

Sermon for February 4, 2018 - 2nd Petition of the Lord's Prayer

Romans 14:17 (EHV)

Theme: The Kingdom of God:

- 1) What it is.
- 2) The blessings it offers.

For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.

Christ's kingdom. We ask for it every time we pray the LORD's prayer. But, what exactly is it?

At first glance, we might imagine that we are merely asking Jesus to come back again at the end of time to take us to his promised, eternal paradise. Now, while it is certainly not wrong to think this about our final deliverance when praying this petition, Jesus intended these words to mean something slightly different.

As we will learn today, the kingdom for which we pray is not only a future hope, but a present reality that gives us amazing practical blessings for our daily lives. Let us consider these things, under the theme: **The Kingdom of God:** *what it is and the blessings it offers.*

Part One: The Kingdom of God – What it is.

Now, what is the first thing you think of when you hear the word “kingdom”? If you are in any way like me, you might think of a territory ruled by a king, which would mean Christ's kingdom is heaven, right?

Well, not so fast. When the Bible uses the word “kingdom,” it doesn't only refer to a place, but often to the ruling activity of a king. For this reason Jesus, when asked when the kingdom of God would come, answered: *“The kingdom of God is not coming in a way you can observe,²¹ nor will people say, ‘Look, here it is!’ or ‘Look, there it is!’ because the kingdom of God is within you.”ⁱ*

Based on what Jesus said, understand that God's kingdom is not so much a place (like heaven), as it is his ruling activity in the hearts of believers. And how does the LORD rule in the hearts of believers? Through his Gospel in Word and Sacrament. His rule in the heart begins when the Holy Spirit, through the preaching of the Law, leads a sinner to acknowledge his sins in terror. Then, through the preaching of the Gospel, the Holy Spirit leads that same sinner to confess his sins to God – trusting in the LORD's mercy to forgive him for Christ's sake.

And the LORD does forgive the sinner who thus repents. Why? Because *God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish, but have eternal*

life.ⁱⁱ In other words, the kingdom of God comes to a person when the Holy Spirit, working through the Word, leads a sinner to repent and believe in Jesus for the forgiveness of his sins. In the sacrament of Holy Baptism the Holy Spirit seals the person in this forgiveness, marking him as God's dearly loved child who he adopted and clothed in Christ.

Christ's kingdom is not just a place. It is the LORD's guiding, strengthening and protecting through the means of grace. For this reason, the coming of Christ' kingdom is not just some future hope of ours. It is a present reality – existing wherever his Gospel is taught and sacraments administered in truth and purity; for wherever that happens, you can be sure the Holy Spirit is present, working his wonders.

Part Two: The Kingdom of God – The blessings it offers

Now that we understand what the Kingdom of God is, let us consider why we continually ask God that it comes to us. In other words, what blessings does God offer us through Christ's kingdom that make us want to make sure that we never wander away from it? They are wonderfully summarized in our sermon text, which reads:

For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking (that is to say, a matter of outward acts that are neither commanded nor forbidden by God's Word), but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.

The first blessing of Christ's rule in our hearts is, therefore, that of righteousness, or, to say it another way, being right with God. And how do we attain this righteousness? Through our own good life and behavior? Absolutely not! As the apostle Paul so aptly points out in the first three chapters of Romans: *There is no one who is righteous, not even one. ¹¹ There is no one who understands. There is no one who searches for God. . . ²⁰ For this reason, no one will be declared righteous in his sight by works of the law, for through the law we become aware of sin.*ⁱⁱⁱ

Yes, if left to our own devices, there is absolutely no way we could get ourselves right with God. Left to ourselves, we would have no hope – only despair. But, thanks be to God, he doesn't leave us to work out our salvation on our own, as St. Paul says: ²¹ *But now, completely apart from the law, a righteousness from God has been made known. The Law and the Prophets testify to it. ²² This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all and over all who believe.*^{iv}

This, then is the first blessing of Christ's rule in our hearts: we are covered with his righteousness to such a degree that He sees no sin in us at all. "But how can that be?" you might ask. It can be because Christ's sacrifice has paid for our sins to such a degree, that they can't ever haunt us again, as the Psalmist writes: *As distant as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our rebellious acts from us.*^v The Holy Spirit keeps us in this righteousness through the Gospel by continuing to remind us of what God has done for us in Christ, thereby strengthening our faith in Him.

