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 Texts: I Chronicles 29:10-13, I Timothy 1:17

Thine Is the Kingdom, and the Power, and the Glory

Introduction to Scripture

This summer we have been considering the Lord's Prayer. We come now to the ending, "For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever." You won't find these words in the Lord's Prayer as we have it in Matthew and Luke, as they were a later addition. But they have become an important and traditional part of the prayer. They are not novel words. Words like them--doxologies, you could call them--are sprinkled throughout the scriptures. We'll hear two examples now.

The first is a prayer by King David. This prayer he offered at what you could call the capital campaign commitment event for the first temple which his son Solomon would build : *I Chronicles 29:10-13*.

A second example of a doxology common especially in the letters of the New Testament is found in I Timothy: *I Timothy 1:17*.

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God!

Sermon

We just lived through August, the month that is named for Caesar Augustus. Augustus means "great, great in stature, venerable, revered." Caesar Augustus was the founder and first emperor of the Roman Empire which he ruled from 27 BC until his death in 14 AD. He didn't get and keep his power by being a Boy Scout, as it were. He was a very shrewd politician and a successful military leader. He laid the foundations of a regime which lasted nearly 1500 years. He was in his own words, "master of all things." ¹ The legacy of Caesar Augustus is certainly august.

By the time Jesus was born, Augustus had been emperor for nearly a quarter of a century. He ruled territory that stretched from Gibraltar to Jerusalem, from Britain to the Black Sea. He had done what no one had done for two hundred years before. He had brought peace to the whole wider Roman world. *Pax Romana* came with a price, however, a price paid in cash by subjects of far-off lands and with the giving up of the ideals of the old Roman Republic. Power was concentrated in the hands of one man whose kingdom stretched from sea to shining sea. As one scholar put it, "With Caesar Augustus, you have in a nutshell the whole structure of human empire: a kingdom of absolute power, bringing glory to the man at the top, and peace to rest on those whom he favored."

We just lived through August but revisit with me the story we usually hear only in December. "In those days," Luke writes, "a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that

all the word should be registered.”ⁱⁱ This king in Rome lifts his little finger and in a province 1500 miles away a couple makes a dangerous journey. In just a few verses Luke moves us from the marble halls of great Roman power to the birth of a poor baby whose crib was a feed box for the animals. But this baby was not just any peasant child. He was the new king. But a very different sort of king. There was no question for Luke which ruler made the angels sing.

Yes, and watch what happens now, Luke says. The birth just so happens to be in a town mentioned by the Hebrew prophets as birthplace of the Messiah. The Messiah, the prophets foretell, will not be a great warrior or a finely dressed king. The Messiah will be in the mode of a shepherd who feeds his flock. His strength and his majesty won't come from any human source but from Yahweh, the Lord. He will be a man of peace. His kingdom will be established and upheld with justice and righteousness.ⁱⁱⁱ And it is at this birth—the birth of the baby in Bethlehem on the outer reaches of Rome's empire—that the angels sing of glory and peace.

Herod was threatened by the news of this newborn king brought him by the Wise Men. If someone had told Augustus what the angels had said to the shepherds, he would have been threatened, too. Suddenly, as we watch what Luke is doing, the scene is no longer just a sweet story of rustic shepherds paying homage to the infant king. It becomes a startling contrast, a statement of two kingdoms, kingdoms that are destined to compete, kingdoms that offer radically different definitions of sovereignty, power, and glory.

Here is the sixty year old king in Rome, standing in his toga gazing out the window on the capital he has restored. He represents perhaps the best that pagan kingdoms can do. At least Augustus knows peace and stability are good things; unfortunately, he has had to kill a lot of people to achieve them, and to kill a lot more, on a regular basis to maintain them. Unfortunately, too, his real interest is in his own glory. As emperor he took on as one of his titles “son of a god.” Many of his subjects have begun to see him as divine.

Here, by contrast, is the child king, wrapped in swaddling clothes, nestled in his mother's arms in a Bethlehem stable. Already he has a price on his head. He represents the dangerous alternative, the possibility of a different empire, a different power, a different glory.

The two systems stand over against each other. Augustus's empire is like a chamber lit at night with beautiful lamps. There are pools of light, but outside it is still black as pitch. The lamps have not overcome the darkness. Jesus' kingdom is like the morning star rising. It signals it's time to blow out the lamps and throw open the curtains. A new day is dawning.

It is this two-fold vision of reality that we invoke every time we pray those words that conclude the Lord's Prayer: “For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever.”^{iv}

These words are not in the earliest and best manuscripts. But we can't imagine this prayer without them. It would be like Handel's Messiah without the Hallelujah Chorus. It would be like the Bible without the book of Revelation. The Lord's Prayer doesn't conclude with a casual “over and out.” It ends with an exclamation point! It

ends with a trumpet blast! “For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever!”

