

The Theme of the Bible: The Kingdom of God

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Lord, Teach Us To Pray

Acts 28:23

This evening [morning] I am going to be continuing in a series that I have been doing on prayer. I have called this series “Lord, Teach Us to Pray.” My hope and prayer through this series is that this church and that you, as an individual, might really learn how to pray and might, indeed, be inspired to pray. I have tried to communicate throughout this series that prayer is not meant to be a burdensome thing, but rather one of the simplest matters in the world. Prayer is opening the door to God. Just opening the door.

The verse that I started this series with is Revelation 3:20 where Jesus says, *“Here I am, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him and he with me.”*

You know, you don’t need great intellectual ability to open a door. You don’t need to study the great door opening masters of the past in order to open a door. I can send a 2-year old to the door and they will figure out how to open it and let someone in.

That is the best metaphor that I know of regarding prayer. Prayer is inviting God into your marriage. Inviting God into your worries about the future. Inviting God into your job and letting God into your sex life. Inviting God into your money management. Inviting God into your thoughts about the future. Rather than keeping God out and planning everything yourself, rather than keeping God out and fighting with another person in order to solve a problem, rather than keeping God out and figuring out your future by weighing pros and cons, open the door and invite him in. That is what you are doing in prayer.

Now, we need track to run on. Many of us don’t really know how to begin in terms of talking to God or opening the door to God. Fortunately, Jesus gives us a track to run on in the Lord’s Prayer. The Lord’s Prayer, “Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven...”—the Lord’s Prayer is not meant to be prayed in rote fashion. It is not meant to be a mechanical thing that you run through without thinking. The Lord’s Prayer is a model prayer. It is an outline for the way for us to pray.

And we discovered in our prior studies of the Lord’s Prayer that the way to begin to pray and to open the door to God is to simply begin with a focus upon God. And so we start “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven”—we start with petitions focused on God because, as I have said over the last few weeks, if we start with ourselves and what we need: O, God, I need help with my financial situation; or O, God, heal this or that; if we start with our needs, we don’t ever get beyond our needs.

Now, let me suggest to you that it is not wrong to begin with your needs. You are not sinning if you start with your situation. I believe Jesus gave us this

model for prayer not by way of commandment, but by way of help. He is really serving as the wonderful counselor that he is described as in Isaiah 7. Jesus is giving us counsel regarding how we can best pray. Start with God. Lift up your eyes off yourself, off your anxieties. Focus on how great God is and how powerful God is, how good God is, how much God is over. And focusing upon God will on its own, lift you up, drag you out of the muck, pull you out of your despair and depression. Lift your eyes up beyond the next huge step that you are walking in and focus upon God. That will give you the confidence to begin to pray about the specific issues that you need help or God's activity in. Issues of personal needs, personal sin, personal temptation.

So far, in the Lord's Prayer, we have covered the first few phrases: Our Father in heaven; Hallowed be thy name—which leads, perhaps, to the height of the Lord's Prayer, "Thy kingdom come; thy will be done."

You know, this little phrase about the kingdom of God coming and the will of God being done, in many ways is the theme of the entire Bible. For many of you who are relative newcomers to the Bible, which includes really most of us here, we are faced with an amazingly daunting task in trying to put together the story or the overriding theme of the Bible. One of the things that keep people from really reading the Bible and understanding it is at the moment a person cracks the cover of a Bible and begins to read, what you see is that you are not just reading one book, but you are faced with a library of books—66 books in all, from Genesis in the Old Testament to Revelation in the New Testament—a library of books written over the course of 1500 years by a variety of authors who lived in different parts of the world, stretching from Persia in the East to Rome in the West; having occupations as diverse as farmer and fisherman to physician and king. Sixty-six books written over 1500 year, a variety of authors, a variety of geography, a variety of writing styles—some of it poetry, some of it historical narrative, some of it pithy sayings, some of it symbolic, some of it literal.

The Bible that I have up here right now is about 1,100 double-columned pages and that is not including the Concordance or the Table of Weights and Measures or all these little study helps. And this is a thin-line Bible. If you have one of those massive study bibles, your Bible might be 2,000 pages or more. It is a big book.

