

**Week Two**  
**Reading**

# WILL IT MATTER?



## THE LORD'S PRAYER

Let's consider a well-worn prayer of Christ's:

*Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.* (Matthew 6:10)

This is from the Lord's Prayer. This particular line in Christ's prayer is a petition for a kingdom to come. It's a prayer asking that God's will would be done on earth as his will is done in heaven. Christ first made this request, but because it was recorded in Scripture, this request has been stated and re-stated by innumerable followers of Christ for the better part of two thousand years. Again and again, God has been asked to eradicate injustice, eliminate hardship, usher in peace—to bring about a new kingdom.

It's a beautiful prayer, a noble request, but let's ask a bold question:

Has the request been denied?

Let's be forthright. Christ initiated his work two thousand years ago. His followers picked up where he left off and have been carrying on since that time. Despite the fact that the continuance of this movement is impressive, it's fair to ask if the movement is succeeding. If the work of Christ is being done, and if it has been done for two thousand years, then why does the world continue to spiral out of control? Why does hardship abound? Why does evil continue to have its day? If Christ's work was or is successful, would we not expect to see better results by now?

This question is important for many reasons, but one stands out.

As much as we're willing to participate in the work God is doing, and as much as we're willing to sacrifice or give, we're not willing to do much at all if we're not convinced it will genuinely make a difference. Yes, we'll pour out our lives if it matters. But no, we won't do so just to do so. There are countless good and noble ways to make a difference in this world. Why join the cause of Christ? Why participate in the work he inaugurated? If after two thousand years the world is still a mess, it's fair to ask if this movement is moving much more than itself.

To get after this question, we need clarity. What exactly did Christ mean by asking, "Your kingdom come," and what expectations should we carry with it? To gain clarity, let's consider Daniel.

## THE KINGDOM OF GOD

Midway between the Garden of Eden and the New Jerusalem there are prophecies. These predictions tell of a coming day when all will be well. One of the more colorful descriptions comes from the book of Daniel. Speaking of a coming king, Daniel describes a vision he received. Thoughtfully consider these ancient words...

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*I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed.*  
(Daniel 7:14, ESV)

This vision is profound. Let's consider it carefully.

We read of a coming king described as a “*son of man*.” This son of man would be given a kingdom by the *Ancient of Days*—a descriptor of God the Father. This coming kingdom is like no other kingdom. Kingdoms of the day were of one people and one language. This coming kingdom would encompass all people of all languages. Even more, kingdoms of the day would come and go, but this coming kingdom “*is one that shall not be destroyed*.”

With that in mind, who is this “*son of man*”?

Seventy-nine times throughout Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, an unmistakable connection is made to this prophecy in Daniel by referring to Jesus as the “*Son of Man*.” It seems to be Christ's own preferred title. In one place we read...

*Jesus said to him... “For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost.”* (Luke 19:9-10)

With Daniel's prophecy about a coming kingdom ringing in our ears, and with Christ's identification with the “*Son of Man*” mentioned in Daniel, consider Christ's statement of his purpose. Hear these words carefully...

*I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns also, because that is why I was sent* (Luke 4:43).

Christ was clear. He came with a purpose. His purpose was the establishment of a new kingdom. This would be fulfillment of Daniel's prophecy along with other prophecies of Scripture. Which is interesting, it gives perspective, but let's continue to ask our question.

Is it working?

Two thousand years ago Christ stated that his purpose was to “*preach the good news of the kingdom of God*.” He coupled this statement with prayers for this kingdom—like the above-mentioned request in his most famous prayer. If this good news was truly good news, it's reasonable to expect that this kingdom would bring about the kind of existence for which humanity longs. Sure, we see some good, but we also see abounding injustice and harm. If Christ inaugurated a kingdom, is this kingdom really working?

## **SETTING EXPECTATIONS—THE GARDEN**

With these questions in mind, it's fascinating to read carefully the parables of Jesus. Consider this opening line...

*[Jesus] said, “What shall we say the kingdom of God is like, or what parable shall we use to describe it?”*  
(Mark 4:30)

Hear that carefully. The purpose of the parable that follows is to explain what “*the kingdom of God is like*.” It's as if he wanted to carefully set his followers' expectations. His listeners anticipated the kingdom of God. They knew Daniel and other passages, and they expected a coming kingdom. They were looking for this “*Son of Man*.” From him, they expected immediate change. They expected the

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kings of this world to be dethroned and a new kingdom to be established where all would be well. Christ knew they carried these expectations and used parables to adjust their perspective.

Hear carefully the full parable that follows the just-mentioned introduction.

*[Jesus] said, "What shall we say the kingdom of God is like, or what parable shall we use to describe it? It is like a mustard seed, which is the smallest seed you plant in the ground. Yet when planted, it grows and becomes the largest of all garden plants, with such big branches that the birds of the air can perch in its shade." (Mark 4:30-32)*

So, yes, the kingdom of God would be the grand and eternal kingdom described in Daniel, but Christ was careful to set an expectation of *gradual progression*. He did not want his followers disillusioned by this gradual progression but wanted them to expect it.

