

New Hope Sermon Thy Kingdom Come

Introduction:

I read an illustration that fits our theme today. The illustration is called [Depression Era Theaters Gave a Glimpse into a New World](#)

“In our generation movie theater lobbies are plain but necessary entrances. They are a place where you deposit your ticket or purchase your popcorn, candy, and beverage. But in the hard days of the Great Depression, the lobbies of show palaces were places of awe-inspiring beauty. ([Paramount Theater](#) in Seattle, Washington, built in 1928.)

The [whole theatre]... was a feast for the eyes because it was designed to offer a transition from the grind of daily life... During the Depression era movie tickets cost about 27 cents apiece. That wasn't cheap for those times, but movies offered Americans a chance to escape loneliness and fear, bringing strangers together for a moment of beauty and hope. Theater architects [included] vaulted ceilings, museum-worthy art, lush tapestries, beautiful fixtures, and uniformed ushers” to embody this other world.



“The body of Christ ...is a lot like those classic theaters. God has called us to give the world a preliminary picture of another world—not an imaginary film world, but a real world filled with God's glory. ...Even in our sin and brokenness, we're called to model a way of life that is different from the world around us. Our love, our hope, our forgiveness should offer the world the beautiful alternative of life with Christ. Submitted by Greg Asimakoupoulos, Mercer Island, Washington

An alternative of another set of values, another way of life. That is our theme today. Let us pray.

Sermon:

For Thy Kingdom come I went to Kent Annan's book *Slow Kingdom Coming*. Here is how he frames the issue: “Thy kingdom come...” but another family huddles in fear as bombs rip through concrete and flesh nearby.

‘Thy Kingdom come...’ but another innocent black man is assaulted as though guilty.

‘Thy Kingdom come...’ but another woman was raped on a college campus, her cries later answered with shame instead of justice.

‘Thy Kingdom come...’ but it still hadn't come this morning when a child, instead of going to school, walked three miles to fetch a bucket of water that will give him diarrhea.

‘Thy Kingdom come...’ but the kingdom is still divided as another persona made in God's image was denigrated for her gender or sexuality instead of receiving respect as a fellow child of God.

‘Thy Kingdom come...’ while the world's richest eighty-five people luxuriate in as much wealth as the poorest 3.5 billion people try to survive on. Today someone gave everything at his or her dignity-crushing work to provide for his or her family. They still didn't bring home enough” (Kent Annan, *Slow Kingdom Coming*, IVP, p. 20)

What are these implications for us? Giving people a taste of another reality- God's reality in the world. How do we do that? By loving what God loves. I like this analogy from the sports world.

“A single mom's eleven-year-old loves baseball. Personally, she doesn't care about baseball, but because her son loves it, she hasn't missed a game in over two seasons. Sometimes she has to work double shifts to make sure she's free, but when the umpire yells "Play ball!" she's always sitting right behind the dugout, cheering for her boy. Let's suppose a man begins to date that single mom. Obviously, if he says he loves her, he must love her son. Period. The mom's sphere of concern wraps around her boy's life, and it always will. So if this man wants to tell the single mom that he loves her, without being a liar, he must be right there at the ballgame, beside the mom, cheering for her son. If he loves the mom, he'll love both her son and her son's baseball games.

In the same way, if we care about God's kingdom, we'll love what and who the King loves..Adapted from Ken Wytsma, *Pursuing Justice* (Thomas Nelson, 2013), pp. 182-183

“If we care about God's kingdom, we'll love what and who the King loves.” So what does God love? When we pray Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, what are we talking about? The passages that have come to mind are Amos 5:11-15, Isaiah 58:7-11, Matthew 25:31-40. Let's look at those passages.

Old Testament #1- Amos 5:11-15, 24

11 *You levy a straw tax on the poor and impose a tax on their grain. Therefore, though you have built stone mansions, you will not live in them; though you have planted lush vineyards, you will not drink their wine.*

12 *For I know how many are your offenses and how great your sins. There are those who oppress the innocent and take bribes and deprive the poor of justice in the courts.*

13 *Therefore the prudent keep quiet in such times, for the times are evil.*

14 *Seek good, not evil, that you may live. Then the LORD God Almighty will be with you, just as you say he is.*

15 *Hate evil, love good; maintain justice in the courts. Perhaps the LORD God Almighty will have mercy on the remnant of Joseph.*

24 *But let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream! **God loves justice and hates evil.***

Old Testament #2 – Isaiah 58: 7-11

7 *This is the fast that I choose. Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter— when you see the naked, to clothe them, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?*