The novice facing this incredible array of literature can feel totally overwhelmed. They don't even know where to start. That is one of the questions that people in the church ask me all the time as they are beginning to read the Bible. Where do I start? Typically, they read the Bible like they would any other book. They start at the beginning. It is pretty interesting. They read all of Genesis. They get somewhere in the middle of Exodus and hit the description of the building of the Tabernacle and the sacrifices being offered and they just bog down and say:

"Well, maybe I will just listen to someone teach the Bible because I don't get it. I don't understand it."

"Maybe I will just dip into a different place and read about battles with the Assyrians."

“Oh, I heard about Revelation. Look at this, here is a beast rising from the sea. I wonder what that is all about.”

“Maybe I will read one of the genealogies—the genealogy of Jesus.”

“Think I will switch back here to reading a few prophecies about the fall of Moab or Noah’s Ark.” Finally they read a few favorite Psalms and a little bit of the New Testament for their reading.

Friends, I believe that without understanding the theme of the Bible, it is just going to be a massively confusing undertaking.

You say, “Well, Rich, what is the central theme of the Bible? What is it that ties together all of these books and all the various literary styles, all of these authors and makes it one cohesive book that we call the Bible? The Holy Scriptures?”

The theme that ties the whole Bible together is the phrase that we are looking at: “Thy kingdom come, thy will be done.” Which, by the way, I think is saying the same thing; these are not two prayers, but one. The unifying theme of the whole Bible is the kingdom of God. Yes, the Bible talks about baptism. Yes the Bible talks about the 10 Commandments. Yes, the Bible talks about Noah’s Ark. Yes, the Bible talks about the cross and the end times, the coming judgment, the church, the Lord’s Table, and prayer and family life, being good fathers and mothers, giving and everything else. What ties these threads together is an overriding theme: The kingdom of God.

What I am going to talk about in tonight’s [today’s] message is the theme of the whole Bible, which is the kingdom of God. My hope tonight [today] is that the result of this message will be that you will have a way of pulling together all the various strands of biblical literature. That you would come away saying, “okay, now I see how things fit together in the Bible. But I also see, I have a lens through which I can also understand all of history.”

The kingdom of God is the theme of the Bible, but the kingdom of God is the theme of world history. World history is not about the evolution of man. It is not about the conflict between the owners of capital and the workers, as the Marxists have said. History is not about working out your own karma, as the Hindus suggest. Or just try to be happy, as the typical person in the 90’s understands the goal of life. History is about the establishment of the kingdom of God.

What will we learn today? We are going to learn the theme of the Bible. We are going to learn about the central theme of human history: The Kingdom of God. Let’s Pray.

Now, you might say, “Rich, why do you say that the kingdom of God is the unifying and central theme of the Bible? Why do you think that this is what ties everything together?”

I want to take you on a little tour of the Bible. First of all, you need to see that the message of the kingdom of God was the central message preached by Jesus. In Mark 1:14-15, it says after John was put into prison, Jesus went into Galilee proclaiming the Good News of God, “*The time has come,*” he said, “*the Kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the Good News.*”

The gospel, the good news that Jesus preached was the message of the kingdom of God. This little phrase, "the kingdom of God," or "the kingdom of heaven," which is the same thing in Jesus' teaching 128 times, New Testament scholars are virtually unanimous these days that the kingdom was the theme of Jesus Christ's preaching. He preached it when he began his ministry. He preached it throughout his ministry. And right before Jesus ascended into heaven, what do we find him talking about? Acts 1:3, "*After his suffering, he showed himself to these men and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of 40 days and spoke about the kingdom of God.*"

You say, "Well, maybe Jesus preached about the kingdom of God, but what about Paul? Paul wrote so much of the New Testament. What was Paul's basic message?"

Turn with me to Acts 28:23. It says, "*They arranged to meet Paul on a certain day and came in even larger numbers to the place where he was staying. From morning to evening, he proclaimed and declared to them, [and underline this] the kingdom of God and tried to convince them about Jesus from the Law of Moses and the prophets.*"

Then drop down to verse 30. "*For two whole years Paul stayed there in his own rented house and welcomed all who came to see him. Boldly and without hindrance, he preached [underline this] the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ.*"

You say, "okay, this is the theme of the gospels, this is the theme of Paul, the chief author of the New Testament, but what about the Old Testament?"

