

## Title: “Thy Kingdom Come”

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Luke 18:1-8

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**Service Readings:** Gen 32:22-30, 2 Tim 3:14-4:5, Luke 18:1-8

*Pray without ceasing. Pray for the kingdom to come. But what does that mean? What, exactly, are we praying for?*

### Message:

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

Pray. This is what Jesus was teaching his disciples in the gospel passage from this morning. Pray without ceasing. But, that begs the question: what were they to pray for, exactly? Up to this point, Jesus and the disciples had been traveling from Galilee towards Jerusalem. He had been teaching them about the kingdom of God and what it would mean when it arrived. He told them that it would bring forgiveness for sinners, healing for the broken, liberty for the captive, good news for the poor, and even justice for the oppressed. They would later ask him how to pray and he would respond with “Our Father, who art in heaven. Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come...” Following our passage, as they came closer to the holy city, he would speak a parable to them because they thought that the kingdom of God was at hand and would appear while Jesus was in Jerusalem.

So what were they to pray for, exactly? For the arrival of God’s kingdom. This is what Jesus told them to anticipate, to pray for, and to watch for. And they probably were all too eager to do exactly that, for their expectations were a Godly reign in a worldly sense: that God would raise Jesus up as the new king of Israel who would crush Rome and restore God’s nation to power and authority over the promised land. And what Jewish person would not want that, would not long for that, would not even pray without ceasing for that?

And so you can imagine what they must have been thinking as he was telling them this parable. Listen again with this context in mind:

**18** Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up. <sup>2</sup> He said: “In a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared what people thought. <sup>3</sup> And there was a widow in that town who kept coming to him with the plea, ‘Grant me justice against my adversary.’

<sup>4</sup> “For some time he refused. But finally he said to himself, ‘Even though I don’t fear God or care what people think, <sup>5</sup> yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she won’t eventually come and attack me!’”

<sup>6</sup> And the Lord said, “Listen to what the unjust judge says. <sup>7</sup> And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? <sup>8</sup> I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly.

Yes. This was it exactly. After all, weren't *they* being persecuted by the Romans? This parable seems to indicate that if the corrupt judge would eventually give in to this poor widow, how much faster would a righteous judge bring about his justice? This is what they wanted to hear. This is what they longed to hear. The promised king would soon come and reign. The nation would soon be restored and a new king would soon be seated. And, maybe, just maybe that king was right here among them, traveling to Jerusalem to reclaim his rightful throne.

And so, how troubling it must have been, how deflating it must have felt when they saw their king and earthly savior get crushed by the very evil force he was supposed to conquer! Everything Jesus had taught them clearly had a different meaning than what they expected. What was it all to mean, then? How was God to bring justice for the oppressed? How was God to vindicate *them*? Jesus was dead! He had suffered the same fate that they all feared. So what were they to pray for?

This message may have not reached their hearts at that time but after Jesus was resurrected, after he ascended into heaven, they may have recalled it and it may even have provided comfort to them: Pray constantly. Pray for God's justice. Pray that God's kingdom come. But when? And how? And what? What was God's kingdom, exactly? For it was clearly very different than what they had thought it was. Let's set that question to the side for a moment.

When I reread the passage, I omitted the very last sentence and so I want to read it now. Jesus ends the teaching with this statement:

However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?"

What did Jesus mean by this? We read in other places where nothing can stop the growth of Christ's church, so it cannot be a question about that. We can place our confidence in the reality that the church will exist until he returns. So the question is not about the universal church but is a question about the individual's faith. When Jesus returns, what will he find in *you*? Will *you* be counted among the faithful?

For many of us, this is probably an easy question to answer. We reflect on our lives and find that it is pointed towards him. And we can confidently state, that even as a sinner, we through faith, and with the help of the Holy Spirit, we live a life that attempts to be pleasing to God.

But at the same time, there are also some among us who are struggling with their faith and they hear this parable and identify with the widow or even the judge. And maybe those who are firm in their faith, also find identity with one of these characters on occasion. What must it be like to see themselves as the judge – as one who is focused on self, who has the world by the tail, so to speak? How must this message land on their hearts? Or what if they are the widow, never ceasing in their pleas, calling out for justice but justice just never seems to come. This parable is for them just as it is for the confident faithful.

Pray without ceasing. Pray for justice. Pray for the kingdom to come. Pray. A church father, Augustine, once said: "When faith fails, prayer dies. In order to pray, then, we must have faith." So pray. But this leads us back to the question we set aside. If we are to pray for the kingdom to come, what exactly are we praying for?

It is not something that reflects any earthly kingdom. It is not bound by physical borders; there is no succession of power from one king to another. It's not even bound by time. It is a kingdom that has already come - it arrived the very moment that Jesus entered the world as an infant and it continues to this very day. And it will continue until he returns again to make all things new. It is a kingdom that exists wherever the king exists - and king Jesus exists right here, right now, with us. And so the kingdom is already near. And because it is near, we can enjoy the blessings that it offers - the forgiveness of sins and the promise of our own resurrection. We receive these blessings through his Word and at his table. And because his kingdom is near we have access to these blessings. And so we pray that his kingdom come because we need his kingdom to come near - especially when we act like the judge.

But, although we know that the kingdom is already near we also acknowledge that there continues to be a kingdom of Satan that rules in this world. And so we pray that Jesus will return once again to destroy evil once and for all, to set us free, and to make all things new. And so our prayers about the coming kingdom is more than just a prayer for today - it is also a plea for a time in the future when the kingdom will be realized completely, just as God has planned. It will be a kingdom where we will live with him, face to face, and free from the influence of Satan and the corruption of sin. And it will be a kingdom where complete justice - not earthly justice, not the kind of justice that we expect, but heavenly justice - exists. And so we pray for that day. And we pray without ceasing. And through faith we know that it will one day come.

Please pray with me.

Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name, Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen.

Amen.