

“Where is God’s Kingdom?: The Lord’s Prayer, part 2”

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FBCB

Matthew 6:5-13

CHILDREN’S TIME

Do you know what this symbol is? It is the symbol of a company called Nike.

At one time, they were just known as a running shoe company, but now they make equipment for just about every sport you can imagine. People around the world recognize the Nike symbol.

In a lot of Nike’s ads they say “Just Do It!” But what does that mean? Well, it means that when it comes to sports, don’t just talk about it — just do it! Don’t just talk about running, go out and run. Don’t just talk about basketball, go out and play the game. Don’t just talk about ... well, you get the idea.

One day Jesus was with his closest friends and they asked him to teach them how to pray. Jesus didn't say, “Well, first you get down on your knees, then you fold your hands, then you close your eyes, and then you start to pray.

After giving them a prayer, he said to his friends to “just do it.” It is important to pray, but it is just as important to go out and live the prayer.

When we come to this church building, we talk a lot about prayer, don't we? When someone is sick, we pray for the them. When someone is having problems in their family or at work, we pray for them too. When there is war in the world, we pray for peace.

It is important to do this because God asked us to take all of our concerns to God in prayer.

It is also just as important to live out the prayer — to “just do it!” We do this by visiting that person who is sick, or sending them a card if they are contagious, and letting them know that they are loved. It means that we give a hug to those who are having problems and encouraging them. It means that we are people of peace, even when those around us are not.

SERMON

Last week, in our first Sunday on the Lord's Prayer, we talked about the similarities between chicken culture and rabbi culture. Just like hens follow a rooster's lead, Jesus' disciples followed his lead. They dedicated themselves to imitate him as their rabbi.

Like other rabbis, Jesus taught them his prayer — the prayer that summarized the essence of his teaching. We talked last week about words like “our” and “us” in the Lord's Prayer. These words demonstrate how Jesus wanted his disciples to consider a larger circle of people than just the believers inside their white picket fence.

Jesus' concern was for the whole world.

This pulls us out of a self-centered way of thinking and living, to consider the needs of those outside our church community. This is a theme we find throughout scripture.

Today we are considering the part of the Lord's Prayer that says, “Your kingdom come, your will be done on Earth as it is in Heaven.”

Of course this needs to begin with a story from the world of football.

How many of you are football fans? We are now into the thick of the NFL playoffs after the wildcard games last week and two games yesterday. The Lions, of course are out, and getting a new coach, so some of you might be done with football for the season. Others of you might be excited to watch the playoffs all the way to the Superbowl in February. And some of you could care less about football at all.

Now I have to tell you that Phyllis, is a professed non-football fan. I shared the following story with her and she really enjoyed it, so this is for everyone.

A man named Ken Davis recounted this story from the days when Mike Ditka was coaching the Chicago Bears.

Ditka was about to give a pep talk to the team in the locker room and he looked up and saw William Perry, also known as William the “Refrigerator” Perry. The Refrigerator was a mountain of a man. He stood 6’2” and weighted in at 338 pounds and was a fright for any offensive lineman or quarterback.

Ditka looked up at the Refrigerator and said, “When I get finished I’d

like you to close with the Lord's Prayer." Then he began his talk.

Meanwhile Jim McMahon, the brash and outspoken quarterback, punched John Cassis and whispered, "Look at Perry, he doesn't know the Lord's Prayer."

The Fridge sat there with a look of panic on his face, his head down in his hands as sweat poured off his forehead.

Cassis replied, "Nah...sure he does! He's just nervous." Everybody knows the Lord's Prayer."

After a few minutes of the coach's pep talk and watching the Refrigerator leak several gallons of sweat, McMahon nudged Cassis again and said, "I'll bet you fifty bucks Fridge doesn't know the Lord's Prayer."

"You're on." said Cassis.

When Coach Ditka finished his talk, he asked all the men in the locker room to remove their caps and bow their heads and then nodded at the Fridge.

The room was silent for a few moments before the Fridge began in a shaky voice, "Now I lay me

down to sleep. I pray the Lord my soul to keep..."

