

Your Kingdom Come

PART 1: 'WHY ARE WE HERE?'

Every now and then in my life and ministry I pause and ask an important question: *Why am I here?* Sometimes I ask this question when I am in a quiet, reflective mood and want some clarification of my life's purpose so that I don't waste a moment pursuing causes that are not God's or chasing dreams that He has not given me. But then there are those times when I am battle-weary and struggling to navigate the choppy seas of front-line ministry as I fight against opposition, apathy, betrayal and spiritual attack.

That's when it's more of a desperate cry of anguish, "*Why am I here?!*" In both cases, the answer is always the same, assuming I am listening to God and not my tortured mind or the voice of the enemy. My life's purpose is actually very clear and deep down I already know the answer to that question before I ask. Perhaps I just need God to remind me and encourage me to press on.

The driving force in my thinking and the over-arching reason I do what I do happens to be what also defines the purpose of the Church on earth. So I want to suggest from the beginning of this teaching series that ultimately we are all here for exactly the same reason and that our defining purpose comes from a line in the prayer that Jesus taught His disciples to pray. In our culture this is commonly called *The Lord's Prayer* but that's misleading because it's a prayer which contains confession of sin and there was no sin in Jesus. So this is not the Lord's personal prayer, it is actually a model prayer or pattern prayer the Lord gave His disciples and that's why a growing number of Biblical scholars and preachers refer to it now as *The Disciples Prayer* or, as I noticed in one Bible Translation recently, *The Model Prayer*.

This prayer has been memorized and prayed privately and corporately in Church gatherings by millions of disciples over hundreds of years. I have no problem with that - but there's always a risk that memorised prayers and Scriptures can lose their punch and their deepest meaning when said in a ritualistic manner and that has certainly been the case with this prayer.

I actually find it really hard to recite the whole prayer without stopping at every statement and reflecting on its meaning and implications. I could preach a whole sermon on almost every phrase and many preachers have done just that. It is so rich and full of meaning. Today I just want us to look at the first part of this prayer.

It begins with, "*Our Father*" and that's the first place to pause and understand why it doesn't say "*My Father*." Very often in our western culture the emphasis is placed on the individual. Most advertising is intentionally focussed on an individual's needs and desires and the emphasis on our individual rights has never been higher than it is now in our society.

That's why it's no accident that Jesus reminds us right up front, before we pray anything else, that we are a family, a community. We are not just individuals. The prayer begins with "*Our Father*" and ends with "*Yours is the Kingdom*" which basically implies that Kingdom is family. So anytime we remove ourselves from the context of family, we remove ourselves from the reality and power of the Kingdom. Now as the name implies, the 'King-dom' is literally the King's domain. The Kingdom is the realm of the King's dominion and the King is Jesus Christ. So when we see the dominion of the King of Kings come upon a person who has torment, they obtain peace of mind.

When we see the dominion of the King come upon somebody with cancer, we see them cancer-free. Therefore when the Bible exhorts us to *“Seek first the Kingdom of God”* what that looks like depends on what the problem is at that time of seeking. For example, if you're ministering to someone in poverty then the Kingdom will break the spirit of poverty and bring them into a place of increase and blessing. Why? Because in the Kingdom, there's no poverty. To seek first the Kingdom is not a generic prayer to God in which we affirm, *“Someday, I want to go to heaven.”* It's a specific prayer that says, *“I'm looking for Your Dominion to be realized; to be manifest; to be revealed in this situation here and now.”*

In Matthew 12:28 Jesus said, *“If I cast a demon out of you by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.”* So what is Jesus doing here? He's talking to an individual who is tormented by devils and he says, *“If I get that demon out of you, it's only because the Kingdom of heaven collided with the Kingdom of darkness and the Kingdom of heaven always wins.”*

So all of us are ministers of the Kingdom of heaven or the Kingdom of God – the two terms mean the same thing and are used interchangeably in the Bible. As citizens of God's Kingdom we don't just carry a message, we carry a message that embodies a presence – the presence of the King. We actually release something - we are distributors of His dominion – stewards of His presence. So to seek first the Kingdom of God means that in any given situation, we are looking for God's solution for that problem and God's presence and power to bring that solution to effect. Which means at the very outset, we have to carry a hope and a belief that God has an answer now for every problem we ever face – no matter how small or large. Sometimes we see the results and the breakthrough immediately, sometimes it takes patience and hard work over time. Those times can be tough but they're also a necessary part of our faith journey. Ok let's get to the line upon which this whole teaching series will be based and in which I believe the whole Church finds its purpose.

