

Thy Will Be Done:
A Lenten Sermon Series
To Restructure Your Preaching

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With sermons from

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Lent 1, Your Kingdom Come, Your Will Be Done

“Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.” (Matthew 6:10)

By Justin Rossow

Focus: Praying for God’s Kingdom to come and His will to be done, we remember Jesus’ past activity with thanksgiving, we long for Jesus’ future activity with hope, and we look for Jesus’ present activity with expectation.

Function: that the hearers would pray for God’s Kingdom and God’s will with thanksgiving for the past, with hope for the future, and with expectation for the present.

Structure: Cause and Effect

<https://concordiatheology.org/sermon-structs/thematic/causeeffect/>

- I. Praying for God’s Will and Kingdom, We Remember the Past with Thanksgiving.
 - A. Praying with Thanksgiving for the Past
 - B. Jesus and the Active Reign and Rule of God
- II. Praying for God’s Will and Kingdom, We Long for the Future with Hope.
 - A. Hope at a Graveside
 - B. Hope for a Broken Relationship
 - C. Hope in Confusing Circumstances
- III. Praying for God’s Will and Kingdom, We Entrust the Present with Expectation.
 - A. Write Down a Present Prayer Need or Burden
 - B. Write Down 1) Thanksgiving for Jesus’ Kingdom Activity in the Past
2) Something about the Future Promise that Gives You Hope
 - C. Pray B1) and B2) and then Pray A)

Prayer of the Day

Lord God, Heavenly King, Almighty God, and Father, let Your active reign and rule be present in my life today. In the realm of politics and world history, let Your gracious will prevail. Within the bounds of my own home and family, be present in love and power. In the citadel of my will and the sanctuary of my heart, take up residence and reign; let my thinking, acting, and feeling be an expression of Your kingdom’s goal. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

I. Praying for God's Will and Kingdom, We Remember the Past with Thanksgiving.

A. Praying with Thanksgiving for the Past

The year was 2001 and I have to confess, I thought my very pregnant wife was crazy. The doctors said we should have no trouble making the trip from St. Louis to Indianapolis. The car was already packed. The baby shower was starting as soon as we got there. And the hospital was *in the wrong direction*.

But my wife, whom I love, was *concerned*. Something didn't feel right. And I knew, for her peace of mind (and therefore for mine) we would need to stop by the hospital "on the way out of town."

I cannot tell you how profoundly thankful I am for that decision. As it turns out, we never made it to Indianapolis. A week of bed rest and steroid shots was followed by an emergency C-section, and my first-born entered this world 16 years ago this month. Naomi was 6 weeks early, a 4lb 6oz little gecko of a baby, who spent her first week with a feeding tube and her first month and a half in the hospital. She came home for the first time on her due date.

If we lived in a different century or in a different part of the world, both my daughter and my wife would probably have died that day, and my story would be very different; my family's story would be very different.

So you can understand when I say that I can't celebrate my daughter's birthday without a sense of deep gratitude. I can't pray over my wife or any of my four children without a fundamental thankfulness. I know things could have been different; I know the people I love were brought from death to life; I know how precious and irreplaceable this gift is.

When I pray, I can't help but remember God's work in the past, and that work leads me to give thanks.

[Obviously, inserting your own personal story here would be best. Remember to give the narration a sense of time, rising conflict toward climax, and provide resolution. In this sermon, the narrative should be brief.

Basically, you want to tell a story from your personal experience that allows you to say at the end: "I know things could have been different; I know the people I love were brought from death to life; I know how precious and fragile this gift is.

When I pray, I can't help but remember God's work in the past, and that work leads me to give thanks."]

B. Jesus and the Active Reign and Rule of God

The disciples saw Jesus praying and they said, we want to be like that. We want to trust and believe and pray like you do, Lord. Jesus, teach us to pray.

That's part of what we are saying to Jesus this Lent as we explore what it means to pray, Thy Will Be Done. Before that was *our* prayer, it was Jesus' prayer. And when Jesus teaches His followers to pray, He invites them to pray like He does.

Jesus invites us to address God as OUR Father, not just His Father, and our Lord's prayer begins by asking that God would let His name be holy, that God would cause His Kingdom to come and His will to be done, in heaven so also on earth.

But Jesus did more than *ask* for God's reign and God's will to become a reality: Jesus *made it happen*. Jesus began His ministry by proclaiming that the active reign and rule of heaven, the Kingdom of God was now near at hand. Jesus *brought God's kingdom* and *did God's will* wherever He went.

The miracles are often exactly that: Jesus bringing God's eternal reign into the real lives of real people in real time. No power of darkness could hold authority over people when Jesus shows up on the scene! This is God's Kingdom reign! Demons are ousted, sins are forgiven, the poor in spirit are welcomed home, and the kingdom banquet begins as the worst kind of offenders sit at table with the King Himself.

Jesus' entire ministry from start to finish was about bringing God's Kingdom and God's reign on earth as in heaven.

