

Isaiah 61 ¹ *The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor.*

He has sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners,

² *to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour and the day of vengeance of our God,*

to comfort all who mourn,³ and provide for those who grieve in Zion –

to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of joy instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair.

They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the Lord for the display of his splendour.

⁴ *They will rebuild the ancient ruins and restore the places long devastated;*

they will renew the ruined cities that have been devastated for generations.

⁵ *Strangers will shepherd your flocks; foreigners will work your fields and vineyards.*

⁶ *And you will be called priests of the Lord, you will be named ministers of our God.*

You will feed on the wealth of nations, and in their riches you will boast.

⁷ *Instead of your shame you will receive a double portion,*

and instead of disgrace you will rejoice in your inheritance.

And so you will inherit a double portion in your land, and everlasting joy will be yours.

⁸ *'For I, the Lord, love justice; I hate robbery and wrongdoing.*

In my faithfulness I will reward my people and make an everlasting covenant with them.

Matthew 13 ³¹ *He told them another parable: 'The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field. ³² Though it is the smallest of all seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds come and perch in its branches.'*

³³ *He told them still another parable: 'The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into about thirty kilograms of flour until it worked all through the dough.'*

⁴⁴ *'The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field.*

⁴⁵ *'Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. ⁴⁶ When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it.*

As we continue our series on *How to pray – using the Lord's prayer*. Last week...

Our focus this week is *Your kingdom come* - intercession: focussing on the needs of others – their real needs – what God sees as their needs.

For those of you doing *the Prayer course*, we are jumping ahead to session 4, because on Sundays we are working our way through the Lord's prayer as it is written. (We will be coming back to session 3 *Give us today our daily bread* in 3 weeks time). I'll leave it up to home-groups as to which session you follow this week.

What is God's Kingdom? It is not a place, Jesus said *the kingdom of God is among you*.

Nor is it just something for the distant future when Christ returns in glory.

There is a danger that when we pray: *Your kingdom come*, we end up praying in an escapist sort of way – imagining a glorious future when God takes us off to his heavenly kingdom away from this world of suffering and tears. But we are not praying *Take us off to your kingdom* – no, we are praying *Your kingdom come...i.e. come here on earth*. Certainly, we can look forward to a time when Jesus returns in glory and when we shall see the fullness of God's kingdom established here on earth – the new heaven and the new earth, but that is the fulfilment of a process that has already begun. God's kingdom is wherever and whenever God's reign is at work –

Do you remember Jesus' message? *Repent for the kingdom of God is at hand* – it's here, this glorious kingdom you have been longing for has arrived!

Our first reading from *Isaiah 61* was used by Jesus as his manifesto right at the beginning of his ministry. He read this passage in his home town of Nazareth and then sat down to preach and when he had the attention of everyone in the synagogue, he said, *'Today this scripture is fulfilled*

in your hearing. His hearers knew that this prophecy of Isaiah, was the Messiah – God’s anointed king, speaking: *The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me, because **the Lord has anointed me*** Jesus is saying I am the anointed one, the *Messiah*, the anointed King that Israel has been longing for down through the centuries. And if the king is present, his kingdom is present also. That’s why Jesus could say *the kingdom of God is at hand*

That means that this passage from Isaiah tells us what God’s kingdom looks like?

God’s kingdom is *good news to the poor* because everyone will have all that they need, no-one will be down-trodden

Those for whom life is currently ashes: grey, destroyed, bitter – will have *a crown of beauty* those who mourn loss not just loved ones but lost opportunities, or loss of vitality will be anointed with *the oil of joy*

Those who are filled with *a spirit of despair*, will be given *a garment of praise* – they won’t be able to stop dancing and singing, thanking and praising God for his goodness and blessing *the broken-hearted*, will be *bound up* – healed, comforted, restored

the captives to addiction: drink, drugs, or other obsessions will be set free.

Those who have been unjustly imprisoned will be *released*

God’s kingdom is where people find healing, freedom, blessing, comfort, hope, encouragement, justice, restoration, provision, everlasting joy, awareness of God

It’s where ordinary people like you and me who often feel weak and feeble, easily swayed from living the way we want to, become *oaks of righteousness, a planting of the Lord for the display of his splendour*, in other words we will become the people God created us to be, we will be like Jesus.

In God’s kingdom everyone will have an intimate relationship with God - *make an everlasting covenant with them (where we are his people and everyone will know the Lord)*.

And wherever Jesus went he gave people a foretaste of his Kingdom - through his miracles of healing, raising the dead, and his ministry of forgiveness and new life. If we want to know what God’s kingdom looks like, look at what happened when Jesus came to town –

- *Those who were captive to all different kinds of demons were set free – viz addictions etc today*
- *Those who were thrown out of their families and community because of leprosy and had to resort to begging were made clean and restored – the coming of Jesus was certainly good news for the poor*
- *Those whose lives were made a misery by chronic debilitating diseases were healed*
- *Those who were hungry were fed in the feeding of the 5000*
- *Those whose lives were devastated by grief because they had lost someone beloved, had their mourning turned to joy as the beloved was raised to life, Jairus, the widow of Nain, and Lazarus’ family*
- *Those who were blind were enabled to see*
- *Those whose lives were ashes because they felt, they had been rejected not only by society or family because of some terrible sin but by God himself, discovered forgiveness and the grace of God – viz the woman caught in adultery or who anointed Jesus’ feet with her tears*
- *Those whose faith was weak and feeble – like the disciples – became oaks of righteousness, confident that they were loved forgiven and accepted by their heavenly Father*
- *Wherever Jesus went he brought joy and peace except for one type of people*
- *Those who were filled with self-righteousness and hypocrisy, who desired to oppress others were revealed for what they were – because God’s kingdom brings justice.*

This is what we need to have in mind when we pray *Your kingdom come*. Sometimes we look at a situation and we are not sure how to pray so we need to ask *what would it mean for God's kingdom to come here, for his reign, his hand to be at work?* Then we can pray with confidence that we are indeed praying in Jesus' name.