Matthew 6:9-10 *“Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be your name, **your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.**”*

Now this is where some knowledge of NT Greek can be very helpful. In the original language for this particular verse, it doesn't actually read as a prayer asking for the Kingdom to come. In the Greek it reads more like a decree. So we could translate it as, *“Kingdom of God, come. Will of God, be done.”* It's a declaration and so Jesus is telling His disciples, then and now, to declare that heaven has come and will come to earth. I remember when the true meaning of this statement first unfolded for me many years ago - I felt a burning conviction inside and I found that I could no longer tolerate things that exist in this world that don't exist in the Kingdom of heaven. Things like sin, sickness, disease, death, discouragement, doubt, fear, evil, deception, pride, loneliness, isolation, racism, hatred, jealousy and the list goes on. None of these things exist in the Kingdom of Heaven and so as that Kingdom eclipses the kingdom of this world, we despise those things more than ever and our desire to release to power and reality of heaven into the dysfunction and darkness of this world just grows over time.

It has also been suggested that there will be no shadows in heaven. I bet you haven't thought much about that, have you? Let me share a few Scriptures.

“Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning.” (James 1:17)

“God is light and in Him is no darkness at all.” (1 John 1:5)

“The city had no need of the sun or of the moon to shine in it, for the glory of God illuminated it. The Lamb is its light.” (Revelation 21:23)

What causes shadows in this world? The sun, the moon and many different man-made light sources. Well none of those exist in the Kingdom of heaven. In the Kingdom of heaven God is the only source of light and He is shining everywhere all at once. We have shadows here because we have light coming in one direction from somewhere to somewhere, but in heaven the light source is God Who is everywhere simultaneously. He doesn't come from or go to anywhere – He just is – all the time. And so there are no shadows. What does that tell us? It tells us that in heaven, everything is directly connected to the presence and identity of God.

So if we are going to pray that the reality of God's world will come into this world, it's vital that we value what heaven values. The absolute supreme value of heaven is the presence of God and so when we declare '*Your Kingdom Come*' we release the presence of God into this world and into every circumstance over which we make that declaration. So it is my prayer that as we move through this teaching series we will be asking ourselves what does it look like to develop a culture in our lives, in our families and in our Churches that is anchored in, rotates around and finds its identity and purpose within the presence of God? Because that is the highest value in the Kingdom of heaven.

Of course this should have always been the focus of the Church but sadly that is not the case. For most of my life and ministry, much of the Church which bears the name of Christ has been focussed on numerical growth. In fact we even have a name for this focus – it's called the 'Church growth' movement and in the last fifty years there have been thousands of books written, hundreds of thousands of conferences held and millions of sermons preached – all focussed on one thing: growing or building the Church. In fact, I believe if only a fraction of the energy, time, money and passion we've seen in the Church growth movement was effective, the Body of Christ on earth would be 1000 times larger than it is today. So why isn't it? It's certainly not for a lack of commitment, passion, effort and prayer – that's for sure.

The reason the Church growth movement has failed is because it was flawed from the outset. It was never our job to grow the Church in the first place. In Matthew 16 we read where Jesus said, "*I will build my Church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it.*" It is so vital that we see the triumphant authority of Christ's promise here. World missions is not ultimately dependent on human initiative or human wisdom or human perseverance. It is ultimately dependent on the power and wisdom and faithfulness of the risen and living Christ to keep this promise: "*I will build my Church.*" Not, "*You will build My Church.*" Or, "*Missionaries will build My Church.*" Or, "*Pastors will build My Church.*" But, "*I will build My Church.*"

The Apostle Paul understood this and he was jealous to always give glory to Jesus. In Romans 15:18 Paul says, "*I will not presume to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me.*" Christ accomplished it. Christ brought about the obedience of the people. Yes, missionaries are crucial. Pastors and elders are crucial. But we are not ultimate. Only the presence of God in Christ is ultimate. Only Jesus Christ has the right to say, "*I will build My Church.*"

Church growth has always been Christ's responsibility. Christ promised to build His Church. Church planting and Church establishment is a supernatural work and without that supernatural work, all we have is a human organization which lacks the power to achieve anything for God's Kingdom. This was the point of the way Matthew ended his gospel in 28:18-19, where Jesus said, "*All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations.*"

Jesus effectively says here, "*I have authority to do it – authority over all the powers of darkness, over death and hell, over governments and terrorists – and I will do it. I will build My Church. So now go and make disciples.*" Making disciples of Christ is our calling, our purpose and our responsibility. We are called to lead people to a person, Jesus and then help them grow in their relationship with Him.

We were never called to enrol them in an institution. We are commissioned to bring people into the presence of God and everything else flows from there. We even invented a word to describe what has been happening for decades now. The word is 'unchurched.' The unchurched are the people who are not part of the Church we have been building and the primary task of most pastors, leaders and disciples over my lifetime has been to connect the unchurched to the Church. The primary focus of millions of Christians across the world for many decades has been to fulfil a mandate that God never gave us! At no point in history have we been called by God to connect the unchurched to the Church!