While these words are lacking in the oldest manuscripts, it would be wrong to suppose that the Lord’s Prayer was ever prayed without some closing words of praise to God. It would be unthinkable for a Jew of Jesus’ day to end a prayer with the words “deliver us from evil.” It was customary for prayers in Judaism to conclude with a “seal,” i.e. a sentence of praise freely composed by the person praying.^v Surely this was what Jesus intended with the Lord’s Prayer and what the congregation did in the early church. By the second century the words of the seal which have come down to us became fixed. They resonate exactly with the rest of the prayer as a whole: God’s kingdom, God’s power, and God’s glory are what it’s all about. It is a prayer that the alternate vision of reality which Jesus embodied may be not just a vision, but become totally realized; that it may operate not just in heaven but fully on earth. It is a prayer that chooses the baby in Bethlehem over the king in Rome.

Let’s unpack the three affirmations. First: “*For thine is the kingdom.*” This is a bold declaration of allegiance to God. It is a promise of obedience to the sovereign who is above all others, to whom all others must give account. Thy kingdom--or better, thy kingship, thy reign, thy ongoing project--is what is real in this world. We may be tricked into thinking that Wall Street or Madison Avenue rule the world but when we say this prayer, our blinders are off. This is our Father’s empire, not Augustus’s nor any other pretenders to the throne. God created it. God rules it. And we pledge to be subjects of this king. For thine is the kingdom.

Next: “*And thine is the power.*” When we pray this prayer we are trusting that God not only hears us but is able to act. We believe that despite appearances to the contrary, ultimate power isn’t in the Halls of Washington or the Palaces of the Kremlin or the party buildings in Beijing. It’s not in the hands of suicide bombers or terrorist organizations. As followers of Jesus we have the peculiar idea that true power-- God’s power--is often manifested in the most unlikely places—a manger in Bethlehem, a cross on Calvary, and empty tomb in a Garden. St. Paul put it this way: “[God’s] power is made perfect in weakness.”^{vi} We risk trusting this strange God who executes power not like a tyrant but a shepherd, more intent on the power of love than the power of violence. For thine is the power.

And, lastly: “*thine is the glory.*” We use that word (glory) loosely to mean the honor, reputation, or fame that some kind of human achievement can bring. Augustus had his glory, to be sure. But true glory belongs to God alone. When we declare this, we remind ourselves that every moment, whether we are paying attention or not, we are in the presence of divine glory. That’s because God is always with us. God is at every moment upholding the creation she has made. We see it when we look at a mountain or a tree. And we see it in the lives of those whom God is transforming. We bend our knee and bow our head at this glory. Thine is the glory, we pray.

For thine—thine!—and no other’s —is the kingdom, the power and the glory, forever!

In a prison camp in WWII, on a cold evening after a series of beatings, after the hundreds of prisoners of war had been marched before the camp commander and harangued for an hour, when the prisoners were returned to their dark barracks and told to

be quiet for the rest of the night, someone, somewhere in one of the barracks began saying the Lord's Prayer. Some of his fellow prisoners lying next to him began praying with him. Their prayer was overheard by prisoners in the next building, who joined them. One by one, each set of barracks joined in the prayer until, as the prayer was ending with , "Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory," hundreds of prisoners had joined their voices in a strong, growing, defiant prayer, reaching a thunderous "Amen." And then the camp was silent. But not before the tables had been turned, the prisoners had thrown off their chains, and a new world had been sighted, signaled, and stated.^{vii}

An elderly lady in one of my churches very devoutly prayed aloud the Lord's Prayer every single night. Even in her last days as life was draining from her, when she had really become nonverbal, saying little else, her daughter told me she managed to voice this prayer. On her last night in the face of the kingdom of death, the power of disease, and the glory of this world, she proclaimed those triumphant words to her Lord, "Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever."

It's a proclamation the church has been making since its earliest days. It's a pledge of allegiance, a confession of trust, and an act of reverence to God and God alone. It's a crescendo scored for full orchestra and organ that totally drowns out the loudest "Hail Caesar Augustus" the world can shout. Say it with me, "For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever, Amen."

i. <http://www.nndb.com/people/956/000087695/> on 8/29/16

ii. Luke 2:1

iii. See Micah 5:1-6 and Isaiah 9:4-7

iv. The entire beginning of this sermon is heavily indebted to N. T. Wright, *The Lord and His Prayer*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), pp. 77-81.

v. Joachim Jeremias, *The Lord's Prayer*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1964), p. 32.

^{vi} II Corinthians 12:9

vii. Will Willimon and Stanley Hauerwas, *Lord, Teach Us to Pray*, (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996) p. 108-109.