

“Your Kingdom Come”

Lent: Teach us to Pray

Matthew 6:7-15

03/12/23

Introduction

Pray.

Dr. Paul Brand. I want to introduce you this morning to a missionary named Dr. Paul Brand. Brand was born to missionary parents in India in 1914. After spending some time in England attending medical school, Brand returned to India, committing the majority of his life to caring for those suffering from leprosy.

If you're not familiar, leprosy is a condition that destroys the nerve endings in your body causing you to lose the ability to feel. And this is extremely dangerous because those who suffer from this condition can't feel pain, and without pain, they are unaware when they have been injured – so even the smallest of wounds can be left untreated and become infected, leading to the loss of limbs or even death.

Dr. Brand spent his life caring for those suffering from this condition, and near the end of his life wrote an autobiography he named “Pain: The Gift Nobody Wants”.

In the book he writes, **“I thank God for pain, I cannot think of a greater gift I could give to my leprosy patients...Most people view pain as an enemy. Yet without it, heart attacks, strokes, ruptured appendixes, and stomach ulcers would all occur without any warning. Who would ever visit a doctor apart from pain's warnings?”**

Now, I don't think I need to convince you this morning that life is painful. The human experience is one lived in between two perfections – the perfection of the Garden of Eden (Gen 1+2) and the perfection of the return of Christ (Rev 21) but here in this part of the story, the long pain of Genesis 3 to Revelation 20 – we hurt.

We experience:

- Physical pain – sickness, infection...
- Emotional pain – grief, sorrow, depression
- Relational pain – betrayal, loss, heartache
- Spiritual pain – sins, experiences of what feel like the absence of God, dark night of the soul

Today, as we continue journeying line by line through the Lord's Prayer, asking – Lord, teach us to pray – we come to this little, powerful, weighty, line – **v10 – Your kingdom come...**

And what I want to help us understand today is that this line from Jesus gives us an opportunity to turn our pain, that we all have and will experience, into a **gift from God through prayer.**

That learning to pray “**your kingdom come**” is a means by which our pain can transform us and deepen our communion with God.

Kingdom of God

But to understand that, you have to understand exactly what Jesus is inviting us to pray when he says to pray “your Kingdom come” and to understand that you have to understand what exactly Kingdom of God actually is.

So let's talk about the kingdom of God...

Kingdom is not a word we think about or use often. We don't live in a kingdom. We know about Harry and Megan fighting with the British monarchy but that's about it, right?

But the kingdom of God is an idea used all over the place in the Scriptures.

It is one of Jesus' favorite ways to describe what he has come to do...

- Mark 1 – (Jesus' gospel message was) – **the Kingdom of God** is at hand.
- Matt 9:35 (summation of Jesus' ministry) – And Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming **the gospel of the kingdom** and healing every disease and every affliction.
- Matt 6:33 – Seek first the **kingdom of God**.

But even though Jesus references the kingdom often and even tells us what it is like – a mustard seed, a hidden treasure, a fishing net – he never stops to tell us exactly what it is.

So you have to dig a little bit deeper, and when you dig a little bit deeper what you see is two specific things that the kingdom of God entails, or two things that come along with the Kingdom of God being in a place.

Kingdom of God

1. Rule and Reign of God

It is the spreading out and inbreaking of God's dominion, power, and authority. It's where God's reign is visible and exercised in the world. To use the language of last week, it is where the hallowing/adoration of God's name makes its way out into the lived reality of both our inner world and the world around us.

To put it simply – The Kingdom of God is where God is in charge.

To which you might think – but wait a minute, I thought God ruled over all things? I thought He was sovereign and in control of everything? Well God is sovereign, but throughout the Scriptures we see constant examples where humans want something that is against God, they want to rebel and go their own way, and God steps back and allows them to chase after those things even to their own destruction.

So the Kingdom of God is where God's reign and rule is being brought back into fruition over a place or an individual. Often resulting in a turning upside down of their lives.

You may have heard it said before that God's Kingdom is an upside down kingdom. The Kingdom of God confronts and flips upside down the established norms of a society or culture.

In the Kingdom of God...

- The last become first.
- The blind are the ones who see.
- The foolish shame the wise.
- The poor are actually rich.

It is a massive realignment or reprioritization of how God has set up life to work. It turns our lives on its head.

You see this really clearly in the story of **Zacchaeus**. The Kingdom of God breaks into this man's life, a man who had spent years stealing from people, cheating and taking advantage of the poor to set up a comfortable life for himself. Jesus shows up, and in the course of one dinner he starts giving back 4x the amount of what he stole from people. A greedy man becomes a generous man. The kingdom of God broke in, and his whole life has been reoriented, or realigned under the rule and reign of God.

2. Renewal of all things

Things are not just brought under God's authority, but they're also brought back into God's design for flourishing.