How embarrassing is it to admit that so much of the energy of the Church which bears the name of Christ has been devoted to fulfilling a calling which Christ never gave us? Not only did Jesus never commission us to lead the unchurched to the Church – I doubt Jesus would even understand or accept our terminology. I doubt we even really understand our terminology. What does 'unchurched' actually mean? When we do lead an 'unchurched' person into the Church, does that mean they are now 'churched.' That's not even a word and nor is 'unchurched' if we really want to be honest. Someone just made up the word many years ago so as to enable us to categorise people in the world as those who are in and those who are out and we then assumed the role of those who were called to lead them into the Church and we had the audacity to say that this was what God called us to do.

We need to forget all that nonsense and listen to what the Spirit of God is saying to the people of God today and every day. We are called to lead people to a Person with Whom they will have a relationship which will transform their whole life forever. Our calling is to then disciple those people so they may grow closer to God in Christ, through Christ and for Christ.

This was the Apostle Paul's calling and it was his prayer for everyone to whom he ministered. His prayer in Ephesians 3 is full of the language of intimacy, the language of relationship. Paul led people to have a personal encounter with a living God in Christ. Paul never built a Church – Jesus did that.

Ephesians 3:16-21 *"I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge – that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen."*

So in the most prayed prayer of all time, the model prayer Jesus gave us, we declare, "Your kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven," and then we notice that the rest of this amazing prayer that Jesus gave us actually contains the fruit of that prayer. By that I mean when God's Kingdom comes; when the reality of heaven is birthed in the kingdom of this world, then He *will* give us our daily bread; our sins *will* be forgiven; we *will* be empowered to forgive others; he *will* strengthen us in temptation and He *will* deliver us from evil. Brothers and sisters, when we pray (or declare), "Your Kingdom Come," everything else flows from that reality – absolutely everything.

Now I have always encouraged people to pray about anything and everything. Some people have a very long list of things and people to pray about and that's great. God loves to hear our prayers and see our faith as we pray. But the mother and father of all prayers, if I can put it that way is, "Your Kingdom Come." Even the next phrase, "Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven," is actually the fruit of and the answer to, "Your Kingdom Come." Because when God's kingdom invades the kingdom of this earth, His will is always done on earth as it is in heaven.

So in anticipation of where God is going to lead us in this Kingdom journey over the coming weeks and months, I have now changed the opening text on the [Home Page](#) of our Church website. It now reads,

'Touching Heaven, changing earth – in Christ, through Christ, for Christ.'

That is our calling, friends. *That* is our purpose - to release heaven on earth. That was and still is the mission of Christ and He has called us to partner with Him in His mission. When God came into our world in the flesh as Jesus of Nazareth, heaven was opened and every day of His life, as well as through His death and resurrection, Jesus touched heaven and changed the earth. Every sermon, every healing, every miracle, every action by Jesus was evidence of the coming Kingdom.

Everywhere Jesus went He declared, *"The kingdom of heaven is here,"* or *"the Kingdom of Heaven is among you,"* or *"the Kingdom of Heaven is within you."* Then before leaving us in the flesh He said an amazing thing – to His disciples then and to us today through the Holy Spirit, Jesus said, *'As I have been sent, so I am sending you'* and then He breathed on them and said, *'receive the Holy Spirit.'* (John 20:21,22).

What happened next? The kingdom of heaven exploded across the land and God's will unfolded in the most spectacular way imaginable as Jesus began to build His Church with an effectiveness and a power that we only dream of seeing today. So how did those early disciples trigger such an explosion? It's simple really. They never tried to do God's job. They were fully aware that it was the power of God through His emerging kingdom presence which would change the world through Christ. Their job was to speak the truth about Jesus and allow the Spirit of God to use the word of their testimony (Revelation 12:11) to demolish strongholds and lead people to Christ. Jesus did the rest, just as He promised.

So strap yourselves in friends. That's where we are headed. The mission of Christ has not changed. The call of God on the lives of His people has not changed. Our purpose in still being here and the God-given mantle placed on every disciple is the same as it always was.

We are called to advance the Kingdom of Heaven, by His grace, for His glory as stewards of His presence and power.

Are you brave enough to boldly pray and declare, *"Your Kingdom Come?"* and not stop praying that until God answers – any way He chooses? Don't respond too quickly here - because saying 'yes' may very well open the floodgates of heaven and we will need to learn very quickly how to surf that wave in faith and trust God to lead us deeper into Him as we learn to embrace our destiny in Christ.

Come, Holy Spirit. Give us wisdom. Give us insight. Give us faith and give us the discernment to always hear Your voice above our own and the courage to go where You lead us. Amen.