

Your Kingdom Come

Psalm 47; Matt 13.24-53

Let me introduce you to some very important people. This is HRH Prince Leonard of Hutt. In 1970, after an agricultural dispute with the Government of WA, Leonard declared his wheat farm an independent state and the Principality of Hutt River was born.

This is Emperor George II, leader of Atlantium. Atlantium was declared a sovereign state in the southern Sydney suburb of Narwee in 1981. These days the empire is run from an apartment in Potts Point.

This here is Prince Paul of Wy, otherwise known as Paul Delprat. He's a well-known member of Sydney's visual-arts community. He seceded from the Municipality of Mosman after a dispute about a driveway.

You may be surprised to learn that Australia plays host to almost half of the world's micro-nations. "What's a micro nation?" you ask. Well, micro-nations are small, privately held properties where the owners have declared themselves King (and yes, they are predominately male), and they challenge others to accept this claim of sovereignty. Now for most of us, it's not hard for us to form an opinion regarding these self-styled monarchs; if we are kind, we'll say that they are eccentric. We usually hear about them at the end of the news bulletin or when 60 Minutes is looking throw a light hearted story into the mix. No matter how seriously these Kings might view themselves, we know it's really all a bit of a joke.

Look beyond the micro-nation, and even the serious monarchies don't hold the same place as they once did. I'm told that there's only really one absolute monarchy operating in the world these days: The Kingdom of Tonga. You could argue that apart from the Kingdom of Tonga we have had kings of a different sort in the form of military dictatorships, but their record does nothing to commend the virtues of absolute rule.

The monarchy that we operate under seems to be serving us quite well, but it's a constitutional system with the Queen keeping her distance. Even then, Her Majesty doesn't hold the same place in our hearts as she once did. My only visit to Waitara Anglican before coming as your minister was back in the mid 1990s when I was here for a beach mission meeting. I remember sitting in the hall under a portrait of Her Majesty. I notice she's now disappeared! Not that I'm suggesting we find her and put her back! I'm simply making the point that Kings and Queens don't really have the same place in the world as they once did.

When a new nation is formed, like South Sudan or East Timor, no-one suggests we install a King or Queen. A president for a limited term? Maybe. But certainly some

sort of government based on the principles of democracy rather than the principles of inherited rule.

So with all this in mind, isn't it a bit old-fashioned to hear Jesus sincerely praying for the coming of God's Kingdom? What exactly are praying for when we echo these words of Jesus? Are we surrendering ourselves to something unhelpful and old-fashioned? Or maybe it's simply a harmless idea that ought not be taken very seriously.

Well friends, neither of these conclusions could be further from the truth. What I hope to show you today is that when we pray for God's Kingdom, we're praying for something wonderful, something incredibly valuable. I think God's kingdom is exciting! I really do - I want to be a part of it. But at the same time, praying for God's kingdom is no joking matter; We're asking God to act in ways that have really big consequences. For these reasons I think we need to know exactly what we are praying for.

First of all, I feel the need to define what the "Kingdom of God" means. It's one of these terms that Christians use a lot but it seems a somewhat abstract concept it leaves some people scratching their heads. We're simply speaking about the sphere of God's rule and authority. Wherever God rules and has authority, that's where you'll find his kingdom. Psalm 47 seems to indicate that this sphere is pretty big, verse 2: For the LORD Most High is awesome, the great King over all the earth. And again in verse 7: God is the King of all the earth. In a sense it's true to say that every single person lives in God's Kingdom: We each live and breathe by God's will and decree.

But it's also true that many people don't recognize God as King. In his own wisdom, God has limited how much people can see of him. Before anyone can recognize him, the Holy Spirit has to open their eyes. So God's Kingdom is a funny thing in a way: there are passive members who benefit from the King but don't know him, and there are active members who've had the secret revealed to them. And it's also funny because it involves some different stages: the present stage when some people know the king while others don't, and the future when everyone will see God and he'll rule in a new way.