In Luke 11, Jesus casts a demon out of man and he says – **20 If it is by the finger of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.**

When Jesus sends out the 12 apostles for a season of ministry while he's still on earth he tells them, **Matt 10:7-8 – 7 And proclaim as you go, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand.' 8 Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, cast out demons. You received without paying; give without pay.**

When God's Kingdom breaks into the world:

- What is broken gets restored.
- What is evil gets defeated.
- What is wrong gets made right.
- What is decaying gets renewed.
- What was contrary to God's design is now brought back into wholeness.

There's a renewal of everything that has been messed up by sin, made right in the Kingdom of God.

So the Kingdom of God involves:

- **The rule and reign of God breaking out over the earth**
- **The renewal of all things from brokenness to wholeness and flourishing**

But then notice – just like last week, that modifier phrase at the end of v 10 – **On earth as it is in heaven.** Your Kingdom Come Lord – your rule and reign be exercised, your renewal and healing break in, here on earth like it is in heaven.

In heaven...

- Where you rule and reign perfectly...
- Where there is no brokenness (crying, pain, suffering, sickness, death) and everything is flourishing as it should be...

...bring that to earth here and now.

Meaning this is not just some future reality we wait and long for. That's not the prayer. The prayer is not – "Lord, help me be patient until your kingdom comes." NO the prayer is – God bring your kingdom – your rule, reign, and renewal here and now into my life and into the world.

We want that Kingdom here and now. We want to see that take place on the earth. That when we look into the physical, relational, emotional, and spiritual realities of our world we would see God's Kingdom. We would see things working and functioning like He's designed them to work.

That is what we are invited to pray for. Kind of a big deal, yeah?

Kingdom Come + Prayers of Lament

Now, here's what this has to do with our pain. Here's why this line matters so much for turning our pain into a gift.

All of our pain in life points us to where God's Kingdom has not yet come.

When we start to pray this prayer on a regular basis – Your kingdom come – something starts happening – you'll start seeing your pain and grief, and the pain and grief of those around you, through the lense of where God's Kingdom is not currently happening right now in your life and in the world.

You'll start to have eyes to see:

GOD'S KINGDOM		WORLD + LIFE
Peace + Unity	→	Strife + Conflict
Rest for our souls	→	Anxiety + Worry
Worship of God	→	Worship of Self
Flourishing	→	Suffering
Healing	→	Sickness
Generosity	→	Greed
Love one another	→	Use one another

Every time you pray "God, your kingdom come" you're admitting that you're not seeing that happen all around you and that it's painful.

So then the question becomes:

- What do you do with that pain?
- What do you do with the grief that arises from areas in your life where God's Kingdom is not being made manifest?
- What do you do with the hurt left from the gap between what is and what should be?

You let the pain become a gift. How? **Through the Biblical invitation to pray prayers of lament.**

Jesus teaching us to pray – Your Kingdom Come – is an invitation to lament all the ways God's Kingdom is not coming.

To lament is to bring our pain and grief to God in sorrowful yet hope-filled prayer.

It is to see what is broken in the world, to see where His kingdom is not in full in your life or in the world around you, to stare down face to face what is contrary to God's design and to bring that before the Lord – with weeping, with grieving, with pain, and with Holy Spirit empowered hope.

As one pastor Mark Vroegop says – **"Lament is the honest cry of a hurting heart wrestling with the paradox of pain and the promise of God's goodness."**

Lament is the language of the Scriptures for where our world and our lives are missing the renewal of the Kingdom of God, and yet choosing to still trust him as we bring that pain before him in prayer.

And the beautiful thing about the Lord's prayer and the Scriptures is that it gives language to that for us to pray.

The Psalms, our ancient prayer book, more than 1/3 are lament. Lament over the very same things we face today – illness, suffering, death, rejection, betrayal, protest, repentance, loss, depression, justice, fear.

We have a whole book in the bible called **Lamentations**.

Ecclesiastes (after Easter) – "Meaningless, Meaningless, Everything is meaningless."

The narratives of the Bible give us stories and personal prayers of lament:

- Hannah – infertility
- Job – loneliness and loss
- Moses – sin of the nation of Israel
- Tamar – laments her abuse and rape
- Jesus – laments with the language of Ps 22 as he suffers on the cross for the sins of the world

The Bible gives space for all of our suffering and invites us to lament, by bringing that before the Lord with the tension of grief and trust.

Our Father in Heaven – the one who knows us intimately and personally and yet is powerful to act, invites us to cry our longings before him.

Reasons We Don't Lament

So it's worth asking, if it's such a pervasive part of the Scriptures, a practice done by Jesus, and one we're invited into that, if we're honest, our souls even crave – a place to put our longing and sorrows – why don't we more often lament?