The Old Testament continually preaches the message that the Lord God is the king. The king not only of the nation of Israel like some local deity, not just the king of the nations, but the king of the whole universe. In fact, he calls himself in the Old Testament, "King of Kings." As a king he is said in Psalms to exercise his rule from the throne. Psalm 47:8 says, "*God sits on his holy throne.*"

Psalm 11 says, "*The Lord's throne is in heaven.*"

Psalm 45:6 says, "*Thy throne, O God, is forever and ever.*"

The prophets speak about the throne of God. They talk about it as being like a blue gem." A sapphire in Ezekiel 1. Apparently there is a footstool attached to the throne of God. At least in the language of the Psalms. Psalm 99:5 says, "*Exalt the Lord our God and worship at his footstool.*" Isaiah says the whole earth is God's footstool.

But there is something special about the throne of God and his footstool and that is a river of fire runs out from under the throne. Again in Daniel 7:10, "*Peals of thunder and lightening come from around the throne.*" And not only is there a river of fire and peals, but there is a river flowing as well. I don't know how this all works together. Human language finds its limits as we try to describe the heavenly courts and the throne room of God. But there is a life-giving river flowing from the throne, along with the river of fire. And I am taking that life-giving river as the flow of the Holy Spirit proceeding out from the Father who sits on throne.

This whole scene is a rainbow, that you have this extraordinary throne made of blue-like stone and a footstool that the Bible teaches consists of the entire earth. Peals of thunder and a river of fire and a river of water. Then around the scene is this rainbow according to Revelations 4:3 resembling an emerald encircling the throne. This green light encircling all of this. And then because God is King, the Old Testament says that he has to have a court. Kings have their attendants. People running around doing this for them. The guys in with the lines of trumpets. You have seen the scenes in old movies of kings and they always have their attendants and soldiers standing by the door. Well, the Old Testament describes it just this way that God has his heavenly court. His heavenly court consists of angels who are attending God and serving God and serving God's purposes as messengers in this world and as ministering spirits. So that God the King gets a name in the Old Testament as Lord of Hosts or the Lord, the God of Hosts. We are talking about the Lord of the angels. And this is the theme, when people get a glimpse of heaven in the Bible; this is the scene that they see. When people have the veil removed and they are able to look into the heavens where God is, they see God sitting on the throne. They see the river of fire. They see this river of water. They see this green light coming off. But they see these angels all around him serving him, doing his will. Doing God the King's bidding.

So, if I were to sum up the theme of the kingdom of God in the Old Testament, I couldn't do a whole lot better than Psalm 103:19-22. If you have a Bible, I want you to read this and perhaps underline it in your Bible. It is a crucial text for understanding the Old Testament as well as these various pictures of God reigning from a throne in heaven. Psalm 103:19-22:

"The Lord has established his throne in heaven, and his kingdom rules over all. Praise the Lord, you his angels, you mighty ones who do his bidding, who obey his word. Praise the Lord, all his heavenly hosts, you his servants who do his will. Praise the Lord, all his works everywhere in his dominion. Praise the Lord, O my soul."

You see, the response to the revelation of God as King, this awesome vision of seeing God enthroned is for people to give God worship. To be full of awe and wonder and to fall down before him in joyful submission, to worship him who sits on the throne. The message of the kingdom of God is a simple declaration that God reigns, that God rules. God calls the shots. God has authority.

But, you know what? From the beginning of this book from the third chapter until the end of this book in the 20th chapter, God's rule and reign, God's authority, God's right to command everything and see it done the way that God says it should be done—from the 3rd chapter at the beginning of this book to the 20th chapter at the end of this book, God's right to have his will done is being challenged.

Do you want to understand the Bible? The Bible is about the challenge to God's kingdom, the attack on God's right to rule and God's dealing with that attack. If you want to know about the whole of history, it is the challenge of men and women to God's kingly authority.

The Pledge of Allegiance that many have learned in school contains a little phrase that says, "One nation under God." And from the virtual beginning of human history until the end, men and women have heard that phrase "under God" and said, "No way. Not me. Not my money. Not my sex life. Not my choice of a mate. Under God? Count me out."

Where is the meaning of all the wars and all of the sin and all of the death and all the rapes and all the dishonesty and all the corruption and all the court decisions? What's the meaning? The meaning is a challenge to the kingdom of God, God's right to rule over everything.

God creates the world. He puts men and women in paradise. Everything is going wonderfully until Adam and Eve challenge God's right to tell them what to do. Thank you God, that is one opinion that we shouldn't eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. We are going to choose to go our own way. We think that we know better than you do. We believe that you are limiting our freedom. Your rules are too oppressive. Thanks for your advice to us, God, but we are not under you.

