

THY KINGDOM COME

2021-2022 Wheaton College Advent Devotional



WHEATON
COLLEGE
For Christ & His Kingdom

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INTRODUCTION

THY KINGDOM COME

MEDITATIONS ON THE COMING OF CHRIST'S KINGDOM FOR THE
2021-2022 ADVENT, CHRISTMAS, AND NEW YEAR SEASON

by Wheaton College President Philip G. Ryken

A Tale of Two Kingdoms

Sometimes it is hard to believe that God's kingdom will ever come. The world is troubled by poverty, racial and social injustice, war, and illness. The gospel seems to make little progress from one day to the next. The wicked triumph while the righteous go about in chains.

To understand the slow coming of God's kingdom, it helps to remember that from almost the very beginning, there have really been *two* kingdoms.

Augustine wrote about them in his great work *The City of God*—the kingdom of God and the kingdom of man. Each of these two kingdoms has its own ruler, its own people, its own desire, and its own destiny.

The line "Your kingdom come" from the Lord's Prayer reminds us that God's kingdom is not here yet, at least not in *all its fullness*. Otherwise, why would we still be praying for it to come?

In one sense, of course, the kingdom has already come because Jesus has come, and he is the King. But his rule has yet to achieve its widest extent. The kingdom of God is a once and future kingdom. It is "already" and "not yet." It is a kingdom of present grace and future glory.

We are not praying for the kingdom to come into existence, therefore, but to come into *dominance*.

We long for the day prophesied in Daniel 7:27, when "the sovereignty, power and greatness of all the kingdoms under heaven will be handed over to the holy people of the Most High. His kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom, and all rulers will worship and obey him."

Lord, we pray for the day when your kingdom of grace, power, and glory will come in all its fullness.



FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT *November 28, 2021*

WE ARE CALLED TO BE LIKE JESUS

"The kingdom of God has come upon you." —Matthew 12:28b

Although the people of Israel returned home after many years of exile, they never regained the glory of their former kingdom.

Consider the history of God's people, Israel. Through Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, God set apart a people for himself.

For a time, God's people were content to worship Him as their only king. Even David, one of the greatest kings of Israel, acknowledged that his kingdom was actually God's kingdom and that he was not so much a royal king as he was a loyal subject.

David collected massive amounts of gold, silver, marble, and other precious materials in preparation for constructing a temple for the worship of God. But instead of being proud when he saw the riches of his kingdom, the king was overwhelmed with gratitude to God, praying: "Yours, Lord, is the kingdom... Wealth and honor come from you; you are the ruler of all things" (1 Chronicles 29:11b-12a).

Nevertheless, the day came when the people of Israel decided to seek their own kingdom rather than submit to the Lord. Satan first conspired to enslave God's people in Egypt under the dominion of Pharaoh. Later, God's people were carried off by Assyria and Babylon, kingdoms of this world.

After 400 long years, God delivered his people from Egypt and led them into the promised land. He also returned them home after 70 years in Babylon, but they never regained the glory of their former kingdom.

God's people never stopped longing for his kingdom, however. The Old Testament closes with God's people waiting—waiting and wondering when their King will come.

What are you waiting for God's kingdom to bring? What impact do waiting and longing have on the human heart? How does the Holy Spirit help us in our waiting?

It takes a king to establish a kingdom, which is why
God sent Jesus into the world.

SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT *December 5, 2021*

THE LAST TEMPTATION

"I will give you all their authority and splendor; it has been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to."—Luke 4:6

As prophesied, Israel's true king came, born in the royal city of Bethlehem, born King of the Jews to reign on David's throne. They called him Jesus, the Christ.

But death set its sights on Jesus from the beginning. No sooner had he been born than Satan tried to kill him. Herod sent soldiers to search and destroy every male child in Bethlehem. The king of the world tried to kill God's King while he was still in the cradle.

But Satan could do nothing to prevent Jesus' coming.

Having failed at murder, Satan later attempted bribery while Jesus fasted in the desert. And what did Satan have to offer? *A kingdom*. We read in Luke 4:5-7:

The devil led him [Jesus] up to a high place and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. And he said to him, "I will give you all their authority and splendor; it has been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to. If you worship me, it will all be yours."

Satan was tempting Jesus to use his deity to his own advantage, to win the kingdom without enduring the cross. He was tempting Jesus to trade the kingdom of God for the kingdom of this world.

But Jesus knew which kingdom he would rule. Jesus mentions the coming of the kingdom more than one hundred times in the New Testament. From beginning to end, the gospel, according to Jesus, is the good news about God's kingdom—a kingdom Jesus would wait for his Father to give him.

