

The Real Meaning of 'On Earth as It Is in Heaven'

We're all familiar with the words of Jesus when He instructed us to pray, "Your kingdom come; Your will be done on earth, as it is in heaven" (Matt. 6:10). But what exactly did He mean?

According to a popular teaching today, Jesus was saying that we should pray that the way things are in heaven is the way they should be on the earth.

Put another way, we can deduce God's will for the earth by looking at His will for heaven. Is there sickness in heaven? Absolutely not. Consequently, there should be no sickness on earth. Is there depression in heaven? Absolutely not. Consequently, there should be no depression on earth.

But is this what Jesus was actually teaching?

To be perfectly clear, I believe that healing and health are God's ideal will for His people, based on the teaching of Scripture. And so, when I pray for someone who is sick—especially for a sick believer—I do not pray, "Father, if it be Your will, heal this person." Instead, I ask our Father to heal. Or, if I feel led, I rebuke the sickness or disease.

I also believe that our physical healing was paid for at the cross, giving me further confidence when praying for the sick.

Yet I do not believe that Matthew 6:10 is being rightly interpreted, and it's important we not misapply the Lord's words.

Simple logic would tell you that Jesus was not saying, "Pray that things on earth today will be exactly as they are in heaven."

For example, there is no sexual intercourse in heaven. Does

that mean that all married couples should stop being together? Is that what we're praying when we say, "Lord, may Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven"?

What about evangelism? There is no evangelism in heaven because there are no lost souls in heaven. Are we therefore praying, "Lord, may all evangelism cease on earth in order to replicate what takes place in heaven"?

What about the trying of our faith? Presumably, there are no faith trials for believers in heaven, but they are designed for our growth here on earth. Should we pray instead, "Lord, may we never go through any trials for the rest of our lives since there are no trials in heaven"?

And what about death? Ultimately, in the future age of the new heavens and the new earth, there will be no death. Until then, death is the final reality for every human being. But if we're trying to replicate heaven on earth, doesn't that mean that we should raise every person from the dead—not just once, but endlessly?

Perhaps there is no sleep in heaven. Should we therefore teach, "Because there's no sleep in heaven, there should be no sleep on earth"?

Again, simple, Bible-based logic tells you that this is not what Jesus was teaching. Instead, He taught us to pray that just as God's will is done in heaven—perfectly and completely and without resistance—His will should be carried out here on earth.

And how do we determine what His will is? By studying His Word and asking Him for insight and understanding.

When we do that, we see that He has called us to heal the sick, to set the captives free, to bring good news to the lost. We learn that He has anointed us to bring hope to the hopeless, joy to the downtrodden, victory to the defeated.

His will is glorious and wonderful and liberating. His will reflects His heart and His character. His will brings life and deliverance and freedom. And we look forward to the day when His will and His desires will be carried out perfectly and in full here on earth.

At the same time, the day will come when it will be His will to pour out wrath and judgment on a sinning, unrepentant world. (This is taught throughout the New Testament. It is not just an Old Testament theme.) And when we pray for His kingdom to come and His will to be done, we are praying for that as well.

In fact, whenever we say, "Maranatha! Even so, come, Lord Jesus!" we are praying for the Son of God to return "in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Thess. 1:8).

This puts a whole new perspective on praying, "May Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven."

To say it once more, I believe that praying that prayer emboldens us to preach and to heal in Jesus' name. I believe that praying that prayer helps drive back the powers of darkness in the here and now, along with paving the way for the final manifestation of God's kingdom. And I believe that in the end, the order and atmosphere and will of heaven will be the only thing we experience—forever.

Let's just not misapply the Lord's words today. That can lead to some silly, if not dangerous, assumptions and misapplications.

We should avoid them as much as we can. Certainly, that is our Father's will.