And when King Jesus rides into His capital city to shouts of Hosanna; when King Jesus ascends the throne of the cross, crowned with thorn; when they nail His death sentence above His head with the same hammer that drove metal spikes through His hands, don't miss the kingdom activity of the God who promised that on the mountain of the Lord it would be provided.

"Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews," the sign read. And we could add, "He makes *God's Kingdom come* and *God's will be done*."

So when we pray that prayer, when we pray for God's Kingdom and God's will, we can't help but remember Jesus and His Kingdom work in the past. If Jesus hadn't died on that cross, we know things would have been different; we know in His resurrection that people we love were brought from death to life; we know how precious and irreplaceable this salvation gift is.

One way to experience the prayer Jesus taught us is to *remember Jesus Himself, and His work* that brought about God's reign and God's will for us. Then we pray that Kingdom prayer with *a deep sense of gratitude*.

II. Praying for God's Will and Kingdom, We Long for the Future with Hope.

But the prayer for God's Kingdom and God's will is not only a prayer of thanksgiving for the past. If God *proved Himself* faithful to fulfill His Kingdom promises in Jesus, you can count on the fact that He *will be* faithful to bring about the final completion of those promises. God's will was done at the cross and open tomb, but God's Kingdom reign isn't finished with us yet. That connection affects the way you pray the Lord's Prayer.

A. Hope at a Graveside

A woman stands at the graveside of her uncle. The pastor reads from a small book [*holding hands like a book*] marked with a golden cross. His words rise above the cold wind: "May God the Father, who created this body, may God the Son, who by His death redeemed this body, may God the Holy Spirit, who in baptism made this body His holy temple, keep these remains until the resurrection of all flesh."

And then they all pray, quietly, together: "Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name." The words feel so familiar on her tongue, they are a comfort just to say. "Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven."

"Yes," she thinks to herself, "yes! Let Your will be done, Lord: not just in heaven, but here on earth, too. Dear God, I know Your will for my Uncle is eternal life, and I know he is with you even now, but let Your Kingdom come on earth, as in heaven. Jesus, come quickly! Let that great day of resurrection come soon!"

That prayer at the graveside—"Jesus, come soon, and do what You promised!"—that prayer *longs for the future with hope*.

B. Hope for a Broken Relationship.

A man kneels down before bed, just like always. [*folding hands*] And he thinks of his son as he prays, just like always. He gets stuck at the phrase, "Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us..." The past shame of angry words and slammed doors still feels fresh. His guilt comes rushing back: how could he have let those insults stand between them as their final farewell? The sense hurt and betrayal still lies just beneath the surface...

So he forgives his son again, for the thousandth time in the last five years. And he asks his heavenly Father for forgiveness again, for the thousandth time. And he wonders if he will ever see his son again. And he wonders if his boy prays, and if his boy forgives.

The man sighs and starts the prayer again, from the top, and this time he doesn't get any farther than, "Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven."

And he hopes—not an empty wishful thinking, but longing tinged with confidence—he hopes for a broken relationship to be restored. He looks for the reunion that is *sure* to come, if not in time then *certainly* in eternity. In prayer, he *longs for the future with hope*.

C. Hope in Confusing Circumstances

The young couple—the young couple often holds hands as they walk together. [*holding hand out in imitation*] It gives them a time to talk, and sometimes to pray. The walks, and the prayers, have been slower and more difficult lately.

She didn't get the promotion she was expecting. His job feels overwhelming right now. They thought they had plenty of savings, but a couple of minor car accidents have added financial stress. They wanted desperately to start a family, but that wasn't happening quickly, and all kinds of doubts and fears have crept into their talk about the future.

"I don't know what to pray," he confesses. And she agrees. It seems hard even to come up with the right prayer request when so much of their life is up in the air.

But they keep walking. And they keep talking. And eventually they recall the promise: the promise that the Spirit helps us in our weakness, the promise that even when we don't know how to pray as we ought, the Spirit intercedes.

They remember the words of Paul, "Now we know in part, but then we will know fully, even as we are fully known." And those words are comfort *for right now*, but they also stir in their marriage a longing *for something more*, for a time when it won't be so confusing to pray, for the day when faith will be sight.

Since they don't have any other words right now, they simply pray the words that Jesus taught. Without a clear idea of what they are even asking for, they pray as they walk hand in hand: "Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven."

And they find, as they pray, that they don't just mean, *help this not be so confusing right now*. They also find themselves praying for *the Day*; the Day when they will know fully, even as they are fully known.

In the midst of their confusion, *they long for the future Jesus brings; and so they pray with hope*.

III. Praying for God's Will and Kingdom, We Entrust the Present with Expectation.

That's how prayer works. Praying for God's will and God's kingdom, we *remember with thanksgiving* the promises Jesus has fulfilled already. Because God has been faithful in the past, we have a *confident hope as we long* for Jesus to fulfill all of God's promises in the future.

And since we *remember with thanksgiving*, and *long for God's future with hope*, we can *entrust our present with expectation* that God will make His Kingdom come and His will be done among us also.

