

Priority: Kingdom

March 8, 2020

Daily Devotions**Day One**

As a church we desire to see the fame and deeds of God renewed in our day—in Indianapolis and around the world. We pray as Jesus did in **Matthew 6:10**: “**Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.**”

Mentioned over 100 times in the Gospels, kingdom was a major theme in the teachings of Jesus. So, what is “kingdom” and why did Jesus put such an emphasis on it? When we think of the term in our context, we typically think of a people or geographical region. Biblically, however, kingdom refers to a *reign* not a *realm*. Jesus connects “Your kingdom come” with “Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven” because one relates directly to the other. Where the will of God is done, that is where his kingdom has come.

God rules heaven, absolutely and without rival. When Jesus prays for the will of God to be done on earth as it is in heaven, he is praying that God’s will and his rule would be established on earth in the same way it is in heaven—not that Christians would occupy more land, resources or money as in an earthly kingdom. For the vast majority of the life of the church, believers have occupied very little. Yet they have established God’s kingdom around the world. Scripture recorded *by* oppressed people *for* oppressed people, and the gospel is exploding around the world *among* oppressed people. God’s kingdom is not made up of material wealth or territory; it is found anywhere the will of God reigns in the hearts of his people.

With that definition in mind, why did Jesus put such an emphasis on kingdom? Because it was part of his mission. He said as much in **Luke 4:43**: “... **‘I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns as well; for I was sent for this purpose.’**” If we are to follow in the footsteps of Jesus, his purpose has to be our purpose—to proclaim King Jesus, because where the King is, so is his kingdom.

Jonathan Edwards, an 18th century theologian, said, “The seeking of the kingdom of God is the chief business of the Christian life.” If the kingdom of God is where the will of God is done, then it should start with us. Is the will of God done in our hearts? Can we look at our hearts and say, “God’s kingdom has come, and his will is being done in my heart”? In **John 4:34** Jesus said, “**My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work.**” If we are to desire the will of God in our lives in that way, it has to be a work of God in our hearts.

- Read **Ephesians 4:14-21**. Are there areas in your heart where Jesus does not rule?
- Can you say with Jesus, “My food is to do the will of God”? Why? Why not?

- Pray that our city would see the fame and deeds of God renewed. Pray for God to show you your part in making this happen?

Day Two

Have you ever played hide and seek and hid so well the other kids just forgot about you? How long did it take for them to notice that you had disappeared? What would happen if our church disappeared? How long would it take for our community to notice?

When the local church is fulfilling its purpose, it always leaves the mark of God on the surrounding area. We know the church is not a building, but a people. We often say that we “go to church,” but in reality we *are* the church and we go to a building. The work of the church in proclaiming the gospel and the kingdom of God often takes place outside the walls of the building. It happens in conversations with our spouses, our children, our neighbors, and our community.

Jesus said, “You are the salt of the earth and the light of the world,” and he called us to live in such a way that others would want to come and glorify God. When our church is filled with men and women who are 100% on mission for the kingdom of God, we will change this city. This is not just the task of the lead pastor, the church staff, or the elders; this is *our* mission. The enemy works very hard to convince us that we are not the kind of people God is looking for. That’s simply not true. The power of the gospel is not the messenger, it is the message. Being salt and light doesn’t mean performing dramatic acts of service, speaking to huge crowds or writing best-selling books. In reality the kingdom spreads through our everyday, intentional interactions. God’s transforming power working in our ordinary lives is what makes people take notice.

Liu Zhenying (Brother Yun) was a key leader in the Christian house church networks in China during the 1980s. His story is chronicled in the book *The Heavenly Man*. Born into poverty and enduring years in prison for his faith, he said, “It is not great men who change the world, but weak men in the hands of a great God.”

Jesus, during his ministry on earth, set the example for us. He lived a life on mission—to proclaim the gospel and the kingdom of God. That mission has not changed. Before he ascended into heaven, he commissioned us to go and proclaim his message and to invite others to follow him, thus spreading his kingdom.

If someone made a documentary about your life and interviewed the people who knew you best, would they say that your life was a mission to spread the kingdom? It’s not too late! Abraham was 75 when God called him, Noah had adult children when God called him, Moses would have qualified for Social Security by the time God called him. God has a purpose for you in his church and in his kingdom. Will you answer the call to spread God’s glory to your family, your neighbors and your city?

- Most people have a daily routine. How can you use yours to spread the kingdom?
- Write out some barriers keeping you from the mission of the church. How can you remove some of those barriers? Who will keep you accountable for removing them?
- Read **Matthew 6:25-34**. Consider memorizing verse 33.

Day Three

One of the reasons the Jewish leaders in the New Testament did not accept Jesus as Messiah was that he did not seem interested in overthrowing the kingdoms of the world. For hundreds of years the Jewish people had been waiting for the coming Messiah. They wanted a leader to overthrow the Roman government and bring Jewish rule. Instead, Jesus encouraged his followers to pay taxes, obey the government, and resist the use of violence. In the Jewish mind this made him unqualified to be a true “Messiah.” Jesus said, **“My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world” (John 18:36).**

In a world obsessed with power and earthly kingdoms, Christians should stand out because our King and our kingdom are so unlike those of this world. God’s kingdom has already been guaranteed and although not *fully* here yet, it will be one day. Dr. Preston Sprinkle says it well: “The way of Jesus is countercultural. It is upside-down and inside-out—a kingdom, where weakness is power, power is weakness, and suffering leads to glory.”

