

# The Lord's Prayer and Cultural Change

Many of us are so used to the words of the Lord's prayer that we forget just how radical and revolutionary they really are. After all, when we pray, "Your kingdom come," we're praying for the displacing of all earthly kingdoms and the destruction of Satan's kingdom. In essence, we are praying, "Out with the old, in with the new!"

But is this a future-only prayer? In other words, are we praying exclusively for the return of Jesus and the establishing of His kingdom here on the earth (which is clearly the ultimate goal of our prayers)? Or are we also praying for the advancing of God's kingdom on earth in the here and now?

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Before answering these questions, let me pose a series of other questions: Do we believe things are not the way the Lord wants them to be right now? Do we believe that the gospel is His solution for the problems of the hour? Do we believe that the people of God can make an impact on this generation? Do we believe that there is still hope for our nation? Do we believe that the blood of Jesus can undo the damage that sin has done?

It is true: We are in a conflict and we do have serious opposition – but we can triumph. Let us therefore march out and make disciples for the Master, pulling down strongholds, breaking shackles and liberating prisoners as we go. We must believe that things can change.

I believe Jesus had this in mind when He taught us to pray, "Your kingdom come" (Matt 6:10). This is not just a petition for the future. It also has to do with the here and now.

Many New Testament scholars agree with this perspective, arguing that, to some extent, the coming of that kingdom is to occur here, in this age. And while we know that the final and complete coming of the kingdom will be in the age to come, His kingdom broke into this world 2000 years ago and it will continue to grow and expand until the Lord returns.

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As Professor D. A. Carson noted, whoever reads these words in Matthew's Gospel "perceives that the kingdom has already broken in and prays for its extension as well as for its unqualified manifestation."



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To quote him more fully, "That kingdom is breaking in under Christ's ministry, but it is not consummated till the end of the age (28:20). To pray 'your kingdom come' is therefore simultaneously to ask that God's saving, royal rule be extended now as people bow in submission to him and already taste the eschatological blessing of salvation and to cry for the consummation of the kingdom (cf. 1 Cor 16:22; Rev. 11:17; 22:20). Godly Jews were waiting for the kingdom (Mark 15:43), 'the consolation of Israel' (Luke 2:25). . . . But the Jew looked forward to the kingdom, whereas the reader of Matthew's Gospel, while looking forward to its consummation, perceives that the kingdom has already broken in and prays for its extension as well as for its unqualified manifestation" ("Matthew," Expositors Bible Commentary, 8:170).

Similarly, Professor Donald Hagner explained, "The gospel is itself, above all, the announcement that God's promised rule has now begun in and through the work of Jesus the Messiah (see [Matt] 3:2; 4:17, 23), so the disciples are thus

encouraged to pray that what has begun in the ministry of Jesus, what they have now begun to participate in, may be experienced in all fullness . . .” (Matthew 1-13 [Word Biblical Commentary; Dallas: Word, 1993], 148).

We can also cite Professor Craig Keener, who wrote, “If the kingdom were wholly future, one might despair of accomplishing any justice now; if one supposed that it were wholly present, the realities of this age would quickly terminate disciples’ illusive utopianism. But because the Gospels affirm that in Jesus the kingdom is present in a hidden way, believers in him can begin to make a difference in their world now, contending for the reality to be consummated at Christ’s return . . .” (A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999], 200, n. 172).

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That is what we pray for – the “extension” and the “unqualified manifestation” of God’s kingdom on earth. And so, while we await the coming of the kingdom of God in its fullness, right now, in this present age, every single day, we can see God’s kingdom purposes advance on the earth as we preach the gospel, set the captives free, stand for justice, pour out mercy, and glorify His name by our words and deeds.

May Your kingdom come, Lord – and may Your kingdom advance in the here and now until we see you face to face.

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