

Thy Kingdom Come

The Jewish concept of kingdom includes Yahweh's covenant reign over Israel but has ultimate expression in the eschatological defeat of Israel's enemies and the setting up of a glorious future for Israel. This sentiment can be seen repeatedly throughout the prophets, inter-testamental books, and the New Testament. As it moves into the New Testament, Jesus Christ is seen as the King Who brings this kingdom into reality. One such statement is Zacharias' prophesy at the birth of his son John the Baptist (Lk.1:68-75).

Blessed be the Lord God of Israel,
For He has visited us and accomplished redemption for His people,
And has raised up a horn of salvation for us
In the house of David His servant-
As He spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from of old-
Salvation from our enemies,
And from all those who hate us;
To show mercy toward our fathers, And to remember His holly covenant,
The oath which He swore to Abraham our father,
To grant us that we being delivered from the hand of our enemies,
Might serve Him without fear,
In holiness and righteousness before him all our days.

Zacharias anticipates John's role as preparing the way for the Christ, Who brings in the kingdom.

As Jesus comes He is not quite what the people expect such a king to be, but He affirms that the disciples have it right in recognizing Him as the King "the

Christ, the son of the living God” (Mt. 16: 16). When Jesus unpacks this eschatological kingdom associated with His second coming, He does so promising everlasting reward and continuing responsibility for His righteous faithful servants (Mt. 25:14-46; Lk. 19:11-27). This conception fits with the apocalyptic hopes of the Jewish people. The timing of the establishment of this eschatological kingdom is set by God the Father (Acts 1:7). However, in the midst of anticipating an eschatological kingdom, Jesus also identifies that certain virtues in relation to Christ identify the poor in spirit and those who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness as already within kingdom (Mt. 5:3, 10). This kingdom is like mustard seed and leaven; the kingdom starts small (as in Jesus’ band of disciples) and then grows large and permeate the whole (Mt. 13:31-33). This world already lives in the kingdom of Christ awaiting the eschatological expression of the kingdom of the Father to come (Mt. 13:38, 41, 43).

Jesus demonstrated a deep commitment to prayer in His life and prayed repeatedly. These New Testament words for prayer are words describing petition. His disciples noticed His practice and asked Him to teach them to pray as John the Baptist had taught his disciples to pray. The features of the prayer are not altogether novel since Jews had prayed to “our Father” before this and as one compares the following quaddish prayer one can see similarities, “Exalted and hallowed be Thy good name in all the world which He created according to His will. May He let His kingdom rule in your lifetime and in your days and in the lifetime of the whole house of Israel, speedily and soon.” Jesus’ prayer is however deeply personal and compassionate, applying kingdom to life. Jesus gives his disciples a pattern for them to pray (Mt. 6:9 makes it clearer that it is a model; Lk. 11:2-4). Each line in the prayer expresses an application of a kingdom quality into life. “Father, let your name be regarded as holy.” The unique separateness which Isaiah had expressed as holiness had been that God was the everlasting king (Isa. 6:1, 3). “Father” could also be a kingly title, but more

personal. In the eschatological era the living creatures near the Father's throne continue to celebrate the Father as the everlasting God Who has the almighty power to bring about His reign (Rev.4:8). This is certainly a request that God's name be highly honored. "Thy kingdom come" is a request that resonates with Jewish expectation and petition of longing for the eschatological kingdom. The kingdom is however encroaching already in practical ways, so a practical request follows for the next days' sustaining food or bread. This connects with the average peasant's life, where income was earned day to day, and was paid at the end of the day for the next days' food needs. "Forgive us our sins in the manner that we also have forgiven everyone indebted to us." Their own pattern of forgiveness identifies the extent to which they are praying for their own forgiveness as indicated by the *hōs*, which is translated "as" or "for." I have elsewhere argued that the synoptic linkage of divine forgiveness after the pattern of our virtue of forgiveness is seen as salvific in identifying who gains kingdom and misses hell fire.¹ This request is one for continued benefit in relationship with the Father and gracious inclusion in this kingdom program by the Father. It is however a request that we need to have a track record compliance. We must be forgiving people. But life is not simply composed of our choices as though God was a vending machine; God is sovereign. The final request comes, "lead us not into temptation" because God is the sovereign one who leads and has lead Jesus out into temptation (Lk. 4:1), and Jesus is asking his disciples to pray this that they would not have similar trials under God's oversight. Each petition in this prayer has to do with applying aspects of the Father's kingdom to our lives.

