

“Your Kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven”

The word “kingdom” is at first a hard idea to understand. As a child, my mind went to thoughts of a princess standing at a window looking out over green fields, which was certainly a very beautiful picture but did not have a lot of relevance to my life growing up in a big, fast-paced city.

We should begin by unpacking the biblical idea of “kingdom,” showing what it means and why it is important.

We will then connect it with the idea of the will of God and then look briefly at the idea of vocation, i.e. being called by God to some kind of work.

There are several words used in the Bible to describe God’s power and authority and how these are put into action.

The word “kingdom” conveys the idea of **sovereign authority**. By “sovereign,” I mean authority that is uncompromised. As we have seen from the recent financial crisis in Europe, if a country is deeply in debt, its government will not be able to act as they wish. Their decisions will be shaped and limited by the wishes of others (e.g. the IMF or another country that holds most of their debt).

- In contrast, a kingdom has one ruler whose authority is uncompromised and can therefore rule as he sees to be best (ideally, with wisdom and a love for people).

God’s “kingdom,” the sovereign authority by which God asserts his rule over the world, is closely connected with the coming of Jesus.

- The New Testament repeatedly quotes Ps. 110:1 and understands as representing the words of the Father to the Son, whom he has appointed ruler over all things (“Sit at my right hand while I make your enemies a foot-stool for your feet”).
- Jesus, as Son, is also given authority over all things (cf. Mt. 28:18: “And Jesus came and said to them, ‘All authority on heaven and earth has been given to me.’”)
- This includes
  - the authority to forgive sins (Mt. 9:6: “so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins”)
  - the authority to pass the last (and final) judgment on every life that has been lived (Mt. 25: 31-46).

The purpose of the Kingdom is

- to make us God’s own, so that we might
  - be with God
  - be made perfect in wisdom and love
  - share in his power and glory
    - be glorified with Christ (Rom. 8:17: “we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him”)
    - reign with Christ (2 Tim. 2:12: “If we endure we will also reign with him”; 1 Cor. 4:8: “so that [in Christ] we might share the rule with you”)
      - “He [sc. Jesus] himself is the Kingdom of God, for in him we are to reign” (Cyprian *On the Lord’s Prayer* 13)

- to right wrongs and defeat every opposing power (Satan bound; the power of sin defeated and finally abolished; the humbling and judgment of all who continue to stubbornly resist God)
- to restore and renew all things (Acts 3:21: “until the times of the restoration of all things”).
  - When the Son has defeated every opposing power and hands over to the Father all those he has made perfect in love, God will be all in all (1 Cor. 15:24,28).

It is natural for those who love God to want these things and to ask God for them.

- For Jewish people near the time of Christ, the idea of the kingdom (wanting God to extend his power and rule over all things) was of central importance in prayer:
  - “Any blessing in which [the word] ‘kingdom’ does not occur is no blessing [at all]” (*Berakoth* 40b), i.e. nothing can be truly good unless it involves God extending his power and his rule over all things (compare Ps. 16:2, “I said to the Lord, ‘You are my Lord; apart from you I have no good thing,” i.e. “I have no good apart from you”).
  - To ask God for these things is something only the people of God can do:
    - It is “of great boldness and a pure conscience to ask for the kingdom [=reign] of God and not to fear judgment” (Jerome).

The idea of the Kingdom is closely connected with the working out (and final achievement) of God’s will for the world.

- Jesus brought in the kingdom (reign/rule) of God by doing not his own will, but the will of the Father (Jn. 6:3-39; compare Mt. 26:39: “My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will”).
- The past and present obstacles to the coming of the Kingdom come from the stubbornness of our will when it resists God:
  - Mt. 21:28-29: “A certain man had two sons and he came to the first and said, “Son, go work today in my vineyard. He answered and said, ‘**I will not.**’”
- The coming of the Kingdom addresses this stubborn resistance by extending forgiveness and changing hearts of stone (closed off/resist God) with hearts of flesh (the will has been restored and made able to love God).
  - “...since we are opposed by the Devil, and our thoughts and deeds are thus prevented from complete submission to God, we pray requesting that the will of God might be done in us. For this to be done is us, there is need of God’s will, that is his aid and protection, since nobody is strong in his own strength, but is kept safe in God’s kindness and mercy” (Cyprian *On the Lord’s Prayer* 15)
  - “What God asks is a will which will no longer be divided between him and any creature,” i.e. is not compromised by any other allegiance, “a will pliant in his hands which is neither desiring anything nor refusing anything, which wants without reservation everything he wants, and which never, under any pretext, wants anything which he does not want” (François Fénelon)

If praying for the coming of the Kingdom means that we want the will of God to be done in every area of life, it would be reasonable to ask “Where am I closed off?”

