

Seeking God's Kingdom and Will

We live in an age of rampant materialism, in which everyone seems to be grasping after the latest gadgets, the latest fashions, the most up to date models.

Can this ever change?

But is this a new phenomenon? Listen to this written 500 years before Christ in the book of the prophet Haggai where God challenges him.

⁵ *Now this is what the Lord Almighty says: "Give careful thought to your ways.*

⁶ *You have planted much, but harvested little. You eat, but never have enough. You drink, but never have your fill. You put on clothes, but are not warm. You earn wages, only to put them in a purse with holes in it."*

⁹ *"You expected much, but see, it turned out to be little. What you brought home, I blew away. Why?" declares the Lord Almighty. "Because of my house, which remains a ruin, while each of you is busy with your own house."*

These words are so contemporary for us today. The technology and the resources in our time far exceed Haggai's and yet the underlying cravings are no different. Greed, materialism – call it what you will – is still an age old and probably universal characteristic, yet the irony is, it seldom seems to bring happiness, all too often indeed the reverse.

The issue that Haggai's society faced, as we face today, is really where is God in our world today?

The problem is when we put our trust and hope in transient things and when things wear out or fall to pieces then we are helpless and hopeless, if that's where our trust has been placed.

Jesus knew this to be the case. He was able to get to the root of our human problems. He identified this as our broken relationship with God and the result of this is that people become anxious and worry about all sorts of things in life.

But he knew that there was another way and a way to live that would bring fulfilment to life and that was – in his own words – to seek the Kingdom of God and his righteousness and the ironic thing is that when we do this, then Jesus said, all these other things will be added.

He came to be the bridge between humans and God and he came to bring in a Kingdom but a Kingdom that must be entered through faith and trust in him.

We say each week, Your Kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in Heaven.

What are we actually saying?

We are praying for God's reign to come upon the world.

We are praying that this world might be a better place, where the will of God is evident for all to see.

Wouldn't it be wonderful if this was the case?

But in the life of Jesus, we glimpse this Kingdom

We see a reversal of the human idea about power.

Consider his life...Born as a baby in a manger – raised as a refugee, brought up in poverty. What kind of a Kingdom is this?

The Jews of Jesus' day were waiting for a Messiah, a King who would fight their battles and overturn the Roman Empire with the sword.

But Jesus comes to live and proclaim a different Kingdom, not of power and might but of weakness and humility.

He never wrote a book but more books have been written about him than anyone else in the whole of history.

He never painted a picture or composed any poetry or music but nobody's life and teaching have been the subject of a greater output of songs, plays, poetry, pictures, films, videos and other art forms.

He never raised an army but millions of people have laid down their lives for his cause.

He never spoke to more than a few thousand people and yet his followers constitute today the largest religious grouping the world has ever known.

His public teaching lasted only three years and was restricted to a small country and yet his message today is carried round the world.

He had no formal education and yet thousands of universities and colleges are built in his name.

He never owned any property, he had to borrow a boat to sail in, a donkey to ride on, and even a coin to use for an illustration, but all around the world today thousands of buildings have been erected for the sole purpose of teaching his followers and adding to their number.

How did this happen?

Simply because the Kingdom of God has come and is coming through Jesus Christ.

He was opposed and rejected. People asked, how can this be the coming of God's Kingdom?

Jesus preached often about this Kingdom. His parables were Kingdom based. In Matthew 13, he tells a series of parables about the Kingdom – beautiful, insightful and he speaks about the Kingdom of God being like a small mustard seed sown in the ground; like yeast in the dough, it begins small, something of little worth and yet it grows to become the greatest of all plants.

But his parables also speak of a day when God would harvest the world. Here, the Jewish expectation was right because Jesus speaks about the Kingdom coming in power and glory.

There will be a harvest, Jesus said a sorting out, a sifting, a judgement. This is the fulfilment, the finale, the coming kingdom.

And he tells his disciples, pray for the coming of the Kingdom.

The Lord's prayer is an encouragement to those who have experienced Jesus' Kingdom, to continue to pray for the fullness of the Kingdom still to come.

The Lord's prayer is a prayer that encourages the disciples to keep an eye on the end times. To pray for the coming of God's Kingdom in glory, to pray for Christ's return when he will return not as gentle as a lamb but as a powerful King.

The King of all glory!

To pray, your will be done on earth as it is in Heaven, is to pray that earth and Heaven will be brought into conformity and the Bible tells us that this day will

come. In Revelations, John speaks about a new heaven and a new earth coming down upon us. Rev 21.

On that day, God's time and ours are merged together and eternity begins.

It's a prayer of hope. Hope that God will decisively bring about the end times and these end times are not something for the Christian to be fearful about but rather something to rejoice in because his Kingdom will be restored, the perfection of the first garden will come again and the will of God will be done for all eternity.

But his Kingdom began with his death, like a seed falling into the ground and taking new life. If the resurrection was a hoax then this new Kingdom would have disappeared. But his Kingdom began with a few followers, who were frightened and fearful men and women but with the coming of the Holy Spirit, it empowered them to take the message of the Kingdom out and beyond the confines of Jerusalem and Judaism and to bring it to the wider world.

What does this look like?

The Kingdom looks like Jesus. It is characterised by forgiveness, love and grace. The Kingdom is opposed to all that is evil and would causes suffering and pain. The Kingdom comes to bring healing and eternal life.

Jesus called people to enter the Kingdom. He said Seek first the Kingdom and everything else shall be added. Mt 6:33 *Here is the secret of the Christian faith. To be a follower of Christ is to live in his Kingdom.*

How do we enter his Kingdom? With humility - acknowledging our need for Him, that he has come to bring forgiveness and grace and through we are members of God's Kingdom.

Then when we are in the Kingdom, we receive his spirit in our hearts, to live out our faith. His spirit is our teacher and will teaches us to do his will.

So as we pray each week, Your Kingdom come, your will be done. We are praying for God to enter our hearts, so that we can live for Him.

This is what will change the world.