8 *Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly appear; then your righteousness will go before you, and the glory of the LORD will be your rear guard.*

9 *Then you will call, and the LORD will answer; you will cry for help, and he will say: Here am I. “If you do away with the yoke of oppression, with the pointing finger and malicious talk,*

10 *and if you spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed, then your light will rise in the darkness, and your night will become like the noonday.*

11 *The LORD will guide you always; he will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land and will strengthen your frame. You will be like a well-watered garden, like a spring whose waters never fail.”*

New Testament Matthew 28:31-40

31 *“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne.*

32 *All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. **33** He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.*

34 *“Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world.*

35 *For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, **36** I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.’ **37** “Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink?*

38 *When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you?*

39 *When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’*

40 *“The King will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.’*

What are the themes that you hear in these passages? God is concerned when people trample the poor, who oppress others. God is concerned for justice. God is concerned for mercy in our attitudes toward the needy—we are to feed the hungry, invite the stranger, give clothes to naked, to heal the sick, and to visit those in prison. In fact Isaiah says we are to “spend ourselves on behalf of the hungry” and “satisfied the needs of the oppressed. We are to do away with the yoke of the oppression, with the pointing finger and malicious talk” (Isaiah 58:9-10).

How are our priorities aligned with these priorities? Are we all aligned with God's heart on these matters?

I remember when I was in India going to a leprosarium. It was one of many Christian outreaches to these outcasts to Indian society who were suffering from leprosy: losing hands, losing feet, deformed faces, disfigurement at every level. Christian missionaries, national or overseas, had come there because these people matter to God and they wanted to give these people a safe place, a place of love, a place of medical help and emotional healing, a place where they would have value. That's what Jesus was talking about in Matthew 25. That characterizes much of God's heart. Going to the untouchables. Going to the outcasts of society and sharing the love of God. Today a large number of these untouchables are actually Christians, and that's wonderful.

But there is more than going out to those on the margins of society when we think about reaching out to those who are hungry. There are millions trapped by the oppression of tradition or false religion. A couple of decades ago a Sri Lankan colleague and I modeled our ministry to Hindus and Buddhists in Chicago on E. Stanley Jones' work in India. Jones went not to the outcasts but to the intelligentsia. He gathered the leaders in Hinduism, in Islam, Buddhism and Christianity together in round table discussions where they could share the most important ways their religion was touching their lives. In discussion after discussion he discovered that it was Jesus Christ who could meet the deepest needs of these intellectual religious leaders. Their oppression came from their religious efforts to fulfill the highest goals in their religion. Remember, it was to the Pharisees, the intellectual religious leaders of Jesus's day, that Jesus said: *"If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth and the truth will set you free."* They answered *"We are Abraham's descendants and have never been slaves to anyone. How can you say that we shall be set free? [To the arrogance of the religious intellectual] Jesus said "I tell you the truth, anyone who sins is a slave to sin...If the Son sets you free you will be free indeed"* (John 8:31-36).

Many of the people you will meet in your normal social circles after you graduate will probably be more like the Pharisees than the outcasts of any society. When you share Jesus' reality and truth with them, you are aligned with God's heart that they be set free from their religious oppression. Or you may go to a people who are crushed beneath the load of poverty and injustice or persecution and materialism and share the reality of Jesus with them.

Aligned with God's heart means we move out to demonstrate the truths of the kingdom with all those on God's heart. The poor, the oppressed, those in false religions.

Or that may involve an outreach to children – whether to those oppressed as bondslaves in labor (working in factories when they are as young as 8), or working as sex slaves, or working among children traumatized by war.

An example that comes to mind is from the book *The Color of Grace*. Bethany Haley Williams suffered a severe trauma in her early adult years and subsequent Post traumatic Stress Disorder. After her eventual healing, and PhD, she became a licensed psychotherapist, specializing in people's healing from trauma. In her journey God exposed her to the stories of child soldiers of war in Africa and the trauma of their broken lives. She began to experience the pain in God's heart at their brokenness and responded with her own life and skills. Here are a few excerpts from her story:



"Children do not have the same vocabulary as adults. They have images and memories and heartaches that they often do not have words to express. Artistic expression is a unifying language in Africa –

whether it's dance, drama, drawing, singing or storytelling...It's a natural pathway to healing(122),..In some countries 90% of child soldiers show evidence of PTSD."166...Though their minds contained memories that were too horrible for words, drawing their stories was a safe way for them to communicate their pain."168. So Bethany began workshops with other therapists who worked with these children of war. Here's her description of what happened in one such workshop:

