

# Prayer for the Advancement of Christ's Kingdom

by Edward Payson

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*Edward Payson's sermon emphasizes the necessity and benefits of praying for the advancement of Christ's spiritual kingdom on earth.*

**Scripture:** Psalm 22:27, Isaiah 2:4, Matthew 6:10, Matthew 12:30, Luke 17:21, John 3:3, Romans 14:17, 2 Corinthians 5:17, Philippians 2:9, Revelation 11:15

**Topics:** "Kingdom Prayer", "Spiritual Growth"

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## Description

Edward Payson preaches on the importance of praying for the advancement of Christ's kingdom, emphasizing the divine command to prefer God's glory and the benefits that will result for mankind. He explains that the kingdom of God is spiritual, consisting of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost, and encourages fervent prayers for its universal prevalence. Payson highlights the promises of God for the fulfillment of Christ's kingdom and urges believers to align their actions and hearts with the principles of the kingdom to make their prayers acceptable.

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## Transcript

"Thy kingdom come"

Matthew 6:10

well known form of prayer, of which these words are a part, is in every respect worthy of its divine author. On this, as on all other occasions, he spoke as never man spake. In the compass of six short petitions, expressed in language at once simple and dignified he has included every thing necessary for man to ask, or for God to bestow; and at the same time has shown us the spirit, which should animate our devotions, and indirectly, but impressively, taught us our duty to our Creator, to our fellow creatures, and to ourselves.

Even the order, in which the several parts of this inimitable prayer are arranged is full of meaning and instruction. By assigning the first place to those petitions, which relate to the honor of God's name, the advancement of His kingdom, and the accomplishment of his will, our Savior probably intended to teach us to prefer these objects to our own private interest and to give them as he invariably did, the first place in our exertions and desires. To this place indeed. they are preeminently entitled.

They embrace at once the best interests of heaven and of earth--of God and of his creatures. So inseparably is their promotion connected with the highest happiness of our fallen race, that love to man and to ourselves as well as concern for the divine glory, must induce us to prefer it to every other object. Never do we display a temper more worthy of men and of Christians; never do we ask for such a profusion of blessings on ourselves and others, as when we sincerely pray that God's name may be hallowed, that his kingdom may come, and that his will may be done on earth as it is in heaven.

These few words express or imply all that boundless benevolence can desire; and were it possible to personify benevolence, these are the words which she should be represented as uttering. The kingdom, for the advancement of which we are here taught to pray, is that spiritual kingdom which Christ came to establish. It is styled the kingdom of God, and the kingdom of heaven, in allusion to a prediction of the prophet Daniel. In the days of these kings, says he, the God of heaven shall set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever.

The nature and design of this kingdom, as well as its future extent, are largely and particularly described by the inspired writers. Our Savior has informed us, that it is not an external kingdom. The kingdom of God, says he, cometh not with observation; neither shall they say, Lo, here! or, lo, there! for behold, the kingdom of God is within you. He has also assured us, that his kingdom is not of this world; and we farther learn from one of his apostles that it consists in righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Ghost.

It is, therefore, a spiritual kingdom; its throne is erected in the souls of men; its laws are the benevolent precepts and doctrines of the gospel; and its subjects consist of those on whose hearts these laws are indelibly inscribed by the finger of God. When therefore we pray that his kingdom may come, we pray for the universal prevalence of Christianity; and for the removal, renovation, or destruction of every thing which tends to retard or limit its progress. We pray that the gospel of Christ may be known, believed, and obeyed throughout the world, that his religion may soon become the only religion of man; and that its glorious effects, righteousness, peace, and holy joy, may universally prevail.

The brief sketch which has been given of the nature of Christ's kingdom is intended to prepare the way for a consideration of the motives which should induce us to pray for its advancement: Some of these motives, as was unavoidable, have already been indirectly brought into view. They, however, deserve to be more fully and particularly stated. The first motive, to which I request your attention, is the divine command. We ought to pray for the advancement of this kingdom, because God, our rightful Sovereign, requires it of us.

He commands us to pray for the peace or prosperity of his church; to keep not silence and to give him no rest till he establish and make it a praise in the earth. Even that first and great command, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, implicitly inculcates the same duty; and love to God will necessarily lead us to pray fervently and perseveringly for the advancement of his kingdom. I may add, that the form of prayer, a part of which we are considering, has all the force of a positive divine command; and that we violate both the letter and the spirit of this command, whenever we presume to address our Maker without praying that his 'kingdom may come.