The Lord's pattern prayer is immediately followed by parables for persistence and confidence in getting our petition answered in the affirmative. Suppose a friend has arrived late at night, perhaps traveling because of the heat of the sun in the desert. Hospitality requires feeding people, but as a peasant you

¹ Doug Kennard, ed. *The Relationship Between Epistemology, Hermeneutics, Biblical Theology and Contextualization* (Lewiston: Mellen Press, 1999) pp.128-133.

may have no more food for that day, so you wake up a neighbor requesting food from him. Though the neighbor makes excuses about his family already laying out on their mats, but because you are persistent he will get up and give you as much as you need. This neighbor's reluctance is overcome by persistence. However, God, the Father is not reluctant. The asker will receive and the seeker will find (Lk. 11:10). Perhaps such encouragement to be persistent in prayer for application of the kingdom is informed by such requests actually having an effect of bringing in the kingdom, with its benefits. Jesus then follows this with a fatherly perspective that when a son makes a request for food, fathers would not give their son something hazardous to his health, like a snake or a scorpion. "If you being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him?" (Lk. 11:13). The giving of the Holy Spirit was identified as the enablement for the kingdom era (e.g. Joel 2:27-29). So unlike the neighbor, God is eager to give that which will bring in the kingdom and apply these kingdom benefits. Perhaps our persistent prayers make a difference. Remember that the Spirit and the bride request Lord Jesus to come (Rev. 22:17). Jesus responds, "Yes, I am coming quickly" (Rev. 22:20). The apostle John joins in this sentiment that Jesus is urging us to pray, "Come Lord Jesus." Perhaps these prayers for the coming and establishment of the kingdom make a difference. Anyway around it, on Jesus' authority, and John's authority, and God's authority we should be praying for the kingdom to come. O Lord Jesus come to establish your kingdom!

The imminence of God's coming is balanced in Peter between God's timing and man's participation. Peter emphasized that Christians beloved by God need to remember that God's time is different than the way man counts time; "with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day" (2 Pet. 3:8). This different divine timing is not a chiliastic argument for a six thousand year development of the creation with a thousand year kingdom rest.² In

² *Contra Epistle of Barnabas* 5:4; Irenaeus, *Adv. Heb.* 5:23.2; 5:28.3.

fact, Peter's statements argue the opposite of a known time frame; he points out that one cannot calculate when these events will take place. Neither does the verse mean that God is contemporaneous with time³ because Peter still describes God as experiencing time as days and years. Furthermore, God's counting of days and years as being different than a human assessment does not make time meaningless. God's time as with His attributes are measured on a much greater scale than a human normally considers. The fact that God's timing has not been reached provides no grounds for viewing it as slow, which would raise a concern of God's indifference or impotence (2 Pet. 3:9). Presumably some had regarded it as slow but Peter exhorts believers to regard it as an expression of God's compassionate patience in bringing in salvation for them and others who would repent (2 Pet. 3:9, 15). However, to those who mark God as impotent or indifferent, judgment will come quickly when they are not ready (2 Pet. 3:4, 9-10). God's timing seems to hinge on His accomplishing a salvific goal rather than an arbitrary date.

