

## Introduction

For two thousand years, Christians have prayed the Lord's Prayer together. This is the prayer that Jesus himself taught his disciples to pray, not because they are magic words that get God to give us what we want, but rather because this prayer shows us the necessary components(组成部分) of true prayer – adoration ( 敬拜 ), confession, thanksgiving, and supplication ( 祈求 ). The Lord's Prayer helps reorient our wishes and desires; helping us to pray when we don't know what (or even how) to pray.

The prayer opens with a call to address God as our Father, in order that we might remember that we are God's children, adopted by grace into the Father's family. As God's children, we should have a posture ( 态度 ) of childlike reverence ( 尊崇 ) toward him, showing respect as well as familiarity. In the first petition ( 请求 ), “Hallowed be thy name,” Jesus teaches us that the glory of God ought to be the goal of our prayers. Connected with this petition—that God's name would be made holy among us—is the petition we want to consider today, “Your kingdom come”. As God's kingdom is made manifest on earth, his name is hallowed and regarded as holy by all creation. As we consider this petition, there are three questions we want to answer: What is the kingdom of God? How does his kingdom come? How should this affect our prayers?

## The Kingdom of God

What exactly do we mean when talk about ‘the kingdom of God’? The answer depends upon who we're asking! In the Classical Dispensational view ( 时代论 ), the kingdom of God refers to the thousand-year reign of Christ in Jerusalem when he returns at his second coming. According to dispensationalists, Christ offered the kingdom to Israel when he came at his first coming, but when they rejected it, he went to the cross and began this long parenthesis ( 插入语 ) in history, which we call the church age/

However, in the Reformed view (which is also shared by other Christian traditions) Christ rules and reigns now, albeit in the midst of his enemies. From the Reformed perspective ( 角度, 视角 ), the kingdom of God *proper* refers to the New Creation, and that blessed eternal life that was symbolized at the beginning of the world in the Tree of Life.<sup>1</sup> Now, it is always problematic when you define a term with another complex term, so let me explain. Scripture shows us that the new creation has two main reference points: (1) God's people who have been made alive by the regeneration 重生 (that is, the re-birth) of the Holy Spirit, and (2) the new heavens and new earth, where our Triune ( 三位一体的 ) God reigns supreme through his Son, Jesus Christ. The Bible makes is clear that our salvation in Christ is not just about getting us back to the Garden of Eden, but to the blessed life that the Tree of Life symbolized in the garden—a life where man is not able to sin, not able to die; a life were we have glorified bodies fit to inhabit a glorified earth.

In the Old Testament, the kingdom of God was identified with the nation of Israel. They were a theocracy ( 神权政治 ); a people who lived in an earthly land ruled by God through the Mosaic Law ( 摩西律法 ). Remember, after being liberated from Egypt, the Israelites traveled through

the wilderness to the Promised Land ( 应许之地 ) . Just before they arrived at Canaan, God met them at Mt. Sinai and established a covenant ( 圣约 ) with them. This covenant—this agreement—confirmed Israel as his people; his holy nation. A few decades later, Joshua and the Israelites drove out the indigenous people ( 原住民 ) , purifying the land according to God’s commandment. This is always a difficult text for us to read—is God wantonly ( 无节制地 ) ordering the systemic genocide ( 种族灭绝 ) of an entire people? It is true that he ordered them put to death, but it was not by any malicious or unrestrained impulse ( 冲动 ) . The Promised Land was not just a gift to Israel, it was holy land—it was set apart as a place where God would dwell with his people. It was a literal kingdom, ruled by God through the law he gave to his people—it was a picture or symbol of heaven. Therefore, nothing unclean could dwell there.

God made it clear that Israel would only inhabit the holy land as long as they themselves were holy. They promised Joshua that they would love the Lord their God and obey his commandments, but it wasn’t long until Israel was exiled from the Promised Land and sent into captivity ( 被掳的境地 ) . As they dwelt in foreign lands they were to be good citizens of the city they lived in, to marry, have children, and work, but to remember that they were strangers in a strange land. (Jer. 29:6-7). They were ultimately to look forward to the promised homeland where God would bring them. They were to look for the coming Messiah who would establish his everlasting kingdom. They were to look for the one Isaiah spoke of, “For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor ( 奇妙的策士 ) , Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace, Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore.” (Isaiah 8:6-7). When Christ is born, he is heralded as the newborn king—but he is not born on a throne. He is not born with any visible authority, majesty, or power, but in a stable ( 马厩 ) , a manger ( 马槽 ) —in poverty and humility ( 卑微 ) . So how is this baby king, born to humble parents in a dirty stable, bringing the promised kingdom spoken of in the Old Testament? How will the Son of a carpenter usher in the kingdom of God?