We also need to remember that we are not just praying for God's kingdom to come into individual's lives, but our whole society, our whole nation, our whole world. God's kingdom will one day encompass the whole world and the whole of humanity. And so to pray *your kingdom come* means to pray for real justice and fairness in our society, to pray against corruption and violence, to pray for compassion and reconciliation – for this is what God's kingdom is like.

It is of course a huge task for we live in occupied territory – territory occupied by forces of greed, corruption, prejudice, violence, lust, self-aggrandisement. It might seem the task is impossible, but we are not alone. We have been reminded this last week of how when France fell to the overwhelming forces of Nazi Germany in June 1940, Charles de Gaulle fled to London and gave a speech which began the French resistance movement. He reminded his people that they were not alone, that this was a worldwide conflict and that France had powerful allies in the United Kingdom and the United States. This hope that one day the allies would land and defeat the Nazi forces completely and bring about the liberation of France did not mean that those longing for such rescue from the Nazi regime thought they could just sit back and wait – on the contrary, it inspired the French Resistance which over the next 5 years worked tirelessly and courageously to overthrow the Nazi powers.

In the same way, our certain hope that one day Christ will come in glory to establish his kingdom in all its fullness across the world is not an excuse to sit back and do nothing, but an inspiration to do all we can to bring forward that day. The forces against us might seem overwhelming but God is an ally infinitely more powerful than any foe, human or demonic. Those of us who remember 1989 will remember at being astonished at the fall of Iron curtain and how one communist regime after another collapsed. Perhaps we would not have been quite how astonished if we had realised just how much prayer was going on around the world for God's kingdom to come in these sorely oppressed countries.

It is no accident that after worshipping God as our heavenly Father, praying *your kingdom come*, is the first thing that we pray for. So often we jump straight in with our personal needs or even our personal *longings* (whether they are God's longings for us or not is a different matter), rather than focussing on God's kingdom – his purposes for the world, our land, our community, our loved ones, ourselves. Jesus said *Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well*.

Of course we cannot pray for God's *kingdom to come*, without asking "What do I need to do as part of this?" This is why *Your kingdom come* is followed immediately by "your will be done" – but that's the theme for next Sunday's sermon.

The Prayer course:

2 Chronicles 7:13-14 New International Version - UK (NIVUK)

13 'When I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or command locusts to devour the land or send a plague among my people, 14 if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land.'

Exodus 17 ⁸*The Amalekites came and attacked the Israelites at Rephidim. ⁹Moses said to Joshua, 'Choose some of our men and go out to fight the Amalekites. Tomorrow I will stand on top of the hill with the staff of God in my hands.'*

¹⁰*So Joshua fought the Amalekites as Moses had ordered, and Moses, Aaron and Hur went to the top of the hill. ¹¹As long as Moses held up his hands, the Israelites were winning, but whenever he lowered his hands, the Amalekites were winning. ¹²When Moses' hands grew tired, they took a stone and put it under him and he sat on it. Aaron and Hur held his hands up – one on one side, one on the other – so that his hands remained steady till sunset. ¹³So Joshua overcame the Amalekite army with the sword.*

Genesis 18 ²² The men turned away and went towards Sodom, but Abraham remained standing before the Lord.¹ ²³ Then Abraham approached him and said: 'Will you sweep away the righteous with the wicked?' ²⁴ What if there are fifty righteous people in the city? Will you really sweep it away and not spare¹ the place for the sake of the fifty righteous people in it? ²⁵ Far be it from you to do such a thing – to kill the righteous with the wicked, treating the righteous and the wicked alike. Far be it from you! Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?'

²⁶ The Lord said, 'If I find fifty righteous people in the city of Sodom, I will spare the whole place for their sake.'

²⁷ Then Abraham spoke up again: 'Now that I have been so bold as to speak to the Lord, though I am nothing but dust and ashes, ²⁸ what if the number of the righteous is five less than fifty? Will you destroy the whole city for lack of five people?'

'If I find forty-five there,' he said, 'I will not destroy it.'

²⁹ Once again he spoke to him, 'What if only forty are found there?'

He said, 'For the sake of forty, I will not do it.'

³⁰ Then he said, 'May the Lord not be angry, but let me speak. What if only thirty can be found there?'

He answered, 'I will not do it if I find thirty there.'

³¹ Abraham said, 'Now that I have been so bold as to speak to the Lord, what if only twenty can be found there?'

He said, 'For the sake of twenty, I will not destroy it.'

³² Then he said, 'May the Lord not be angry, but let me speak just once more. What if only ten can be found there?'

He answered, 'For the sake of ten, I will not destroy it.'

³³ When the Lord had finished speaking with Abraham, he left, and Abraham returned home.

Intercession

1. **Get informed:** learn the facts by checking the news, or updates about the people you're praying for.
2. **Get inspired:** What is God saying about this? Invite the Holy Spirit to speak into the situations you're interceding for.
3. **Get indignant:** Engage your own heart and allow yourself to think and feel honestly as you pray.
4. **Get in sync:** engage together. You might like to all pray out loud at once, or pray in a circle so that everyone has a chance to pray and be heard.