With the real subjects of his kingdom these commands will ever be the first and most prevailing motive; and did we all belong to the happy number, we should need no other motive to induce us to pray for its advancement. A plain thus saith the Lord, would influence us more powerfully than volumes of reasoning,

or than all the motives which human ingenuity could devise. A second motive, which should induce us to pray for the coming of God's kingdom is, that by this desirable event the divine glory will be greatly promoted.

Though God's essential glory is ever the same, and incapable alike of diminution or increase, yet his declarative glory, or, in other words, his glory as displayed to his creatures, is intimately connected with the prosperity of his kingdom, and shines with a greater or less degree of luster in proportion as that is increased or diminished. The sun is ever bright and luminous, yet its beams may by various causes be obscured or eclipsed, so as to render it apparently dark. So the glory of God, the Father of lights, the Sun of the universe, is often, as it were, shrouded in a veil, and his name is dishonored, rather than glorified, in the view of his intelligent creatures.

While the world remains in its present state, this must inevitably continue to be the case. The glory of God is principally displayed in his word and in his works, especially in the great work of man's redemption. But of his word millions know nothing. Of the work of redemption they are equally ignorant; and even the glory of creating and preserving the world, is by them taken from Jehovah, and ascribed to some worthless idol, the work of their own hands. Thus as the apostle expresses it, men have changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and four footed beasts, and creeping things, and have worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator.

How many myriads of intelligent, immortal beings are at this moment bowing to stocks and stones, in humble adoration, and giving that worship and glory to some impure or cruel idol, which is due to God alone--while he is comparatively left almost without a worshipper in his own world; a world which he has made, which he preserves and fills with his goodness. The apostle informs us, that when the heathen sacrifice to their idols, they in reality sacrifice to devils. Behold, then, millions of the human race robbing that God whom they ought to love and adore, of his glory, to give it to the prince of darkness, the great foe of God and man.

Behold his kingdom extensive, and his subjects almost innumerable, while the kingdom of God is circumscribed within narrow limits, and his subjects are comparatively few. But this is not all, nor even the worst. Would to God that it were. But even in lands called Christian, what contempt is cast upon the ever blessed God! How openly and impiously is his sacred name profaned and blasphemed! How are his holy Sabbaths dishonored! How is his law of love trodden under foot! How is his word neglected and abused, and the gospel of his Son despised!

How little do men thank God for his unspeakable gift! With what profane contempt do multitudes treat the ordinances and institutions of his religion! How little are the dispensations of his providence regarded! How much is ascribed to second causes, while the Great First Cause is overlooked and neglected! And to say no more, how many infidels, politely styled philosophers, have even attempted to rob him of the glory of creating the world, by ascribing its existence to fate or chance, while thousands wish them success in their impious endeavor!

Now, my friends, who that feels as a creature of God ought to feel, who has the smallest portion of reverence or love for his Creator, can, without the utmost grief and indignation, see him thus dishonored, insulted, and robbed of his glory? Can a loyal subject hear, without emotion, his sovereign dishonored? Can an affectionate child see his father insulted without being moved? If then we are the subjects, and the children of God, how can we behold our Almighty Sovereign, our heavenly Father, thus insulted,

dishonored, without feeling the strongest emotion of indignant sorrow, and fervently praying that his kingdom may come, and that the knowledge of his glory may fill the earth, even as the waters fill the seas?

The psalmist informs us that, when the Lord shall build up Zion, that is, extend and establish his kingdom, the spiritual Zion, he shall appear in his glory; he will then appear peculiarly great and glorious in the view of all his creatures. Pray then, ye, who, like David, are grieved when men keep not God's law; ye, who, like Elijah, are jealous for the honor of the Lord of hosts, ye, who, like Moses, desire to see God's glory; pray and beseech him to come quickly, and build up his kingdom on earth.

The benefits which will result to mankind from the coming of God's kingdom, furnish another powerful motive to induce us to pray for its advancement. The number and value of these benefits, as they respect the present life, may in some measure be inferred from a consideration of the nature and tendency of Christ's kingdom. It essentially consists, as has already been observed, in righteousness, peace, and holy joy. That all these are much needed in our world, you need not be told.

Wherever we turn our eyes, we find little but melancholy proofs of their absence, and of the dreadful prevalence of the opposite evils. Injustice, discord, and wretchedness everywhere abound. The whole earth is filled with violence. Mankind have long been at war with God; they can therefore have little peace either in themselves or with each other. If we contemplate them individually, we find them destitute of benevolence, actuated by base or malignant passions, a prey to care, anxiety and discontent, and often harassed by guilty fears amid the reproaches of a guilty conscience.