I think there's a whole host of reasons:

- We don't lament for God's Kingdom because we're too focused on our own personal kingdoms.
- We don't lament because we don't believe God cares about our pain or the pain of the world.
- We don't lament because we don't think God can handle our honesty.

And those are all valid and worth exploring at another time. But I think for us as a church community there's two primary reasons we don't lament as the Bible invites us to:

1. We run from pain.

We live in a society created to buffer us from pain.

- Pain from lacking something? Amazon Prime – Order it and it can be here by the end of the day.
- Want to avoid thinking about painful things? I present to you an abundance of streaming services and the addictive power of social media.

- Is your body painful? We have medicine, vitamins and essential oils.

And not all of that is bad – I praise God for medicine and Amazon prime. But it's worth noting that it develops us into people that think either pain should be avoided or solved quickly in 4 easy steps.

Neil Postman, who was an award winning author and cultural critic, wrote a book in the 1980s called "Amusing Ourselves to Death". It's a fascinating read. But the whole book is one big argument that western society trains us to fill our lives with trivial possessions and experiences in an attempt to distract us from the fears and pains of life.

I'm just going to busy my life up as much as possible so I don't have to stop and deal with my grief.

Or maybe it's not busyness, we might work hard to avoid grief by spiritualizing our grief-avoidance.

We can wrongly believe that to lament or to grieve the brokenness of our lives is faithless, rather than actually faithful. We can think that if we let ourselves hurt over what we long for, let ourselves grieve over what is missing or painful in our lives – then that means we don't trust God enough or aren't content enough or are not committed to his kingdom enough or whatever. We've at some point in our lives equated trusting God with being happy. Which is nowhere in the Scriptures.

And yet this is not the way of Jesus. And this is not the way to flourishing. And it's not letting pain be a gift to draw us into communion with God. Ignoring grief is not the call of Christians. Christians should be a people who grieve the most deeply because we know how broken the world and our lives truly are. And yet we learn to grieve with faith.

We learn that stepping into the pain, not distracting ourselves away from it, is the more Christ-like response and the way we become more like Jesus.

Augustine – "It is better that the human heart feel grief and be cured of it, than by not feeling any grief and becoming inhuman."

2. We grieve, just not to God.

For others of us, we have almost the opposite problem. We have no issue focusing all of our attention on grief and pain. Everything seems to always be bad for us. We cry, we grieve, we sit in our sadness, we just never actually lament by taking it to our Heavenly Father who can do something with it and can do something with us even in the midst of it.

So instead of lamenting, we settle for its secular substitute called complaining.

Complaining is an airing of grievances and venting out into the world or to others. Lament is a faith-filled posture of bearing our burdens before the Lord. Lament forces us to actually bring our grief to God.

We are praying – God your kingdom come. I'm lamenting this brokenness in my life and in the world to you, Father in heaven, because it's not how you've designed things to be. So I'm bringing it to you, laying it before you, and entrusting that you can do what only you can do here.

In addressing the difference between biblical lament and grief or crying, Mark Vroegop writes – **"Lament is different from crying because lament is a form of prayer. It is more than just the expression of sorrow or the venting of emotion. Lament talks to God about pain. And it has a unique purpose: trust. It is a divinely-given invitation to pour out our fears, frustrations, and sorrows for the purpose of helping us to renew our confidence in God...Lament is the prayer language for God's people as they live in a world marred by sin. It is how we talk to God about our sorrows as we renew our hope in his sovereign care. To cry is human, but to lament is Christian."**

Or in the words of author Christine Hoover – **"Without lament, we feel and emote without also inviting truth to reign in our hearts and our hope to rest in God."**

Lament requires us bringing our hearts to God. We have to actually look at our grief, then we take the extra step of bringing our grief godward, letting pain be the gift it can be to bring our hearts closer to Him.

Remember – the goal of prayer is communion with God. So lament is a chance to deepen our communion with him through bringing our sorrows and grief before Him.

Lindsay + Sharing my emotions.

Guided Exercise – Psalm 13

So what does it look like to lament? Let me show you, and then we'll actually walk through it together from Psalm 13.

*Take a minute or two in silence to stare down your grief and sorrow. What do you need to lament today? Where is God's Kingdom – his rule and reign, his renewal, not present in your life or in the world?

Lament has 4 steps:

- 13:1 – **Invite God to be near you in your pain**
- 13:2 – **Describe your pain to God**
- 13:3-4 – **Depend on Him** (instead of despair ('there's no hope') or denial ('everything's fine'))
- 13:5 – **Dwell on His character and faithfulness**

Psalm 13:6 – Let's sing to the Lord, because he has dealt bountifully with us.

- NLT – Because He is good to me.
- NASB – Because He has looked after me.
- HCSB – Because he has treated me generously.