So when we come to the Lord's Prayer we're left with a bit of question - which Kingdom are we talking about? The one now that's partly hidden or the one that will come in the future? Jesus isn't really clear, so I'm going to suggest that perhaps he meant both! We pray for God's Kingdom to grow in the present and for its future form to come quickly. Both prayers are asking for some pretty serious things to happen, and as we'll see, you can't really pray for second without praying for the first.

When we ask for God's kingdom to come in the present, one thing we're asking is for God to start ruling the lives of individual men and women. One classic example: the Story of Zacchaeus in Luke ch19. You remember the story - short little Zacchaeus

who had to climb a tree to catch a glimpse of Jesus as he walked by. Zacchaeus was a hated tax collector. These guys would over-tax the populace and keep the margin for themselves. But he meets Jesus, and what happens? He says he'll give half his possessions to the poor, and hand back four times what he's stolen. The rule of God starts manifesting in his life. Greed is replaced by generosity.

Here's another example. Do you know who this is? Andrew Chan. I was in two minds about referring to Andrew's story because it's so recent and the events over there in Indonesia were so distressing. And although I wish the outcome was different, his is a remarkable story of God's rule coming to bear in an individual's life. One of the last letters he wrote was to his young nephew. It's a letter where he admits that he was guilty of some bad things, but then he writes this: "I leant a lot while I was in prison, what was important and what life was all about. I wish I could have taught you about Jesus, about how he blessed me in many amazing ways."

When God starts reigning in people's lives. Things start to change. Men who once trafficked drugs start counseling and training others. Anger and bitterness give way to peace. I was amazed to hear the stories of how these men died; singing Amazing Grace. How does that happen without God? I wish this change could have happened in better circumstances, but how incredible to see God's rule establishing itself in a person's heart.

And as we pray for God's kingdom to come and establish itself in people's hearts, we're also praying for this story to be repeated time and time and time again, so that present Kingdom continues to grow and grow and keep on growing. Matthew 13 contains a whole series of pictures of what the Kingdom is like. For starters, think about the images in vs 31-33: A mustard seed growing into the largest tree in the garden; and a small portion of yeast kneaded through a massive pile of dough.

Back in our old yard in Balmain, we had a sapling that sprouted up all on its own beside the corner post of the back fence. We didn't even recognize it was there until it was as big as the fence, and I thought "I'll rip it out one day". Eventually I realized the sapling was now a tree too big to tear down! It was already over the 4-meter mark – anything higher than that and council didn't let you remove it. It had started to push over the corner post, and I still remember the day I discovered that I could see it from the other side of the house, poking over the roof top. God's Kingdom works in exactly the same way. We are growing by stealth. Read the newspapers and it seems that Christianity is a lost cause, but over history, and this will continue into the future, the plant is growing.

And the kingdom is being established everywhere. This is the point of the second image with the yeast. Just as the yeast spreads into every bit of that dough mixture so too the Kingdom extends into all these different nooks and crannies. It's an exciting project to be a part of! This is what I think every time I walk into a classroom to teach Scripture. I'm kneading that mixture just a little bit more, getting that yeast into one more corner as these kids hear about who is really ruling this

world, praying that God will make his rule manifest their own lives. That's what it means for the Kingdom to come.

And it's a really important prayer that these kids will come to know God's rule, because as we lift our eyes from the present to the future kingdom, we see the second phase starting in a way that must be taken seriously. The future kingdom pushes us to pray because there's a lot at stake. The first parable we heard this morning tells of a field in which weeds are sown in among the good crops. Based on what we've seen this accurately describes the kingdom currently; those who have God as their ruler are living beside those who deny him. But this situation won't last forever. At harvest time the weeds and the crops are separated and they meet very different ends: the good crop is brought into the farmers bar; while the weeds are bundled up to be burnt into nothing. The parable about the fish teaches the same lesson. As the fishermen gather in their net they see its full of all kinds of fish. But then they go about the process of sorting the good from the bad. And so it will be when this age ends and the next phase begins.

