

The Lord's Prayer (3) - Thy kingdom come

In this third talk in the series on the Lord's Prayer we are considering the words, 'Thy kingdom come'. As is the whole Lord's Prayer, they are easily said. However, how much depth and sincerity lies behind them as we say them? Do we really understand what we're praying for, or ever stop to think about it?

"Our Father, who art in the heavens,

Hallowed be Thy name.

Thy kingdom come."

So easily said, but what in fact are we praying?

One thing which is certain is the kingdom spoken of is not outside of us, but it is a kingdom within. Though He acknowledged kingship and allowed Himself to be hailed a king, the Lord made it clear that His kingdom was not of this world and taught that it wasn't to be thought of in a temporal, earthly sense. The Lord's kingdom is not something which replaces worldly governments or which is one day to be established in their stead. His kingdom is within. His government is a government of the hearts and lives of people. He rules where His laws are known and every effort is being made to live according to them.

People overlook this point, and yet it is plainly stated. "Once, on being asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, Jesus replied, "The coming of the kingdom of God is not something that can be observed, nor will people say, 'Here it is,' or 'There it is,' because the kingdom of God is in your midst." Luke 17: 20, 21

Then the prayer, 'Thy kingdom come', essentially concerns the individual who is saying it. It is a prayer concerning change within ourselves. It is a prayer that in time the Lord's kingdom of truth and goodness will be established within our lives. In praying, 'Thy kingdom come', we are supplicating the Lord to come and govern our lives, both our thoughts and our actions. To say these words sincerely, 'Thy kingdom come', means to desire with all our heart that the Lord should rule our lives, both what we think and what we do.

We have to acknowledge that He doesn't rule our lives at first. It is a kingdom which is as yet to come. We realise that it isn't present by birth or by nature. At first there are other factors, thoughts, feelings, and considerations which govern and control us.

As is obvious, we have to acknowledge when we look closely at the matter, self and self-regard invariably play a leading role with us at the beginning. Self is the all important thing, causing our concern with the impression we are making, and the credit we are getting, self is at the centre of things, the governing factor behind what we think; the driving force behind what we do.

Even though self-love governs us at first, it need not always do so. Slowly change can occur. In time, if we truly desire it, the Lord, through His love and wisdom and by means of His truth and goodness, can come and take over. And it is this change for which we are praying; this removal of the love of self from its dominance over our lives; when we say, 'Thy kingdom come' we know and recognise that the government of our lives is in other hands; there is selfishness when there should be selflessness, there is a readiness to judge others when in fact our thoughts about them should be tempered by love and mercifulness; and we pray, humbly, "Thy kingdom come', that all this will change.

The Lord Himself spoke of the need for such change in His conversation with the Pharisee, Nicodemus. 'Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again.' (John 3:3). Man is born into the love of self and of the world, so he must be reborn into the love of the Lord and of the neighbour. Of his parents, a person is born into natural life. By rebirth from above the person comes into spiritual life which Swedenborg wrote, "consists in loving God above all things and the neighbour as one's self." (*The New Jerusalem and its Heavenly Doctrine*, 174) To the extent that spiritual rebirth takes place and change occurs, to the same extent has the kingdom come. To pray, 'Thy kingdom come', means to ask the Lord for His help in this process; for help in overcoming the love of self and the love of the world, and for the resolve which we so frequently lack to put them away from us.

The Lord's kingdom, "comes not with outward pomp and glory; it cannot be forced on us by legal enactment: nor can it be imposed by power of arms, (Charles A. Hall in "A Program for Life") It is the Lord's love and wisdom, ruling the hearts and minds of men and women. His way having become our way, His thoughts our thoughts. Some would speak of this as an impossible ideal, and they question whether drastic change and a total reorientation of values in a person can in fact be accomplished and brought about. But it can. And, indeed the re-born person, the person in whom the Kingdom has been established, becomes a new and altogether different being as to quality of outlook and inclination

How then is such change accomplished? What is it that enables the Kingdom to come? The important thing first of all, is to come to terms with instances of selfishness and to isolate occasions where self love has obviously played a role. We must examine ourselves for where we have fallen down and resolve that with the Lord's help we will resist a repetition of such things. We must weaken the grip and influence which such a love has upon us, by neither giving in to its promptings nor listening to its suggestions.

The Lord said, "Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom" (Luke 12, verse 32). And given it, not to a few, not just to some, but to all. Given to the extent that people make room for it in their lives; to the extent that they remove the loves and overthrow the influences which rule over them at the beginning.

Granted, they are not easily overthrown and their hold on us is not easily shaken off. People despair, as possibly you may have done, of overcoming the power of evil in their lives and of clearing the way for the coming of the Kingdom.

However, all evil can be resisted and eventually overcome. Of this we constantly need to remind ourselves. Having seen evil in their thoughts and in retrospect in their actions, a person is able, if he or she implores the help of the Lord, not to will it, but to shun it and afterwards to act against it: if not wholeheartedly, still he or she can exercise constraint upon it by combat, and at length turn away from it and hate it.' wrote Swedenborg, (*Divine Providence* 258).

Swedenborg also wrote that if we will concentrate on one thing; one shortcoming of which we are aware; on one particular area where we know selfishness and evil is influencing us, and make up our minds to overcome it, this is enough to initiate the process of spiritual rebirth and get it under way. This can be the starting point of the coming of the Lord's kingdom into our lives. This is where it will have all begun.

The Lord's Kingdom holds within it the promise of a new order and of better things. But it will not come while we sit back and wait for it and so long as we think it is up to others to make the effort. It can only come as people like you and I strive for the reordering of our lives and so make it possible for the Lord to establish it within us.

The Swedenborg Programme – Number 126.

<http://www.swedenborg.com.au>