In other words, what parts of my life operate in a separate compartment, one least directly connected with explicit thoughts of Jesus Christ and love for him?

The answer will obviously vary with the person, but for many people in America today the part of life that is felt to have the least direct connection with Jesus Christ is our place of work.

Americans increasingly no longer have a sense of **calling**, but simply have a **job** or pursue a **career**.

In a calling,

- there is one who calls—God--and
- there is also a goal which is beyond (and bigger) than oneself, the place of work and the tasks of work, a goal which is supernatural in character and concerns higher and lasting goods.

A job can be simply a means of making an income and obtaining a certain kind of lifestyle for myself and, as an extension of myself, my immediate family. When viewed this way, work does not have to have any higher, lasting purpose. When this is so, and work consumes a significant portion of one's life, this leads to large parts of one's life having little vertical reference to God and little direct connection with a God-oriented picture of the future and of what would count as success.

It is also worth noting that churches rarely offer people entering the workforce (teenagers and college students) meaningful guidance on how to

- understand work as a kingdom calling and as being called to something that comes from God and is connected with the coming of the his kingdom;
- discern what specifically one is being called to (individual vocation).

If churches cannot raise the question of vocation with persons entering the workforce who have grown up in the church, it is unlikely they will have much success in getting others to address these questions later in life.

The church has traditionally used a number of criteria for discerning a calling from God to a certain style of life and a certain type of work. The way these criteria are understood and used is a bit complex and can't be reduced to a simple presentation, but the following basic questions are often asked to solicit some basic information and get the discussion started:

(1) What is being done?

- a. What degree of acquaintance/experience does one have with this work?
- b. Does it tend to the honor of God, the glory of his people, the benefit of the neighbor, etc.
  - i. Why is this thought to be the case?
  - ii. What limitations are observed and what is the nature of these?

(2) For whom is it being done?

- a. What is the goal and intention of the one doing this work?
  - i. Why is this thought to be the case?

(3) In what spirit is it being done?

- a. Is there evidence of being called to this work or does it just seem like a choice one made?
- b. Is it being done out of love of God or of the neighbor?
  - i. What fruit is observed in this respect and why is it thought to be relevant?
  - ii. What is the nature of one's desire for this work?
- c. Is it being done
  - from some good that the mind sees and approves or
  - from false pictures of God, oneself or the world?

- d. Is it being done from some holy affection which is moving the will?
- e. Is it being done out of the fear of God? The fear of a slave or the reverence of a son or a daughter?
- f. Does the thought of doing this work or the decision to do this work bring
  - i. disturbance
  - ii. anxiety which
    - 1. lasts or is recurrent (goes away and comes back);
    - 2. is disorienting;
    - 3. creates consumes a great deal of energy, so that it takes attention and focus away from other things or encourage choices that are hasty or seem one-sided;
    - 4. evokes excessive reactions of antagonistic irritability, aggressive anger or defensive rigidity),
  - iii. rapid movement between different opinions and/or states?
- g. Is the inclination to this work connected with the approval (or virtual presence) of another person? In other words, to what extent is it one's own desire and to what extent is it an effect or by-product of someone else's desire?
- h. Does it arise from a moving toward something or a moving away from something?
- i. Does it arise from a desire to right some past wrong?
- j. Does the desire for (sense of obligation to) this work seem like something that rests outside the person and exerts force on them from without (duty which is poorly internalized, fear)?
- k. Does the desire for this work arise from a sense of freedom and joy in a good beyond oneself? Or is it associated with resignation and a sense that other options are not available?
- l. Does one return to this work again and again in spite of the significant difficulties associated with it?
  - i. Does the return to this work arise from a healthy motive, i.e. that one could not not do this work, even after taking account of the difficulties and repeatedly experiencing their effects?
  - ii. Is the return to this work evidence of an undivided love for God that is not compromised by other considerations?
- m. Does one's desire for this work outstrip and get ahead of one's present (regularly-exercised) capacities?
  - i. Does one's proposal for completing this work rest upon the assumption of extraordinary efforts?
  - ii. Does this work require a kind of maturity and capacities for understanding and handling people that one may not yet possess?
    - 1. "Those whom God chooses for something, he likewise prepares and disposes, so that they are found to be fit for that for which they are chosen, in accordance with that passage (2 Cor. 3:6), 'He [sc. God] made us fit to be ministers of a new covenant'" (Thomas Aquinas *Summa theol.* 3, q. 27, a. 4)