I thought of another parable from my own day-to-day life. When I'm in my kitchen making gravy, I pour the juices from the roasting pan into a glass jar, and then I wait until the layers separate; the tasty meaty fluids sink to the bottom while the oil rises to the top. I get rid of the layer of oil, it's got no future in the recipe from that point on, and then I pour the good stuff back into the roasting pan with some flour and stock and I make up my gravy.

What's the lesson in these images? Jesus makes it clear: a day is coming when God's true kingship will be revealed for all to see, and those who recognize him now will be vindicated and brought through while those who deny God's rule will be excluded from what is to follow. Being excluded is a terrifying proposal. The imagery that Jesus uses here, of weeds being gathered up and burned, of fish being discarded without any hesitation, this makes me realize that I want to be included in that Kingdom.

Friends, I implore you: Submit yourselves to the true King before it's too late. The NT tells us that God the father has exalted Jesus Christ as the King and so the action required is simply this: if we declare with our mouths, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in our hearts that God raised him from the dead, we will be saved (Romans 10.9). That's all it takes to have our very own Kingdom citizenship ceremony.

And for those who are citizens, the future kingdom has lots we can look forward to. When we pray for the eternal Kingdom to come, we're praying for God to bring something incredible. We just get a glimpse in Matthew 13:43 when Jesus tells us that the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. It's difficult to imagine in concrete terms exactly what this future will be like, but whatever we'll experience, it will be as if we are shining like the sun. That's got to be great thing. I think for many people life can feel very dark. They feel enveloped in darkness they feel as if

they don't have a lot of light to give to others. The future for those who know God as King will be very different experience.

The Bible has other images for this future kingdom as well. This week in School Scripture we were speaking about this Kingdom which is to come. I asked the year four class to read a section of Revelation ch 21 and to draw the best thing about the future Kingdom. Many of them drew the fountain of life that's described in that chapter. Imagine having a fountain like the one we have here in Hornsby, a fountain which, if you drank from it, enabled you to live forever! I suspect the fountain here in Hornsby might shorten your life rather than extend it, but that's another issue.

There's some pretty big things we pray for when praying for God's future kingdom: we're praying for God to bring us eternal life, but only after his judgment. This is why we can't pray for the future kingdom without obsessively praying for him to act in the present; that he might rule in the lives of the people we love, so that they too might have this future.

To close I'd like you to think about the two short parables there in Matt 13.44-45: A man finds some buried treasure; and a merchant finds a pearl of great value. Apparently, in the ancient world people would bury their money to keep it safe. If the person died, the money would remain in the ground until a worker perhaps many years later would discover it. If the worker was smart they'd keep quiet about it and then do everything possible to buy the land from the current owner so that ownership of the field and the treasure would become theirs. The merchant? He's found a beautiful pearl that's been undervalued, so he snaps it up. Kind of like finding a genuine antique among the junk at Vinnie's. If you saw something worth \$500 in the \$5 bin it'd be wise to nab it. The lesson in these images is to know a good thing when it comes to you and to make ownership of that good thing a priority.

The kingdom of God is not a joke, nor is it old-fashioned or irrelevant. It's a precious and important and valuable thing, and so Jesus is telling us to make it a priority. And one way to do that is to urgently pray for its arrival. Let's do that now.

Father, we honour you as the one true ruler of this world, and we thank you for the clear message that you have spoken through your Son Jesus Christ, that there is coming a day when this rule will be made obvious for everyone to see. We thank you for the good things you have in store for us as we await our final entry into this eternal kingdom. In the meantime, we see the importance of seeking the expansion of your Kingdom in the here and now. May you use us and our church to bring men and women and children to a place where they willingly sit as your loyal subjects, seeing Jesus clearly and turning to him. Amen