

Sermon for November 24th, 2024 – Christ the King Sunday

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.

When we pray “Your kingdom come” in the Lord’s Prayer, what exactly are we asking for? Initially, we might think we are requesting Jesus to return at the end of time and take us to His promised everlasting paradise. While it is not wrong to think about our final deliverance when praying this petition, Jesus intended these words to convey a more profound meaning.

As we will discover today, the kingdom for which we pray is not only a future hope but a present reality that bestows incredible blessings in our daily lives. Let us consider this truth, under the theme: **The Kingdom of God:** *what it is and the blessings it offers.*

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

What comes to mind when you hear the word “kingdom”? If you are like me, you may envision a territory ruled by a king, such as the United Kingdom or the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Is this what Jesus has in mind when He speaks of His kingdom? No, not quite.

The concept behind the word translated as “kingdom” in the Bible goes beyond a geographical location. It often signifies the activity of a king governing his people. Therefore, when asked when the kingdom of God would arrive, Jesus 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*

Understand then that Christ’s kingdom is not just a place (like heaven), but it also encompasses His overall ruling activity, especially within the hearts of believers. And how does the LORD rule in our hearts? Through His Word and Sacraments.

Christ’s rule over our hearts begins when the Holy Spirit uses the preaching of His Law to lead us to acknowledge our sins and the punishment we deserve because of them. Then, through the preaching of the Gospel, the Holy Spirit reveals that our God is merciful and willing to forgive us because of Jesus’ sacrifice. With that assurance, God awakens faith in our hearts, enabling us to confess our sins and trust in His forgiveness for Jesus’ sake.

And the LORD certainly forgives us when we repent. 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 The joy of receiving Jesus' forgiveness through the Gospel moves us to abandon sinful pursuits and start living for God. The Holy Spirit helps us understand that God's Commandments are meant for our well-being, providing protection and blessing. That understanding makes us want to keep God's commandments - not out of fear of punishment, but out of love for Jesus, who saved us and promises to work in all things for our everlasting good.

Therefore, Christ's kingdom is not merely a location; it is His governing activity over everything, especially His forgiving, guiding, strengthening, and protecting presence through the Gospel. That is why our prayers for Christ's kingdom to come are not just expressions of future hope, they also affirm our confidence in Jesus' promise to be with us now, ruling in our hearts through His Gospel. Moreover, we ask not only for Him to rule in our hearts but also in the hearts of many others as we share His message of salvation with the world.

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

Now that we understand that a key aspect of God's Kingdom is His rule in our hearts through the Gospel let's examine three amazing blessings the LORD grants us through His kingdom. These are beautifully 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 God bestows upon us through Christ's rule in our hearts is righteousness, or, to say it another way, being right with God. That invites the question: why would God consider us right with Him? Is it because we've been so good at keeping His law? Absolutely not! As the apostle Paul aptly points out in Romans chapter 3: *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.*²¹ *But now, completely apart from the law, a righteousness from God has been made known...*²² *This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all and over all who believe.*ⁱⁱⁱ

In other words, God declares us righteous through faith in Jesus. Why? Because Jesus perfectly kept God's law in our place, died to pay for all our sins, and rose from the grave to show that God accepted His sacrifice for us. Jesus saved us so completely that the Bible states: *as distant as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our rebellious acts from us.*^{iv}

Having declared us completely righteous in His sight for Jesus' sake, God has made us citizens of heaven and heirs of everlasting life. And Jesus continues to apply His righteousness to us through His Gospel, forgiving us each time we fall into sin and blessing our lives with peace and joy.

Isn't it supremely comforting to know that God considers us righteous because of Jesus? Why? Because the devil loves to overwhelm us with feelings of guilt and shame over our sins, trying to convince us that we are too far gone for God's forgiveness.

But listen to what Jesus says in the Gospel: "I have paid for all your sins in full. You are forgiven. More than that, I give you my righteousness as a gift. Trust My promise and live in the peace and joy that your future is secure: Heaven is your home. Let My Word guide you, and my Sacraments strengthen you for your life on this earth, to the glory of My name."

And that brings us to the second blessing God bestows on us through Christ's rule in our hearts: peace.

What kind of peace? Well, it's not the kind the world offers. No, this peace is far superior. It's the peace of knowing that because God reconciled us to Himself through Jesus, we don't have to worry about His anger anymore. Because God loves us, we can be certain that everything He allows in our lives is meant for our good, even the things that cause us immense heartache and pain. 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.*^v And elsewhere, Paul writes: *We know that all things work together for the good of those who love God.*^{vi}

Oh, how happy those truths make me! Why? Because the devil often tries to convince me that the struggles I face in life are God's punishment for some past sin. He constantly tries to make me feel like God is against me, demanding that I suffer before I can be fully forgiven. But that is a lie! The truth is that, because of Jesus, God doesn't require anything from me at all. The difficulties I endure are not because God hates me but because He loves me—causing me to cling to Him in faith so that I don't stray from Him. Because of the peace God blesses me with through the Gospel, I can live my life with confidence that the Lord will keep his promise to *rescue me from every evil work and will bring me safely into his heavenly kingdom.*^{vii} Oh, how this truth gives me joy.

Yes, Christ's rule in our hearts gives us joy unlike any other. It is not just a fleeting feeling of happiness. No, it is a deep-rooted confidence in Christ that sustains us through the tears of sorrow we shed in this sin-cursed world. Even if God allows many troubles into our lives, the fact that Christ rules in our hearts gives us joy. Why? Because we are certain of His promise *that our sufferings at the present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is going to be revealed to us.*^{viii} Because of Jesus, our future is as certain, bright, and everlasting as the glories of heaven, and, oh, how that truth brings us joy!

And our deep joy in the future that awaits us in Christ has many practical effects on our daily lives. It makes us want to wake up each morning, ready to face whatever comes our way, knowing that the Lord is with us and won't leave us as we cling to Him in faith. Our Christian joy impels us to demonstrate love to our enemies and share the Gospel with them, even when they persecute us for it. The joy we possess in Christ radiates through our attitude and actions, drawing others to Christ. This allows Him to rule in their hearts just like He rules in ours and give them the same blessings we have received through faith in the Gospel.

So, you see, brothers and sisters in Christ, the Kingdom of God is more than just a future wish; it is a present reality brimming with extraordinary blessings that infuse meaning, purpose, and hope into our earthly lives. Therefore, let us fervently pray: “Your Kingdom come, O LORD. Send your Holy Spirit to rule in our hearts through your Gospel so that our lives may glorify you in all we think, say and do. And when our last hour comes, welcome us home to your side in heaven, where we, together with all your saints, will praise you without end for the incredible 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, 20-22 (EHV)

^{iv} Psalm 103:12 (EHV)

^v Hebrews 12:4-7 (EHV)

^{vi} Romans 8:28 (EHV)

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

^{viii} Romans 8:18 (EHV)