

**Altavista Presbyterian Church
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**“The Lord’s Prayer, Part II”
Joshua 2:1, 8-11
II Peter 3:8-10**

**First Sunday of Lent
March 10, 2019**

Joshua 2:1, 8-11

And Joshua the son of Nun sent two men secretly from Shittim as spies, saying, “Go, view the land, especially Jericho.” And they went and came into the house of a prostitute whose name was Rahab and lodged there.

Before the men lay down, she came up to them on the roof and said to the men, “I know that the Lord has given you the land, and that the fear of you has fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land melt away before you. For we have heard how the Lord dried up the water of the Red Sea before you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan, to Sihon and Og, whom you devoted to destruction. And as soon as we heard it, our hearts melted, and there was no spirit left in any man because of you, for the Lord your God, he is God in the heavens above and on the earth beneath.

II Peter 3:8-10

But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed.

“The Lord’s Prayer, Part II”

The grass withers and the flower fades, but the Word of the Lord remains forever. Friends, this is the Word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God. May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be pleasing and acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

A couple years ago, Betsy and I got very involved in the Netflix series *The Crown*. *The Crown* follows the reign of Queen Elizabeth from her rise in the middle of the 20th century to today. While watching this series, a thought hit me, “Why am I getting so invested in the British monarchy?” I’m an American. Americans rejected the monarchy. Yet we, as a society, have a fascination with kings and queens, princes and princesses. I remember all the mourning done statewide at the death of Princess Diana. More recently, there was all the hubbub around Meghan Markle, Kate Middleton, and their royal weddings. Many young girls imagine themselves as a Disney princess. What is our fascination with monarchies? While much of Western society has rejected the absolute sovereignty of a monarch, I believe we still have within our natures a certain nostalgia for a sovereign. Truth be told, I don’t think this is mere nostalgia. In fact, I believe the reason why we as democrats are fascinated by monarchy is because we, as Christians, long for God to be our Sovereign King.

As we continue in our study of the Lord’s Prayer, we’re going to talk about this very point as we look at the twin petitions, *Your kingdom come, Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven*. To begin, we should answer the question, “What is the kingdom of God?” How would you respond? The easy answer is based on logic. Usually we equate a kingdom to a territory over which a king reigns. Since we understand that God is the Creator of all things, the extent of his realm must be

all the world and across all time. So the simple answer is “the Kingdom of God is wherever he reigns, and since he reigns everywhere, the Kingdom of God is everywhere.” That’s logical, right? It’s certainly not incorrect. The thing is, the Bible is getting at something else. I’m going to bring us back to this in a moment, for right now I want us to look at our perception of God’s Kingdom.

If we assert the simple and logical explanation that God’s Kingdom is everywhere, don’t you think that would mean everyone would be able to see it and accept God as their Sovereign? Well, we know that’s not the case. This tells me that while God’s Kingdom is all around us, and indeed we are within it, many, if not all of us at one point or another, are blind to it. The reality is, not only are we naturally blind to it, but we naturally reject God’s Kingdom. Think back to the Old Testament, to the time right after the Judges. The Israelites approach Samuel and they say to him, “You’re old and we don’t like your sons. We don’t want your family to be Judges over us. Instead, we want ourselves a king, just like our neighboring countries.” Samuel is taken aback by this request because he feels his countrymen are rejecting his ministry. But the thing is, that’s not how God saw it. Rather, God saw that his people were rejecting him and his kingship over them. In their arrogance, the people of Israel were saying of God, “He shall not reign over us.”

And remember, there are things God doesn’t like. God doesn’t like disobedience, much less disobedience that stems from arrogance. So he tells Samuel that he will grant Israel’s request for a king just like their neighbors and just how much of a terrible person he will be. Samuel tells them that the king will conscript their sons and daughters into his service, he will tax their land and property, and they will cry out to God on that day because of this king, but the Lord will not hear them. The biblical image of earthly kings is one of take, take, take; yet the Scriptures speak of God as a King who gives, gives, gives. God blesses his faithful people with great and many good and perfect gifts. The thing is, humans don’t want a King who will give. The madness of our race is that we want a king who will take just so we can be like everyone else.

