

12 YOUR KINGDOM COME, YOUR WILL BE DONE

SANDI: Meg, did you hear about those kids at school who got arrested yesterday for selling drugs?

MEG: Everybody's heard! I never thought anything like that would happen here, did you?

SANDI: My brother knew one of the guys. He said he never would have guessed. He was just an average kid.

MEG: It's scary, isn't it? Sometimes I think the whole world is messed up. I mean, how's it ever going to end?

SANDI: By the time we graduate, who knows what it's going to be like around here. I think society is out of control.

• A growing number of young people are feeling like Sandi and Meg. Bad news is no longer something they just read about in the newspapers. Powerful problems like drug and alcohol abuse, violence, and so many others are becoming commonplace events. People often feel as if these are problems that will never go away.

It is tempting to write off the human race and expect that nothing will ever get better. The Christian, however, can never do that. In the Second and Third Petitions of the Lord's Prayer, we find the core of what the Christian faith is all about.

3 STATEMENTS

- The kingdom of God is the reign of God.
- The coming of the kingdom was Jesus' central promise and reflects God's will.
- When we pray for the kingdom to come, we are praying to be part of what is inevitable.

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SOURCE

JESUS' MAIN TEACHING

Nothing was more central to Jesus' preaching and teaching than the coming of the kingdom of God. Time after time the gospel writers tell about Jesus saying or doing something to emphasize that God's kingdom was real and that it was coming.

Read the following Bible passages about Jesus' kingdom teachings and answer the questions that follow to check your understanding of them: Matthew 5:1-11; Matthew 19:13-15; Matthew 6:10; Mark 4:26-33; Mark 1:14-15.

1. What idea is common to all five of these passages?

2. According to Matthew 5:1-11, to whom belongs the kingdom of heaven?

3. According to Matthew 19:13-15, to whom belongs the kingdom of heaven?

4. According to Mark 4:26-33, does the kingdom of God come crashing in or does it grow slowly?

5. According to Mark 1:14-15, what does Jesus say in Galilee at the very beginning of his ministry?

6. In one or two sentences, summarize what these five Bible passages teach us about the kingdom.

Jesus singles out an unusual group of people as already being residents of the kingdom. A careful reading shows us that the coming of the kingdom is something that is under God's control and not ours. It is as if Jesus was saying, "Here it comes, ready or not."



WHAT DOES MARTIN LUTHER SAY?

See what Luther wrote to explain the Second and Third Petitions of the Lord's Prayer (see page 173).

Notice the first thing Luther says about each Petition. For the Second Petition he says, "God's kingdom comes indeed without our praying for it. . . ." Then for the Third Petition he writes, "The good and gracious will of God is surely done without our prayer. . . ."

This is a very important idea. God's kingdom does not depend on what we do or don't do. It depends only upon God. In both cases, Luther goes on to say that we pray for these things so that *we* can be a part of it—a part of the inevitable.

THE KINGDOM OF GOD

In reading the Bible passages under "Jesus' Main Teaching," did you notice that there were two different ways of identifying the kingdom? In the verses from Matthew, it was called the kingdom of heaven. In Mark, it was called the kingdom of God. These are simply two different ways of saying the same thing.

But what is the kingdom? *The kingdom of God is the reign of God.* The word *kingdom* may be a bit misleading. It sounds as if the kingdom is a geographical place, but it is not. It is a kingdom that has no borders, no flag, no national anthem, no currency. It is

The kingdom of God is the reign of God.



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a kingdom made up of only two parts: God and citizens.

Whenever and wherever God's will is done, there is the kingdom of God. That's why Jesus told those two parables about seeds growing (Mark 4:26-33). That is how the kingdom of God comes—growing slowly, a step at a time. As with seeds, it is impossible to sit still and watch the kingdom grow, but grow it does. It will grow until everything in creation once again reflects the will of God, the way God intended the world to be.

