

TWO COUNTRIES

MATTHEW 6:9-10

This Wednesday is July 4th, our Independence Day. And I'd like to share some thoughts on *our country, American patriotism, and our allegiance to Jesus.*

How do we reconcile *our pledge and our prayers?*

And to do so, let's examine the first line of the most famous prayer in all the Bible... *the Lord's Prayer...*

Verse 9, **In this manner, therefore, pray: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.**

On June 6, 1944, the 2nd Ranger Battalion, consisting of 225 young American troops, landed on the beach at Normandy, France. Their orders were to scale a treacherous 100 foot high cliff - known as *Pointe du Hoc*. The moment these brave soldiers stepped onto the beach they came under intense fire.

On top of the cliff, German troops had dug in with heavy-duty artillery. They were now unleashing a massive assault on the Americans. Of the 225 men who tried to scale the cliff, tragically only 99 survived.

But when the bullets stopped flying, and the smoke cleared, the daring mission had been accomplished. Allied troops were now on European soil. *It was only a matter of time before the continent would be liberated.*

Today, 74 years later, a bayonet-shaped monument adorns the steep cliff where Ranger blood was shed. It memorializes

the courageous D-Day sacrifice of our troops. *It's now a destination for many Ranger families.*

In 1994, Kathie Wintz brought her nine kids to Pointe du Hoc. Her father, Richard Wintz, was a lieutenant in the 2nd Battalion. Over the years, Richard never talked much about the battle. But just before he died, his family got him to open up and recount his story.

Kathie was stunned at how naïve she'd been. She had no idea of the horrors her dad had endured, and his heroic show of courage. To help her children appreciate the sacrifices made by the boys of Pointe du Hoc - which included their granddad - she flew her family to France, and stood on the point at Normandy, *and together they all prayed the Lord's Prayer.*

I'm sure on D-Day in 1944 the Lord's Prayer was prayed loud and often on the beaches of Normandy.

There probably wasn't an American GI who didn't at least breathe the Lord's Prayer under his breath. *In the heat of battle, you fall back on what you know...*

All those little boys who had quoted the prayer in Matthew 6 in Sunday School were now praying it with all the desperation of a soldier fighting for his life.

I'd like to one day go to Pointe du Hoc and pray the Lord's Prayer. Against that backdrop, and in light of the history, its recitation would be a moving experience.

Especially when you get to verse 10, **"Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven."**

For if ever there was a day in history when God's will was done on earth *it had to have been D-Day...*

The evil Adolf Hitler and his German troops were on a rampage. Countries in Europe were toppling like dominoes, as the smell of burning Jewish flesh was rising up from concentration camp smokestacks.

If the Allies had lost that day on the beaches of Normandy we'd probably be speaking German and eating sauerkraut for lunch. The American flag would be a swastika instead of the stars and stripes.

At Normandy, God answered the prayers of Americans, and took up the cause of freedom. **His will was done on earth as it is in heaven.** If ever Almighty God wore red, white, and blue it was on June 6, 1944.

But not always has America lined up on God's side.

For the first 100 years of our history, legalized slavery stained America's legacy. It was an atrocity for a nation founded on the belief that **"all men are created equal"** to deny freedom to a whole segment of its population. It was *an inconsistency that defies logic, and an evil prejudice that grieved our common Creator.*

Recently, our nation's legalization of abortion and same-sex marriage has defied God's will. *Respect for life and the sanctity of marriage* are godly priorities.

And today, how can God be pleased with the failure of our politicians - on both sides of the aisle - to deal with immigrants lawfully yet compassionately?

Today, America is hated in Muslim countries, not just because of our politics, and our support of Israel - but Islamic fundamentalists despise America because of the filth and immorality we traffic all over the world.

We're seen as a threat to the morality of Arab youth.

Muslims watch us legally murder unborn babies in the name of convenience, and see us export a flood of pornography... Is it any wonder we're *the Great Satan*?

Sadly, America is hated for its decadence... Our nation is a mixed bag. At times we stand for Christian values. At other times we find ourselves God's enemy.

And in light of our corruption... for an American to pray, "*Your kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven*" we're not just asking God to protect us and prosper us... but to bring revival, and stir us to repentance, and turn our nation from its wickedness.

"*God bless America*" might be a sweet notion, but it's often sung superficially. I'm sure, at times God is ashamed of the colors - red, white, and blue.