## The Coming Kingdom

To the disappointment of his disciples (and sometimes, to us as well!) the gospels show us that Christ has not come to drive out the Romans or overthrow ( 颠覆 ) the governments of this world, but for a deeper and greater purpose. The prophet Isaiah foretold that he would be stricken and smitten, a man acquainted with grief and sorrows—not a man praised and honored, victorious and triumphant ( 得胜的 ) . Christ confirms this when he says, in Luke’s gospel, “The Kingdom does not come in all of its outward glory right now... (Read v.20-24) . **“first** the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation.” (v.25). You see, Christ begins the first stage of his reign through suffering.

“But why?” we ask. “Why not just bring the kingdom in all of its fullness at his first coming? Why doesn’t he overthrow the Romans and the governments that are opposed to God, and establish his everlasting reign right now?” This is what the disciples expected! A Messiah who would triumph now, who would come in power and glory to liberate them from the Pharaohs of their day! We even read in Mark 8:31 that Peter pulled Jesus aside and rebuked him for talking

about his suffering, death, and resurrection (复活) —the Messiah (弥赛亚) isn't some sad, weak mortal who's going to die like everyone else! But Jesus rebukes Peter for his lack of understanding: "Get behind me Satan. You do not have in mind the concerns of God, but only the concerns of men." Jesus knows that the greatest bondage we have is *not* the oppression (压迫) of an earthly nation or tyrannical king, but the enslavement (奴役) of our natures and our wills to sin. The great Pharaohs that we need to be liberated from are ultimately the Devil and the fear of death. This is what the disciples did not understand, "...that first, the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation (v.25). We don't need Jesus to save us from our bad circumstances, but from our sins! That is what he came to do, and that is how his kingdom comes to us now. Through his payment of the penalty we owed, through his victory over sin and death, the Father establishes him as king over all, and he now holds the keys of death and Hades (阴间) in his hand. That is how his kingdom comes to us now!

It's important for us to recognize that although Christ didn't come to overthrow the Romans and governments of this world *now*, he will overthrow all kings and princes opposed to him *soon*. Jesus' second coming will be like the days of Noah (v.26) or like the days of Lot (v.28); days when men and women were going about their business of marrying, working, eating and drinking. Just as the skies opened and fire descended upon them without warning, Christ will come suddenly and unexpectedly. On the day of Christ's return, he will bring to completion the Kingdom that he began at his first coming. He has already conquered Satan on the cross and freed us from our bondage to sin, and his victory has validated by his resurrection from the dead. But on the day of his return, his victory will be fully realized by the all the world when he does away with evil. Today is not that day—the kingdom is here now, but it is hidden under the sufferings of the cross. The visible church is the church militant (武装组织, 斗士), not yet the church triumphant. This is the already-but-not-yet nature of his kingdom; the sometimes difficulty tension (对立, 张力) we live in as God's people.

One helpful way of thinking about this tension of Christ's kingdom is an example from World War II. In 1944, the Allies (盟军) invaded the beaches of Normandy and broke through the Atlantic Wall's fortresses (堡垒). Although they paid a costly price, they were able to establish a beachhead in Europe that they never surrendered. That was D-Day (诺曼底登陆); the day that definitively changed the course of the war. It wasn't just the Allies who were aware of the significance of victory—Hitler knew it, as well. He would never be able to recover from this invasion. The war was not finished until a year later, and there was still much pain and suffering between D-Day, (the day of the invasion 侵略), and V-Day, (the day of victory).

Beloved, when we pray this petition of the Lord's Prayer, we are praying between D-Day-- Christ's decisive victory over sin, Satan, and death—and V-Day, when the full realization of his victory unfolds before our eyes. There will still be pain, tears, and suffering during these last days. Christ is king now, but he rules in the midst of his enemies. We must not lose heart—V-Day is coming, and it is coming soon— and on that day, he will put our enemies under his feet. And it's because his kingdom is not fully here that he has commanded us to pray, "Thy Kingdom Come!"

