

Your Kingdom Come

PART 4: 'THE PRESENCE OF GOD'

So Jesus gave us a model prayer and encouraged us to pray and declare, *"Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven."* But what does it look like when that prayer is answered? What does it mean to live in the kingdom of heaven whilst still being a citizen of this broken earthly kingdom? What kind of lifestyle do we live once we are fully devoted to Jesus Christ? Heaven functions very differently to earth, so what it is like to live in what the New Testament calls the kingdom of God or the kingdom of heaven?

These are important questions because learning how that kingdom functions is one of the primary mandates put upon us as believers. Heaven is supposed to be a present tense reality, something that's discernible, measurable, understandable and able to be experienced. The kingdom of heaven is meant to have an impact on how we view reality and how our values are established.

The more we discover and experience this practical expression of the kingdom of heaven and the more we learn how to build and organise our lives around the central values of that kingdom, then the more transformational we will become as we impact this earthly kingdom.

I think more than any other part of Scripture, this prayer represents the heartbeat of Jesus for our lives. This is His heart's desire for each of us – that we will radically impact the world around us as we live out His mission on earth – a mission which can be summed up in the words: *"Your kingdom come, Your will be done on earth, as it is in heaven."* When Jesus told us to pray this it wasn't just a pipe dream or a plan to keep us spiritually minded and occupied until He comes back. This was a strategic military assignment in the war against God's enemy and the ruler of this broken world.

It actually falls into the category of an apostolic prayer. What is an apostolic prayer? Well the word 'Apostle' means 'sent one' but it's so much more than that. The concept behind this word came from the Roman army where they would send a military leader into a land that had already been conquered. They would send this military leader in with a team of architects, language specialists and all the experts required to re-design the appearance of this city or sometimes a whole nation. They would redesign the roads, the way the cities functioned; their business principles; they would teach the people the language of Rome and they would continue to do all this until that city actually looked and functioned like Rome. Why? So that when the Emperor came he would feel at home.

So when Jesus says to pray *"on earth as it is in heaven,"* it's that apostolic prayer. So herein lies the challenge to us. Is it possible for us to have homes, churches, cities and even nations in which Jesus feels at home? Places that function like the kingdom in which He has dwelt for eternity? You see, *"on earth as it is in heaven"* is not some waffly philosophical concept, it's an apostolic directive to bring heaven to earth and to transform our surroundings so that this world functions like Jesus' world; so that the reality of heaven progressively becomes the reality of this world. That is our mission. That is our calling. That is the only reason we are still here!

Now as we embrace Christ's mission and our calling, it is really important we understand that everything in heaven is connected to one thing and that is the presence of God. The greatest reality and highest value in heaven is the presence of God. So we can't really pray, *"on earth as it is in heaven,"* unless we are devoted to learning to recognize and value the presence of God.

In other words, I can't just pray that because I want to see cancer healed. I can't just pray that because I want to see marriages restored or businesses succeed and all those things are appropriate expressions of heaven on earth. The central reality and dominant experience in the kingdom of heaven is presence of God. He is everywhere and His presence has an effect everywhere.

So in the face of that reality, it is interesting to note how all over this world every Sunday millions of God's people gather around a sermon. They sing, they worship, they pray, they share fellowship but the pinnacle of modern pastoral ministry is the preaching of the Word – the sermon. That's how it has been for hundreds of years. That's why in so many of our old churches and cathedrals the pulpit is elevated high above everything else – representing the priority of the Word of God as brought to us in teaching just like this.

But if we go back in history and look at God's gathered people we see that Israel camped around the presence of God and as such they emulated the kingdom of heaven more than the modern Church! If we really want to know how to live in the kingdom of heaven, then we need to return to those roots and that reality. We need to learn how to be tethered to that one supreme value above everything else: the presence of God.

It is possible for us to learn how to live kingdom lifestyles by merely studying principles. I can teach you certain principles about healing. I can teach you things to do when you face this sickness or that sickness, this condition that condition; what to do in this kind of Church setting and what to do in that kind of Church setting; what to do in public etc. I can teach you the principles, and you may have some success. But if we want the full reality of, *"Yours is the kingdom, the power and the glory"* to break across our community and our nation then we need to follow Jesus' lead.

Jesus ministered out of the presence of God. It's not that principles aren't important. Principles are what you turn to when you can't discern the presence. Of course the Lord never leaves us, but sometimes He shuts down our capacity to discern Him so that we are forced to live out of what He's already taught us. It's our own personal journey of discovery. Whenever God is silent it is never punishment. He is not ignoring us. He just knows there are certain things we will never find, unless He's quiet. But God is always present, whether He is talking or not. Let me take you to a verse in John's gospel.