Do you now understand the wonderful blessing this righteousness has for your life? All too often the guilt of our sins drags us down to such despair, that we feel as if we can't go on living. But Christ conquers your guilt. How? By declaring you forgiven and acquitted of all sin – regardless

of what you have done. Christ can do this because he paid for your sins in full. Through faith in Him you received the benefits of His work. Through faith in Him, you are at peace with God.

And that brings us to the second of the three blessings mentioned by Paul concerning Christ's rule in our hearts: that of peace.

What, exactly, is the peace that Christ's kingdom brings? It is, first and foremost, a total reconciliation with the LORD. We no longer fear his wrath. We are at peace with God. And if we are at peace with Him, we can be sure that the tough, trying and downright sorrowful times we face in life are not punishments for sin, rather they are ways through which the LORD trains and strengthens us in love – as the Bible says: *My son, do not regard the Lord's discipline lightly, and do not become weary of his correction. For the Lord disciplines the one whom he loves, and he corrects every son he accepts. Endure suffering as discipline. God is dealing with you as sons.*^{vi} And elsewhere Paul writes: *We know that all things work together for the good of those who love God.*^{vii}

Oh, how happy these thoughts make me. Why do I say that? Because the devil often tries to tempt me into thinking that the evil I face in life is payback for a completely unrelated sin I repented of long ago. The devil tries to use the guilt of that sin against me, claiming that God is against me. But the truth is that God is not against me; He is for me! Because the LORD has so wonderfully reconciled me to himself, I can face life with the confidence of knowing that I am at peace with him - regardless of the evil comes my way. He's got my back. The LORD will keep his promise to *rescue me from every evil work and will bring me safely into his heavenly kingdom. To him be the glory forever and ever.*^{viii}

And this, brothers and sisters in Christ, leads me to the final blessing mentioned by Paul that we have under Christ's rule in our hearts: the blessing of joy.

Understand this joy correctly. It is not the kind of joy that always shows itself in ecstatic expressions of happiness. No, more often than not this joy is hidden behind the tears of sorrow we shed on this evil earth. But even though there may be many troubles in our life, this inner joy in the Holy Spirit's work sustains us. We trust that Christ will keep his promises – working even in the evil we experience for our eternal good. We believe that our sins are indeed forgiven, and this makes us happy as we look forward to the eternity that we will get to spend with God in the perfect paradise he will bring with him on the last day.

Yes, looking forward to that day gives us great joy as we think about all the blessings it will entail. And this joy sustains us as we go about our daily lives. It moves us to get up every morning and praise God for his wonderful works. This joy moves us to show love to others – even when they don't show that same love back. It gives us the reason to share the Gospel with others – even if they mock us for doing so. The joy we have in Christ shines through our attitude and actions – attracting others to Christ, so that He might rule in their hearts like he rules in ours, giving them the same blessings that we have received ourselves through faith in the Gospel.

So you see, the Kingdom of God is more than just a future wish, it is a present reality filled with wonderful blessings that give meaning, purpose and hope for our lives on this earth. For this reason,

let us always fervently pray: “Thy Kingdom come, O LORD. Send your Holy Spirit to rule in our hearts by means of your Gospel so that our lives might glorify you in all we think, say and do. And then, when our last our comes, welcome us home to your side in heaven, where we – together with all your saints – will praise you without end for the wonderful salvation you have won for us in Christ”. Amen.

ⁱ Luke 17:20-21 (EHV)

ⁱⁱ John 3:16 (EHV)

ⁱⁱⁱ Romans 3:10-11, 20 (EHV)

^{iv} Romans 3:21-22 (EHV)

^v Psalm 103:12 (EHV)

^{vi} Hebrews 12:4-7 (EHV)

^{vii} Romans 8:28 (EHV)

^{viii} 2 Timothy 4:18 (EHV)