

One of my favorite columns by Erma Bombeck tells of God in the act of creating mothers. She says that on the day God created mothers he had already worked overtime. An angel said to him, “Lord, you sure are spending a lot of time on this one.” The Lord said, “I’m close to creating someone very much like myself. I’ve already come up with a model who can heal herself when she is sick, who can feed a family of six with one pound of hamburger and who can persuade a nine year old to take a shower.”

Then the angel looked at the model of motherhood a little more closely and said, “She’s too soft.” “Oh, but she is tough,” said the Lord. “You’d be surprised at how much this mother can do.” “Can she think?” asked the angel. “Not only can she think,” said the Lord, “but she can reason, compromise and persuade.” Then the angel reached over and touched her cheek. “This one has a leak,” he said. “I told you that you couldn’t put that much in one model.” “That’s not a leak,” said the Lord. “That’s a tear.” “What’s a tear for?” asked the angel. “Well it’s for joy, for sadness, for sorrow, for disappointment, for pride.” “You’re a genius,” said the angel. And the Lord said, “Oh, but I didn’t put it there.”

Moms are somewhat biased and a bit prejudiced when it comes to their own children. Oh, they try not to be, but let someone try to hurt their child or treat their child unfairly and you’ll hear the growl of a mama grizzly bear! The mom in today’s scripture is named Mrs. Zebedee, the mother of James & John.

The story begins this way: *Then the mother of Zebedee’s sons came to Jesus with her sons and, kneeling down, asked a favor of him. “What is it you want?” he asked. She said, “Grant that one of these two sons of mine may sit at your right and the other at your left in your kingdom” (20:20-21).* “You don’t know what you are asking,” Jesus answers, with all the seriousness of his teaching about the kingdom. Of all the lines in the Lord’s Prayer, “*your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven*” is so crucially important because of its broad implications. It asks for God to exercise God’s rule and reign in every part of his Creation. That implies a rejection of other rulers and authorities that are out of sync with the reign of God. It confronts us by asking “Who is the legitimate king of our lives?” Unless it’s God, kingship brings no blessing but rather steals blessing from the very people it was meant to serve. Power and wealth, might and militia, apart from the staying, guiding hand of God, turns to bitter ideology and wasted lives.

The Bible points us to Jesus as the true King. He redefines kingship. And his kingdom reverses the usual way of doing things.

R.C. Sproul writes in his book, *The Prayer of the Lord*,\* “Jesus was brought before the Roman authorities on the grounds that He was making Himself King. He didn’t make Himself King, the Father made Him King. But just as God had been rejected as King by the ancient Israelites, Jesus was rejected as King in the time of His incarnation. The Jewish leaders brought Him before Pilate, the Roman governor. That led to a fascinating exchange: Pilate...said to Him, “*Are You the King of the Jews?*” Jesus answered, “*My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, my servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now my kingdom is not from here.*” Pilate therefore said to Him, “*Are You a king then?*” Jesus answered, “*You say rightly that I am a king. For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth.*” (John 18:33b-37a)

What was the truth to which this King, whose kingdom is not of this world, was bearing witness? It was the kingdom of God. He was testifying to the reign of the true King. Thus, when Jesus told His followers to pray, “*Your kingdom come,*” he was making them participants in his own mission to spread the reign of God on this planet so that it might reflect the way God’s reign is established in heaven to this day.

Sproul goes on to say, “I had been a Christian only a few months when I was invited to a Christmas party hosted by my pastor and his wife at their home...During this party, he called me aside and asked me this question:

“R. C., what is the kingdom of God?” I had no earthly idea. I didn’t know what he was asking and I certainly had no idea why he was asking it.

Well, suppose someone asked you that question: What is the kingdom of God? How would you respond? The easy answer would be to note that a kingdom is that territory over which a king reigns. Since we understand that God is the Creator of all things, the extent of His realm must be the whole world. Manifestly, then, the kingdom of God is wherever God reigns, and since He reigns everywhere, the kingdom of God is everywhere.

