

# Thoughts on the Lord's Prayer

## 4. "Thy kingdom come"

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**A**LL THE WORDS in this three-word statement have meaning. Thus in praying for the Kingdom to "come" we indicate that we understand that the Kingdom of God has not yet come. If it had, why then would we pray for it? This completely destroys the notion of the Kingdom of God being only in our hearts, or being the church, or any other such ideas which have grown up in Christianity since Christ.

What is essential is that we understand what Jesus meant when he said, "Thy kingdom". Mostly when Jesus taught about the character of the Kingdom of God he did so in parables, many parables. It is not for us here to expound on the parables of the Kingdom, but we may briefly summarise the features of the Kingdom as taught plainly in the Gospels, chiefly by Jesus. Thus:

- Jesus will be the King and the twelve disciples princes (Mt. 19:28)
- It will occur at his coming (16:28; 24:30)
- It will involve a sorting out process or judgement (ch. 25)
- The patriarchs and prophets will be there (Lk. 13:28)
- It was in God's plan since the world began (Mt. 25:34)
- It is intimately connected with the Kingdom of God under David (Mk. 11:10).
- It will last for ever (Lk. 1:33)
- God desires to give us a place in it (12:32)
- It is not a worldly kingdom (Jno. 18:36)
- Jerusalem will be the capital (Mt. 5:35).

If we add to these evident teachings the lessons from the parables, and to those the Old Testament passages to which our Lord referred, we have a comprehensive picture indeed. It is calamitous in the extreme that Christianity has lost its roots and now has little or no understanding of the Kingdom that Christ taught.

The historian Edward Gibbon tells the dreadful story of how the belief in the Kingdom of God, as taught by Jesus, was held strongly by the early Christians, but was slowly watered down, and at length became a prohibited heresy. Do we maintain the same fervent desire for the Kingdom that our pioneers had?

How can we pray, "Thy kingdom come" if we do not know what it means? It is historically evident that the early Christian community had as the focus of its desire the return of Jesus Christ and the establishment of the Kingdom of God. Tragically these things are not longed for, or even believed, by the vast majority of modern Christians. In fact, I am not entirely certain that people who either reject the clear teaching of Jesus or who never believed it ought properly to be called Christian. There is an urgent need for the Christian community to return to the teachings of Christ before he comes to set up his Father's Kingdom.

For those who believe that the Kingdom of God is coming, the matter does not end there. How shall we say the words, "Thy kingdom come", if we do not want it to happen? This phrase is asking God to speed His purpose and bring it to a completion. Is that what we want, or is life now providing adequate enjoyment and fulfilment? These are very searching things which delve down deep to the heart of our desires. We would all give assent to our desire for the Kingdom of God to come, yet is that how we live our life? The patriarchs were as strangers and pilgrims. Is that how we see ourselves?

Since the phrase occurs in the section with requests for God, and is sandwiched by "Hallowed be Thy name" and "Thy will be done", we understand that we are asking for something for God, and not for us. Certainly we will benefit from the Kingdom of God, and it will be the best thing ever for us, but the issue here is about God. Our longing for the Kingdom should rise above self-centred thoughts to centre on the pleasure that the completion of His purpose will give to God.

We might have placed a request for God's Kingdom on our own list of things to ask for, but our Lord does not. Actually the list of personal requests is very Spartan indeed! It goes without saying that the man who has immersed his mind in the things of the Kingdom of God will have little time for the things of "the kingdoms of this world".