There's one certainty, "*Father God and Uncle Sam are not the same person. And if ole Uncle Sam takes an ungodly position, or steers from biblical truth, we need to always side with our Father, not our uncle.*"

Once, a little boy asked to say the blessing at the evening meal. He closed his eyes, bowed his head, and prayed, "*I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America...*" Well, I wish the USA was so dedicated to God

there was no difference between *our prayer* and *our pledge*, but that's not the case.

There are occasions when our pledge of allegiance to God puts us in conflict with the policies of our nation.

I hope you realize God's kingdom is distinct - and far greater than the United States - or any other nation for that matter. The US is not the world's superpower... The one and only *superpower* is the Kingdom of God.

Certainly, our nation has a rich spiritual heritage.

The freedoms defined in the United States Declaration of Independence and Constitution would've never been conceived, if not for the Protestant Reformation that preceded them. Martin Luther's idea of the priesthood of every believer... laid the foundation for the principle of **one man one vote**.

Our faith taught us that in God's eyes there's no difference between the plough-boy and the king.

Both come to God on the same basis - the work of Jesus Christ on the cross. It was the fire of the Reformation that gave birth to the idea of a democracy.

Scotsman, Samuel Rutherford, wrote a book in 1644, that he entitled, "**Lex Rex**" which means, "*law is king.*"

His book was revolutionary. It challenged the political philosophy in Europe at the time. No longer did Rutherford accept "**Rex Lex**" or "*the king is law.*"

He believed men should be governed by laws, *not by other men*. Rutherford's ideas were based on the Bible, especially on Moses and the Law from Mount Sinai.

Ancient Israel was governed by God's law, not the will of a kingly class. A brave Samuel Rutherford concluded that to be governed by a man or men was nothing but tyranny. Since the Law was given by God, no less than the king himself is subject to that Law.

When the founding fathers of America gathered for the signing of the Declaration of Independence, Samuel Adams, made the statement, "We have this day restored the Sovereign, to whom alone men ought to be obedient. He reigns in heaven and... from the rising to the setting sun, *may His kingdom come.*"

Adams and the other signers believed that they had restored God - not the king - as their final authority.

Where do you think the early Americans got the famous phrase written into the Declaration of Independence... "certain inalienable rights?"

"Inalienable rights" refer to freedoms not conferred *by other men*, or *by the state* - but unchallengeable, absolute rights bestowed by the Creator Himself!

Realize the very notion of freedom has Christian roots. The Bible teaches that God - not man - is the ultimate authority. We were made in God's image, thus humans should be free to serve God, and be governed by God - with limited intervention from the state.

Sadly, at times we've applied freedom unequally, but its concept originated from the Christian Scriptures.

The American legal system was initially founded on the theories of the British jurist, *William Blackstone*.

Blackstone believed there were only two bases for law - *nature* and *revelation*. And according to him the best approach was God's revelation. For Blackstone the revealed will of God was found in the Bible.

This is why from bankruptcy laws, to private property rights, to judgments for damages - American common law was founded on principles found in the Bible.

The American flag that flew over Fort Henry in 1814 was 42 feet by 30 feet - an enormous flag. This was the flag Francis Scott Key saw ten miles out to sea - *in the midst of battle*. That flag is what inspired our national anthem, **The Star Spangled Banner**.

For years no one knew how a flag that size could fly from a pole 189 feet tall. You would think in stormy, windy weather the flagpole would snap. But a recent discovery solved the riddle. The National Park Service found a cross-shaped support nine feet underground near the fort's entrance. As it turns out, it was this cross-shaped beam that supported the huge flag.

And this is a microcosm of Christianity's role in America... Freedom flies in our country - though often imperfectly - because of our Christian underpinnings.

It's the Bible that has provided us the precepts that protect individual rights, yet at the same time bring order to a diverse and changing society. **Without Christianity, America, as we know it, would not exist!**

It's true that the United States has a rich spiritual and faith-filled history. This is why I'm proud to be an American. And this is why we should continue to teach future generations of Americans the wisdom of the philosophies on which our country was built. *The future of the house depends on the strength of its foundation.*

But what we also need to do, is not confuse a flawed and feeble system of human government with God's kingdom. Earthly kingdoms will come and go, including the United States - but the Kingdom of God is eternal!

At times, American interests and God's concerns run parallel. God may use our country to accomplish His purposes, but that doesn't exempt us from His judgment. When we're weighed and found lacking, God will set us aside, and raise up another nation!