When Jesus told Pilate, “*My kingdom is not of this world,*” was He indicating that His kingdom was something spiritual that takes place in our hearts or was He speaking of something else? The whole Old Testament called attention not to a kingdom that would simply appear in people’s hearts, but to a kingdom that would break through into this world, a kingdom that would be ruled by God’s anointed Messiah. For this reason, during His earthly ministry, Jesus made comments such as, “*If I cast out demons with the finger of God, surely the kingdom of God has come upon you*” (Luke 11:20). Similarly, when Jesus sent out seventy disciples on a preaching mission, He instructed them to tell [surrounding] cities that “*The kingdom of God has come near you*” (Luke 10:11b). How could the kingdom be upon the people or near them? The kingdom of God was near to them because the King of the kingdom was there.

When He came, Jesus inaugurated God’s kingdom. He didn’t consummate it, but He started it. And when He ascended into heaven, He went there for His coronation, for His investiture as the King of kings and Lord of lords. So Jesus’ kingship is not something that remains in the future. Christ is King this [very] minute. He is in the seat of the highest cosmic authority. All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to God’s anointed Son (Matt. 28:18).

To be honest, we will no doubt experience conflicted loyalties when Jesus tells us to pray, “*Your kingdom come.*” When we pray this line do we expect all other kingdoms to fall? R.C. Sproul says, “There is a logic that runs like a ribbon through the Lord’s Prayer. Each of these petitions is connected to the others. The first petition Jesus taught us was, *Hallowed be your name,* which is a plea that the name of God would be regarded as holy. Unless and until the name of God is regarded as holy, His kingdom will not and cannot come to this world. But we who do regard His name as holy then have the responsibility to make the kingdom of God manifest. John Calvin said it is the task of the church *to make the invisible kingdom visible.* We do that by living in such a way that we bear witness to the reality of the kingship of Christ in our jobs, our families, our schools, and even our checkbooks, because God in Christ is King over every one of these spheres of life. The only way the kingdom of God is going to be seen in this world

before Christ comes is if we manifest it by the way we live as citizens of heaven and subjects of the King.”

If Mrs. Zebedee was in tune with what Jesus was saying about the kingdom, I’m sure she approaches Jesus with caution and concern as she is asking, “*Lord, will you grant that my two sons James and John have positions of authority in your new kingdom? Lord, could you place them on the right and the left?*” So when she came to the Lord Matthew says she came “*kneeling down*” before Jesus to make her request. At first appearance it seems as if Jesus is chastising the mother of James and John. The audaciousness of asking such a request! She seems so presumptuous.

But Jesus simply reminded her of the cost of being seated on the right or left and told her that it is the Father’s business to determine who will be seated on the right and left. Jesus calls his disciples together and tells them “*whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant*” (20:26).

R.C. Sproul\* also tells about a trip he took to Eastern Europe to do a series of lectures in three countries, first in Czechoslovakia, then in Hungary, and finally in Romania. “As we were leaving Hungary, we were warned that the border guards in Romania were quite hostile to Americans and that we should be prepared to be hassled and possibly even arrested at the border.

Sure enough, when our rickety train reached the border of Romania, two guards got on. They couldn’t speak English, but they pointed for our passports, then pointed to our luggage. They wanted us to bring our bags down from the luggage rack and open them up, and they were very brusque and rude. Then, suddenly, their boss appeared, a burly officer who spoke some broken English. He noticed that one of the women in our group had a paper bag in her lap, and there was something peeking out of it. The officer said: “What this? What in bag?” Then he opened the bag and pulled out a Bible. I thought, “Uh-oh, now we’re in trouble.” The officer began leafing through the Bible, looking over the pages very rapidly. Then he stopped and looked at me. I was holding my American passport, and he said, “You no American.” And he looked at the woman holding the paper bag and said, “You no American.” He said the same thing to the others in our group. But then he smiled and said, “I am not Romanian.” By now we were quite confused, but he pointed at the Bible, gave it to me, and said, “Read what it says.” I looked at the verse from Philippians 3:20 and it said, “*But our citizenship is in heaven.*”

The guard was a Christian. He turned to his subordinates and said: “Let these people alone. They’re OK. They’re Christians.”

As you can imagine, I said, “Thank you, Lord.” This man understood something about the kingdom of God—that our [ultimate] citizenship is in the kingdom of God.”

That is what we acknowledge by faith, and that is the way we vow to live our lives, every time we pray the words “*Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.*” Amen and Amen.

\*© 2009 R.C. Sproul. *The Prayer of the Lord* Published by Reformation Trust. Kindle Edition.