We're told early in Acts that the total number of followers after the time of Christ was "a group numbering about a hundred and twenty" (Acts 1:15). It is this tiny band of followers that were essentially entrusted with the continued establishment of the kingdom of God. They could look in Scripture and see descriptions of the coming kingdom, grand visions of an entire world reveling in God's glory, and their current reality would have seemed painfully insignificant, as insignificant as a tiny seed. As the early church debriefed Christ's teachings over time, it's likely that this mustard seed parable spoke important words of encouragement to their desires and expectations.

## SETTING EXPECTATIONS—THE FIELD

On another occasion Christ told another parable, this one also setting expectations for the "kingdom of heaven," a phrase used interchangeably with "kingdom of God." He said,

*The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field. But while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away. When the wheat sprouted and formed heads, then the weeds also appeared. (Matthew 13:24-26)*

What expectation is Christ addressing?

Consider the expectations of farmers when they sow seeds into their fields? No doubt, they're not naive, they know to expect a few weeds here and there, but they do not expect to be sabotaged by weeds planted by an enemy. Weeds are pulled before seeds are planted. They don't expect weeds in every row.

The parable continues...

*The owner's servants came to him and said, "Sir, didn't you sow good seed in your field? Where then did the weeds come from?"*

*"An enemy did this," he replied.*

*The servants asked him, "Do you want us to go and pull them up?"*

*"No," he answered, "because while you are pulling the weeds, you may root up the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest. At that time I will tell the harvesters: First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned; then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn." (Matthew 13:27-30)*

That's fascinating.

Will the establishment of the kingdom of God solve all the world's problems? How has it been since the time of Christ? Has it been clean? Has the kingdom of God expanded in a way that would

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minimize cynicism and always be persuasive? Does the garden of this world now look neat and pretty since the kingdom of God has been advancing from generation to generation?

Not at all. It is, in fact, quite messy.

The question of the servants in this parable is a question often asked of God, “*Sir, didn’t you sow good seed in your field? Where then did the weeds come from?*” Or put another way, “If Christ and his church are doing so much good, why then after two thousand years is the world still a mess? If the kingdom of God is expanding, why does hardship and suffering still abound? Are followers of Christ accomplishing anything of significance?”

The questions are justified but predicted. Christ was clear from the beginning. The growth of God’s kingdom will not be clean, it will not be pretty, and it will not bring immediate relief to all the world’s problems. Weeds will abound. The world will continue in its imperfection. The expectation set by Christ was to expect an era of confusion. The wheat will flourish in the garden of this world, but the weeds will flourish as well. Yes, God is up to something profound through Christ, but misguided expectations of the appearance of this work will leave Christ’s followers needlessly disillusioned.

## DOES IT MATTER?

Daniel’s prophecy, and others like it, inspired sky-high expectations in Christ’s earliest followers as Christ declared the kingdom of God. The people, like all people, wanted a quick fix. Consider a revealing event in the life of Christ...

*Jesus, knowing that they intended to come and make him king by force, withdrew again to a mountain by himself. (John 6:15)*

Early followers wanted to declare Jesus king. One might think Jesus would have seized this opportunity. He didn’t. He withdrew. Why? Consider his words to Pilate...

*My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But now my kingdom is from another place. (John 18:36)*

The kingdom predicted by Daniel would not be a minor regime change. Christ was not interested in merely replacing Pilate or Caesar. When walking with his disciples, Christ said, “*I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am*” (John 14:2-3).

Which is hopeful but potentially de-motivating. If the kingdom of God is “*not of this world*” and if Christ has gone to “*prepare a place for you,*” then does service today matter? Why straighten the deck chairs on a sinking ship? If the weeds and the wheat will both flourish until harvest, then why concern ourselves with passing matters?

Such questions are justified but fail to see the true nature of the current work. To get the true nature, we must trace a fascinating theme in Scripture. It’s the theme of Christ’s role in creation. Insight into Christ’s role will give us insight into our role.

## THE CREATOR

Previously, we noted Scripture’s opening line...

*In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. (Genesis 1:1)*

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Throughout Scripture we learn more. Most interesting for our purposes here is the role Christ played in creation. Regarding Christ we read...

*Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. (John 1:3)*

So according to this passage, Christ was the creator. Everything that was made was made by Christ. In another place, we read a similar description of Christ's role...

*He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible...all things were created by him and for him. (Colossians 1:15-16)*

Here again, Christ is said to be the one by whom "all things were created: things in heaven and on earth." This is powerful language not only affirming the deity of Christ, but also challenging our common perception. More commonly, we think of creation happening through the Father. Hebrews brings clarity...

*In these last days [God] has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe. (Hebrews 1:2)*

The Father created through the agency of his Son. It's as if the Father decreed creation, and the Son carried out the decree; he made it happen. Christ is "before all things, and in him all things hold together" (Colossians 1:17). Christ's power must truly be tremendous.

But so what? Why does this matter here? Why does it matter that Christ fulfilled the Father's decree to create the universe in which we live? Consider the just-mentioned statement of Christ's concerning what he would do after his time on earth...