When Jesus announced at the beginning of his ministry that "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near" (Mark 1:15), he was telling us that in him, God was ushering in the kingdom. Jesus was the first citizen and came to make it possible for all of us to be citizens. He taught many things about the kingdom, but he also died so that the last barrier to our citizenship would be removed.

Notice, too, that even as Jesus announced that he was ushering in the kingdom, he gave directions about how to be a citizen in it. "Repent, and believe in the good news," (Mark 4:15) he said.

To repent means literally to "turn around" and look a different direction. To do so, we must take our eyes off our own goals for life and fix them on God's goals for life. To become a citizen of the kingdom means to turn around and look at the kingdom—to look at Jesus himself.

GOD'S WILL

The kingdom is God's reign, the perfect reflection of God's will. But what is God's will and how can we know it? A Christian must always answer that question by speaking about Jesus. Our God, who is "totally other" than us has chosen to reveal the divine nature and will through Jesus. Jesus is God's message about God.

One of the places where Jesus was clearest about his mission and about the will of God was when he read from the Book of Isaiah in the synagogue. Read Luke 4:18-21 and answer these questions.



1. After reading from Isaiah, Jesus closed the book he had been reading from, sat down, and said something remarkable. What did he say?

2. What do you think Jesus meant?

3. Who was the kingdom focused on?

There are many kinds of poverty, captivity, blindness, and oppression in the world. Some of the wealthiest people are really poor in the things that matter. Some of the freest people are captive to life-styles that hurt themselves and others. Some of us who have perfect vision are still blind to what is going on around us. Some of the most powerful people in the world are oppressed by their own drive to have more power. Appearances can be deceiving. Some of the most together-looking people on the outside are the most broken on the inside. By contrast, some of the most broken-appearing people are the most whole on the inside.

One could say that God's will is for the world to recover the *wholeness* that God created it to have. Jesus' mission was to be that wholeness and to share it with others.

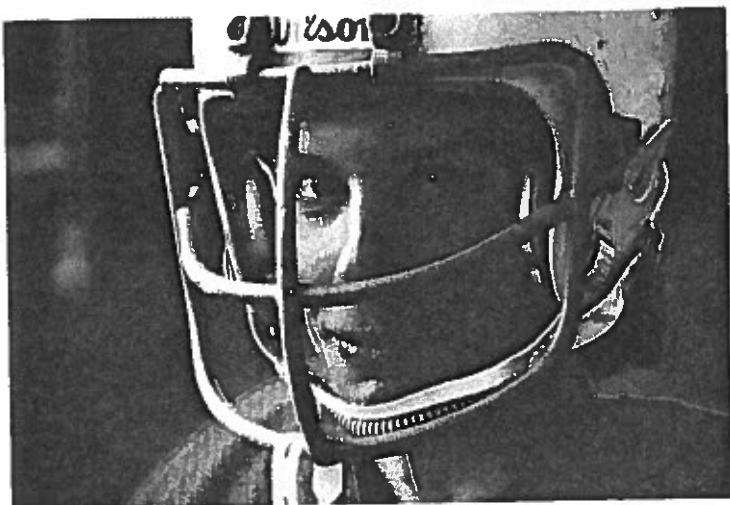
Wherever God's kingdom is, there we will find wholeness. And it all begins with ourselves and whether we will permit ourselves to "turn around" and look at the kingdom. The kingdom is only here now as a seedling, but it will come fully. *The coming of the kingdom was Jesus' central promise and reflects God's will.*

WHY PRAY FOR THE INEVITABLE?

In the Second and Third Petitions of the Lord's Prayer, we pray for something that is inevitable. The kingdom will come whether we turn around or not. So why pray for it?

Think back to the conversation between Sandi and Meg. If they were your friends, what ways might you find to carry out your baptismal mission with them? How might you share with them the truth that *when we pray for the kingdom to come, we are praying to be a part of the inevitable*? Does our baptismal mission call us to do anything in the meantime or should we just wait for the inevitable?

The coming of the kingdom was Jesus' central promise and reflects God's will.