"After Amanda read Jeremiah 29:11-12, the team gave each child two white handkerchiefs and a set of markers...The Bible tells us that God captures our tears in His bottle (Ps, 56:8). 'Our sad tears and our happy tears,' I said. These two handkerchiefs represent God capturing your tears. If you wish, on one handkerchief you may draw your heartache or a sad time in your life. On the other handkerchief, you may draw what you dream for your life after war – what your happy tears would draw if they could" (168). They drew of "being snatched from their families in the middle of the night and led deep into the forest to be trained as soldiers,,of the young ones being placed on the front lines as human shields for the rest of the soldiers. Of the guns, machetes and knives thrust into their hands...of being forced to cut off the ears, arms or feet of the villagers...of having to kill their own family members and eat their flesh...of being brutally raped – even at the young age of four...and being forced to become sex slaves."(89-90)...”Then, one by one the children who volunteered to share the story of their drawing bravely stood before their peers...Robert said: ‘the rebels came and kick in the door. They abducted my parents and cut my brother into pieces...When I was in captivity the rebels made me to kill one of the other boys with a machete who tried to escape. He was my brother and my friend’...Grace said: ‘The rebels came into my school and took me. There was loud fighting and fire. They tied my friends and me together with a rope. I was made to carry heavy loads on my head. If I said a word, I was given more loads to carry or was beaten one hundred strokes’...The children told “story after story. And then it came. The weeping. Dennis started crying. Then Grace. Then Barbara. Tears of pain started to flow like rivers of life. Silent tears. Raging tears. Tears held back for years by dams of strength....The colors of their art mixed with their tears on the cloth and Jesus was right there in the center of it all” (170)

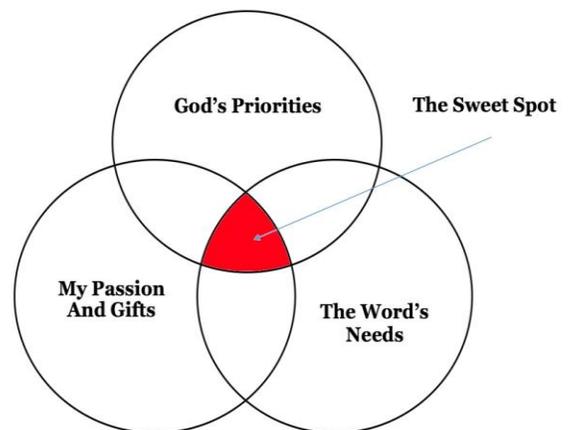
“Jesus was right there in the center of it all.” That’s right. Because God hears our cries; he weeps when we weep, and calls His followers to go to bring His presence and healing, therapeutic love to broken people. That’s when God’s will is done on earth as it is in heaven.

An English visitor recently commented about U.S. churches, "You Americans are so concerned about being happy," as if our kingdoms were the focal point of God's designs rather than God's kingdom the focal point of ours. *Evelyn Bence in Christian Herald (April 1987). Christianity Today, Vol. 31, no. 10.*

In the book I reviewed this week, *Kingdom Calling* by Amy Sherman, she had this excellent graphic.

She says we need to answer the questions:

“What breaks my heart? In the world, my country or my neighborhood, what makes me angry because it should be better? Questions like these can awaken our attention for how we’re called to serve the kingdom. But we do it with focus – we don’t spread our efforts scattershot. Then they are not effective. We find God’s focus for us – our vocational sweet spot where there is the intersection of God’s priorities, the passions He has put on our heart and the needs of the world. Then we build our lives around that focus. That makes us accountable for the responsibilities we’re trusted with, not for all the needs around us.” (Sherman, *Kingdom Calling*, p. 135).



The Vocational Sweet Spot

So, when you pray 'Thy Kingdom come', you are asking that God's heart and vision of His kingdom of peace and reconciliation and forgiveness and healing align with your heart and vocation. You are asking that it change your goal and motivation.

It's about focus and vision and calling. "The story is told of the foreman on a building site who asked one of the builders what he was doing. One builder replied, "I'm breaking rocks." Another worker was asked the same question, and he answered, "I'm earning for my family." The question was posed to a third worker. With a glint in his eye, he responded, "I'm building a cathedral." *Submitted by Owen Bourgaize, Guernsey, United Kingdom* He was working for a bigger goal, a bigger boss, if you will, and this gave his life and work purpose. What are you building with your life? How does it reflect God's kingdom values and God's heart?

Let us pray.