

**“Thy Kingdom Come. Thy will be Done,  
As in Heaven, so upon the Earth.”**

a sermon by Rev. Michael Gladish  
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Jesus said, “My kingdom is not of this world.” – John 18:36

And, “The kingdom of God does not come with observation...  
for indeed, (it) is within you.” – Luke 17:20-21

When we pray as the Lord instructed us we ask that His kingdom may come “upon the earth.” Can we reconcile this with the things He said in these two quotations? What does it mean to have His kingdom come and His will be done “as in heaven, so upon the earth”?

Other translations of the Lord’s Prayer use the phrase, “on earth as it is in heaven,” which is perfectly OK except that in the Greek of the New Testament heaven comes first, and then the earth. This is consistent with what we know about cause and effect, for every natural thing comes about from a spiritual cause, and here the idea is that when things are right in the heaven of our minds then we are for the first time really in a position to make a difference in our natural lives. (Of course, an evil person can do good and useful things for others, but because these actions are poisoned from within they generally do not have really lasting positive effects.)

Still, before we try to answer our question, let’s understand what is meant by the Lord’s kingdom, and by His will.

The word, kingdom, in Scripture is not used lightly. Of course it has the ordinary meaning of a people, state or nation governed by a king, and so in the Prayer specifically it refers to heaven, and all of those – angels – who accept the government of God, our heavenly Father. But what is that government, and how does it work?

Simply put, it is the order provided by Divine truth. The angels in heaven all know and understand that truth, each from his or her own particular vantage point, and they all co-operate together as they live according to it – each with a focus on some unique use.

There is no compulsion in heaven; no one is *forced* to obey the rules because everyone *loves* the rules and freely abides by them; in fact there really are no rules at all, just ways of life organized and defined by what everyone can see to be true and useful. But this is the key: – they see it, they know it and they appreciate it. So the *kingdom* of heaven is the realm of *understanding* and faith in the Divine truth.

This is why the famous parables about the kingdom of heaven all relate in some way to the truth of the Word: – “The kingdom of heaven,” we read, “is like a man who sowed good seed in his field... (it) is like a mustard seed... like leaven... like treasure hidden in a field... like a merchant seeking beautiful pearls,” or “like a dragnet cast into the sea” (Matthew 13). Each one of these parables focuses on some aspect or element of the truth, as seeds, treasure, pearls and fish are all symbols of knowledge or insight related to the truth of the Lord’s Word. Even leaven, which normally corresponds to falsity, as in “the leaven of the Pharisees” (Matt. 16:6), in a more generic sense refers to the doctrine or teaching that is always *based* on the truth, even if it’s perverted.

Likewise, notice how the Lord answered Pilate on the day of His crucifixion, when Pilate asked Him directly if He was a king: He replied, “You say (rightly) that I am a king. For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, *that I should bear witness to the truth*” (John 18:37). The purpose of a king is to establish the rule of law, according to the truth.

In contrast – or rather in a complementary sense – when we pray about God’s will we are in the realm of His affection, goodness or love. So what do we know about God’s love?

There are many passages in the Old and New Testaments that describe His love toward the human race. Some relate to people in general, but most refer to particular individuals, to Israel, to Judah, or in the New Testament to His disciples. In Isaiah 43, for example, the Lord speaks about His redemption and protection of the tribes of Israel, saying,

“...When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned, nor shall the flame scorch you. For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior; I gave Egypt for your ransom, Ethiopia and Seba in your place. Since you were precious in My sight, you have been honored, *and I have loved you*; therefore I will give men for you, and people for your life.”

Still, the most straightforward teachings about the Lord’s love for all of us are in the Heavenly Doctrines, where we read, for example,

“The essence of God consists of two things, love and wisdom; while *the essence of His love consists of three things*, namely, to love others outside of Himself, to desire to be one with them, and from Himself to render them blessed. And because love and wisdom in God make one, as has been shown (before), the same three things constitute the essence of His wisdom; *and love desires these three things, and wisdom brings them forth*” (TCR #43).

The effect of God’s love, then, is the creation of the world to support the human race, and ultimately the creation of heaven from the human race. In heaven, the ultimate goal, people bond with Him in love, and enjoy the blessings that He offers forever. So in the end His will, flowing from His love, is that all of us should live in heaven. And incidentally, since His love is infinite He is constantly creating *new* people, and, presumably, new worlds.

But if this is His will *for* us, what does He ask *from* us? How can we contribute to His will being done “upon the earth”? In a nutshell, why should we say this portion of the prayer unless we have some responsibility in bringing it to pass?

