

# WE SEEK YOUR KINGDOM

## Sermon outline

### INTRODUCTION

Hopefully you've just heard or sung 'We Seek Your Kingdom'. It's a beautiful song, written to the familiar tune of 'Abide with Me' – deliberately chosen in the hope that the song will resonate and stay with you.

The theme of the song is also closely linked to the Church of England's 'Thy Kingdom Come' prayer initiative. Both the song and the movement have the same biblical root. They draw their inspiration from the prayer Jesus taught his followers – in which we're invited to pray: 'Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.' (Matthew 6:10)

It's the second line of the Lord's prayer as Matthew presents it:

*'your kingdom come,  
your will be done,  
on earth as it is in heaven.'*

Here's the thing – if we explore this oh-so-familiar verse in more detail, we might discover more than we sometimes notice. That's so often the case with Jesus.

Maybe it's just me, but when we say the Lord's prayer in English, if there's one line that sometimes slips by quicker than the others, it's 'your kingdom come'. And yet so much flows from that line. It's rich in meaning.

My prayer is that if we spend some time considering this verse – 'your kingdom come' – then our understanding of the song and our reciting of the Lord's prayer might be all the richer for it.

### SECTION 1: GROUNDED IN EARTHLY CHANGE

Firstly, let's recognise that 'your kingdom come' is a prayer that should be grounded in earthly change.

Sometimes beautiful, familiar words can lose their impact. That's especially true when we elevate biblical prayers to the point where they're so heavenly that we don't ground them in earthly reality, or pray for an earthly difference.

'Your kingdom come' must be a general prayer that we ask to see come true in specific places – or else it loses its purpose. It must be a prayer we take personally – or else it loses its impact. And it must be a prayer we want to see come true *on the ground* – or else it's meaningless.

'Your kingdom come' is *grounded* in the sense that we long to see heaven's demonstration here, as the song says. And if it's to be seen on the *ground*, then all the lines of the song flow from this verse.

That's why the song includes the words 'transform, revive, and heal society'. That's why it focuses on wide areas like the economy and the public square. Because 'we seek your kingdom throughout every sphere.' Because 'we long for heaven's demonstration *here*'.

And that includes your *here*: the places where you spend the most time working, resting, and playing, especially with those who don't yet share your faith.



## SECTION 2: KINGSHIP

We should also note that ‘your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven’ is a prayer about kingship.

And if it’s about kingship it’s about sovereignty, authority, and rule – both in the world and in the hearts of people. It’s a prayer for things to change for the better.

A kingdom always requires a monarch. So for the followers of Jesus, this was a radical prayer for regime change. We’re urged to pray that the kingdom will come, and that God’s will would be done here and now. And his kingdom clashes with alternative ways of life.

When Jesus first taught this prayer, the Jewish people were working out what it meant to be the people of God under an all-powerful Roman Empire. Many Pharisees believed they should concentrate on personal piety and religious observance. They majored on keeping the letter of the law – that was how they lived out their faith.

Many Sadducees thought they should accommodate to the political powers around them, assimilate, and do what the Romans told them. Many Essenes took to the desert to withdraw completely. Most ordinary people just tried to get on with life.

But Jesus came and declared that the kingdom of God had arrived in and through him. The followers of Jesus are called to point to another way: to pray for change and yet to engage with the culture around them.

And that’s still true for us today. Praying ‘your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven’ is praying for system change. So when we pray or sing this prayer we can ask:

- What would it be like if God’s kingdom’s values were more evident on our frontlines – in the places where we find ourselves day to day, with those who don’t know Jesus?
- What are some of the things we would like to see change – at school, at work, in our neighbourhood, in our nation – to better represent God’s values and God’s kingdom?

These are the questions this prayer is asking us to consider. It’s edgy! It’s a cry of dissatisfaction. It’s about change becoming increasingly seen and known.

‘Your kingdom come’ isn’t just an expectant yearning for the coming of Christ in the future, although that longing is in there. It means praying that God’s values are seen more today than yesterday, and more again tomorrow than today.