It takes a king to establish a kingdom, which is why God sent Jesus into the world.

Where do you see people in your community or in our culture seeking their own kingdoms? Are you ever tempted, as Jesus was, to win the kingdom without enduring the cross?



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THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT *December 12, 2021*

ALL THAT IS GOLD DOES NOT GLITTER

"See, your king comes to you, gentle" —Matt. 21:5; cf. Zech. 9:9

Jesus wanted to conquer the real enemies of humanity—sin, death, and the devil—and to establish his rule in the hearts of his people.

Jesus not only preached the kingdom, he practiced it. Every time he cast out a demon, healed a disease, or raised the dead, Jesus was exercising his kingly ministry by overthrowing Satan's kingdom.

The more Jesus established God's kingdom, the more people started to treat him like a king. When he rode into Jerusalem on a donkey, the people gave him a royal welcome, spreading their garments on his path. Before they could proceed to the coronation, however, Satan tried to persuade people to reject God's kingdom by coaxing them to wish for the wrong kind of king.

In the first place, people misunderstood God's *plan* for his kingdom—although the fact that Jesus rode in on a donkey should have given them a clue. The people thought the kingdom would come the way kingdoms usually do: through military force, rather than modest grandeur.

Second, they misunderstood the kingdom's *purpose*. They hoped God would achieve political supremacy, driving out the Romans and establishing Israel's independence once again. They prayed that God would bring the end of Roman oppression and the end of suffering and pain.

Third, people misunderstood the *progress* of the kingdom. They thought the full reign of God would come right away. Humanly speaking, it was people wishing for the wrong kind of kingdom that got Christ crucified.

But Jesus had a different strategy, one that not even Satan could anticipate.

Jesus wanted to conquer the real enemies of humanity—sin, death, and the devil—and to establish his rule in the hearts of his people. The kingdom of God would not come by power and might, but through Christ's suffering and death, his gentle submission to the cross.

*What kind of King do you want Jesus to be? What kind of King do you need him to be?
Where do you see growing signs of your own willingness to make sacrifices for Christ and His Kingdom?*



FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT *December 19, 2021*

GLORY IN THE SEED, GRACE IN THE FLOWER

“From that time on Jesus began to preach, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.’”

—Matthew 4:17

When Jesus came, the people of Israel hoped that suffering and sadness would be abolished. But anyone on earth can attest to the fact that suffering continues, even after Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection.

Sometimes this causes us to wonder: is Jesus really King after all?

In one sense, of course, God has always been king, for he has “established his throne in heaven, and his kingdom rules over all” (Psalm 103:19).

Yet God has always had to defend his sovereign rule against the kingdom of darkness. Even now, an invisible war rages between God and Satan for the souls of men and women. We see the casualties all around us: abuse, addiction, hatred, injustice, war.

In this great struggle, the progress of God’s kingdom is gradual. It does not come all at once, as Jesus explained in a number of his parables. Like the mustard seed that gradually grows into a small tree or the yeast that slowly works its way through the bread (Matthew 13:31-33), Jesus used those parables to teach the slow but consistent growth of the kingdom.

The coming of the kingdom has often been compared to the way the Allies defeated Germany in 1944. For all intents and purposes, World War II ended on the beaches of Normandy. There were still battles to be fought, but from that point on, the Germans faced inevitable loss.

As far as the kingdom of God is concerned, D-Day was Good Friday—Satan’s last mad attempt to defeat God’s King. But by dying on the cross, Jesus struck a lethal blow to sin, death, and the devil.

The outcome of the battle between the two kingdoms is certain. All that remains is for God to liberate the captives of Satan’s kingdom and bring them into the kingdom of his Son.

We live, therefore, between the “already” and the “not yet.” Jesus is establishing one kingdom in two installments. In the words of the Puritan preacher Thomas Watson: “The kingdom of grace is glory in the seed, and the kingdom of glory is grace in the flower.” *

Where do you experience the most frustration in waiting for God’s kingdom to come? What experiences have helped you understand and value the slow, transforming power of the kingdom?

*Thomas Watson, *The Lord’s Prayer* (1692; repr. Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1960), as quoted in *When You Pray*, 59.



CHRISTMAS EVE & DAY *December 24 & 25, 2021*

A NEW AND GLORIOUS MORN

“He who testifies to these things says, ‘Yes, I am coming soon.’ Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.” —Rev. 22:20

The trumpets of angels
will sound, and loud
voices from heaven
will say the words
that we often sing
at Christmastime,
when we celebrate
the Messiah: “The
kingdom of the world
has become the
kingdom of our Lord
and of his Christ, and
he will reign for ever
and ever.”

