

Sermon on Lord's Day 48
Our Lord teaches us to pray for God to bring his kingdom
By Dr. Wes Bredenhof

Order of Worship (Liturgy)

Hymn 77

Psalm 99

Hymn 63:1,3

Hymn 1

Hymn 9

Scripture readings: 1 Chron. 29:10-20, Romans 5:15-21, Rev. 7:9-17

Catechism lesson: Lord's Day 48

Beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ,

Tradition has it that it was on October 31, 1517 that Martin Luther posted the 95 Theses on the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg, Germany. This sparked a debate which eventually led to the Reformation, a movement back to the Bible. We can be thankful to God that we are heirs of this movement.

However, the time of the Reformation also saw the emergence of the Anabaptists. The Anabaptists were diverse. The only thing that most had in common was a rejection of infant baptism and a belief that the church was made up only of those who had made a sincere public profession of faith and been baptized as adults. But otherwise, there was great diversity amongst the Anabaptists. Some of them were the equivalent of today's Pentecostals – they believed they received direct messages from God apart from his Word. Amongst some you could hear the genuine preaching of the gospel. But amongst others you would hear legalism or moralism. Some Anabaptists were peace loving, gentle people. But others were violent and eager to kill and destroy.

In 1534, a group of these violent Anabaptists took over the German city of Munster. Munster was declared to be the New Jerusalem, the place where God had established his kingdom on earth. Anabaptists travelled to Munster from all over Europe to find a refuge in what they believed was the kingdom of God. Private ownership was abolished – they practiced a form of early communism. Polygamy was implemented. Jan van Leyden was appointed the King of the New Zion and he ruled with an iron fist, tolerating no dissent. Those who opposed him were killed. The Kingdom of God took the form of a dictatorship in Munster. The city was eventually besieged by Roman Catholic forces. The city came under attack on June 25, 1535 and the so-called Kingdom of God in Munster came to an end. The Anabaptist leaders were tortured and executed. Their bodies were displayed in cages hanging off the tower of one of the city's churches. The cages are still there to this day.

The Munster Anabaptists failed to recognize something fundamental about the way God works in this world. God brings his kingdom. Yes, he uses instruments, but those instruments are only two: his Word and his Holy Spirit. God does not use human violence and tyranny to establish his kingdom. God uses his Word and Holy Spirit to bring about the recognition and reality of his royal dominion in the universe. And so, at the root it is God's kingdom, and it is God's work to bring it about. We see this in the model

prayer that our Lord Jesus teaches us too. So, when our Lord Jesus tells us to pray “Your kingdom come,” he again wants us to have God’s plan and God’s priorities foremost in our hearts. So, this afternoon I preach to you God’s Word with this theme:

Our Lord teaches us to pray for God to bring his Kingdom.

We’ll see that God’s kingdom is one of:

1. Power
2. Grace
3. Glory

In 1 Chronicles 29, we find a way in which God’s rule is completely different from that of earthly rulers. We have here words of praise from David. We have the historical context clearly laid out for us. King David is about to transfer his kingdom over to his son Solomon, along with the responsibility to build the temple. At this point, David was at the height of his rule. In fact, it seems that the promises of God about the boundaries of Israel in Numbers 34 were fulfilled in his time. Sure, David had his struggles and difficulties, but there was no question that he was a king of great power, his kingdom was one of great power.

That makes it all the more amazing to hear these words of praise from David in 1 Chronicles 29. He doesn’t take the credit for himself. He doesn’t heap up praise on his own name. He doesn’t sound like a modern politician who might say, “We’ve built a country that we can be proud of.” Instead, David points to God and gives all the praise and thanks to him. Moreover, King David recognizes God’s kingship as being entirely different. He knows that his kingly power is limited and fleeting, he’s getting near death. But he says about God in verse 11, “Yours, O LORD, is the greatness and the power, and the glory, and the majesty, and the splendour, for everything in heaven and earth is yours.” Then in verse 12, “Wealth and honor come from you, you are the ruler of all things. In your hands are strength and power to exalt and give strength to all.” He says that God is the king whose power is incomparable. David only rules Israel, but God rules all creation. God is the supreme King before whom all people, including David, have to bow.

That helps us to understand something of the character of the kingdom that we’re taught to pray about in the second petition. If we try to define it, the kingdom of God is simply his rule over the world and everything in it. We don’t define it in geographical terms – God’s kingdom has no borders, for instance. Instead, we define it in terms of the exercise of power and dominion. Simply put: God rules. And he rules with power over all that has been created. There is nothing, not even one atom, which falls outside his royal rule. His is a kingdom of power. And when we say that, we’re really making reference to what we call God’s omnipotence. Omnipotence means that God is all-powerful. God is able to do whatever he wills in the way in which he wills it. The angel said it to Mary in Luke 1:37, “For nothing is impossible with God.” Why? Because he has the power to rule over creation as he wills!

