

No. 4. The Lord's Prayer – The coming of the Kingdom of God

In the Lord's Prayer, the second item Jesus suggests we pray is for 'your Kingdom come'. I have always understood this to have two distinct meanings, one concerning the here and now, and one concerning the future. Do you agree, or perhaps you have some alternative?

We have three parables within our Bible passage, and we need to bear in mind, as we try to understand them, that our culture today is very different from that of Jesus' first audience, who were more familiar with Old Testament scriptures and plant cultivation.

Read Mark 4: 21-34

Jesus uses the picture of a lamp on a stand to introduce this three-parable teaching on the coming Kingdom – (1) the measure you use, (2) the growing seed, (3) the small mustard seed. If Jesus is the lamp, what should we understand his message to be?

(1) Jesus continues (v24) "Consider carefully what you hear" which appears to be a clue that you will need to think carefully about what follows. An understanding of verses 24 & 25 is not straight forward. Do you think he simply means the more you put in, the more you get back – try harder because you'll get a better return? Where would God's grace be in such an understanding? Perhaps it is something to do with fairness or justice? Discuss.

Tom Wright proposes that Jesus is giving both a promise and a warning. Jesus is saying if we grasp what he is saying and go deeper and deeper into it, we will get more and more from it. If we hear and remain at a superficial level, we will lose even that sense of God doing something new that is happening right now in their midst (the Kingdom breaking into the present). So, the Kingdom of God, where everything will be as God intended, has started to break into the present; what does this mean for us today?

(2) (v26-29) Jesus' audience would most likely have recognised v29 as a quote from the prophet Joel (3:13), a book about the coming Day of the Lord, when devastation will fall on Israel followed by restoration and a harvest of judgement for their neighbours. This then is unlikely to be a simple story about the life cycle of seeds. Like most parables, several explanations are possible; here is one. The picture of night/day/night/day/seedtime/harvest/year-round is one of how God has ordered His creation; and mankind is doing what the seed is doing; but come harvest time (Day of the Lord), expecting judgement to fall only on others. From small beginnings (like Jesus' ministry from lowly Galilee) God is initiating His promised coming of the Kingdom, day and night this is inevitably progressing unnoticed, and also, ultimately, there will be a reckoning (harvest) for all. What should our response be? Discuss.

(3) (v30-33) This seems to have a close connection to the preceding parable, and relatively simple. The key points to understand are, don't underestimate the power of God or the size and impact of His coming Kingdom; the Kingdom will certainly come; from small/humble beginnings much can flow/develop; reference to birds and shade draw on pictures used by prophets where a tree grows and grows until those around can find shelter (Ezekiel 17:23, 31:6, Daniel 4: 12 & 21). What encouragements can you take from this?

Are you able to summarize what Jesus' teaching in these parables has taught you?

Prayer: Creation is a fact, order is recognizable, and redemption occurs. In them one God commands, one Spirit breathes, one Love reaches out. Praise you holy Name. Jamie Wallace