John 3:12 *"If I have told you earthly things, and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things?"*

Now this statement comes just after Jesus told Nicodemus that he must be born again. Birth is a very natural thing. So Jesus is talking about something everybody can connect to and that's intentional. When the Lord begins to reveal the nature of His world to us, He always starts with things that we understand. So in this context, Jesus talks about two earthly natural realities. He talks about being born again but back in verse 8 He says, *"The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit."* So He illustrates the nature of His world with these natural realities of birth and the wind.

We see Jesus doing this all the time throughout His ministry. Using things we understand in this reality to describe and explain things in His reality – Kingdom. He teaches about sowing and reaping; He says the merciful will be blessed and will obtain mercy; you plant corn, you're going to harvest corn and the list goes on. He's teaching the nature of His world and how it connects to earthly principles and values. Let's jump over to Matthew 16:19, where we find an instruction that Jesus gave all of His followers. Unfortunately some Bible translations get this wrong.

For example here is the NIV translation:

"I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be [d] bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be [e] loosed in heaven."

Now this is a bad translation because you can't bind something in time, then have it bound in eternity. The whole model of Scripture was heaven as the model for Earth. That's why Jesus only did what He saw his father doing. Everything He did was modelling heaven's effect on planet earth. Now the NIV translators actually acknowledge this with a footnote against the words "will be." If you read the footnote it will give an alternate translation: *"will have been."*

So the verse would then read (and this is the correct translation), *"Whatever you bind on earth will have been bound in heaven. Whatever you loose on earth will have been loosed in heaven."* Other translations say, *"whatever you permit on earth will be what has already been permitted in heaven and whatever you forbid on earth will be what has already been forbidden in heaven."*

So all that to say this: Heaven is the model. What is true in heaven can be true on earth as the kingdom of heaven comes and God's will is done here as it is in heaven. The Bible tells us that the devil came to kill, steal and destroy. So wherever there's death, loss and destruction, we know the devil's fingerprints are there. But we also know that in the Kingdom of heaven the devil is a defeated enemy, a spent force and has no authority in heaven or on earth – because all authority has been given to Jesus. That's why we can bind sickness, oppression and all the fruits of darkness on earth, because they have already been bound in heaven.

But the other part of the command is to loose here, what is loosed there. But unless we get a clear revelation of His world, we don't know what to loose. You may remember that story Jesus told in Luke 11:24 about the house being clean and swept and evil spirits driven out, and there was nothing put back in its place. So the evil spirit came back seven times worse. The whole concept is when you displace you have to replace. So when you bind, you've got to loose. This may seem abstract, but from Jesus's perspective, this is ministry 101. This is extremely practical. This is us becoming familiar with His world and releasing, or loosing that reality into our world. Let's go back to John.

John 3:13 *"No one has ascended to heaven, but he who came down from heaven, that is the son of man who is in heaven."*

This is a strange verse – but what does it mean? Well this is early in Jesus' ministry. He ministered for three and a half years. This was towards the beginning. This is where He introduces the concept of being born again. And in this early part of his ministry, we know that Jesus hasn't died. We know that He hasn't been resurrected, yet. We know that He hasn't ascended to the right hand of the Father, we know He has not been glorified. We know these things have not yet taken place. And yet Jesus is standing before this group of people and He says, *"Nobody has ascended, except for one."*

He was describing His own relationship with the father. Now I concede that it's abstract but Jesus is pointing us towards what we could call an ascended lifestyle. Which in layman's terms simply means our primary focus is on heaven. We have been given an assignment. My job is not to go to heaven. I long for that day and will overjoyed the day I live only in that Kingdom. But that's not my assignment whilst on earth. My assignment (and yours) is to bring the reality of that world here. That's our mission because that's the mission of Christ. It's not some abstract, out of reach, pie in the sky dream. It's a very practical military commissioning which God imparts to all people born of the Spirit. He gives them His authority and a perfect model of the life they are to live: Jesus Christ.

So when Jesus tells us that nobody has ascended to heaven, except He who descended, He is shedding some light on His special relationship with the Father and says there is an ascension of sorts taking place. I don't understand it but the text is there. Paul later found language for it when called this *"being seated in heavenly places in Christ."* Our problem is Paul's statements tend to get reduced to dry, boring doctrines instead of being invitations to an experience. Understanding doctrine and getting the truth right is really important but that is not the goal. That is only a means to another end.

We are meant to walk in, live in and experience the reality of those truths and the truth is, **there's no transformation without encounter and the transformation of a person does not come because we gained intelligence or knowledge. It comes because that insight took us to the Person.** In John 5:39 we read where Jesus put it as clearly as anyone could when He said:

"You study the Scriptures diligently because you think that in them you have eternal life. These are the very Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life."