And from that moment to this, that is what people have been saying. God calls the nation of Israel. He shows himself as the great and awesome King by destroying the gods of Egypt. You know each of the plagues that were issued upon Egypt was a judgment on each of the Egyptian gods. The Egyptians believed in the Nile River as a God. What does God do but bloody the Nile River. The Egyptians worshipped a God shaped like a bull named Apus. What does God do? He kills all the bulls. The Egyptians worshipped the sun God Ra, what does God do? He sends darkness over the sun God Ra. They worshipped the fertility God. What does God do? He kills the fertility of the land. Every one of God's plagues was designed to show Israel and the nations that God is the mighty King and destroys all of the other kings and Gods of the nations.

In the beginning of Israel's history, God says, "I am the King. Bow before me." He thunders his law down from Mt. Sinai when he descends in fire. And what does the nation of Israel consistently do? The nation of Israel is a picture of the human race and they consistently say to God, "Thanks, but no thanks. We will follow our own way. We choose to not acknowledge your reign and right to rule over everything. Surely, you revealed yourself to be the mighty King, but we are not into this. We have decided to give our worship and our submission to something in the creation or to ourselves, to lust or a demon."

From the beginning of the Bible until right before the end, God's right to rule has been challenged. And behind that challenge is an evil spiritual power named Satan, who directs this great force of opposition against the reign of God. We read that in Matthew 13:27 in the parable of the weeds. It says, "*The owner's servant came to him and said, 'Sir, didn't you sow good seed in the field? Where, then, did the weeds come from?'* [Where, then, is this opposition? Where did it come from? Here is the answer.] '*An enemy did this, the owner replied.*" Jesus tells us who the enemy is in verse 39: "*The enemy who sows the weeds is the devil.*"

You say, "Well, all of this is good and fine, Rich, but it is awfully spiritual and kind of abstract. Where do we see the challenge to God's right to rule in our country? Where do we see people saying 'No' to one nation under God?"

Why, all one would need to do is look at the last four decades of Supreme Court decisions. Here we have nine men and women deciding for us as a nation what is just and good. And what have they come up with in the last four decades of One Nation Under God? In the late 1950s, the court decided that pornography was protected under the First Amendment.

In the early 1960's, just by way of a quick snapshot of Supreme Court decisions, the Supreme Court ruled that the Ten Commandments could not be on schoolroom walls. They needed to be pulled down.

Then they ruled that children could not say a prayer to God in public school.

A decade later they ruled that women had a right to kill the babies that were being formed in their wombs.

And just last week, they ruled that homosexuality is protected by the Equal Protection Clause of the Constitution, a clause that was written after the Civil War to grant equal status to freed slaves.

I will tell you, and I am not a prophet, but I will tell you what will happen in the next five years of Supreme Court decisions. I am a former attorney. I taught law at OSU. I wrote scholarly articles on Constitutional law. I am not speaking as a completely uneducated layperson or as a right-wing fundamentalist. I am speaking right now as an observer of the course of Supreme Court decisions of which I have been a student for almost two decades. In the next five years, there will be unless there is a radical change on the Supreme Court, two major decisions that are handed down.

1. There will be a Supreme Court decision constitutionalizing euthanasia death as a part of a right to choose. And when that happens, the whole focus of the American medical system will change from life preservation to intricate decisions about which lives are determined to be unlivable. Doctors and nurses will turn from healers to killers. The impact on the medical community, in terms of the way that doctors and nurses and paramedics react to emergency care, long-term care of patients, and our treatment of both the elderly and newborns. Holland, about a decade ago, embarked down this road that we are about to get on. And we will get on it. I want you to hear that. This will happen in the next five years if the current makeup of the Supreme Court remains the same. One observer of the Dutch situation, because Holland has for all intents and purposes legalized euthanasia, one observer said that euthanasia has perceptively affected the position of the individual to society, society's very nature and purpose, the government, the judicial system, the family, the expectation of older persons, and the prospects of newborn infants, the practice of medicine and the care of persons with disabilities. Every year in Holland right now, approximately 13,000 people are euthanized, half of them without their consent, because doctors determine that their lives are unlivable.

