

The Prayer of Surrender

Sterling UMC
February 13, 2011
Matthew 6:9-13

It is a common plot for television and movies for a man to take a woman to a restaurant on a date.

It is a French restaurant, and the menu is printed in French. The woman, fluent in the French language, orders something that only she and the waiter understand. The waiter nods approvingly at the woman's order.

The man, not wanting to appear ignorant, does something truly ignorant. He simply points to some mysterious words in the menu and says, "I'll have one of those."

Big mistake.

Much to the dismay of the man, when the meal is brought to the table, what the man has ordered is both alien and disgustingly similar to what he has tried to keep out of his garden.

Be careful what you order in restaurants. If you don't know what you are asking for, you might very well regret it.

The same can be said for prayer. Be careful what you pray for. You might get it, and regret it.

Take the Lord's Prayer, for example. Here is a prayer that looks and sounds safe. What could possibly be distressing about praying for our daily bread, or freedom from temptation? And what could possibly be wrong as we learned last week with praying to our caring, constant, consistent, and competent Heavenly Father?

But hold on a moment. Very early in the prayer, there is the phrase, "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven."

Praying for the kingdom to come and for God's will to be done on earth might be like asking for escargot in a French restaurant and ending up with a plate of snails. You'll get what you ask for, but it might not be what you want.

Do you really want the kingdom of God to come on earth? Do you really want God's will done on earth as it is in heaven? Do we really have any idea what it is we are praying when we nonchalantly pray that part of the Lord's Prayer?

You see this may be the most misunderstood phrase in the Lord's Prayer. Most people

have no idea, really, what this means. What in the world, first, is “God’s kingdom?” Well let me tell you what it’s not. It’s not a political entity. God’s kingdom is not political. It’s not national. It’s not governmental. What it is, is it’s eternal and it’s universal. It has nothing to do with government. In John 18, Jesus said, *“My kingdom is not of this world.”*

The second thing is this, the Bible says, *“The kingdom of God is not a matter of talk but of power.”* (1 Corinthians 4:20) What does that mean? That means the kingdom of God is not just something you just talk about. It’s not just conceptual. It’s not just confessional. It’s not just creedal. It’s not something you sit around and debate and discuss. It’s something that changes your life. It’s not just some head knowledge. It’s not something you go to seminary and study. It’s not the words that matter; it’s the work of God that matters. It is God’s work in the world.

Here’s the third thing the kingdom is not. Romans 14:17 says, *“The kingdom of God is not a matter of what we eat or drink but it’s living right with God and a life of peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.”* In other words it’s not material. It’s spiritual and it’s relational.

So that’s what the kingdom of God is. But where is the kingdom of God?

The kingdom of God is wherever Jesus is king. It’s wherever his rule and reign is.

In fact, in this phrase *“Thy kingdom come, thy will be done,”* the second phrase explains the first. It’s redundant. To say, *“Thy kingdom come, thy will be done,”* is the same thing. The kingdom of God is wherever God’s will is done. Wherever God’s will is done, the kingdom is there.

So when Jesus taught us to pray, the second thing he told us to pray was, *“Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”* Why did he do that? Because God’s will is not done on earth most of the time. A lot of times you hear of something bad happening and you hear people say, “It must be God’s will.”

No, it’s not! God’s will is not evil. God’s will is not sinfulness. God has given us the freedom of will to choose right and wrong. God’s will is not people making bad decisions. God’s will is not always done on this earth. That’s why we’re to pray this. In heaven, God’s will is done perfectly. But on earth it’s rarely done as it is in heaven. But that is the Lord’s desire, that is why he taught us to pray in this way. You see this is really a prayer of surrender. It’s saying “Lord, I surrender to your will, in my life and in this world in which we live.” And by praying that prayer we are actually asking for two things. We are asking for a radical change in our society and a radical change within ourselves. And that is a dangerous prayer to pray. Why?

Because in the kingdom of God, it is the poor who are blessed. It is those who mourn and grieve. It is the meek and those who hunger and thirst for what is right. It is the merciful and the pure in heart. It is the peacemaker and the persecuted. These are the people blessed in God’s Kingdom.

That is a radical change from our present society in which the rich are the ones who are blessed; in which the aggressive climber of the corporate ladder gets the best job; and in which the immoral prosper.

In the kingdom of God, when you get hit on your right cheek, you will willingly get hit on your left cheek as well.

In the kingdom of God, if someone asks for your coat, you give him your shirt as well. If anyone has two shirts, one of them is shared with some one who has none.

It only gets worse in the parables of Christ. It is the son who wished his father dead so he could get his inheritance early who ends up having a party thrown in his honor in Jesus' best-known story. It is a despised Samaritan who is to be respected for his compassion. Tax collectors and sinners enter the kingdom before the pious and upright. Lazarus, the beggar, rests in Abraham's bosom, while the rich man at whose gates he had begged languishes in torment. Those who work one hour are paid the same as those who work twelve. What kind of economic order is that?

In the kingdom of God, nobody is forced to live in poverty. Everyone is treated with dignity, no matter the amount of his or her productive work. The last go first and the first last. The nobodies receive a place of honor at the feasts. In story after story it is the worthless of the world's societies who become the most important in God's society.

What in heaven's name is going on here? Well that's just the point. What is going on is in heaven's name. These things are things of the kingdom of God. These are the things that express the will of God.

If we are poor, powerless, and oppressed, all of this is positively Good News. Indeed, in the Scriptures, it is said that to these descriptions of the kingdom, the "poor heard gladly."