As a guide to thinking about this last question, imagine that your football team was ahead 44-0 late in the fourth quarter. You are going to win the game, right? Maybe. Even though it is clear you are going to win, you must still finish the game. The great part, though, is that though you still must play, you know you are playing on the winning side!

When we pray for the kingdom to come, we are praying to be part of what is inevitable.

Shaping life

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

In Jesus' day, there were many powerful kingdoms and empires in the world. The one that controlled Israel during Jesus' lifetime was the Roman Empire. When Jesus spoke about the kingdom of God, it sounded threatening to those who had mighty empires. This was even one of the reasons that some people wanted to crucify Jesus.

FURTHER

opportunities

Bible Reading and Reflection

Read Luke 4:16-21 each day during the week and spend time reflecting on it. Allow yourself to be open to new insights that are likely to come with each return to the text.

Memory

Memorize the two questions and answers for both the Second and the Third Petitions of the Lord's Prayer. This is a longer assignment than usual, so it is a good idea to get off to an early start.

Activity 1

God places some people in our midst as great examples for us. Pick one or two of these people and write down the reasons you think they are kingdom citizens. If you wish, write those persons a note or a letter thanking them for the Christian example they set for you.

Activity 2

Some people in recent history have clearly demonstrated through their words and actions that they take the Second and Third Petitions of the Lord's Prayer very seriously and have trusted God enough to have the kingdom come to them as they go about doing the will of God. Below are some people who have made important contributions to our understanding of the kingdom. Learn more

about them. Your public or church library will have information you can look up that will help you know them better. You could choose one person to study in depth or you could look up each of them and see the wide variety of people who are kingdom citizens.

- Mother Teresa, helper of the poor in India
- Toyohiko Kagawa, helper of the poor in Japan
- Martin Luther King Jr., worker for justice in the United States
- Chief Seathl (sometimes spelled Seattle), great leader of Native North American peoples
- Roberto Clemente, helper to organize humanitarian aid after an earthquake devastated Nicaragua

Activity 3

Following are some key words for the session, but none of the consonants stayed in place. The vowels are in their proper places and the pile of consonants is at the bottom. Can you put the consonants back in place?

— i — — — o —

— e i — —

— i — —

i — e — i — a — — e

— u — — e —

— e a — e —

— i — i — e —

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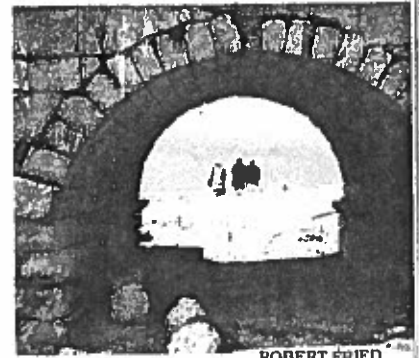
All this talk about the kingdom of God apparently had people feeling threatened.

They were, of course, threatened, but certainly not in the way they thought. Jesus was not going to overthrow a government by raising an army for the kingdom of God. The threat that Jesus posed was in calling attention to the power of God's love, which was stronger than any Roman legion.

Today there are few mighty kingdoms in the world. Many of the kings and queens today have more ceremonial responsibility than real power. Talking about the kingdom of God these days threatens no one.

Or does it?

- What other kinds of mighty kingdoms are around these days?
- How might they be threatened by the kingdom of God?
- Can God's kingdom really compete with these other kingdoms?



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FOCUS

ON KINGDOMS IN JESUS' DAY

There were many kingdoms in Jesus' day. Some were powerful and some were not. Rome was the great power during Jesus' lifetime. (It was an empire and not technically a kingdom.) Rome, however, controlled many smaller kingdoms. The kings still directly ruled over their people in many cases, but were pretty much told what to do by Rome. Rome also ruled Israel, but during Jesus' day there was much political unrest. There had even been a few open attempts at rebellion that were quickly and brutally put down. The Romans were very unpopular and most Jews wanted them out of their country.