Cassis felt a tap on his shoulder. It was McMahon who whispered to him, "You win. Here's fifty bucks. I had no idea Fridge knew the Lord's Prayer."

The Lord's Prayer is not something that we are born knowing, but something that we learn from others, from family, from the faith community — and it is about much more than just words. **The Lord's Prayer is about the kind of world that those words create when people like you and me live them.**

"Your kingdom come, your will be done on Earth as it is in Heaven"

Jesus' prayer speaks of a kingdom. We have all sorts of mental pictures when we think about kingdoms, don't we?

What comes to mind when you think about a kingdom? Shout them out.

There are many fairy tales, movies, and many a TV series that are centered around kingdoms of the past or from imagination. A kingdom, by definition, is a system

of government run by a single ruler, a monarch, a king or queen.

The kingdom structure of government over time has given way to various forms of democracy or parliamentary government, beginning with Rome and Greece in the 500s AD and with some exceptions, most are gone from the world since World War II, after Hitler.

But in Jesus' day the "kingdom" was the primary form of government throughout the Middle East and world. This was the form of government that people understood, so it makes sense that Jesus would describe God's realm as a kingdom.

However, the Kingdom of God, as Jesus described it, was very different from the typical kingdom that people knew and saw around them.

This is why Jesus kept telling his disciples stories and parables to help them understand this new kind of kingdom.

He started these stories often by saying, "The Kingdom of Heaven is like..." or "To what can I compare the Kingdom of Heaven? It is like..."

God's Kingdom was very important and central to Jesus' message because he included it in his prayer.

Jesus also referred to Heaven in his prayer.

What are some images you have when you hear people talk about "Heaven"? Shout them out.

Just like kingdoms, we have many images and pictures of Heaven from movies, cartoons, and books.

Most of the time Heaven is depicted as part of an other-worldly reality. Heaven is where God lives out there, up there, in some other place beyond us, unreachable by us.

We also often think about Heaven as the place we hope to get to when we die ... if we live the right way.

Or we might think of Heaven in a more practical way, as that reward after putting in the hard work, after living well, or doing things right.

After working hard, our "Heaven" might be moving into that new house with the yard for the kids, or space for the garden, and that

open-floor plan kitchen-dining-living area.

Perhaps you have been driving an older car, like me, that has some rust on it, and your Heaven is that shiny new car you have been dreaming about with the heated seats and the rear camera with screen that helps you back up without hitting anything.

Maybe your “Heaven” is that promotion you feel you deserve that will move you up the ladder and give you more respect.

What is your “Heaven?” What is it that you feel you have worked hard for and deserve?

Whatever that is, you have to ask, once you have obtained it, achieved it, or are rewarded with it, what then?

When we get that thing we have dreamed of or feel we have earned, we are left empty because there is always something more that we want or feel we deserve. Whatever that “Heaven” is, it simply will never satisfy us.

Instead of Heaven as the place we go when we die, or the reward we receive after hard work, perhaps we can understand Heaven simply

as the dwelling place of God, the space marked by God’s presence.

“Your Kingdom come, your will be done on Earth as it is in Heaven.”

The prayer is a petition for this world we live in to be like God’s realm.

It is a prayer that God’s presence would be here, transforming this world to be just like it is in Heaven, where God resides.

But the petition is even more than that, because Heaven is referred to by Jesus not as some other-worldly reality out there. Jesus talked about Heaven as a transformative reality here and now where we live.

Heaven is much bigger, much better, much richer, much more than we ever thought!

The Kingdom of Heaven that Jesus referred to includes an eternal reality for all time that begins now!

If we are going to see the Kingdom the way that Jesus does, we will need to rework the way we think about Heaven.

As we read the Bible there is the old way of thinking about Heaven

as a distinctly “other” place from where we are. We read that...

- * God is revealed from Heaven.
- * God pronounces from Heaven.
- * The Spirit of God comes from Heaven.
- * God’s glory resides in Heaven.
- * God’s dwelling place is in Heaven.

