

The Conclusion

For Thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen.

What does this mean?

This means that I should be certain that these petitions are pleasing to our Father in heaven, and are heard by Him; for He Himself has commanded us to pray in this way and has promised to hear us. Amen, amen means “yes, yes, it shall be so.”

SCRIPTURES

“Whatever is good and perfect is a gift coming down to us from God our Father, who created all the lights in the heavens. He never changes or casts a shifting shadow.” (James 1:17, NLT)

“Let all that I am praise the Lord; may I never forget the good things he does for me. He forgives all my sins and heals all my diseases.” (Psalm 103:2–3, NLT)

“Now he is far above any ruler or authority or power or leader or anything else—not only in this world but also in the world to come.” (Ephesians 1:20–21, NLT)

“Yours, O Lord, is the greatness, the power, the glory, the victory, and the majesty. Everything in the heavens and on earth is yours, O Lord, and this is your kingdom. We adore you as the one who is over all things.” (1 Chronicles 29:11, NLT)

“All honor and glory to God forever and ever! He is the eternal King, the unseen one who never dies; he alone is God. Amen.” (1 Timothy 1:17, NLT)

MEDITATION

‘In those days,’ says Luke, ‘there went out a decree from the Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered.’ These words have become so well known through constant repetition in Christmas services. But have we ever thought what Luke is trying to tell us in this bit of historical data? In one short paragraph (2:1–14) he moves from the great Emperor in Rome to the new King who was to rule the world. There is no question, for Luke, as to which one makes the angels sing. As we look at this story, which we know so well and yet so little, we may catch a glimpse of what we might mean when we say: Thine is the Kingdom, the Power and the Glory.

The rulers of this world stand compared to the King of kings in that familiar Christmas story. By the time Jesus was born, Augustus had already been monarch of all he surveyed for a quarter of a century. He was the King ruling a territory that stretched from Gibraltar to Jerusalem, from Britain to the Black Sea. He had done what no-one had done for two hundred years before him had achieved: he had brought peace to the whole wider Roman world. Peace that came with a price: a price paid, in cash, by subjects in far-off lands, and, in less obvious ways, by those who mourned the way life use to be. Power was now concentrated in the hands of one man, whose kingdom stretched from shore to shore. While it sounds good in the history books (and to my high school Latin teacher), let’s face it all hung together as long as the guy on top was getting praised. It could all fall apart very quickly if the people became unhappy and voted him out of office There was peace only as long as was everyone was content with the status quo.

But Luke says watch what happens now. This man, this king, this absolute monarch, lifts his little finger in Rome, and fifteen hundred miles away in an obscure province a young couple undertake a hazardous journey, resulting in the birth of a child in a little

town that just happens to be the one mentioned in the ancient Hebrew prophecy about the coming of the Messiah. And it is at this birth that the angels sing of glory and peace. But who was really in control Augustus or God? Hmm, the plan was already there in Micah 5 – long before Augustus' grandparents were born, and Luke intends to get us aware of who really rules this world. But you, "Bethlehem of Ephrathah, little among the clans of Judah—from you shall come forth the one who is to rule in Israel" (Micah 5:2). The passage is often shortened when read at Christmas. Verse 4 makes a proclamation that should make Augustus nervous, we know it made Herod paranoid. "He [that is, the coming King] shall stand and feed his flock in the strength of LORD, in the majesty of the name of LORD his God; and they shall live secure, for now he shall be great to the ends of the earth." But the next verse goes on: "And he shall be the man of peace."

How is this peace to be secured?

What Luke is doing is not some kind of Hallmark scene that is cute and a warm fuzzy – it is a statement of who it is that has the power and brings peace. Luke 2 is a fairly clear statement of two kingdoms, kingdoms that are destined to compete, kingdoms that offer radically different definitions of what peace and power and glory are all about.

Here is the old king in Rome, turning sixty in the year Jesus was born: he represents perhaps the best that worldly kingdoms can do. At least he knows that peace and stability are good things; unfortunately he has had to kill a lot of people to bring them about, and to kill a lot more, on a regular basis, to preserve peace and stability.