If we turn our attention to families and societies, we see the effects of these evil principles in the neglect of family religion, and of the education of youth; in frequent difficulties and distensions; in the invention or circulation of false and scandalous reports; and in innumerable petty frauds and acts of injustice, if we extend our views to the nations of the earth we see the same evils operating on a larger scale. We see nation rising up against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; whole countries desolated; extensive cities wrapt in flames; millions of human beings dragged from their families and led forth as sheep appointed for the slaughter, and millions more fainting and dying under the calamities of war, or groaning in hopeless anguish under the iron rod of oppression, or the merciless scourge of slavery.

Could we hope that the myriads of immortal souls, who are hurried out of time by these complicated evils, found an end to their miseries at death; could we hope that, after a life embittered by so many sufferings and sorrows, they entered into eternal rest, we might contemplate these scenes with emotions comparatively pleasing. But we cannot hope thus. The scriptures forbid it. They uniformly teach us that a life spent in sin unrepented of, is a prelude to an eternity of wretchedness and despair; and those who live without God in the world, are expressly said to have no hope.

With respect to those, therefore, who die in this situation, we are compelled to believe, unless we renounce our belief in Christianity, that they lie down in everlasting sorrow. From this imperfect sketch of the temporal evils which mankind are suffering, and of the far more to be dreaded evils to which they are exposed beyond the grave, it must, we conceive, be apparent that a remedy for these evils is the one thing needful. But this remedy is only to be found in the universal spread of the kingdom of Christ.

Reason and philosophy have long been endeavoring to discover such a remedy, and their votaries have often boasted of their success. But their boasts have proved false, and their endeavors fruitless. They have not even succeeded in finding a remedy for the evils of time; much less for those of eternity. The world is still as full of vice and wretchedness as ever; and it still is and ever will be true, that there is

salvation for sinful man in none but Christ; for there is no other name given under heaven among men whereby we must be saved.

But while no other remedy can possibly be found, the universal extension of Christ's kingdom will prove a certain and effectual remedy for all the present and future evils, to which the race are exposed. This is undeniably evident from its very nature. Let righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Ghost universally prevail, and sin and misery will be banished from the world. By righteousness is here intended a temper and conduct conformable to our Savior's rule of equity; whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them.

By peace is intended peace with God, peace of conscience, and peace with our fellow creatures. By joy in the Holy Ghost is intended those divine consolations which God imparts to his people, and which often cause them to rejoice, as the apostle expresses it, with a joy unspeakable and full of glory. Now were these things universally prevalent, what evil could remain to infest the world. Universal righteousness would banish all those evils which spring from fraud, injustice, and oppression; all the crimes which now disturb the peace of society; all causes of contention between nations and individuals.

Peace with God would deliver mankind from the heavy judgments and calamities with which he is now constrained to afflict them on account of their opposition to his authority; and from all the unhappiness occasioned by want of resignation, by anxiety, and discontent. Peace of conscience would entirely free them from that guilty fear, remorse, and dread of death, which now often embitter their choicest comforts. Peace with each other would destroy at once the innumerable evils which arise from public and private wars, disputes, and dissensions, while the consolations of the Holy Spirit would fill them with that peace which passeth all understanding, and give them, while on earth, a continual foretaste of the joys of heaven; toward which they will be constantly advancing, and at which they would at length arrive, there to live and reign throughout eternity with him in whose presence is fullness of joy, and at whose right hand are pleasures forevermore.

Such, my friends, are the benefits which would result to mankind from the universal spread of Christ's kingdom, such the glorious effects which it naturally tends to produce. That the description here given of them is not exaggerated, is evident from the language of time inspired writers when speaking on the same subject. In his days, say they, referring to Christ, in his days shall the righteous flourish and abundance of peace so long as the sun and the moon endure. Men shall be blessed in him, and all nations shall call him blessed.

The desert and the solitary place shall be glad, and the wilderness shall rejoice and blossom as the rose. Then shall the eyes of the blind be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; the lame man shall leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb shall sing. Nation shall no more lift up sword against nation, but they shall beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning hooks, neither shall they learn war any more. The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard lie down with the kid, and the calf and the young lion together, and a little child shall lead them; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox, and the cow and the bear shall feed, and their young shall lie down together; and the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the serpent's den.

Thus that paradisiacal state, which was lost by the first Adam, shall be restored by the second; and love, peace, and happiness universally prevail under the mild reign of him who is emphatically the Prince of peace. Who then, that is not totally destitute of benevolence, can refrain from praying, most fervently

praying, that Christ's kingdom may come? He who will not thus pray, and still more he, who opposes the spread of this kingdom, ought to be banished from it forever, and to be considered as the common enemy, fit only to be a subject of the prince of darkness.