Everything we have been saying about the coming of God’s kingdom is well summarized in the *Westminster Shorter Catechism*, which reads:

In the second petition [of The Lord’s Prayer] (which is, *Thy kingdom come*) we pray, that Satan’s kingdom may be destroyed; and that the kingdom of grace may be advanced, ourselves and others brought into it, and kept in it; and that the kingdom of glory may be hastened (A. 102).

The word “hastened” is an appropriate word with which to express our prayer of longing for the kingdom. Sometimes, the kingdom seems to come all too slowly.

But it will come: make no mistake about that! It has come in the royal birth and atoning death and world-changing resurrection of Christ, the King. Jesus even promised that it will come soon (Rev. 22:12). The troubles of the world thus send us back to our knees, back to the prayer Jesus taught us to pray. As we wait for the kingdom, the prayer we often find on our lips is, “Come, Lord Jesus” (Rev. 22:20).

“Come, Lord Jesus” is the last prayer in the whole Bible. It is really another way of praying the second petition of the Lord’s Prayer: “Thy kingdom come.” One day that prayer will be fully answered. Jesus Christ will come again as King to establish the “dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed” (Daniel 7:14b).

Jesus will gather all his loyal subjects around his throne and say to them, “Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world” (Matthew 25:34). Then the King will destroy the dominion of the devil, with all his unholy followers.

When that day comes, the trumpets of angels will sound and loud voices from heaven will say the words that we often sing at Christmastime, when we celebrate our Messiah: “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever” (Rev. 11:15). Hallelujah! Amen.

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What plans do you have to celebrate Christ’s coming today, both privately and publicly? What are some practical ways you can show that Christ is your King in your day-to-day life?

Anyone who wants to live forever with God must take Jesus in the way a hungry person takes in daily bread.

FIRST SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS DAY *December 26, 2021*

GIVE US OUR DAILY BREAD

"Give me neither poverty nor riches, but give me only my daily bread." —Proverbs 30:8

Jesus taught his kingdom disciples to add daily bread to their daily prayers. Praying for daily bread may not seem very spiritual. Indeed, some of the early church fathers were almost scandalized by the idea of making such a mundane request. So they tended to spiritualize the meaning of this petition.

What the fathers could not quite bring themselves to see was how down-to-earth the fourth petition is. Body and soul—God redeems us, restores us, and cares for our physical needs as well as our spiritual needs.

Today, many people in the western world have such an abundance of bread that we forget to pray for it. But the fact of the matter is that the more we have, the more we need this petition, not less.

C. Stacey Woods wisely observed: "I am in greater spiritual danger when I have plenty than when I have nothing. Hence the almost greater need of the wealthy to cry to God for mercy that we may not fail to trust him."*

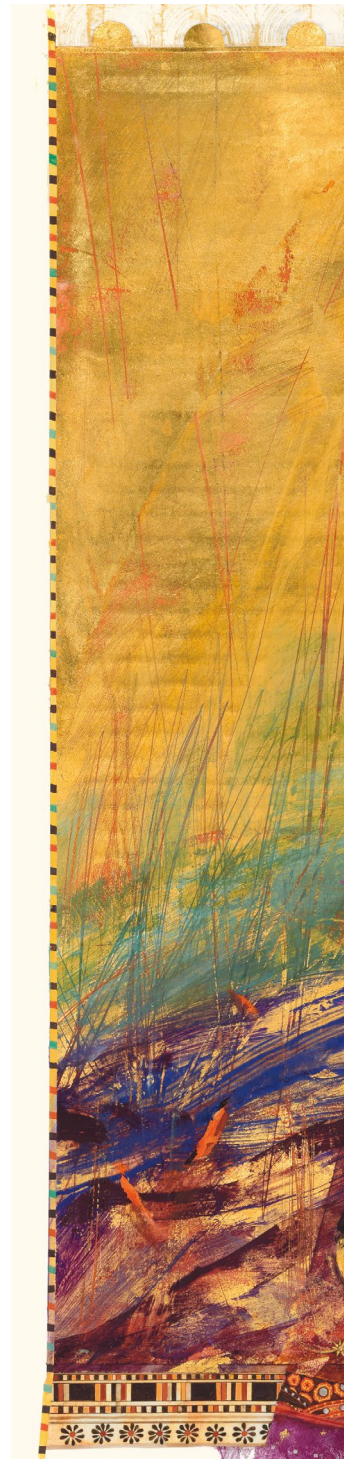
The truth is that everything we eat is a divine gift. Praying for God to give us our daily bread, therefore, is a matter of fundamental honesty. We are utterly dependent upon God's gracious provision every moment of every day.