Unfortunately, too, his real interest is in his own glory. Already, before his death, many of his subjects have begun to regard him as divine.

Here, by contrast, is the young king in Bethlehem, born with a price on his head. He represents the dangerous alternative, the possibility of a different empire, a different power, a different glory, a different peace. The two systems stand over against one another. Augustus' empire is like a well-lit room at night. The lamps are arranged beautifully; they shed pretty patterns; but they haven't defeated the darkness outside. Jesus' kingdom is like the morning star rising, signaling that it's time to blow out the candles, to throw open the curtains, and to welcome the new day that is dawning. Glory to God in the highest—and peace among those with whom he is pleased!

It is this double vision of reality that we pray for every time we conclude the Lord's Prayer with the words 'For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, for ever and ever.' You will never find these words in the best manuscripts of Matthew or Luke (where you will find the Lord's Prayer. Somewhere along the line those who designed the liturgy, added it. In fact, it was part of the liturgy within a century or so of our Lord's ascension. . It seems to summarize the whole prayer, as to say, in conclusion, let me summarize Lord what I am praying – "Lord, it's all about your kingdom, your power and your glory being done around and through me."

Next week we will see the two empires squared off against each other towards the end of John's gospel, when Pilate confronts Jesus with two questions: don't you know that I have the power to have you killed? And—what is truth? That is the language of kingdom, power and glory that the world knows. Notice how the two halves support each other. In order to be able to say, 'Support my kingdom or I'll kill you', earthly power needs to say that there's no such thing as truth. And if someone not only tells the truth but lives the truth, earthly power has no alternative but to kill them. Jesus responds by

quietly reminding Pilate that all power comes from on high, and by getting on with the job of *being* the truth—living out truly the love of God for the salvation of the world. This final clause in the Lord's Prayer points us to two aspects of Jesus' life and work which we must put in place.. We have seen what it meant for Jesus to call God 'Father'; we have seen the radical meaning of his prayer for the Kingdom, the rich provision of daily bread and the astonishment of forgiveness. We have seen Jesus go to the place of darkness, to confront and defeat evil on its own turf. But now, as we put the whole package together, what can we say about Jesus himself?

The clue to this question is found in some more of the strange stories Jesus told. Jesus repeatedly told stories about a master, a king or a father going away and coming back again. He would return at last, to see what his servants had been up to in his absence. From quite early on, the church read these stories in terms of Jesus' own second coming. Jesus had gone away in the Ascension, and would return on the last day as Savior and Judge. But it seems clear to me that Jesus himself did not intend that meaning, at least as the basic one. His hearers were, after all, eagerly awaiting the Kingdom of God; and one part of that package, ever since Isaiah's Advent message, was the theme of LORD's return to Zion. Israel's God had abandoned his sinful people to their fate of exile; but he would return at last, to be king over all the earth. This is the kingdom-and-power-and-glory theme: the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together.

Jesus not only tells stories about this happening at last; he behaves as if he thinks it is happening in and through his own work. As Jesus told the great story, of the nobleman returning to find out what his servants had done in his absence, he was himself approaching Jerusalem; and, with the warnings of that parable still ringing in his followers' ears, he rode over the Mount of Olives on a donkey and wept over the city. If only you had known, he said through his tears, the things that make for peace; but now they are hidden from your eyes. Your enemies, the Romans, will come and destroy you, because you did not know the time of God's visitation.

So saying, Jesus rode into the city on Palm Sunday and proceeded to act out a parable of judgment upon the Temple. This is what Advent looks like in flesh and blood: the Lord whom ye seek shall suddenly come to his Temple; but who may abide the day of his coming? Jesus had come as the Bethlehem Jesus, the Prince of Peace; and Jerusalem had refused his way of peace, opting instead for the way of the sword, which, as Jesus himself said to Peter, could have only one result. Jesus as an adult acted out the message the angels had sung at his birth; but, when he came to his own, his own received him not.