Then we get to the Gospels and there is a deepening of the story where we discover that God has come to where we are in the person of Jesus. God’s presence is among us and therefore this place is now Heaven.

It is like Air Force One — you know, the plane that the President flies in. There is a specific plane that the President rides in called Air Force One. But if the President would climb into one of those two-seater prop planes that takes off from a farmer’s field, that plane, while the President was aboard, would be called “Air Force One.” Literally, any plane that has the President on board is considered Air Force One.

It is the same with God. Any place where God dwells is considered Heaven. So, when God came to be among us, God established Heaven here in this world.

Jesus’ purpose was to establish the Kingdom of Heaven here on Earth. Then, as he was wrapping up his time, he turned over this work to the Holy Spirit, that God’s presence would continue to lead us and guide us, the Church, in building Heaven here in our world.

But how is this done. The answer is in the prayer itself.

“Your Kingdom come” is explained by “Your WILL be done on Earth as it is in Heaven.”

God’s Kingdom is here when we do the WILL of God — when we embody the message and live out the Lord’s Prayer.

This is hard to understand, because we look around us and see all sorts of examples of Heaven not being here, not the least of which is on display in politics with hurtful, hate-filled banter slung back and forth, and then terrorist attacks, racial tensions, homelessness, stories from North Korea, refugees fleeing Syria for their lives, and more. This all reminds us that many things in this world are not like Heaven.

“Where is the love?”

“Where is the compassion?”

“Where is peace?”

The Lord's Prayer is a petition that Heaven would reign here so that there is peace for those at war, there is healing for the sick and wounded, that there is enough for the poor, and that prisoners might be set free, and the blind might see.

This is the WILL of God.

This petition is not however us asking God to work some kind of magic and make it so while we stand on the sidelines and watch.

No, the petition is that we might be empowered to participate in what God is doing here in our world and be part of the work of Heaven.

The prayer calls us to action to be God's Church, to be God's people, to be God's Kingdom!

The prayer is to invite God to be present in us — that Heaven is real here in us as a people — that the Kingdom of Heaven reigns here by the way we live — that God's will is made complete in us!

This circles back to what we talked about last week. We participate in Heaven as we imitate Jesus, our rabbi. This is how we create a new way of life, a new way to be human in this world.

The first generation of Christians, described in the book of Acts, were building Heaven on Earth. They were giving selflessly to those who had need and even sacrificing of what they personally had accumulated for the good of those who didn't have enough. This is a picture of a living, breathing Heaven on Earth.

Let's make it personal as we pray: May Birmingham be re-created, be transformed into Heaven. May the warmth of God's love, hospitality and compassion, by the power of the Holy Spirit, be so infused in the community that is called First Baptist Church of Birmingham, that guests experience it when they walk through our doors.

And even more importantly that they may know the reality of the Kingdom of Heaven when you walk out those doors and live your life as the Church in the world.

Heaven is real when you visit someone in the hospital who is going into surgery. God's presence is there, and therefore Heaven is there.

Heaven and the hope of the Gospel exist when you selflessly and courageously stand and defend someone who is being

discriminated against or excluded because they happen to be gay, or black, or Muslim.

Heaven is found in the selfless act of generosity giving someone who is homeless and hungry a place to sleep, a warm meal, and lively conversation.

Heaven is real when you and a friend go out of your way to visit a prisoner and get to know them when nobody from their family acknowledges them. When they know that someone cares, Heaven is there.

Heaven is found where a middle school student sticks up for the kid bound to a wheel chair who is being bullied at school.

Heaven is found when you choose the very tough road of bringing humility and peace to your family when there has been only bitterness, hurt, and pain.

This is what it means to live the Lord's Prayer.

Where have you found Heaven in reality in your life?

Where have you participated in the Kingdom of Heaven?

How is God nudging you right now to participate in the Kingdom of Heaven?

What does God's Kingdom look like? It looks like you, when through God's Spirit, you live out the Lord's Prayer!