Jesus tried to teach people this lesson after he fed the five thousand. "Sir," they said, "always give us this bread" (John 6:34). But Jesus answered, "I *am* the bread."

Jesus was saying that what he did on the cross—offering his own body and blood for our sins—is the food and drink of eternal life. Anyone who wants to live forever with God must take Jesus in the way a hungry person takes in daily bread.

When were you most thankful for a meal and why? What daily needs do you need to bring before God in prayer today?

*C. Stacey Woods, *Some Ways of God*, quoted in *Christianity Today* (September 7, 1998), as quoted in *When You Pray*, 88.



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NEW YEAR'S DAY January 1, 2022

THE ACCUSER VS. THE SON OF EVE

"He will crush your head, and you will strike his heel." —Genesis 3:15

Almost as soon as humanity fell into sin, God promised to send a Savior who would bring Satan to absolute ruin.

The Evil One (as Jesus called Satan) appears several times throughout the Gospels. Whenever he appears, he tries to keep God's kingdom from coming—by tempting Jesus in the desert, by snatching away the good seed of God's Word in Jesus' parables, and by sowing weeds next to God's wheat. His methods of entrapment include domination, temptation, accusation, and confrontation.

But the devil can only do what God allows him to do. Perhaps the best place to see the part God plays in temptation is the testing of Christ in the wilderness. Before he began his public ministry of proclaiming the kingdom, Jesus was led *by the Spirit* to be tempted by the devil. The whole situation was under the Father's control.

This confrontation between Jesus and the devil continued the long conflict between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of evil.

Almost as soon as humanity fell into sin, God promised to send a Savior who would bring Satan to absolute ruin: "He will crush your head, and you will strike his heel" (Genesis 3:15).

The gospel of salvation from sin through the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ is the good news of our final deliverance. It is the gospel God first announced in the garden of Eden and later accomplished by dying on the cross and rising again.

Our long-promised deliverance has been fulfilled in the coming of Christ. Now we too are part of the spiritual conflict. God allows temptation, but he has also promised to lead us out of danger and save us from all the powers of evil.

This promise recalls the words of the hymn "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God": "His rage we can endure, for lo! His doom is sure; one little word shall fell him."

Ezekiel's Vision at Chebar
— *Eating the Scroll*, Donald
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Where can you identify Satan's voice of temptation in your life? In what concrete ways can you combat his deceptions with trust in Jesus?





SECOND SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS DAY January 2, 2022

THE POWER AND THE GLORY

To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever! —Revelation 5:13

Every king has power, but all earthly kings are also limited. Their economies are limited by natural resources. Their policies are limited by the wisdom of their counselors. But the kingdom of God does not have these limitations. God's power is absolute.

A whole book could be written on the power of God. He is omnipotent, all-powerful, the God of infinite strength and might.

God has power over creation; he made all things out of nothing. God also has power over history; all things come to pass according to the will of his eternal decree. He has power over sin and death, which he conquered through the cross and the empty tomb. He has power over life, as his Spirit transforms everyone who comes to faith in Christ.

Once we have been brought into God's kingdom and have seen his power, the only appropriate way for us to respond is by giving him the glory.

When we speak of the glory of God, we refer to the internal weight of God's character. We also refer to what Jonathan Edwards described as "the outshining of internal greatness or excellence."* God sometimes reveals his inward nature through outward displays of his majesty, and the most spectacular display of God's glory is through his Son, Jesus Christ.

Jesus saved us so that we in turn would glorify God. This is another way the Bible speaks of glory: the worship we offer to God. To God alone be the glory!

When we worship God, we offer a shining sacrifice that demonstrates his goodness and mercy. At the same time that we pray for God's kingdom to come in all its fullness, therefore, we praise God that he is already King. We claim Christ as our King, the ruler of our thoughts, actions, and emotions.

Already we are citizens of the kingdom of glory, even as we live for the day when Christ will reign supreme over all.

As you begin this new year, in what ways do you most hope to see God's power at work in the world? What are the most important ways you hope to give him the glory?

Jesus with Mary and Martha,
Donald Jackson with contributions
from Aidan Hart and Sally Mae
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*Jonathan Edwards, "The End for Which God Created the World," is reprinted in John Piper, *God's Passion for His Glory* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1998), 233, as quoted in *When You Pray*, 181.



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