Projecting that on the U.S., we are talking about a quarter of a million people a year. You see euthanasia is a sign of a culture that has moved away from our historic understanding that for every human being there are certain inalienable rights. As the Declaration of Independence says, we are endowed by our Creator with certain inalienable rights. Among them are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

The second thing I believe the Supreme Court is going to do in the next five years:

2. Declare that homosexuality is the rough equivalent of race and therefore in all areas of life, including marriages, government benefits, government pensions, employment relationships, housing, adoptions, affirmative action, homosexuals will be treated the same as every other minority group.

Now, these Supreme Court decisions in our culture are really just the tip of the iceberg. Below the surface, what you see in our modern assault on the authority of God is relativism and a democratic spirit.

By relativism, I mean that we Americans have lost God, have abandoned God, as the reference point for our moral decisions. What we have now is that everyone is left to his or her own working out of right and wrong. We must be open to everyone and every opinion. As Alan Bloom, the University of Chicago professor said a decade ago in a book called *The Closing of the American Mind*, the only absolute in modern culture is that there are no absolutes. And so what people do right now is instead of pursuing the right solution, or believing that there is a right answer, most Americans have given up the search and so there is really no right, it is all just a matter of opinion. In fact, every opinion is as good as any other.

What we have now in our current relativism is perspective. And we must be open to each other's perspectives. The perspective of the Jewish Holocaust survivor is no different than the perspective of the Nazi who persecuted him. It's no different than the Alroytolla's perspective. It is no different than Dennis Rodman's perspective; is no different from Madonna; is no different from anyone. We have no point of reference because we have abandoned the notion of One Nation Under God.

And where you really see this relativism is every time the press does a story on the Pope, particularly when he travels to the U.S. Because rather than see the Pope as the authority for what Catholics believe, the Pope's opinions about Catholicism are relativized. We are so used to seeing any person's opinion as just one opinion, that the press, after interviewing some dissenting priests and nuns, will turn to Mrs. McGuire, a 44 year old housewife who claims to be a Catholic and say, "Well, Mrs. McGuire, what do you think about what the Pope just said?" She will disagree with the Pope on a number of opinions. The obvious conclusion is that Mrs. McGuire or a dissenting priest or the typical man on the street has as much right to determine what Catholicism is as the Pope does.

This relativism has led to what I call the democratic spirit, which suggests that ultimately we have a right to vote on everything, including God. Over against the biblical notion that God is King not because we elected him but because he is the Lord and inherently has the right to rule. We Americans say, "Well, that is all fine and good. But I like a smorgasbord approach to Christianity." Even in this church, even in my life, and perhaps in your life, you may see a pick-and-choose method of dealing with God's commandments and God's Word.

Well you know, I hear what God says in the Bible about him hating divorce, but after all, I am an American and I didn't vote for that, so I am not going to do it. And I hear what God says about sharing my faith and acknowledging him before men, but sharing my faith makes me feel uncomfortable and it might hinder me in my career. I am just not going to pull down that particular lever in the voting box.

Or the lever about judgment of those who do not receive Christ as Savior. I don't really like that doctrine. Or the lever about giving. Or sex before marriage. Or gossip. Or anyone of a hundred other items. By our democratic spirit and by our relativism, we Americans continue the historic assault on the kingdom of God.

One Nation Under God? Forget it. Forget it.

I realize that this isn't a very pretty picture that I have painted, but this is the story of human history and the story of the Bible. There is, however, another theme that runs through the Bible from the beginning to the end. That is a promise of an invasion by God into this age, into our rebellion. A promise that the reign of God and the rule of God are going to invade and penetrate this age. Right through the Old Testament and into the New Testament there is a series of promises where God, as King, essentially says, "Well don't worry, guys. All is not lost. I am going to reestablish my rule and reign and put down every rebellion and defeat every challenge to my authority and deal with every usurper and throw out every traitor until I am recognized universally as the King." See, we cannot pin our hopes on the latest election returns. You cannot go up and down based on what the President or the court of the polls say. Our hope as Christians is pinned on the Kingdom of God, not the kingdom of America or even the kingdom of your family.

I want to share with you very quickly five promises that God makes regarding the invasion of the kingdom. First of all, God promises that in a world characterized by death and dying that when his kingdom breaks in, he will give eternal life to the subjects of the kingdom. You know the kingdom is there when the recipients of the kingdom get eternal life. Daniel 12:2 says, *"Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake, some to eternal life and others to shame and everlasting contempt. Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens and those will lead many to righteousness like the stars forever and ever."* A promise of eternal life.