Once again, then, there went out a decree from Caesar, which had a profound effect fifteen hundred miles away: rebel kings get crucified. If you let this man go, said the chief priests to Pilate, you are not Caesar's friend. This, then, was what it would look like when the ancient promises were fulfilled, when the glory of the Lord would be revealed for all flesh to see together: a young Jew, riding over the Mount of Olives in tears, driving the traders out of the Temple, and dying at the behest of Caesar's kingdom. And once again, Luke intends us to realize, the angels are singing that God is glorified, and that the way of peace has been achieved after all. This is the ultimate redefinition of the kingdom, the power and the glory. Caesar's plans for his own glory are turned by God into the establishment of the true Kingdom.

How, then, are we to take this final clause of the Lord's Prayer, and to use it to breathe in Jesus' message, his agenda, his very life, and to make it our own? Three things by way of conclusion.

First, this is the prayer of mission and commission. If Jesus is the true King of all the world, whose kingdom redefines power and glory so that they are now seen in the manger, on the cross, and in the garden tomb, then to pray this prayer is to pray that this kingdom, this power and this glory may be seen in all the world. It is the starting point of how we live our lives every day – we submit our lives to God and his will and his way. But that is not enough, we must pray and work for the vision to come in reality, with the rulers of this world being confronted with the claims of their rightful king.

We cannot, then, pray this prayer and simply give into the whims and ways of those in the power and glory of Caesar's kingdom. Augustus would have known quite well what was going on if he'd heard anyone praying this prayer, and he would have trembled on his throne. If the church isn't prepared to subvert the kingdoms of the world with the kingdom of God, the only honest thing would be to give up praying this prayer altogether, especially its final doxology.

Second, this is the prayer of incarnation and empowerment. Jesus lived the Kingdom because he was the rightful king. But we, who take upon ourselves the holy boldness to join him in calling God 'Abba, Father', believe that we have been anointed with Jesus' Spirit; 'anointing', of course, being part of what 'Messiah' means. The church that prays this prayer does so as the new royal family—which lives by, and only by, that radical redefinition of kingship, of royalty, which we discover in the manger and on the cross. Just as Jesus was asked by what authority he was acting, and answered by referring back to his anointing, the church should be active within the world as the people of the true King, as the Christ-people, and should be prepared to justify that action by appealing to her royal, anointed status. We stand with God who wants to bring grace and goodness to all people – to restrict no one from his goodness and life. To pray this prayer is therefore to invoke the power of the Spirit of Jesus, as we work for the glory of God in his anointed son.

Thirdly, this is the prayer of confidence and commitment. It is the prayer that rounds off and seals off all the others. It is because God is King, and has become King in Jesus, that we can pray the rest of the prayer with confidence. The gospels contain a good many remarkable promises about what happens when people pray in the name of Jesus. Those who take those promises know that when they pray things happen. God answers and is active in our world, usually through us.

Such prayer, in the name of Jesus, isn't magic. Sometimes people try to use it as such. Others, reacting against such nonsense, back off from the boldness and confidence that should characterize the prayer of children to their Father. Rather, to pray in Jesus' name is to invoke the name of the Stronger than the Strong; it is to appeal to the one through whom the creator of the world has become king, has taken the power of the world and has defeated it with the power of the cross, has confronted the glory of the world and has outshone it with the glory of the cross. When people in Jesus' world backed up a request with the Emperor's name, people jumped to attention. How much more, when we pray in the name of the true King of kings?

Of course, when we pray in the name of Jesus, we find, again and again, that what we want to pray for subtly changes as we focus on Jesus himself. Part of the game is the

readiness, in great things and small, to put our plans and hopes on hold and let God remake them as we gaze upon him, revealed in the inglorious glory of the manger, in the powerless power of the cross. But when we allow that to happen, bit by bit, and then come with holy boldness into the presence of our Father, we discover that he really does have, prepared for those who love him, such good things as pass human understanding. Charles Wesley caught the mood of the end of the Lord's Prayer, celebrating Jesus' first coming and eagerly awaiting his final coming to fulfil all things, when he wrote:

Yea, Amen! Let all adore thee,
High on thine eternal throne;
Savior, take the power and glory:
Claim the Kingdom for thine own:
O come quickly!
Alleluia! Come, Lord, Come!

(Last stanza of *Lo, He Comes with Clouds Descending* by Charles Wesley. You can hear the whole hymn at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-TS-th7Bf-A>)