayer, called the Kaddish, which dates from the time of Jesus: *“Exalted and hallowed be his great name in the world which he created according to his will. May he let his kingdom rule in your lifetime and in your days and in the lifetime of the whole house of Israel, speedily and soon. And to this, say: Amen”*

Here is a striking parallel to the Lord's Prayer – but there is a difference.

In the words of one distinguished scholar: *“In the Kaddish the prayer is by a congregation which stands in the darkness of the present age and asks for the consummation. In the Lord's Prayer, though similar words are used, a congregation is praying which knows that the turning point has already come, because God has already begun his saving work”* (Jeremias)

Yes, that's the difference. For Jews the Kingdom of God always belongs to the future – it is a future hope; whereas for Christians it is a future hope based on a present reality. For while we pray ‘**Your Kingdom come**’, at the same time we rejoice that in Jesus God's kingdom has come – God's rule has begun.

Strange as it may seem, Jesus who taught his disciples to pray ‘**Your Kingdom come**’, also declared that the kingdom had already come.

- Listen to how he began his ministry. Mark tells us: **“After John had been put in prison, Jesus went to Galilee and preached the Good News from God. ‘The right time has come’, he said, ‘and the Kingdom of God is near! Turn away from your sins and believe the Good News’”** (Mk 1:14,15). I.e. Jesus was saying, God is already beginning to set the world to right. And in this setting the world to right Jesus was the prime mover. In and through the ministry of Jesus God began to invade the world and claim back the territory that had been in the hands of the Evil One for far too long.
- For Jesus the miracles were signs of God in action, they were signs of the Kingdom. On one occasion, for instance, Jesus restored the power of speech to a mute. Luke tells us that the crowds were amazed, but some of the people accused Jesus of being in league with the devil. But Jesus rebutted them, saying: **“It is by the means of God's power that I drive out demons, and this proves that the Kingdom of God has already come to you”** (Luke 11:20).

- Supremely we see God in action in the death and resurrection of Jesus. In words of Jesus recorded by John: **“Now is the time for this world to be judged; now the ruler of this world will be overthrown. When I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw everyone to myself”** (John 12.31). Or as Paul wrote to the church at Colossae: **“On that cross Christ freed himself from the power of the spiritual rulers and authorities; he made a public spectacle of them by leading them as captives in his victory procession”** (Col 2.15). As one commentator put it *“On the cross of Christ the work Satan had built up over millennia was overthrown in a single afternoon. The battle lasted six hours, but when it was over, Satan’s kingdom lay in ruins”* (Gerald Bray). Since then it has just been a mopping up operation. To use a modern parallel drawn from Iraq, although the Western powers won a quick victory in 2003, they have been forced to spend years trying to bring real peace to the country.

Yes, in Jesus the Kingdom has come. Through his living, dying and rising again God has begun to establish his rule.

But, someone might object, how do I know that all this isn’t just theological double-talk? How can I be sure that we are not indulging in pious day-dreaming?

We know the Kingdom has come, because we Christians have already begun to experience God’s life-changing power in our lives.

Listen to words of Paul found in Rom 14.17: **“God’s Kingdom is... the righteousness, peace and joy which the Holy Spirit gives”**. Yes, through the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives we have begun to experience the forgiveness and new life that God offers us in Christ. The Kingdom is already a present reality. It has come!

Does this therefore mean that the prayer **‘Your Kingdom come’** has already been answered? Is there in fact no point in praying **‘Your Kingdom come’**?

No, far from it: for in a this-worldly sense we are praying for the kingdom to be extended.

- In the first instance, we are praying: “O God, may my family, my friend, my neighbours ‘acknowledge and obey you’” – O God being to work in their lives. Hey, that makes the prayer to take on an evangelistic connotation. “Your kingdom come” – in my mother’s life, in my son’s life, in the life of Fred next door, in the life of Audrey at work.
- But there is even more to the prayer than that. For the Kingdom of God is not just about God changing the lives of individuals, but of God changing the life of society too. All too often when we evangelicals talk of extending the Kingdom we think in terms of evangelism – that of course is involved. Every time a person surrenders their life to Jesus and makes him Lord of their life, there the Kingdom is extended. But look at the ministry of Jesus. Jesus was concerned not just for people’s spiritual well being, but for their total well-being. In the words of one preacher: *“When the kingdom came in Jesus, conquest of sickness, stress, hunger and the destructive forces of nature were involved. This speaks about our priorities in hospital-building programmes, the situation in our psychiatric (literally, ‘mental’) hospitals, world development and the growing concern of ecology”*: i.e. extending God’s Kingdom involves us in fighting the forces of darkness where they may be found. So to pray **“Your Kingdom come”** is to pray that God will transform our society in the here and now!

#### 4. A PRAYER FOR THE KINGDOM TO COME IN OUR LIVES

Yes, the prayer “**Your Kingdom come**” has all kinds of applications. But we cannot leave this petition without applying it to our lives in a personal way

- To pray “**Your Kingdom come**” is to pray for God to establish his kingdom, to set the world to right, to take up the reins of power. But are we ready for that day? Are we ready to meet the King of kings? Have we made Jesus Lord of our lives?
- To pray “**Your Kingdom come**” is to pray for God’s Kingdom to be extended in the here and now. It is to pray for our families and friends to acknowledge and obey the Lord; it is to pray that even now wrongs would be righted and communities be transformed. But do we really mean what we pray? Are we prepared to match our prayers by our actions? To go out and tell our friends and neighbours of Jesus and his love? To roll up our sleeves and get dirty in the service of the Kingdom.
- To pray “**Your Kingdom come**” is to pray for God to rule in our lives. But do we mean what we pray? Are we prepared for God to set our lives to right – are we prepared to allow God to come first in our lives. Hey, it takes real courage to pray that kind of prayer!