British journalist, Malcolm Muggeridge was once speaking in Washington DC. Throughout his talk he was very negative in his outlook on world affairs.

After his speech a reporter asked, *"You've been very pessimistic. Don't you have any reason for optimism?"*

Muggeridge was surprised, *"Friend, I could not be more optimistic than I am, because my hope is in Jesus Christ alone."* He paused to let the thought sink in, and then he finished, *"Just think if the first church had pinned its hopes on the Roman Empire!"*

Ancient Rome was proof that even superpowers - even democratic superpowers - outlive their usefulness, and fall victim to sin and corruption.

Yes, I'm privileged to be American... Yes, I will gladly pledge my allegiance to my country... And yes, I appreciate the sacrifices of the men and women who fight to keep us free... I would even take up arms myself if my country ever needed me to do so...

But do I believe God travels on an American passport? No!... Do I believe Jesus is returning on Air Force One? No!... Do I believe God is indebted to America? Of course, not!... And do I believe He'll bless us today just because He's done so in the past? No!

I ran across a quote by a man named JB Priestly.

He writes... *"We should behave toward our country as women behave toward the men they love. A loving wife will do anything for her husband except stop criticizing and trying to improve him. We should cast the same affectionate, but sharp glance at our country."*

Now ladies, I don't want to give you any ideas or steer you in the wrong direction, but you get my point...

We need to nag our nation to righteousness!

On the eve of the battle of Jericho, General Joshua encountered a soldier with a drawn sword. Joshua confronted the fellow, *following military protocol...* He barked at him, *"Are You for us or for our adversary?"*

The mighty soldier replied, *"No, but as Commander of the army of the LORD I have now come."*

In essence Joshua had shouted, *"Friend or foe?"* And the man had replied, *"neither"* He was neither on *Israel's side* or *Jericho's side*. He was on **God's side**.

And this is the question all nations and all people should ask themselves - not is *God on our side*, but are *we on His side*? God's kingdom stands above all else!

Understand, the OT taught that the kingdom of God would be an earthly, political kingdom. The last book of the NT, Revelation, paints a similar picture.

A day is coming when Jesus will return to earth. Our Lord will come riding *a white horse - a war horse*.

He's leading troops of the redeemed into battle.

He destroys the Antichrist, and all earth's armies.

In **one day**, Jesus will restore order to the fallen planet... *He'll right wrongs, throw down rulers, wipe out rebellion, establish His throne, enforce a true peace, and bring about the restoration that God has promised.*

Revelation 11 predicts the day when, "The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever..."

In a sense to pray "*Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven*" is to pray for that day.

At the end of Revelation, John sings, "*Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord...*"

He got a glimpse of the apocalyptic events which will lead up to the glorious Second Coming of Jesus Christ. And his reply, was to pray "*Even so, come Lord Jesus.*"

At the end of John's long life, and in light of his remarkable revelations - John, one of Jesus' original twelve disciples -

reverts back to the first prayer he was taught, *the Lord's Prayer*, "*Your kingdom come.*"

When I see corrupt politicians abuse our trust - and wicked businessmen prosper - and criminals get away with their crimes - and terrorists kill the innocent - and Christians persecuted - and children starving - and women sold as sex slaves - and nations at war... *I long for the day when God's kingdom will rule this earth.*

One day Jesus will come in great power and glory.

He'll bring justice and healing to our fallen world. He'll establish His authority over all the kingdoms of the earth. Thus, let's always pray, "*Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.*"

This is one way to pray for the Kingdom of God.

But there's another way to pray this line in the Lord's Prayer. In Matthew 13:11 Jesus speaks of "*the mysteries of the kingdom...*" The full meaning of God's Kingdom isn't explained by the OT prophecies and the book of Revelation. For there is more to the Kingdom...

Before God's kingdom comes with *military might*, or *political prowess*, or earthly *glory* it comes spiritually in human hearts. It flies under the radar and moves below the surface. Like a seed it grows, but isn't seen.

Before the kingdom appears in a tangible, visible form it first conquers *gradually, subtlety, invisibly, spiritually...* It's hidden in the hearts of God's people.

When Jesus began His ministry in Galilee, Matthew 4 records His message, “The kingdom of heaven is at hand.” Of course, *Jesus pointed to no palace, carried no flag, sat on no throne, marched with no army* - but Jesus had begun to build a spiritual kingdom. In one sense, “Jesus was the kingdom of God in person.”