We’re citizens of heaven (where God’s will is thoroughly and ultimately brought about). Paul says in **Philippians 3:20-21**, **“But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.”** We live and act under the authority of King Jesus, not under the authority of any other ruler. All of the earthly powers, systems, and structures will ultimately come under the subjection of Jesus Christ. In the midst of all the pain, suffering, and brokenness, Jesus will make all things right.

Christians don’t need to fight for power and status, because we trust that God’s purpose will be fulfilled. One of my favorite examples of divine sarcasm is in **Psalms 50:12** where God says, **“If I were hungry, I would not tell you, for the world and its fullness are mine.”** God does not *need* us to establish his rule on earth, but he invites us to participate in spreading the glory of his kingdom. The expression of that kingdom starts with us and spreads to the entire world.

- What does it mean to be a citizen of heaven?
- In what ways do you “keep your eyes fixed on Jesus” in the midst of a broken world?
- Pray that you would not invest in the kingdoms of the world but in the kingdom of Christ.

Day Four

On Day Three we talked about our future hope in the coming kingdom of Jesus and the reality that he will make and is making everything right. Jesus is in the business of renewing all things. So what do we do in the meantime?

To be passionate about the kingdom of God is to be passionate about seeing people flourish, now *and* in the future. Christians, more than any other group of people, should be passionate about improving the lives of others because as believers we know that every person is fearfully and wonderfully made and loved by God. A common criticism made by prominent atheists like Sam Harris, Richard Dawkins and the late Christopher Hitchens is that Christians not only fail to make the world better, but we don't care. That should never be said of God's people. In Jesus' teachings about the kingdom, there is always an emphasis on hope and human flourishing. In the gospel of Matthew, preaching the kingdom and helping people flourish go hand in hand. We see it in **Matthew 9:35: "Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people."**

We don't simply preach the good news of gospel and kingdom, move on, and hope for the best. As citizens of the kingdom, we *live* the gospel and its message of love and salvation. In his message, *"Abortion and the Narrow Way That Leads to Life,"* author John Piper says, "Let's be like Jesus. In every social issue from abortion to alcoholism, from AIDS to unemployment, from hunger to homelessness, let's give the help that we would like to receive if it were us. And at every moment in that love, let us feel an even greater urgency to pray and speak and work to rescue people from everlasting suffering through the gospel of Jesus."

The coming kingdom in the New Testament was not to be won by military might or conquest, but by proclaiming the good news of the gospel. As Christians we dismiss no one as outcast or forgotten; we have a desire to reach the whole world. Jesus was the ultimate manifestation of love, so it is only natural that his kingdom and followers should be marked by love and service. That is what the rule of Christ in our lives should look like. In the city of Indianapolis, 167,666 of 835,405 residents reported income levels below the poverty line in the last year and 1,700 people are sleeping in temporary shelters, transitional housing, or on the street. What would the "kingdom" look like for them? What about your neighborhood?

- What would it look like for you to be the hands and feet of Jesus in the 317?
- Do you have a regular pattern of service? Why? Why not?
- Pray that Jesus would give you a heart for those in need around you.

Day Five

This week we've talked about what the kingdom is, why Jesus was so passionate about it, and what impact it should have on our church, our community and ourselves. But we should also talk about the cost of the kingdom. The kingdom was one of the central themes of the ministry of Jesus, and he was murdered for it. If we are to be a part of God's spreading kingdom, it will also cost us.

Christians around the world have been suffering for centuries, making unimaginable sacrifices for the kingdom of God. In our context today it likely won't cost us our lives. But it will cost something. Justin Martyr was an early church father and philosopher, killed in 165 A.D. for defending his faith in a public debate. He had this to say: "For if we looked for a human kingdom, we would deny our Christ, so that we might not be killed. We would try to escape detection, so that we might obtain what we hope for. But since our thoughts are not fixed on the present, we are not concerned when men cut us off...."

God governs the world, but the world hasn't gotten the memo yet. World War II officially ended on September 2, 1945, yet some German soldiers continued fighting for months afterward. Some Japanese soldiers fought on for years, unaware that there was no longer any need to do so. In the same way, the world continues to resist God's will. The war is over, Christ is victorious, all struggles are coming to an end—but the fighting is not over yet. A lifestyle patterned after Jesus will, at some point, bring us into that conflict. Jesus prayed that the Father's kingdom would come and that his will would be done because, at the current time, this is not fulfilled yet. Until it is, we are called to risk everything to advance that kingdom.

The beauty is that we don't go alone. God is with us. We advance the kingdom in the name of the Father, the Spirit, and the Son. **Hebrews 13:13-14** challenges and inspires us: "**Let us, then, go to him outside the camp, bearing the disgrace he bore. For here we do not have an enduring city, but we are looking for the city that is to come.**" The "he" in this passage is Jesus. Bearing disgrace, just as Jesus did, for the sake of the kingdom doesn't make us look weak. It makes us look like him.

- Reflect on **Hebrews 13** the rest of this week, particularly verses 13-15.
- What will going "outside the camp" look like for you?