Of course the answer is that we do have some responsibility, in fact a great deal of responsibility for seeing that His will is done. So the Prayer is originally written in what is called the aorist tense, a Greek form that is not limited to past or future but stresses our obligation to do our part. Some people, when they speak of God’s will, speak of it with a certain resignation, as if to say, “Oh, well, this is just the way it is and so it must be God’s will, and so I guess I just have to accept it.” But one thing we know in this church is that there is a big difference between what God wills and what He allows or permits (AC 2447). In short He *wills* the spiritual health and welfare of every single person, but He *permits* all sorts of evil and falsity for the sake of our freedom

to believe and love and do as we choose. So, while it may be admirable and necessary to accept something sad or disorderly that is affecting our lives, it is never appropriate to accept it as “God’s will,” since God *wills* only what is good.

What, then, are we to do?

The Lord said it quite simply: “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!” (Matt. 4:17. “If you love Me, keep My commandments” (John 14:15) and “If you keep My commandments you will abide in My love” (John 15:10). This is also reflected powerfully in the Heavenly Doctrines, where we read,

“Love to the Lord cannot possibly be separated from love towards the neighbor, for the Lord’s love is directed towards the whole human race whom He wishes to save eternally and to join so completely to Himself that not a single one of them perishes. Anyone therefore who has love to the Lord possesses the Lord’s love and so cannot help loving the neighbor” (AC 2023).

We can’t change the past, we can’t necessarily change even our present outward circumstances, and we certainly can’t change God. Having infinite love and wisdom and power already, there is nothing we can add to His providential care. *But we can change our attitude and disposition to allow more or less of His love to flow into us and through us.* This in turn should lead to positive actions on our part, and that is essentially what we are committing to do when we say the words, “Thy will be done.”

But how CAN we really do the Lord’s will? We say, “...as in heaven, so upon the earth,” but what does THIS mean, and where does our responsibility begin or end? While we must not neglect our duty to society, our country and the world, if we try to do too much, and especially if we neglect our personal obligations by worrying about how much more we should be doing globally, even though we don’t have the time, knowledge, or power to be effective, we will just drive ourselves nuts and most likely fail at everything.

With this in mind it is important – not just useful but important – to know that both “heaven” and “earth” in the Lord’s Word are symbolic terms. “Heaven” literally refers to the sky, but in the spiritual sense it refers to the spiritual world of the life after death, or, to be exact, the spiritual mind of every good person, which, as we noted at the beginning, is “within” us. Likewise “the earth” literally is the physical earth. But in the spiritual sense it refers to the *church* ON the earth, that is, to the quality of the spiritual states of people living in the natural world where we interact as human beings with one another, serving the Lord as we serve one another.

Now, therefore, in the Lord’s Prayer when we say “...as in heaven so upon the earth” we can see that it’s not about creating some kind of Utopian world order; it’s not really about changing the natural world at all – even though that might be one outcome of what we do! What it’s really about is simply living our religion – putting the principles of true spiritual life into practice *in ourselves* so that *whatever we do* it has integrity and works for good. And again, the means for us to accomplish this are first of all to learn and understand the truth so that His *kingdom* can come, and then to do His *will* by inviting His love for others into our hearts. This, along with real repentance of our evils, is the process we call regeneration.

We can't *make ourselves* more spiritual. How much less can we *make* heaven come down to earth among others? That is the Lord's work. But we can co-operate with Him, individually and as church members together, by doing the things He teaches us. And if we do this with humility, praying sincerely for the gift of an inspired, spiritual perspective in the process, HE can do what is impossible for us to do: He can give us – each of us, one by one – a new will in the understanding, that is, a real sensible perception of His love *in the wisdom of an orderly life*.

So heaven WILL come down to earth – not all at once and certainly not for everybody at some cataclysmic judgment day, but as the Scripture says, little by little, precept upon precept, line upon line (Ex. 23:30, Isa. 28:10). At first it will just be a sort of general idealism, a recognition that things could be better. If sincere, this will then be informed by the knowledge of the truths of the Word and His *kingdom* will come to us as a matter of our understanding.

The next step is to act on that conviction, and as we do so the Lord can inspire us with a new attitude, a new awareness of His love and a real determination to share that love. So His *will* can be done – or at least it can begin to be done as we experience some heavenly peace and freedom.

And so the truth begins to take form in the practical details of our thoughts and intentions, and it begins to affect those around us. Then His kingdom comes and His will is done “as in heaven, so upon the earth” – *as in the spirit, so in the church*, that is, in every aspect of our lives.

Will His kingdom ever come or His will really be done *throughout the whole planet*? Given what we know about human nature and the Lord's preservation of our free will in spiritual things, it is extremely doubtful. But that every one of us has the ability to co-operate with the Lord on a personal level and so contribute to the welfare and happiness of others all around us is a given. Therefore let us pray that we may act on that principal, and *when* we pray ask the Lord to strengthen us in that resolve.

Amen.

Lessons:

Genesis 1:24-31

Children's talk on being created in God's Image and Likeness

Matthew 6:5-14 (using the NKJV)

Apocalypse Explained #48:2