When Jesus returns a second time, He’ll be crowned, “King of kings and Lord of lords.” But today Jesus is *the King of Hearts*. He rules over people.

This is why Jesus said in Luke 17, “The kingdom of God does not come with observation (with outward, visible trappings); nor will they say, ‘See here!’ or ‘See there!’ For indeed, the kingdom of God is within you.”

Before Jesus rules over *institutions*, He rules over *individuals*... Before He occupies *halls of power*, He occupies the *hearts of people*...

Today, God’s kingdom comes when folks come under His sway, and bow to His will, and allow His grace to transform them from the inside out.

Author Phillip Ryken explains God’s kingdom, “It’s a kingdom of the heart. It is not a territory. It is not a party politic. It is not a nation-state with geographic borders. The kingdom of God is simply the rule of God.”

This is why to pray “*Your kingdom come*” not only looks forward to the future, but it asks Jesus to reign right now over *my marriage, my family, my work, my emotions, my play, my thoughts, my money*... It’s to pray, “Lord, permeate *my life with your love and truth!*”

Author Max Lucado puts it, “When you say, “Thy kingdom come”... you are inviting the Messiah Himself to walk into your world... Take your throne in our land.

Be present in my heart. Be present in my office. Come into my marriage. Be Lord of my family, fears, and doubts. This is no feeble request; it’s a bold appeal for God to occupy every corner of your life.”

When I think of what God is doing in the world today, I recall a dad who awoke early one Saturday morning.

All his family was still in bed. He was looking forward to just a few minutes to himself, to read the newspaper, and enjoy a cup of coffee. It was 5:00 AM, but that’s when his 5 year-old daughter decided to join him.

The father pleaded, “Honey, go back to bed. It’s not time for you to wake up yet.” But the little girl just couldn’t. She was ready to greet the weekend.

Well, the dad opted for a distraction. He ripped a full page picture of the Earth from the newspaper, and tore it into pieces. He handed his daughter the scraps, and a roll of scotch tape. “Honey, I want you to go into the den, and see if you can put the world back together.”

To this dad’s surprise, it took just a few minutes before his little girl returned with the task completed.

The daughter showed her daddy the taped up picture. He was stunned. He asked, “how were you able to put the world back together so quickly?”

That’s when she turned the page over.

On the back was the photo of a man. She didn't know a lot of geography, but she knew the shape of a man. The girl said, "When you make the man right, you make the world right." And this is what God is doing today, He's making the world right one man at a time.

I like what J.I. Packer writes of our text here in Matthew 6, "To pray *'thy kingdom come'* is searching and demanding, for one must be ready to add, *'and start with me; make me Your fully obedient subject.'*"

Are you willing to live under the sway of Jesus?

Are we willing to allow Him to put back the broken pieces of our lives, and make us into what He desires?

As Christians the Bible tells us we are citizens of heaven living on earth. Paul calls us "ambassadors for Christ." We're *divine diplomats* - spokespeople for the *Kingdom of God* living among the *kingdoms of men*.

When people walk into our assembly they should get a taste of heaven... *by how we live... by what we believe... by how we treat one another...* Jesus wants you and I to bring a little bit of heaven to earth.

When George Shultz served as Secretary of State he kept a large globe in his office. When meeting with a US ambassador he'd always quiz them. He'd ask them to walk to the globe, and point to their country.

Invariably, they'd pick the nation to which they had been sent. And Shultz would give them a lesson in diplomacy... He'd correct them by pointing to the US.

Shultz wanted all our US ambassadors to remember the land where they happen to live is not their home.

Their home is the land that they represent. And the same is true for “[an ambassador for Christ.](#)” We’re citizens of God’s kingdom dispatched to this world.

In the mid-70s there was a Christian comedy group, *Isaac Air Freight*. They did a skit called “[King Me.](#)”

King Me was a man whose life was all about his own kingdom - *with no regard to the welfare of anyone else.*

Poor *King Me* ended up lonely and miserable. He alienated the people he loved. He got all he wanted, but it never satisfied him. Spiritually, he died a pauper.

Jesus doesn’t want us to be a “[King Me.](#)” Real joy results **not** from *building up* your kingdom, but by *bowing* to His... by praying, “[Your will be done.](#)”

Understand verse 10 is the bridge in the Lord’s Prayer... Before it we pray, “[Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name.](#)” Prayer begins with *who God is* - He is the Father who knows best. He’s holy, or one of a kind. We approach Him reverently, respectfully.