Since we are quick to reject God’s Kingdom, we are also quick to reject the kingship of his Son. This played out almost immediately in Christ’s incarnation with Herod’s attempt to kill the boy king that the Magi sought. The feelings of antipathy against the reign of God run so deep in human hearts that Jesus was brought before the Roman authorities on the grounds that he was making himself King. The irony is, Christ never attempted to make himself King, the Father already did that! But just as God and his Kingship were rejected, so too was Jesus rejected as King in the time of his incarnation. Jesus already reigns supreme, but the world refuses to accept him. Only the followers of Christ have their hearts and minds opened to his Kingship. So when he tells us to pray, “Your kingdom come...” he is making us participants in his own mission to spread the reign of God on this planet so that it might reflect the way God’s reign is established in heaven.

Now this brings me back to the point I asked you to keep in mind. Remember, we said the logic of Scripture is that God’s Kingdom is everywhere and at all times. However, the Bible also speaks of God’s Kingdom as “not yet.” John the Baptist urged his hearers to “repent, for the kingdom of God *is at hand*.” Jesus, in multiple places, makes the same assertion that his Kingdom is *near*. For example, in Luke 10, he sends out seventy disciples on a preaching

mission. He instructs them to tell impenitent cities that “the Kingdom of God has come *near* you.” If the Kingdom of God consists of everything at all times, why would anyone, let alone the Son of God, announce that the Kingdom of God was *near* or *about* to come to pass. It’s obvious that John and Jesus meant something more about this Kingdom.

The arc of the Old Testament calls to our attention a Kingdom that would not simply appear in people’s hearts, but also be a Kingdom that would break through into this world. A true, corporeal Kingdom that would be ruled by God’s Messiah. At the Messiah’s arrival, the Kingdom as in heaven will be inaugurated here on earth. The reason Jesus says the Kingdom is *near* or *at hand*, is because the King of that Kingdom had arrived. When he came, Jesus inaugurated God’s Kingdom. He didn’t consummate it, but he did inaugurate it. The consummation of God’s Kingdom will take place when Christ returns. That’s the story being described in the Book of Revelation. Christ the King will return with all his glory and with all of heaven’s hosts, and his enemies will fall before him.

Now, the petition “your kingdom come” is not just hopeful wishing. We aren’t just twiddling our thumbs waiting for the Kingdom to come crashing down out of heaven. Remember, the first petition Jesus taught us was, “Hallowed be your name,” which is a plea that the name of God would be regarded as holy. Clearly, unless and until the name of God *is* regarded as holy, his Kingdom will not and cannot come to this world. But we, who do regard his name as holy, we have a responsibility to make the Kingdom of God manifest. John Calvin once said it is the task of the church to make the invisible Kingdom visible. We do that by living in such a way that we bear witness to the reality of the Kingship of Christ in our jobs, our families, our schools, our churches, and even our checkbooks, because God in Christ is King over every one of these spheres. The only way the Kingdom of God is going to be manifested in this world *before* Christ comes is if the church manifests it by the way we live as citizens of heaven and subjects of the King.

Now, we’ve seen that Jesus teaches us to first pray, “Hallowed be your name,” asking that the name of God would be regarded as holy. Then he teaches us to pray, “Your kingdom come,” which is a request that Christ’s rule and reign would be made manifest in the world. In the next petition he teaches us to pray “Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” With a cursory glance, it actually seems heretical that Jesus would give his church such a mandate. Didn’t he know that the will of God is *always* accomplished? Isn’t Jesus a good Calvinist, doesn’t he understand the doctrine of divine sovereignty, that all things come to pass because God decreed it? Well, the truth is, because of the Greek language, there really isn’t a hard and fast definition for the “will” of God. In fact, the will of God can be understood in three ways.