But many of you may not understand what eternal life is. The promise of eternal life is not simply the promise of long life or very long life or even infinitely long life. Eternal life, in the Bible, primarily has to do with intimacy with God. Eternal life is all about unbroken fellowship and relationship with God.

You say, "Rich, where do you get that from?"

This is Jesus' definition of eternal life. John 17:3, *"This is eternal life: That they may know you, the only true God and Jesus Christ whom you have sent."* Eternal life is not just knowing that God exists, knowing God in the abstract or philosophical way, but knowing him in a personal way as one would know a friend. An intimate knowledge of God is the promise of the kingdom.

That is the whole meaning of the new covenant, friends, in Jeremiah 31. God says, *"This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel. After that time, declares the Lord, I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God and they will be my people. No longer will a man teach his neighbor or his brother saying, 'Know the Lord' because they will all know me from the least of them to the greatest, declares the Lord."*

The kingdom comes when people are brought into eternal life, that means intimate knowledge of God and fellowship with God forever. The promise of the kingdom is a promise of healing. Isaiah 35:3, *"Strengthen the feeble hands, steady the knees that give way, say to those with fearful hearts, 'Be strong, do not fear, your God will come.' He will come with vengeance, with divine retribution he will save you. Then will the eyes of the blind be opened. Then the ears of the deaf will be unstopped. Then the lame will leap as the deer and will shout for joy. Water will gush forth in the wilderness and streams in the desert."*

The promise of the kingdom is a promise of healing. This, by the way, is what is pictured in Revelation 22 as the Bible closes. It says, *"Then the angel showed me the river of life, clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations."*

Now, this is obviously symbolic language, but it appears that in the coming kingdom that all of our hurts and all of our sicknesses, all of the damage to our bodies, souls and to our relationships will be healed.

The promise of the kingdom is a promise of deliverance from our enemies. That is what Zechariah sang about at the birth of his son, John the Baptist. He said in Luke 1:68, *"Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel because he has come and redeemed his people. He has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David (as he said through his prophets of long ago) salvation from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us—to show mercy to our fathers, to remember his holy covenant, the oath he swore to our fathers to rescue us from the hand of our enemies."*

The promise of the kingdom is that all of the enemies of God and all of our enemies will be completely destroyed. Satan, the one who initiated the assault on the authority of God, will be destroyed in the end. Death that is the great enemy of the human race will be destroyed. War will be destroyed. Sin will be destroyed. The promise of the kingdom is deliverance completely from our enemies.

The promise of the kingdom is provision for the poor. As Mary sang in her song, *"He has filled the hungry with good things, but sent the rich away empty."* God reigns. The poor, the oppressed, the broken will be provided for and fed.

That is why when the kingdom comes there will be a great messianic banquet. Not only no more death, no more poverty and no more hunger.

And the promise of the kingdom is a reign of righteousness. We read that text before in Jeremiah 1 where God says, "I will put my law in their hearts." We see in the kingdom of God that will come in the book of Revelation there is no darkness, but only light, which is symbolic of the absence of sin. In fact, in the New Jerusalem, the Holy City, only those who are totally clean will enter. Revelation 22:15 says, *"Outside are the dogs, those who practice magic arts, the sexually immoral, the murderer, the idolaters and every one who loves and practices falsehood."* The promise of the kingdom is a reign of righteousness.

Now, here is the very good news that the promise of the kingdom and all the aspects that I described, and I could add the forgiveness of sins, the promise of the kingdom is not just promise, it is a present reality. For in Jesus Christ and his incarnation, God's reign invaded from heaven to earth. God's will came down and was embodied in a person named Jesus of Nazareth. In Jesus, the kingdom came. In Jesus, God's reign and rule came. And in Jesus, the promises that we read about, the promise of the kingdom has come so that we just don't look forward to eternal life saying, "Well, one day I will be saved if I believe now." Or, "I have confidence that in the future, after I die, I will be saved."

The Christian says, "At this moment, I am beginning to experience eternal life, not in its fullness, but certainly in its seed. I have more than a promise, more than a future hope. I have present experience." The Christian does not say, "I will have eternal life." The Christian says, "I have eternal life."