But after verse 10, we petition God... “[Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.](#)” We ask for *provision, pardon, protection.* The Prayer starts with praise for *who God is*, and flows into petition for *what God gives.*

But sandwiched in between *God's greatness* and *our neediness* is the essence of all prayer... **We want to live in God's kingdom. We want His will to be done.**

Most people mistake prayer as a means of getting what they want done. They try to use God to further their ambitions, or make their own life easier.

God ends up their servant, rather than vice versa.

Trust me, God never allows Himself to be used to build up another man's kingdom. God is not inclined to support *King Me*. Thus, we're to pray, ***"Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven."***

Before we ask, God expects us to bow. The bridge between praise and petition is surrender, humility, and a commitment to God's kingdom, rather than our own.

In John 14:13 Jesus promises, ***"Whatever you ask in My name that I will do..."*** And people want to stop there. They expect God to cater to their every whim.

But the verse continues, ***"that the Father may be glorified in the Son."*** The promise of Jesus assumes that *you've bowed to Him. You're all about His name, His nature, His glory... His desires are your desires.*

In heaven when God says **"Jump"**, the angels say, **"How high?"** Obedience is immediate and thorough...

And when that becomes our attitude, then we can pray for whatever we want and God will do it for us.

John Wesley once wrote a prayer I hope to mimic... ***"I am no longer my own, but Yours... Put me to what You will. Rank***

me with whom You will... Put me to doing, put me to suffering... Let me be employed for You, or laid aside for You... Exalted for You, or brought low for You... Let me be full, let me be empty... Let me have all things, let me have nothing... I freely and heartily yield all things to Your pleasure and disposal.”

His poem describes a life fully devoted to God. And this is why verse 10 is at the heart of the Lord’s Prayer.

Again, *“Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”* This is the heart of all true prayer - *surrender to God’s will colors our supplication!*

I bring this up because this week in America, we observe our nation’s birthday or Independence Day.

We celebrate the founding of our nation, and the freedoms we enjoy. But I hope you know the greatest freedom is freedom from sin, and self-centeredness.

It’s better to live under a tyrannical dictator in this life, than to live forever in a *cell* of sin, and the *hell* that follows. Sin enslaves us. It turns life into a cage. Pleasures that tickle us also entrap us and torment us. Sin rips us off, and drags down, and degrades us.

Only Jesus can deliver us and set us free from our sin and selfishness. He is the author of real freedom.

Build your own kingdom, and you’ll become the proud ruler over sand castles. You’ll wake up one day having spent your one and only life on what looks impressive, yet gets washed away in the first high tide.

A missionary once said, “Our greatest fear should not be of failure, but of succeeding at something that really doesn’t matter.” In the end the only pursuit that matters is building God’s Kingdom and doing His will.

This July 4th, I want to remind us all, that though we’re American citizens, first and foremost we’re citizens of heaven. *And this presents a challenge...*

True patriotism pledges allegiance to a country, but not to the exclusion of God. *It’s an earthly loyalty, but it refuses to ascribe absolute loyalty to anything earthly.*

It recalls that the kingdoms of man are all passing away. Unrestricted love and devotion belongs only to God. Christians should stand for what’s *pure, and right, and true* - not just what’s *red, and white, and blue.*

I want to close with a patriotic song (don’t worry I won’t sing it.). Its lyrics from a poem written in 1908 by Sir Cecil Spring-Rice. At the time he was serving as the British ambassador to Sweden. Later he was the ambassador to the United States. He was the one who persuaded Woodrow Wilson to join the Allies in World War 1. The song’s title was “*Two Fatherlands.*”

It speaks of loyalty to two countries. The first stanza to our earthly country - the last stanza is to Heaven...

“I vow to thee my country, all earthly things above. Entire and whole and perfect, the service of my love. The love that asks no question, the love that stands the test. That lays upon the altar the dearest and the best. The love that never falters,

the love that pays the price. The love that makes undaunted the final sacrifice.

And there's another country, I've heard of long ago. Most dear to them that love her, most great to them that know. We may not count her armies, we may not see her King. Her fortress is a faithful heart, her pride is suffering. And soul by soul and silently, her shining bounds increase. And her ways are ways of gentleness and all her paths are peace." I also have **two fatherlands**. Temporarily, my home is the United States, but eternally I have a home in God's kingdom.

And on this July 4th, I want us to pledge myself anew to live as a patriot of both my countries - as a Great American, but more so, as a Committed Christian!

I hope you'll take that same pledge!