Now how does this connect to the Lord’s Prayer and then also to our prayers in general? Well, we pray for God’s kingdom to come. But this aspect of God’s kingdom, the fact that it is a kingdom of power, it’s already there in all its fullness. No one can add or take away from the fact that God’s kingdom is powerful to the maximum degree.

So, what the Lord is teaching us to pray in this respect is something different. Christ is teaching us to pray that we would more and more recognize God's royal power and live accordingly. We have to see that God's kingdom is one of power and then let this recognition impact our lives.

And what will that look like? The Catechism says, "So rule us by your Word and Spirit that more and more we submit to you." God uses instruments in our lives so that we recognize his rule and live thankfully in an appropriate way. The instruments or means are simply his Word and the Holy Spirit – and these two always work together. Through the Holy Spirit working with the Bible, we more and more listen to what God wants for our lives. We become more and more the image of Christ. This is about our sanctification. When we pray for God's kingdom to come, we're praying for his rule in our lives not just to be a factoid, a little piece of trivia. We're praying for God's rule to be a reality, something that impacts our lives meaningfully! The king of power speaks, and things change in our lives. The king of power speaks, and our lives are transformed by his power!

We're praying that God would bring us to see his royal power. And recognizing that power changes our lives. It also brings us comfort. We know that our lives are under his royal dominion. He rules us with power and it's not raw power, no, it's molded and shaped by his love for us. And seeing that bring us to praise him in ever greater measures. God is a king unlike any other. Our entire lives should be filled with a prayerful longing to see him honoured through us and others.

Rebellion towards this king of power is intolerable. Sadly enough, the world in which we live doesn't look at it like that. They don't see a King of power who will someday be their judge. They live in mockery and rebellion today. Someday their rebellion will be publicly exposed and the King of power will be vindicated. This has implications for us too – because we have heard about this king's reign in clear and direct language. Most unbelievers have heard little about the king – enough to make them without excuse, but still, relatively speaking, very little. But we are different. We are going to be held accountable for what we did with what we knew about our King. He will say to us in that day, "You knew that I was a king of power. How did you then pray? How did you live?" Through Christ's work in us, we should be able to say that we prayed for ourselves to fall in submission to our King. We should be able to say that, by the power of the Spirit working in us, we sought to live in submission to the King of power.

Now, let's look at how God's kingdom is one of grace.

We should all know the basic definition of grace. Grace is when you receive the opposite of what you deserve. Because of our sins, we deserve God's eternal wrath. But because of Jesus Christ, because we are in him by faith, we receive God's eternal favour and love. Grace is at the heart of the Christian faith. We believe that we are saved by grace alone through faith in Jesus Christ alone.

Now it may not appear that way from a superficial reading, but the Catechism speaks of God's grace when it says, "Preserve and increase your church." If you think about it for a moment: how is it that God's preserves his church through the ages? He works through the Holy Spirit by the preaching and teaching of the Word. The preaching of the Word is a means of grace. It is a means by which God's grace in Jesus Christ is proclaimed, both in our justification and in our sanctification. We're told how Jesus Christ graciously redeems us from our sins by his obedience, suffering, and resurrection. We're told how Jesus Christ graciously sanctifies our lives by the ongoing work of his Holy Spirit. The preservation of the church is therefore completely a matter of God's grace. After all, God doesn't owe it

to the church to preserve it. We certainly don't deserve this from God. But God in his good pleasure wills to preserve a people for himself.

By his grace, he also wills to increase his church. Here again, this happens through the means of grace, particularly through the preaching of the Word. Through the preaching of the Word in mission settings and established congregations, unbelievers are confronted with the command to repent and believe the gospel. By the gracious working of the Holy Spirit in their hearts, they respond in obedience to this command. They are then joined to God's people. All of this is God ruling with grace.

You can see that there is a connection between the church and the kingdom of God. Some people are inclined to set up a fairly rigid distinction between the two. To be sure, there are differences. The kingdom of God is broader than the church. But the church definitely falls in the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God is simply his rule in this world and doesn't the church also fall under that? And nowhere is the gracious aspect of God's kingdom clearer than in the church where we find the means of grace. God does show his grace outside the church too – think for example of the fact that God makes the sun shine and the rain fall on unbelievers as well as believers. Nobody deserves to have that! But it's especially in the church, in its preservation and increase, that we clearly see the King of grace in all his splendour.

So when we pray for God's kingdom to come, we're praying for his grace to be shown more and more. This also applies to the destruction of the works of the devil. Remember the devil is not interested in giving people the opposite of what they deserve. Satan only wants to cause destruction, what people really deserve. But more than that, his intent is also to destroy God's works of grace. He wants to destroy the church where the means of grace are found. And then there's not only the devil, there are also other powers that rise up against God, human powers. There are conspiracies against the Word of God, persecutions brought upon the church. All these enemies are there trying to destroy grace. They hate it when they see people receiving the opposite of what they deserve. They're filled with revulsion at God's goodness. When we pray in the spirit of the second petition, we're praying that God would not allow these evil plans to come to fruition. We're praying that God's kingdom of grace would continue to rule in this world and increase in strength.