Peter exhorts us to look for and hasten the coming of the Day of the Lord (2 Pet. 3:12). The first word (*prosdokaō*) describes an expectant waiting and observing, with hope and perhaps fear about what will take place. The second word (*speyddō*) describes zealous industry to hasten the coming. This concept is not hastening toward the coming, for that would require a preposition like "toward" in the text, however there isn't one there. Therefore, from the free will side it is our zealous industry that actually moves up the calendar day for the day of God to come. The kind of behavior we are to do to bring God's day sooner is zealous holiness and godliness (2 Pet. 3:11-12). This coming of the Day of God has a judgment primarily on the ungodly men and not the heavenly bodies (2 Pet. 3:7). Apparently, the destruction of the existing heavens and earth is the extreme cost it takes to judge ungodly men. The person who considers this message should be zealously holy and godly, identified with the way of salvation and

³ Contra *Jubilees* 4:30; *Apocalypse of Abraham* 28; *Enoch* 91:17; and 2 *Enoch* 33.

secluded from the way of judgment (1 Pet. 1:13-16; 2 Pet. 1:5-6, 11; 3:11). The believer should live his life in such a way as to be recognized by the God who judges, as identifying himself with Christ's spotless and blameless character (1 Pet. 1:19; 2 Pet. 3:14) and far from the false teachers' character of blots and blemishes (2 Pet. 2:13). Furthermore, any length of time it takes for the cataclysm to come should be considered as the Lord's patient salvation work and not an opportunity to sin.

Christ reigns currently in his everlasting kingdom but there is a future expression of this reign in the restoration of all things. As with the exhortation to look for the coming of the Lord, Peter describes himself and his readers as in the condition of looking for (*prosdoxaō*) the new heavens and earth (2 Pet. 3:12-14). They are expectantly waiting and observing with hope and perhaps fear about God's bringing into existence this remarkably new order which serves as the salvific goal, completely characterized by righteousness. The newness of these heavens and earth evidence that the new order is not merely a remaking or refurbishing of the present order, but a whole new order.

The restoration of all things is another description of either the same age or an earlier stage approximating it. *Apokatastasis* refers to a restoration of everything either to a previous state or to perfection. Such a restoration of everything in Judaism took a teleological framework instead of the Egyptian and Babylonian cycles of endless recurrence. The concept of restoration includes restoring Israel back into the land after the exile (Jer. 16:15; 23:8; 24:6). The restoration eschatologically raises Israel to its full former glory (Ezek. 16:55). In this restoration Elijah the prophet restores all things (Mal. 4:6; Matt. 17:11; Mk. 9:12). The objective restoration of all things begins when Jesus Christ returns from heaven to earth (Acts 3:20-21). The prophets spoke about the coming of Christ initiating the restoration; it is characterized as the time when the Abrahamic blessings are realized by the repentant and Christ functions as the Mosaic mediatorial prophet on earth (Acts 3:21-26). The fact that the non-

repentant are excluded from these blessings of restoration indicates that this restoration is not a universal salvation. This indicates that the restoration is to a state of perfection, excluding the unrepentant that expresses a continuum with the best of the past but excelling beyond it.

This objective restoration is identified with the subjective times of refreshing (*anapsysis*, Acts 3:19-29). With the aorist verb and the relationship with the noun "time" (*kairos*), times of refreshing cannot be mere personal or corporate breaks in end-time afflictions; it needs to be seen as the definitive age of refreshment. The concept of *anapsysis* includes breathing space, relief, relaxation, refreshment, and of course the Messianic age that brings rest. The definitive age of restoration and refreshment objectively begin together when Christ comes back to earth. However, Peter develops a subjective effect of when that might be. The Jews' repentance, which provides them with forgiveness serves as a condition enabling the divinely purposed Messianic age of rest to come (as an age, and not merely an individual experience). This means that while the age begins with Christ's coming, the repentance of these Jews (and maybe other non-Christians) has an effect on when Christ will come to initiate this age. That is, perhaps responsiveness in repentance and maybe evangelism could bring the Messianic age of rest sooner than might otherwise be the case.

So, we have seen that the sovereign Lord's eschatological kingdom might be brought sooner than otherwise might be by the following: prayer, holy and godly living, repentance and evangelism. Yet we do not bring in the kingdom; Christ brings in the kingdom. Of this Christ in the divine throne room the myriads say, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing" (Rev. 5:12). All creatures responded saying, "To Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, be blessing and honor and glory and dominion forever and ever" (Rev. 5:13). With God and Christ (at His second coming) bringing in the eschatological kingdom, we must

wait for Him to accomplish this level of His reign, and do what we can to help His reign be soon. So I pray, O Lord Jesus come! Thy kingdom come!