Our prayers are marked by *present expectation* in light of *past thanksgiving* and *future hope*. That's an experience of prayer I would like us to practice together in worship today.

A. Write Down a Present Prayer Need or Burden

You received a blank 3x5 card as you came in today (we have extras if you need one). On one side please write down a present prayer need or burden. It could be a relational or financial challenge. It could be a burden of grief or sin. Or maybe it's a question mark that stands for so much more than you could fit on a card that size.

Just focus on one prayer that seems to come to mind right now, and in a word or phrase, write it down. [leave time to comply]

That's a pretty heavy card right now. And we want to bring that need to God's attention in the name of Jesus. But first, flip the card over. On this side, you are going to write down two things.

B. Write Down 1) Thanksgiving for Jesus' Kingdom Activity in the Past

First, write down *something that Jesus has done in the past*, something that makes you *grateful*. It could certainly be something from your personal story. But it could also be from the story of Jesus. Perhaps you are especially thankful for the raising of Lazarus, because of what that means for someone you love. The calming of the storm might give you comfort and a sense of awe. Or maybe you cling to the words of Jesus about the poor in spirit. Put something down that lets you *remember Jesus and His past action with thanksgiving*. [leave time to comply]

B. Write Down 2) Something about the Future Promise that Gives You Hope

OK, one more thing for this side of the card. Now put down a word or phrase, *something about the future promise that gives you hope*. It might be a moment of reunion. It could be life in a resurrection body, or perhaps the music of angels and archangels around the throne. But try to put down *a detail about our future hope* that makes you *long* for Jesus to restore all things. [leave time to comply]

C. Pray B1) and B2) and then Pray A)

Thankful for God's kingdom activity in the *past*, *longing* for God's ultimate New Creation will to be done in the *future*, now you can flip the card over and spend some time entrusting your *present* concerns to God's will and God's kingdom.

Turn the card back over as many times as you like as you pray, and try to see your present prayer request through the lens of Jesus and His kingdom work in the past and in the future.

After we have had time to pray, we will continue worship with the next hymn. But take this card with you this week and see if *praying for God's will and God's kingdom in the present* is affected by God's will and God's kingdom *in your past* and *in your future*.

We kneel for prayer.

Taking Worship Home small group discussion questions

Discuss one or more of the following with a friend or family member.

Share a personal story that makes you deeply thankful. What could have happened? What happened instead? How did that shape your future? How was Jesus present?

Name 5 promises Jesus has already fulfilled. Then name 5 promises Jesus is still going to fulfill. Which list was easier to come up with? Why would that be?

We pray the Lord's Prayer in different contexts: weddings, funerals, bedtime, Communion, etc. How does the context affect your experience of the prayer?

Talk about one or more of the following with someone who can point you back to Jesus and his love for you.

Are you more likely to focus on the past or on the future? Does it make a difference?

If you are in a group of 8 or more, consider breaking up into twos or threes. Then:

A. Share something Jesus has done in the past for which you are grateful.

B. Share something about our future promise in Christ that gives you hope.

C. Share a personal struggle or burden in the present, and allow someone to pray for you based on what you shared in A. and B.

Lent 2, The Gethsemane Prayer

“Not as I will, but as you will.” (Matthew 26:39)

By Dan Weber, with Justin Rossow

Focus: God’s good will is life and love for His children.

Function: That my hearers would pray “nevertheless” in faith, trusting God’s good will.

Structure: Multiple Story Structure

<https://concordiatheology.org/sermon-structs/textual/genre/narrative/multiple-story-structure/>

I. Introduction—Acknowledge the freedom and the fear that comes from submitting to another’s will.

II. Main Idea 1—It’s scary to entrust ourselves to someone else’s will. Because it might not be for our good. (Stated inductively at the end of the section).

A. Story of Rapunzel in her tower inductively gets at the main idea.

B. Seeing God through the lens of Rapunzel

III. Main Idea 2—Even when we *do* trust someone else’s will, it’s more about trusting the person rather knowing the particular details of their plan. (Stated deductively at the beginning of the section).

A. Story of a parent needing a child to trust *them* to solve a problem.

B. Seeing God through the lens of a child’s trust

IV. Main Idea 3—When Jesus prays, “Nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will,” it’s the prayer of faith, and it’s the proclamation of God’s faithfulness.

V. Conclusion—Seeing God through the lens of the Gethsemane prayer leads us to pair Jesus’ prayer with contemporary petitions of God’s people.

Prayer of the Day

How, Lord? How did You submit to the Father’s will like that? Within hours, You would be beaten, mocked, and tortured; slowly, painfully, wrongfully executed. Jesus, how did You face this soul torment alone? Faithful Friend, do not leave me in my hour of need. Be present in the midst of my temptation. Strengthen my flailing trust. Empower my weak resolve. Let me lean on Your prayer in the garden and teach me more and more to pray: not as I will, but as You will. Amen.