God's gracious rule will continue in our lives and in the lives of others. God wants us to pray to him for that and trust him entirely that this will happen. In Romans 5:21, we read about the rule of grace in our lives. Paul says that sin is there in our lives, but it does not rule us. Instead, grace rules through righteousness. This is the righteousness of Jesus Christ given to us. It brings us to eternal life. So, we are not ruled by sin and death, but by grace! We have to see that grace is being personified in this passage, it's spoken about as if it were a person. There's a good reason for that. Grace is not an abstract theological concept. Grace is an attribute or characteristic of God. God is the king. God is the king characterized by grace. So, when Romans 5:21 says that we are ruled by grace, it really means that we are ruled by the God of grace.

So then what does it mean to pray for the coming of the kingdom? First of all, we saw a few moments ago that the power of God's kingdom is already fully present. It's different with the aspect of grace. When we talk about God's kingdom being one of grace, there is an "already...but not yet" side to it. God's kingdom of grace is already being experienced in the lives of God's people. But it is not yet fully being experienced in our lives or in the lives of others whom God will yet still draw into his church.

That means that when we pray for the coming of the kingdom, we pray earnestly for God to indeed bring in the full number of his elect. We pray for God to increase the church, through mission, but also through and in this local congregation of Christ. This is a general kind of prayer. We can also pray more particularly. We can and should pray earnestly for the salvation of particular people whom God brings across our path. That general and more particular way of praying is the “not yet.” Then there’s the “already,” that means we also pray earnestly for ourselves and other believers that we would continue to live under the reign of grace. We pray that we would continue to see Christ working in us and among us to transform our lives into his image.

Now praying for God’s kingdom also means seeing that his kingdom is one of glory.

The last line of Answer 123 is partly a direct quote from 1 Corinthians 15:28, “so that God may be all in all...” This statement looks ahead to something that isn’t currently the situation. In other words, right now God is not all in all. But a day is coming when he will be. We see something of that day in what we read from Revelation 7.

Here too, there’s also an “already...but not yet” aspect to God’s kingdom. His kingdom is here in its aspect of glory, but not yet in its full measure. In other words, God’s kingdom is already receiving praise and honour, but in the future, a day is coming when this kingdom will be glorified in a way that’s simply mind-blowing.

This coming day involves again the preservation and increase of the church. God’s plan is to bring believers from all nations, tribes, peoples and languages into the recognition of his rule. Being and staying under his rule, they will give him glory. That’s what we see in Revelation 7. We see something of God’s genius. He knows that a choir singing in parts sounds much more beautiful than a choir that sings only in unison. Bringing in people from all kinds of cultural backgrounds is part of God’s plan for his kingdom to receive maximum praise and glory. Isn’t it fascinating that the picture in Revelation 7 is not of a multitude of people who are all the same? They all sing the same song and praise the same God, but they keep their unique cultural backgrounds. This shows that God values diversity among his people and he uses and will use that diversity to magnify the glory of his royal rule.

So, with that picture of Revelation 7 in our minds, how should we be praying and living? We should pray and live as people for whom the kingdom of glory is a present and coming reality. Those who live under God’s rule today make his glory a priority in how they live and how they pray. We are God’s subjects, we acknowledge his royal rule, therefore in our prayers we long to see the day when his kingdom will get the maximum praise and glory. That means that prayer for mission and evangelism is a priority for us. We pray also for God to use us. And when we say these prayers, we pray them from hearts that really long for these things. And having hearts that long for these things means that we look for open doors where God will use us. We look for and pray for opportunities and when God brings them to us, we enter in faith and obedience.

Through all of this, we can prayerfully look forward to the day when God will be all in all. And what does that exactly mean? John Calvin put it this way, “Paul’s words mean nothing but this, that all things will be brought back to God, as their sole beginning and end, that they may be closely bound to him.” In other words, many today disconnect existence, life and everything from God. But the day is coming when it will be clearly made known to everyone that existence, life, and everything are bound up in God. Paul put it a different way in Acts 17:28, “For in God we live and move and have our being.” The day is

coming when it will be plainly made known to all creation that God is the sovereign King upon whom all things depend. God will bring it to pass.

So, when we pray for the coming of God's kingdom, we're really praying for the fulfillment of all his plans for us, for the church, and for the world. We're praying that the good things already in place under his rule will remain. We're praying that the good things to come from his rule will come quickly. We're praying these things not so that God would become king, but that he would be recognized by all creatures as King. Already some do, but not yet all. May the Lord come quickly so that the day would come when all willingly submit to his sovereign eternal rule! May we also be eager subjects, today and everyday, until the fulness of the kingdom comes. AMEN.