The author and speaker John Ortberg interprets ‘your kingdom come’ this way:

*‘Many people think our job is to get my afterlife destination taken care of, then tread water till we all get ejected and God comes back and torches this place. But Jesus never told anybody – neither his disciples nor us – to pray, “Get me out of here so I can go up there.” His prayer was, “Make up there come down here. Make things down here run the way they do up there.”’*

When Andy Flannagan, Noel Robinson, and Graham Hunter came to write this song, they described their aims this way:

*'We hoped that the words we wrote would articulate something of the scope and reach of the kingdom of heaven. The opening two verses were an invocation of God's presence throughout every sphere of human society. They served as an invitation – an expression of our desire for God to be present and active 24/7, in every moment of every day, week, and year. They invited God to be acknowledged on our "frontlines" – wherever we found ourselves occupied in our everyday lives.*

*'They expressed a longing for all our creative work to be in accordance with God's economy – the logic of God's kingdom. Each of the verses conclude with that passionate prayer and petition – that God would "transform, revive and heal society".'*

The reality of this prayer coming true is seen in the lives of Christ's followers. So what does it mean for God's kingdom to come? What does it look like?

- It looks like Laura changing the culture of her workplace for the better when the place was known for cutting corners.
- It means Sina being a messenger of peace to the parents waiting in the playground when they've had a row.
- It looks like Jim speaking up to the procurement department to adopt a more ethical buying policy.
- It looks like Akram treating everyone he escorts to the law courts with dignity at a crucial moment in their lives.

I'm using some everyday examples because some of you might have heard the words of the song and thought: 'that all sounds a bit too political for me!'

It would be such a shame if we took that view. The song clearly points to the big picture of 'society' and the public square – but it also speaks about 'every sphere'.

'Every sphere' does include the political arena, and we should pray more for Christians active in this area, but that doesn't mean this is a prayer we can opt out of as followers of Christ.

Praying 'your kingdom come' means asking the heavenly Father to help us to be faithful, obedient, authentic, and effective Christians *in our own lives*. We demonstrate God's kingdom not only with words but also through our actions and the observable qualities of our character.

If we start with a big view of what 'your kingdom come' means, we should scale down and make it personal. And if we start with a small view, we should scale up. This is a macro prayer with micro implications. This is personal prayer with public implications.



### SECTION 3: ASKING AND VOLUNTEERING

There are two key things at the heart of the prayer 'your kingdom come': asking and volunteering.

None of us fully know what God's kingdom looks like. When we pray this line of the Lord's prayer we're actually asking something. 'Lord, what do you want?'

And, as so often with prayers, when we pray he calls us to be part of his answer to our own prayers. It's as humbling as it is fascinating to consider that God advances his kingdom agenda through the prayers of his people.

So when we pray 'your kingdom come', we're actually asking: 'How can I serve you? What do you want me to do for you and your kingdom today?'

When we become Christians, we sometimes act as though we've enlisted God for our lives: our concerns, our causes, our contexts. However, when we look at the Gospels more closely, and in particular when we pray this prayer, we're reminded that through Jesus God has enrolled us into his cause.

That means when we pray this prayer we're asking: 'how might the atmosphere, relationships, values, priorities, and policies around me change if the kingdom actually came where I am this week?'

Monday to Saturday, the people of God – that's you and me – aren't hemmed into a corner, ghettoised from the rest of society. We're out in the world, touching scores of lives in a whole variety of ways, praying that God's kingdom would come where we are. Praying that he would transform, revive, and heal society. And that he would use *us* to help achieve that transformation, revival, and healing.

### CONCLUDING PRAYER

Lord, help us to recognise that when we treasure your kingdom, we're one step closer to you, the King.

Lord, we seek your kingdom throughout every sphere. We long for heaven's demonstration here – and we picture the different 'heres' where we'll find ourselves this week.

Jesus, may your light shine bright for all to see. Lord, transform, revive, and heal society.

We pray 'your kingdom come, Lord.' So that your sovereign rule will come now, more tomorrow than today, starting with me, increasing in number and quality and in the future in its fullness and permanence with Christ's return.

Amen.