*I am going there to prepare a place for you. (John 14:2).*

That's interesting. Christ created the first earth—the first place humanity has inhabited, and he's creating the new earth—the renewed place humanity will one day inhabit. The Creator is still creating.

## **THE BODY OF CHRIST**

Where this gets intensely interesting is when we look closely in Scripture for how this new creation takes shape. As mentioned, we currently find our existence somewhere between the Garden of Eden and the New Jerusalem. With that in mind, carefully tune your ears to hear these important words of ultimate fulfillment found in Revelation.

*The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever. (Revelation 11:15)*

Did you catch that?

The "kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ." In other words, there is continuation between the kingdom of God advancing on this earth and the kingdom of God that will be brought to ultimate fulfillment in the age to come. The current world is not just waiting around. The current experience, the current progressive expansion from mustard seed to the full-grown expression of Christ's kingdom, participates in the creative process. When Christ left his earthly existence to "go there to prepare a place for you," included in this preparation would be his continued work through his followers on earth.

With fresh ears, consider the commission Christ gave in his final days:

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*All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age. (Matthew 28:18-20)*

Don't miss this. It's profound.

Christ creates. He created the earth on which we walk, and he's creating the new earth on which we will live for all eternity, but Christ's creative work is not just accomplished in the unseen world. The creative work of Christ is happening here and happening now.

With that in mind, consider this stunning statement:

*Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it. (1 Corinthians 12:27)*

What is Christ doing? He's creating. What happens when we entrust ourselves to Christ? We are united with his body and are therefore doing what he's doing. We are participants and agents in his creative work. Ours is not to sit around and wait for another world. Ours is to participate in the creation of that other world.

Which brings us back to Christ's prayer.

*Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. (Matthew 6:10)*

This is no purposeless prayer. This is a prayer for the kingdom of God to expand right here and right now.

The prayer is not "take us to your kingdom."

The prayer is "bring your kingdom here."

Such thinking is reinforced when Christ is "asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come" (Luke 17:20).

*Jesus replied, "The kingdom of God does not come with your careful observation, nor will people say, 'Here it is,' or 'There it is,' because the kingdom of God is within you." (Luke 17:20-21)*

## **CHRIST'S WORK**

All this leads to an essential question: *How do we participate in Christ's creative work?* That is, what do we do and what does this look like day to day? Possibly the best response to these questions is to consider what Christ did. How did he describe his work on earth? For insight, we go to a particular moment in his life. Jesus, as a grown man, visits his hometown and participates in a time of worship at the local synagogue. Scripture tells us that "the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written" (Luke 4:17).

*The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. (Luke 4:18-19 / Isaiah 61:1-2)*

We don't know all the comments that followed, but we do know that after rolling the scroll back up, and after handing it to the attendant, Jesus began his comments by saying, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing" (Luke 4:21).

It's as if Christ is saying, "This is my job description. This is what I do. I preach good news to the poor. I proclaim freedom for the prisoners. I bring sight to the blind, and I proclaim the year of God's favor."

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One might find Christ's assumption of this job description ridiculous if it weren't for the actions that followed. Christ did, in fact, feed the hungry and preach good news to the poor, as the passage states. He healed the sick and reached out to those enslaved and oppressed by destructive patterns of behavior. His entire life—and especially his death and resurrection—were dedicated to proclaiming the “year of God's favor,” or put another way, an era of God's grace, forgiveness, and reconciliation.

Put simply, this passage from Isaiah is reflective of the life Christ lived.

Which is instructive for us when we fast-forward to the end of Christ's time on earth. With Christ's job description in mind, consider the statement made to his followers, after his crucifixion and resurrection, and prior to returning to the Father's side. He says...

*As the Father has sent me, I am sending you. (John 20:21)*

That's stunning.

It's stunning because the very things the Father sent Christ to do are the very things he now sends us to do. His job description becomes our job description. His calling becomes our calling. Those things that ignited his heart and moved him to action are the very things that must ignite our hearts and move us to action. Christ proclaimed freedom; now it's our time to proclaim freedom. Christ liberated those imprisoned by sin and addictive behaviors; now it's our time to liberate the imprisoned. Christ brought healing; now it's our time to bring healing to a broken and hurting world. In doing these things, the kingdom of God expands on this earth, the very kingdom that will one day unite with the kingdom Christ is preparing in the unseen world.

## **THE LORD'S PRAYER**

Let's conclude where we started. Christ prayed...

*Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. (Matthew 6:10)*

Has this request been denied? It's a fair question, but with a more complete reading of Scripture, we hear not only a request made to God, but an exhortation to ourselves. The fulfillment of this prayer not only happens in the unseen world, but it happens right here and right now. Participants in the body of Christ are called upon to do the very work Christ is doing. We are not just recipients of the new earth and the New Jerusalem, but with Christ we are called to create. To join with Christ in this work, we must not only see this work in Scripture, but we must see it in our own lives. The pages that follow are designed to assist us toward this very purpose.

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