But it will perhaps be asked, by some, is not this universal spread of Christ's kingdom a mere chimera; one of those delightful visions which a benevolent mind loves to form, but which will never be realized? No, my friends, it is no chimera; if it be a vision, it is one of the visions of the Almighty; and it shall be realized, more than realized; for he has said it and sworn it, who cannot lie. We may therefore add, as another motive which should induce us to pray for the universal spread of Christ's kingdom, that he has promised, and even sworn by himself, that this event shall infallibly take place.

All the prophetic writings abound with the most full, explicit, animating predictions of the approach of a glorious period when the stone that was cut out of the mountain without hands, shall fill the earth; and when all the kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdom of our Lord and Savior. The fulfillment of these predictions was in vision beheld by the prophet Daniel. I saw in the night visions, says he, and behold, one like unto the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came near to the Ancient of days, and there was given unto him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people and nations and languages should serve him.

We are further assured, that the Lord shall be King over all the earth; that there shall be one Lord and his name one; that all flesh shall see his glory, and that the knowledge of him shall fill the whole earth, even as the waters fill the seas, and that Christ shall reign till all enemies are put under his feet. We have therefore all the encouragement to pray for the universal spread of Christ's kingdom, which the most positive divine assurances of an answer to our prayers can give.

If it be said, since the event is certain, why should we pray for it? We answer, God has said that for all these blessings, he will be inquired of. Prayer is still no less necessary, than if no promises had been made; for the grand design of these promises is, not to supersede, but encourage prayer, and to afford a firm foundation on which faith may stand, and wrestle with God for their accomplishment. Shall we then despise the riches of his goodness? Shall we lose these invaluable benefits, by neglecting to pray for them?

Shall we see God's arm extended, and his hand filled with blessings inestimable and innumerable, and yet neglect to employ the means which he prescribes, to bring them down in copious showers on ourselves, our posterity, and our fallen race? No: let us not thus imitate the fool into whose hands a price is put to get wisdom, but who has no heart to it. Rather let us firmly grasp the divine promises, and pray unceasingly that they may speedily be fulfilled in their fullest extent.

As a farther inducement to do this, permit me to remind you that the time allotted for their fulfillment is rapidly advancing, and that the present appearance of the world and the dispensations of providence plainly indicate that God is about to finish his work and cut it short in righteousness, and that the latter day of Christ's kingdom is beginning to dawn. God is now, agreeably to the predictions of the prophets, overturning the nations; and he will continue to overturn, and overturn, till he shall come whose right it is to reign.

In almost all parts of the Christian world, he is exciting desires and producing exertions for the extension of his kingdom, which have never been equaled since the days of the apostles. So long since as the commencement of time last year [1812] translations of the scriptures had been begun, and in many

instances completed, into upwards of fifty different languages and dialects; and from that time to the present the blessed work has been prosecuted with unabated, with constantly increasing zeal.

At the same period forty-seven societies had been formed in England, Scotland, and Ireland, and seventeen more in this country, for the sole purpose of disseminating the sacred scriptures throughout the world. Since that period, the number of societies for this purpose in England has been nearly doubled, and by their exertions the word of life has been sent, and is still going to almost every part of the habitable globe. In aid of the same glorious cause, more than a hundred missionary societies, and societies for the diffusion of religious knowledge, and for the conversion of the Jews, have been formed, within a few years; in different parts of the Christian world; and they are now 'with united efforts endeavoring to diffuse the knowledge of God and extend the bounds of the Redeemer's kingdom.

Notwithstanding the disappointments they have met with, and the various difficulties which they have been called to encounter, their endeavors have in very many instances been crowned with success, so that from the farthest parts of the earth we have heard songs of praise, ascribing glory to the righteous God. For all these unusual and unparalleled exertions it is impossible satisfactorily to account, without ascribing them to their true cause, the agency of God. He it is, and he alone, who has excited in the Christian world these strong desires and extraordinary endeavors to promote the extension of his kingdom.

And since he has begun to work, we may confidently expect that he will finish what he has begun, and that the long expected time for the universal spread of his kingdom will soon arrive. Soon will the Jews be brought in with the fullness of the Gentiles; soon will Ethiopia stretch out her hands to God, and the isles of the southern ocean wait for his law. Soon will the enrapturing cry be heard, Alleluia! for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth; and the kingdoms of the world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ.

