

Thy Kingdom Come

Most of the petitions that we pray in the Lord's prayer have an aspect that looks forward to fulfilment in the age to come. When we see God seated on His throne in glory, and see Him as He is we shall also take on Jesus Christ's likeness. Then His name will truly be kept holy among us. Then His kingdom will truly be present among us, as it is now, through the Word of the Kingdom.

What comes to your mind when you hear the term, "the kingdom"? "The kingdom" is found in the Bible no less than 104 times. Jesus uses this expression 91 times. It was one of our Lord's favourite terms. Many of His parables, like those in Matthew 13, were about the Kingdom.

Things don't always go well in the kingdom. In the first parable of Matthew 13 Jesus talks about the sower. He plants the seed, the Word of God. Some of it falls on a hard path, where there is no chance for the seed to grow. The second place is stony, where the seed dies off as soon as hot weather comes. The third kind of ground provides strong competition. Weeds and thistles come up and take over. Temptations, the deceitfulness of riches, and pleasures of this world choke out the Word of the kingdom. The fourth kind of ground yields abundantly, and there is a great harvest.

What a lesson! Some of the seed that the sower scattered grew and matured. The kingdom that Jesus describes has those kinds of obstacles. Many of Jesus' parables assume that there will be a bountiful, miraculous harvest. Thank God, wonderful success will be apparent at the time of the harvest. It is for the seed of the Word, wherever it is sown, that we pray, "Thy kingdom come". May the Lord grant that it produces abundantly!

Another parable tells what really happens with the kingdom. Disaster! Jesus says a man planted his field, and, when he finished, he rested. While he slept, something terrible happened. Somebody came and planted weeds in his wheat fields. When this was found out, the man declared, "An enemy has done this!" This didn't just happen. It was a deliberate action. Someone intended to do harm. The weeds in this field weren't a matter of chance, but were put there by someone who wanted to destroy the yield.

Jesus is a master of teaching. The kingdom is subject to evil intentions and evil actions. We have to expect weed planting in the kingdom, and anticipate it. Those who try their best to deny the inspiration of God's Word, for example, will always be around. They will want to select which parts of the Bible they will accept as God's Word, and which sections they deny, because they think they know better. There are those who demand that the Lord's table should be offered to "all Christians". There are those within the kingdom trying their best to regard the Lord Jesus Christ as nothing but an ordinary man. These are examples of what we know will continue to exist within the kingdom, in the sense of visible Christianity.

Two of Jesus' other parables remind us that the church as we see it is a mixed church, not "church" in the proper sense. There will be hypocrites and false believers. One is the parable about the net that gathered all kinds of fish. Separating them out only comes when the net is pulled in. There is also the one about the ten girls who went to a wedding feast, five of whom did not have adequate supply of oil for their lamps in case the bridegroom delayed His coming.

The kingdom doesn't come in such a way that people can see it. It comes on people sooner than they expect, as it came to the thief on the cross. The Word of the kingdom is the mystery of the kingdom. It grows secretly while people sleep, and there is nothing the person who sows it can do to assist its growth. He simply waits until the harvest.

The disciples can understand the parables of the kingdom because they have the key to them. For them the illustration in the parable fixes the truth of the kingdom more vividly. The rest hear interesting stories, and no more.

The expression "the kingdom" dominates the Gospels. Sometimes Jesus uses synonyms for it. They include: "righteousness", "peace", "joy", "the new birth", "tribulation", "patience", "salvation", "power", "authority", "glory", "grace", "promise", "life", and "knowledge."

Basically, the parables of the kingdom deal with the Son of Man, His life, His sacrifice, and His coming in glory. He will rule on the throne of His ancestor David for ever.

Jesus' proclamation of the kingdom went together with His assault on the kingdom of the devil, the prince of this world. His healing of all kinds of sickness and His casting out of demons also indicated that, since He was present, the kingdom was at hand. When we hear about the kingdom we should no so much think of a territory over which a king rules over, his realm, but his "sway", the exercise of his kingship. It is a power that came from heaven, and entered the world. We, who believe, have the privilege of entering it through rebirth, and the hope of inheriting it in its future aspects.

The kingdom belongs to the poor in spirit. Tax collectors and disreputable people enter it ahead of those who try to establish their own righteousness. It has nothing to do with merit. It is given, received, entered, and inherited. It comes by God's will and promise. He allocates positions in His kingdom.

For Jesus the kingdom came in a most unlikely-looking way. He entered Jerusalem as king in an unpromising, humble way for a king. He was mocked as a king, and died with the title "Jesus of Nazareth, the king of the Jews" over His head. He turned everything great on its head as far as earthly kingdoms go. Through His public execution on the cross He became Lord of lords and King of kings.

The kingdom means tribulation for His followers, too.

Jesus said that before the end comes, the good news of the kingdom will be preached all over the world as a testimony to all nations. Strong desire to extend our Lord's rule through the Gospel should also prompt us to pray, "Thy kingdom come."

When Paul faced his impending death, he wrote: "The Lord will rescue me from all harm and will take me safely to His heavenly kingdom." We include those sentiments every time we pray, "Thy kingdom come."