

# Kingdom

## *The Scripture:*

Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people (Matthew 4:23).

This, then, is how you should pray: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven (Matthew 6:9).

Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these" (Matthew 19:14).

## *The thought:*

In Scripture, it is always clear that God is the ultimate King. He is the King of kings. In the Psalms, he is referred to as the "King of glory." Human desires, however, find conflict with this reality. The Israelites hankered for a king so that they could be like other nations (1 Samuel 8). God, the King, who lives in inexpressible light and inhabits the tabernacle, or the temple, is not enough for them. They want a God that they can see and touch even if that desire does not accord with the first three commandments (Exodus 20).

If God is the King, what is the kingdom? Often the difficulty for man is the challenge of understanding the nature of the "kingdom." Is it a place or an idea? Or, a concept?

Jesus often alludes to "the kingdom" or "my kingdom." We do understand from the New Testament that this kingdom is something different from our normal human understanding of a kingdom. This kingdom has been referred to as the "upside-down kingdom" because many of its characteristics seem contrary to normally understood human patterns and structures.

The kingdom of which Jesus speaks is characterized by humility, by love, by healing, and by peace. However, at other times there are also references to judgment, to the sword, and to punishment. The kingdom of heaven is another way of looking at reality,

recognizing that one's allegiance is not to earthly kings and governments but to the True Kingdom and the True Government.

The prophet Isaiah proclaims: "For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end" (Isaiah 9:6-7). What an amazing picture of leadership!

Jesus invites us to be a part of his new vision of the kingdom—to be born into it. As citizens, we are called to obey heavenly spiritual principles which supersede earthly human ones.

The decision to become a citizen of a new and different kingdom, while still living in the earthly framework, has created major troubles for God's people. God's people have suffered persecution both as individuals and also as communities. They have been misunderstood and have received the abuse of the kingdoms of this world. The Bible teaches that there will be a final resolution of this pain when God's true eternal kingdom will be restored and evil will be totally banished forever. The prayer of His people continues to be, "Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven" (Matthew 6).

***The song:***

*Jesus shall reign where'er the sun  
Does his successive journeys run;  
His kingdom spread from shore to shore,  
Till moons shall wax and wane no more.*

*People and realms of every tongue  
Dwell on His love with sweetest song;  
And infant voices shall proclaim  
Their early blessings on His Name.*

*--Isaac Watts (1719)*

***The question:***

Do I love in such a way that others recognize me as a citizen of God's kingdom? What does the kingdom of God look like?

***The experience:***

Growing up in the British Empire, I was born under the authority of a king. I do not remember much about him because I was very young and, anyway, he was soon

replaced by his daughter, Queen Elizabeth II. I do remember a lot about her and actually once saw her pass by in person -- although her car was moving rather quickly at the time.

For me, the idea that I was part of a kingdom was not hard to understand. In Canada at the close of school everyday, we stood and sang "God save our gracious queen."

It always seemed clear to me that the king or queen was the one in charge of everything. A kingdom is a place where the king is in charge. He "calls the shots" so to speak. The kingdom is a big and important place and my citizenship in it gives me a chance to be a part of something big. A kingdom is a place where all fight for, honor, and defend the king and he, in turn, protects and defends his people.

Gerhard Ebeling, in his book, *On Prayer*, suggests that a better word to use rather than "kingdom" is the word "time." So the phrase "your kingdom come" from the Lord's Prayer would become "your time come." Ebeling feels that the concept of "kingdom" can easily become too concretized and the word "time" keeps us from such an outcome. As a man made over by God, I now belong to a new time. I am now no longer controlled by the past and I am open to God's future.

Obviously, this does not even begin to be an adequate discussion of "kingdom" but it is an interesting thought as we try to recognize our new citizenship in God's kingdom. Everything about us is oriented differently. Our focus is on heavenly and transcendent matters and we seek to bring that perspective into our broken world. Obviously, we need to make sure that we are not "so heavenly minded that we are no earthly good." We are in the process of bringing redemption to our world and the people who live in it. We are called to be stewards of God's creation and his creatures. One of God's earliest mandates is to be good stewards of his handiwork (see Genesis 1). We are marching to Zion but we must care for things along the way!