So you see the absolute highest priority in the kingdom of heaven is a personal encounter with God, through Jesus Christ as revealed by the Holy Spirit. Everything about our life, as followers of the Lord Jesus Christ, is connected to and flows from our relationship with God – everything. Therefore there is no part of our walk with the Lord that is not somehow connected to our relationship with Jesus. We should never forget that the kingdom is the realm of the King's domain and the King is Jesus. The King is always present and presiding over every activity in His kingdom. You can't experience the kingdom without relating to the King.

In John chapter 4 we read where Jesus is talking to the Samaritan woman at the well and in verse 23 He says that the Father is looking for those who will 'worship Him in spirit and in truth.' Notice it doesn't say that God is looking for worship. God does not look for worship, He looks for worshipers. God is not an egotist in need of our affirmation. He's not insecure. He does not need us to tell Him He's doing a great job. God is looking for worshipers. Why? Because He loves people and love always requires the best. There's nothing better God could want for you than for you to be a worshiper. Why? Because **we always become like the one we worship.**

So out of love for us, He draws us into the place of worship. He draws us into relationship. He draws us into His presence. Because in His presence there is joy; in His presence there is freedom; in His presence there is victory; in His presence there is power; in His presence there is life; in His presence we find our identity, our calling, our purpose and our destiny; in His presence we see the reality of His kingdom; in His presence we become like Him.

Paul captured all that perfectly here:

2 Corinthians 3:17-18 *"Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we all, who with unveiled faces reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit."*

So I began this sermon by saying that we need to learn how to be tethered to that one supreme value in the kingdom of heaven: the presence of God. Paul tells us why. In His presence we are transformed into the image of Jesus Christ. In His presence we reflect the Lord's glory. The more we embrace the reality of heaven on earth, the greater our transformation into the image of Jesus Christ. The more we are transformed into the image of Jesus Christ, the more we reflect His glory and His light into the darkness of the world. Next time there's a full moon I want to encourage you to go outside last thing at night before you go to bed and just look up and see the wonder of our second greatest natural light source: the moon.

Better still, hop in your car and drive out of town away from the street lights and all artificial light sources and park somewhere and switch off your car and get out and just stand there and gaze at the moon. As you do, I want you to be reminded that the moon has no capacity to shine whatsoever. That magnificent glow which lights up the fields around you is all reflected glory from the sun. It is only as the moon catches the glow from the sun that we see it all. Without that reflected glory from the sun, the moon would be invisible. *“And we all, who with unveiled faces reflect the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory..”*

Brothers and sisters, it is only as we catch the glow from the Son of God, our Lord and Saviour Jesus, that we can shine into the darkness of this world. With unveiled faces, we reflect the Lord’s glory and that is only possible when we embrace the Lord’s presence. The greatest reality in heaven, the highest value in heaven is the presence of God and the degree to which we discern, acknowledge and embrace His presence each day will be the degree to which we fulfill Christ’s mission on earth.

This is a spiritual exercise. Jesus is present through His Spirit and it’s too easy for us to ignore Him because He doesn’t have skin on anymore! I once asked a group of Church leaders what they would say if Jesus walked into one of our worship services in the flesh. There was a long pause as they contemplated such an amazing event. Then one of my leaders was brutally honest and answered, *“Oops, You’re real.”*

Our greatest challenge in living in two kingdoms is the fact that one of them is spiritually discerned. This earthly kingdom doesn’t require much discernment. We are surrounded by things we can see, smell, hear, taste and touch. There’s a little bit of mystery here and there but it’s easy to live only in the physical, tangible realm. The Kingdom of heaven is spiritually discerned. The presence of God is all around us and within us as believers but we are free to completely ignore Him if we so choose. How different would our Church services be if Jesus were present in the flesh? Surely we would abandon all our plans and say, *“What would You like to do and say in our midst today, Lord?”*

I am convinced every worship leader and Pastor would hand the reigns to Jesus immediately, should He appear in the flesh. How could we even contemplate leading God’s people when God Himself is standing in our midst? Spoiler alert: GOD IS ALWAYS IN OUR MIDST - we just don’t acknowledge Him and embrace His mission. All too often we end up like Jacob, as we say,

Genesis 28:16 *“Surely the Lord is in this place and I didn’t know it!”* ()

So herein lies the challenge for us all as we learn to live on earth as it is in heaven; as we learn to minister in and from the presence of God. *“Your kingdom come”* will only ever be a hope and a prayer unless we are prepared to let go the reigns of our life, our family, our Church and our community and let the King truly reign in His Kingdom. Then, and only then, will the book of Acts become a commentary on the Church of today, rather than an historical account of what used to be. Then and only then will this nation see a revival like the great awakenings of days gone by.

Kingdom of God, come. Will of God, be done. Amen.