Many of you know John 3:16, *"For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son that whoever believes in him will not perish, but have eternal [not will have, but have] eternal lasting life."*

1 John 5:11 says, *"This is the testimony. God has given us eternal life. His life is in his Son. He who has the Son has life. He who does not have the Son of God, does not have life."*

Oh, I admit, this eternal life is partial. Remember the meaning of eternal life is intimacy with God, knowledge of God. And as Paul says, "Right now, we know only in part..." We don't have that unbroken fellowship with God. We see through a glass darkly. The promise is that we will get it fully. But the precious message of the kingdom is that in Jesus, I do have it now, really, but not completely.

And then in Jesus not only does eternal life come to us just as present reality, healing comes to us. When John the Baptist asks, "Are you the Messiah, or should I look for another?" Jesus responds and say, *"Go back to John [in Luke 7:22] and tell him what you have seen and heard. The blind have sight. The lame walk. Those who have leprosy are cured. The dead are raised and good news is preached to the poor. Blessed is the man who does not fall away on account of me."* The kingdom of God is present today through the healing of people's bodies. Again, just as with eternal life, not totally, not in the way that it will come in its fullness at the second coming of Christ, but there is a present reality of physical healing that Jesus brought.

The kingdom of God is not just promise when we are talking about deliverance from our enemies or God's enemies. There is a present reality to this, however partial, however incomplete. After Jesus gets done casting out a demon, he says in Matthew 12:28, "If I drive out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you." One of the great signs of the invasion of the kingdom is that demons will be driven out of people. That was Jesus' first action, when he preached in the Synagogue, he drove demons out. His whole ministry was characterized by delivering people from the power of demons.

The kingdom of God is more than a promise. There is a reality, however partial, regarding provision for the poor. You know the one miracle that is recorded in all four gospels is the feeding of the 5,000 because that is a picture of the coming messianic banquet. Jesus is saying, "I am making provision for the poor a present mark of my reign."

And of the things that I mentioned here in terms of present reality, healing, deliverance from our enemies and provision for the poor are all spoken about in Jesus' inauguration message. Luke 4 when Jesus says, *"You want to understand what my reign is about when I come? Here is what it is about. The Spirit of the Lord is on me [Luke 4:18] because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners, recovering of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."*

Preaching a message of eternal life, healing, delivering and provision for the poor. And then the kingdom of the Lord is more than promised, it is reality, however partial, concerning the righteousness of the kingdom. Yes, one day all sin will be dealt with, but right now, God calls us as a people to live by a righteous standard. He tells his people in Matthew 5 that unless our righteousness exceeds that of the Scribes and Pharisees we will not enter the kingdom of God.

Paul says in Romans 14 that the kingdom of God is not about eating and drinking, but about righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. Right now, God is writing his laws on our hearts by the Holy Spirit, putting moral absolutes in us, breaking us free from the cultural drift that says that everything is relevant and that we vote on everything and we vote on the reign of God. We, the people of God, the subjects of the kingdom of God, throw ourselves down and say, "No." We gladly and joyfully submit to your reign.

What are we praying for when we pray, "Thy kingdom come." We are praying, "God, grant eternal life. The knowledge of you" to my mother, my father, my brother, my friend, to someone here in church—grant them knowledge of you in a personal way. And grant me a deeper knowledge of you. I want to experience a fuller measure of eternal life, a greater measure of fellowship with you."

What are we praying when we pray, "Thy kingdom come." We are praying, "Lord, grant healing. Let your reign be manifested by granting healing of people's bodies." That is why we pray for healing in this church. Because it is a sign of the invading kingdom.

What are we praying for when we pray, “Thy kingdom come.” We are praying, “Lord, grant deliverance. Free people from the bondage that they experience to addictive behaviors—to gambling addictions, to drug addictions, to substance abuse and food addictions and work addictions and sexual addictions, demonic bondage.”

What are we praying for when we pray, “Thy kingdom come.” We are praying, “God, provide for the poor. Grant justice to those who are down trodden down. Protect the weak, the unborn, those near the end of their lives. Rebuild the foundations of this country. Grant us justice.”

What are we praying for when we pray, “Thy kingdom come.” We are praying for righteousness, for moral absolutes to be restored in the center of our own lives as we are given the gift of repentance, for moral absolutes to be brought into this church, for moral absolutes to reign among pastors and Christian leaders. Moral absolutes brought into our government, into the Supreme Court, into the White House, into Congress.

What are we praying when we pray, “Thy kingdom come.”? We are praying the theme of the Bible and the theme of human history, which is “the Lord reigns. Let the earth bow down before him.”

Amen.