The first is what we call the sovereign, efficacious will of God. When Scripture speaks of the will of God in this sense, it is describing the will that causes whatever he decrees to come to pass. It is the *effective* will of God. He said, “Let there be light,” and guess what? Light happened. Jesus spoke, “Lazarus, come out,” and guess what? He was raised from the dead. Second is the preceptive will of God. When Scripture speaks of the will of God in this sense, it is describing the *precepts* of his law and commandments. There are things God wills for us and he establishes them in legal precepts. It is his will we keep the Sabbath holy, and so he commands

it. It is his will that we do not murder, or steal, or covet, and so he commands against them. Third is God's basic disposition or inclination. When the Scriptures speak of the will of God in this sense, it is describing the things that are *pleasing* or *displeasing* to him. He loves a cheerful giver, so it must be his will that we be generous. He hates the foolish and prideful heart, so it must be his will that we be wise and humble.

I'd like to illustrate for you how a single verse from Scripture can be interpreted differently if we apply these different nuances of meaning. Our New Testament lesson this morning states, "The Lord is...not *wishing* that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance." If this text means that God does not will that any should perish in the sovereign, efficacious sense, then it must be that no one will ever perish. If it means that he does not will that any should perish in the preceptive sense, then God has stated no one is to engage in the activity of perishing, and to do so is a sin. If it is referring to God's disposition, it is simply saying that he is not pleased when someone perishes. He finds no enjoyment in the fact that not all are saved. It is obvious that the first two understandings can be ruled out by teachings found elsewhere in Scripture. We must conclude, then, that Peter is telling us God takes no pleasure in the death of an unrighteous person.

Now, Jesus doesn't just leave the petition at "your will be done," leaving us to squabble over which of the three nuances is in play here. Rather, he adds that we pray God's will be done "on earth as it is *in heaven*." By adding this qualifier, it suggests to us that there is a discrepancy between Jesus' view of the will of God accomplished on earth and its accomplishment in heaven. We've just established that the *sovereign* will of God is always accomplished, not just in heaven but also on earth. This is why I don't think Jesus is referring to the sovereign will of God in this prayer and therefore he is not speaking heresy. I think he must have the preceptive will of God in view. I think this because the preceptive will of God is always obeyed by angels and saints in heaven. Remember, there is no sin in heaven. There is no conflict between the will of the creatures and the will of the Creator. All who are in heaven are brought into full conformity to the law of God.

This is clearly not the case here on earth. When our race rejects God's sovereign Kingship over us, we are openly rebelling against his preceptive will. Likewise, when we truly pray as Christ teaches, asking that God's "will be done on earth as it is in heaven," we are asking that the citizens of this world recognize God's sovereignty and *submit* themselves to his reign, just as the angels and saints do in heaven. Our chief end, as the Westminster Confession asserts, is to glorify God and enjoy him completely forever. Those who are gathered around the throne of God in heaven are doing just that. They are glorifying him and eternally enjoying him. In this petition, Jesus is affirming that the will of God is done in heaven. He is also affirming that God's will is not followed on earth, at least not fully. People on earth do not strive to glorify God and so they do not experience his enjoyment. So, Jesus says we ought to pray for the church and for the world that God's "will be done *on earth* as it is in heaven." What better wish is there for the human race? Indeed, it is the church's duty to witness to God's will and glorify in doing it. Thereby, those outside the church may see God's glory manifest and his enjoyment experienced. When they witness that, the Spirit moves within them a desire to have that relationship. The Lord's Prayer should not only be our prayer, but also our plan of action.

Let us pray. Holy God, we know intellectually that your Kingdom is all around us. Yet we fail to live as citizens of your realm. Forgive us for our rebellion, our sedition, and our arrogance. Open our eyes to your will inscribed in Scripture. Open our hearts to follow your will. And may we, as adopted sons and daughters, citizens of the heavenly kingdom, bear witness to your loving and gracious reign, until our Sovereign King returns in glory. Amen.