So how do we experience this kingdom? We see it now through the Word and Sacraments (圣礼). The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of the age to come who even now brings to us the blessings of the age when Christ's victory will be fully realized. While we don't live in glorified bodies now,

we are made new creations as the Spirit transforms our lives by the gospel through our faith in Jesus. Even now the Spirit helps us to seek the things that are above; to seek first the kingdom of God, and to allow our ethics to be shaped by that coming kingdom. We don't repay our enemies for evil, or drive them out of some supposed 'promised land', but we bless those who persecute (逼迫) us, and leave vengeance (报复) upon our enemies to our Lord, confident that he will repay our injuries and sufferings

### **Praying In The Light of Victory**

When we pray 'thy kingdom come', we're asking that the Lord would rule our lives by his Word and Spirit. As we confess in the catechism (教理问答), "Rule us by your Word and Spirit in such a way that more and more we submit to you". In other words, "Bend our stubborn hearts to delight in your will." People can easily say, "Thy Kingdom Come," but do we truly desire to seek first the kingdom of God in our daily lives? As we go about our daily work, are we more concerned with God's kingdom, or our daily bread—what we will eat, drink, and wear?

Notice Jesus' words to his disciples: "Remember Lot's wife." Those who would seek to save their lives will lose them, but whoever loses his life for Christ's sake will find it. People will be tempted (被试探) to make the common grace blessings of this life the ultimate things – our spouses, our children, our houses, our work – but Jesus says we must hate those things in comparison to him.

His kingdom; his return must be the ultimate treasure of our hearts. Knowing our weakness and sin, we pray "Thy Kingdom Come," asking the Lord to rule us by his word and Spirit, enabling us to treasure him above all.

Second, we pray that God would rule his church by *prospering* and *protecting* her. We ask that God would prosper the church by "keeping her strong and adding to it"; by gathering more people to himself and joining them to the body of believers which is visible manifestation of his kingdom here on earth. It is in Christ's church that we hear our King address us, reminding us of the gospel and of D-Day, Christ's victory over sin, Satan, and death. We invite others to share in his victory. We pray that God would rule his church by preserving her from the attacks of the devil and every force that rebels against his Word. Christ has already delivered the deathblow (致命一击) to Satan, but we ask that he would keep the church from Satan's last attempts to hinder her witness and cause her to stumble. Because of Christ's victory, we can say with Luther in his great hymn that we will sing this evening,

So we pray that God would keep his church from heresy (异端) and persecution; that he would keep her from the love of the world while she lives in it. Lastly, we pray that God would rule the world in such a way that his kingdom is brought to completion and perfection. In this way we are praying for the fullness of the New Creation to come now, asking that God would make visible to us and to the world all that Christ has won for his people. Beloved, we are not yet in the Promised Land, where God's kingdom is fully manifested before our eyes, but we are also not back in Egypt. We are pilgrims (天路客, 朝圣者) on the way, journeying through the wilderness to our blessed home.

“And though this world, with devils filled, should threaten to undo us, we will not fear, for  
God hath willed his truth to triumph through us. The Prince of Darkness grim (冷酷的), we  
tremble

not for him; his rage we can endure, for lo, his doom is sure; one little word shall fell him.”

So as we journey as pilgrims, we pray that our God might bring us to that place where he will  
“wipe away tears from all faces, and where death will be no more, and where there is no more  
mourning our crying” (Rev. 21:4). In this petition, we are ultimately praying for Christ second  
coming. Only at his return will the kingdom of God be all in all, the works of the devil destroyed,  
and the kingdoms of the earth shaken so that his unshakable kingdom alone will remain.

### **Conclusion**

Let us not grow discouraged if we don't see Christianity accepted in the broader culture. As our  
Lord said, “if the world hates you, know that it hated me before it hated you” (John 15:18).  
Regardless of what you see on the news this week, or read in the papers, Christ is on his throne  
and he rules over all. His kingdom is coming every time the gospel goes out and sinners are  
brought to faith in Jesus Christ. His victory is being applied as people from every tribe,  
tongue (方言), and nation come to faith and as they begin to live lives shaped by his word and  
the values of his kingdom. Beloved, His victory will be made known to all men. V-Day is  
coming!!! On that day “at the name of Jesus every knee will bow in heaven and on earth, and  
under the earth, and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the  
Father” (Phil. 2:10-11). Amen.