Even now the angel with the everlasting gospel is flying through the world, saying to every nation and people, Fear God, worship him who made heaven, and earth, and sea; for the hour of his judgment is come. He who sits on the throne is exclaiming, Behold, I create all things new. I create new heavens, and a new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness. Prepare ye then the way of the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Exalt the valleys, and level the hills, make the crooked ways straight, and the rough places plain, that the glory of the Lord may be revealed, and all flesh see it together.

Since then the kingdom of Christ is thus comparatively nigh, even at the door, let us seize the golden opportunity and improve the precious moments which yet remain, in fervently praying for its arrival. As a farther motive to induce you to this, consider the happy effects which it will have upon yourselves. Nothing can more directly or more powerfully tend to destroy every baleful, malignant passion in your breasts, or promote in them the growth of divine benevolence, than frequently praying for the advancement of Christ's kingdom.

When you leave your closets, after supplicating the Father of mercies with strong cries and tears to send the blessings attending his kingdom to all mankind, and to forgive all, not excepting your bitterest enemies, you will breathe the very spirit and temper of heaven; you will be transformed for a time into the image of Christ; you will feel that his kingdom is set up in your hearts, and that they are filled with righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Ghost; an earnest of that heaven, at which you will then be sure of coming.

On the other hand, nothing can more certainly prove that you are destitute of love to God, that you are not subjects of his kingdom, that you are not the disciples of Christ, than a habitual neglect of praying that his

kingdom may come; nor can you, while guilty of this neglect, offer up a single acceptable petition for yourselves. If then you would not be considered and treated as the enemies of God; if you would possess a heavenly temper and obtain a full assurance of your title to heaven; if you would have your hearts filled with holy peace and joy, and taste the happiness of heaven before you arrive there, pray sincerely, fervently, and perseveringly, that God's kingdom may come.

Let us now, my friends, on the wings of faith, fly forward a few years, and contemplate the world under the mild reign of the Prince of Peace. Let us escape from the wars, the vices and miseries, which surround us, and visit the earth restored to its original state. See it no longer groaning under its Creator's curse; but rejoicing in his smiles. See it no longer producing briars and thorns, but bringing forth fruit in abundance for its almost innumerable inhabitants. See volcanoes forever extinguished, storms hushed to peace, the bolt of heaven deprived of its terrors, the earth no longer trembling and threatening to engulf its inhabitants, and the air no longer wafting the seeds of pestilence and death.

Walk through the villages, and behold the lion, the leopard and bear, grazing with domestic animals around the habitations of man. See children sporting near them, fearless of danger, or twining around their bodies the serpent now deprived of his sting. Walk through the cities, and behold every countenance bearing the traces of happiness and benevolence, and clothed with smiles indicative of the peace which reigns within. That our prayer for this event may be acceptable to God, two things are indispensably necessary.

The first is, that they be accompanied by corresponding exertions. If it is our duty to pray for the advancement of Christ's kingdom, it is no less our duty to do all in our power to promote it, to use all our influence in supporting its laws, and in bringing others to obey them, especially our families and friends; and when occasion requires, to contribute cheerfully to its propagation and support. He who refuses or neglects to do this, cannot sincerely pray that Christ's kingdom may come; nor can he even repeat our Lord's prayer, without incurring the guilt of formality and hypocrisy.

The second thing necessary to render our prayers for the advancement of Christ's kingdom sincere and acceptable is, that we become willing subjects of his kingdom ourselves. It is too evident to require proof, that none can sincerely desire others to submit to the sceptre of Christ, so long as they themselves refuse or neglect to obey him; nor can any present to him an acceptable petition, who do not unreservedly comply with his requisitions. Why call ye me Lord, Lord; and do not the things which I say?

Are we, then, my friends, the willing subjects of Christ? This question may be easily answered: If any man, says the Apostle, be in Christ, he is a new creature. Verily, verily, says our Savior, except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. If then, we are not new creatures if we have not been born again, we are not, we cannot be, the subjects of Christ's kingdom. And it becomes us to remember that, if we are not his subjects, we must be his enemies; for he has himself said, He that is not with me is against me.

But he is willing, he waits to be reconciled. He died for the express purpose of reconciling offending man to his offended God. Come then, my friends, if you have not already done it, come, and touch the golden sceptre of mercy, which he now holds out to you. Open wide your hearts, that the King of glory may come in, and write upon them his law of love, and set up his throne in your affections. Like the Philippians, first give your own selves to the Lord, and then your prayers and offerings will indeed be acceptable.

You will find by experience, that Christ's kingdom is righteousness, peace, and joy; and as a reward for obeying and promoting his kingdom on earth, he will finally advance you to share his throne and kingdom in heaven, there to live and reign with him forever and ever.

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