

Pentecost 4: A Study of the Second Petition

Matthew 6:10: “Your Kingdom Come”

My brothers and my sisters in Christ Jesus, in January of 2022, the international non-profit organization “Open Doors” released their annual World Watch List. And the findings of this yearly study aren’t exactly heartwarming. You see, the World Watch List is a research study that assesses where Christians face the most severe types of persecution. It found that last year 1 out of every 7 Christians is under high levels of persecution for their faith. A high level means Christians face bodily, economic, or social harm for their faith. In total more than 360 million individuals in the world face this kind of persecution.

In one of the top 50 countries of persecution, India, which is number 11, Christians face all kinds of difficulties. They lose their social standing; they can be outcast from their families, and many are even the victims of physical violence for the name of Jesus. One story came from Mehr, whose family was beaten mercilessly after converting to Christianity. But even after that, she went to a hospital, and this woman was refused to be treated for her wounds. The doctors had been bribed not to treat this unpatriotic Christian woman.

Now I know that we, as Christians in America, do not face the same kind of persecution as they do, like this woman in India, Pakistan, or North Korea, and we give heartfelt thanks for the protections that we are provided for our faith in the United States. But I think it is no doubt that you and I have a longing like Mehr does, like any Christian dealing with this world: A longing for the kingdom of God. Even in the United States, you can look around and see the effects of sin and opposition to the will and rule of God, whether it be the sinful violence and heartbreak from it that comes every single day, or the oppression that comes to groups of people, even just the difficulties that come with being a Christian in the 21st century modern age. We pray in the Lord’s Prayer repeatedly, your Kingdom come. But it really doesn’t seem like God’s kingdom is anywhere to be found. I can’t see God’s rule in the governing authorities around me or in the world. I can’t see God’s rule and his kingdom in the associations and people that I frequent. I can’t see God’s kingdom anywhere. God, is your kingdom ever going to come? Will there come a time when people will come to their senses and just acknowledge you will and rule in this world?

Unsurprisingly, the Kingdom of God is something that has been yearned for but also misunderstood by sinful humans since the first sin, even during the time that Christ himself was walking the earth. Jesus frequently teaches his disciples over and over again in parables about the Kingdom, his Kingdom, much to their confusion and sometimes outright disgruntlement. The disciples longed for a time too, when Christ would be King and all the opposition to his will and his Word would be done away with, when they could be free and unified with all others around them who confessed the same Lord and could be in a place free from sin and opposition. When our lives and the people around us, the authorities, organizations, and individuals will all confess, Jesus is King. Even directly before his ascension, the disciples asked him again, “Are you at this time going to restore the kingdom of Israel?”

The disciples and we so often forget that the kingdom that we so long for will come, just not yet. There will come a time when, like the days of Noah or Lot, that the judgment will come, and God, with righteousness, will take his people away to a place of safety. To the ark of heaven

where we will dwell everlastingly with our King Jesus in glory forever and ever. The enemies of his rule will be far out of any reach or thought. But Jesus tells us that that time is not yet. That kingdom will come; you can be sure of it, but not yet.

But what if I told you that that kingdom is not the only Kingdom? Why does Jesus talk about the present reality of the Kingdom if that Kingdom is not yet here? Well, what if I told you that God's Kingdom is not only in the future but is already here? That God's Kingdom is here in this room, that God's Kingdom is alive and thriving in America. That God's Kingdom is even thriving in India, where Christians are persecuted for their faith? That's because it is. God's Kingdom is already here.

Jesus says in Luke 17, **“Once, on being asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, Jesus replied, “The coming of the kingdom of God is not something that can be observed, nor will people say, ‘Here it is,’ or ‘There it is,’ because the kingdom of God is in your midst.”** God's kingdom is not only a place of the final culmination of God's rule in the future but also God's reign in the present. And even though God's kingdom cannot be seen and is often not recognized, it is here.

The Kingdom of God is also God's ruling activity in the hearts of all his believers, of every believer. His kingdom comes to us each individually, whenever and wherever his Gospel is preached and his Sacraments are administered. His kingdom and rule come when faith is strengthened by the Holy Spirit through His Word, and His Kingdom is extended whenever a child is baptized into his name. His Kingdom comes when we, as members of his kingdom, live and love as his redeemed and chosen people, obeying His Word and worshipping our Lord.

It may seem that living before the ultimate culmination of God's kingdom in heaven is a time of struggle. But living in God's kingdom on this earth is still the most blessed place to be. We are all citizens of God's kingdom of grace. We are all living and growing together as a unified church on earth through the means of grace under the cross. As citizens of his kingdom, we have freedom. True freedom that no other place can offer. Under Christ's rule in his kingdom, we are free from the guilt of our sins and the fears of eternal condemnation that the devil would try to convince us of. In God's kingdom, we are assured that we have total and complete forgiveness of all of our sins through faith in our Savior, Jesus. We have absolute confidence that this kingdom in our hearts will one day be glorified in heaven when God finally ushers in that era of his Kingdom of Glory—not living in fear of the end but in eager expectation of it.

When we pray “Your Kingdom come,” we pray that God would continue to work in us and through us with every second that we have on this earth. We pray that he would sustain and strengthen his rule in our hearts by means of His Gospel, in the life-giving Word that he gives, in the sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion. We pray that God's rule would grow in our own lives. That his Word will continue to work powerfully on us. That we would continue to run back to the cross and what was won for us there. That our attitudes and our actions would continuously be influenced and changed by the presence of Christ as Savior ruling in our hearts. That we would bear abundant fruit of faith. So that we can show with pride our membership in his unified body of believers, as we read in Titus 2: **“It teaches us to say “No” to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present**

age, 13 while we wait for the blessed hope—the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ.”

Living in God’s kingdom of his grace, this side of eternity brings us purpose, meaning, and guidance on our earthly walk to the eternal kingdom. We know that in every heart that the gospel touches, there God continues to strengthen and sustain his kingdom. God continues to grow the kingdom and bring in more and more as he uses us as his messengers to spread the saving name of Jesus.

What is often forgotten, is that when we pray for God’s Kingdom to come, we are praying a mission prayer. We are also praying for ourselves. We are praying that God would work through us and all other members of his kingdom, that his Word and his rule would be spread to those who are not yet in it, even to those who might oppose it. We are asking that God would guide and help us to be ambassadors of his rule. That in the work of every Christian, God would, through his Word, continue to work on heart after heart that the Gospel would be spread to souls that do not know him and are destined for hell. We pray that God would work through that Word to change their hearts, to bring them to the knowledge of Christ and him crucified for us and for all. We pray that God would use us and all of his kingdom to bring his life-saving Word to all people.

As we close, I want to go back to Mehr, the Christian woman in India who we talked about in our introduction. Because she has a quote for us as we close our discussion: “Jesus didn’t call me to a life of comfort—but He does promise to walk with me.” Brothers and sisters, Mehr’s story is our story as citizens of the already, not yet kingdom. We are not yet in the time of Jesus’ kingdom of glory, but that doesn’t mean that his kingdom is not here. Yes, God is with all of us in his kingdom of grace, where he dwells in our hearts and rules our lives until the time when he will rule it eternally. Lord Jesus: “Your Kingdom Come.” Amen.