When we pray for the kingdom to come on this earth, we are really asking for two things. First, we are asking for a radical change in the world. For there to be a global change so that there would be established on this earth a perfect society.

In the Old Testament, the prophet Micah wrote of such a perfect society.

"(Nations) shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more; but they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree, and none shall make them afraid; for the mouth of the Lord of hosts has spoken." (Micah 4:3-4)

In Isaiah, the prophet wrote about rejoicing in Jerusalem, where there would be no more weeping.

"No more shall there be in (the land) an infant that lives but a few days, or an old man who does not fill out his days. For the child shall die a hundred years old... They shall build houses and inhabit them; They shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit. They shall not build and another inhabit; they shall not plant and another eat; for like the days of a tree shall the days of my people be, and my chosen shall long enjoy the work of their hands. They shall not labor in vain, or bear children for calamity; for they shall be the offspring of the blessed of the Lord, and their children with them. (Isaiah 65:21ff)

But be careful about what you pray for. These global changes are wonderful. Who could argue with peace, security, and freedom?

But when we pray that the Kingdom of God comes to earth, we are not only asking for something global, but something personal as well. The kingdom of God is not only a global change, but a personal one as well.

At one time Jesus was asked when the Kingdom of God would be established on earth. He replied, "The kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be observed; nor will they say, 'Lo, here it is!' or 'There it is,' for behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you." (Luke 17:21)

In the kingdom of God, we do not worry about what we will eat or drink. We learn to trust in God. (Matthew 6:25-34).

In the kingdom of God, we give up things that are of value to us, such as that extra coat or shirt, because we value other people most.

In the kingdom of God, we learn to love our neighbor as ourselves.

In the kingdom of God, we learn peace within the midst of tragedy.

In the kingdom of God, we learn to hunger to do that which is right and just, rather than to do that which satisfies our greed and lust.

In the kingdom of God, society changes because WE have first learned how to change.

In the kingdom of God, God rules the society. AND in the kingdom of God, God rules our hearts as individuals.

And that can be distressful. Because when God rules our hearts, souls and minds, we have to surrender some things that have become very important and dear to us.

It means surrendering our hate and anger. None of us start out wanting to hate another person, or to be angry. But these become familiar feasts that are hard to leave behind.

It means surrendering our fear and anxiety. Instead, we learn to trust in God.

The kingdom of God means surrendering our greed for possessions, our lust for power, and our selfish world view.

The kingdom of God means surrendering our attempt to control. It means surrendering our plans for God's plan. It means surrendering our will to God's will.

These are hard things to let go of, because they have been part of us for so long.

The truth is we don't like the word "surrender." When we think of surrender we think of waving a white flag. I forfeit. I lose. I submit. But that's the very thing you need to do.

So often, we cling to that which is of no value, and lose the things that are of importance.

We work at our jobs long hours and we miss seeing our children grow up.

We stuff money into our wallets and buy the things we really don't need and that don't last. And all the while we missed the opportunities to give out of our abundance to those who had nothing.

The kingdom of God is within us, or can be. But we have to surrender those worthless things that have become dear to us. Surrender the greed. Surrender the anger. Surrender the fear. Surrender the penny in the vase and begin to value the things that God values. Hold on instead to the love. Search for peace where there was hate. Embrace trust rather than fear.

It is hard to surrender these things. It is a difficult thing to do, to pray for God's kingdom to come, that His will be done on this earth as it is in heaven. Are you ready to pray?

Remember, it is the poor who are blessed in the kingdom. Are you ready to pray?

Remember it is the one who mourns and grieves who is blessed. Are you ready to pray?

Remember it is the meek who inherits the kingdom of God, not the strong and powerful. Are you ready to pray?

Remember, it is the enemy, as well as those who are easy to like, whom you must love. Are you ready to pray?

I'm not certain I'm always ready. My life, as yours, has been seduced by the way things are in this present age. Yet God does not depend on your readiness.

The Kingdom will come by God's initiative and when God decides. And we shall be part of it only by grace.

Ready or not, we must pray, knowing that the answer to our prayer may change all the comfortable rules by which we have lived.

But you know what? There's a great promise that goes with the prayer of surrender. "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done." If I pray that and live that what does God promise? Matthew 6:33 "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you." What is the kingdom of God? His will in your life and His will in the world. If you say, Thy will be done and you live that, He says I'm going to take care of all your needs.

So here's the question. What area of your life is not surrendered to God? I don't know what it is but you do and God does. Aren't you tired of being at war with God? Aren't you tired of being in turmoil? You can have – God promises – the peace of God. How do you make peace with God? Romans 6:13 "*Give yourself to God. Surrender your whole being to Him to be used for His righteous purposes.*" He wants you to surrender your whole being to Him, saying, "God, I want to live for Your purposes, Your plan. Thy will be done in my life and on earth as it is in heaven." Pray that prayer this morning and be prepared for a revolutionary change when God answers that prayer.

THE SERENITY PRAYER

"God grant me the serenity

to accept the thing I cannot change,
the courage to change the things I can,
and the wisdom to know the difference.

Living one day at a time,

Enjoying one moment at a time

Accepting hardship as a pathway to peace

Taking as Jesus did, this sinful world as it is,

Not as I would have it;

Trusting that You will make all things right

If I surrender to Your will

So that I may be reasonably happy in this life

And supremely happy with You forever in the next. Amen.

Reinhold Niebuhr