

Lord's Day 48

January 6, 2019

Willoughby Heights CanRC

Rev. R.C. Janssen

Read: Revelation 19:11-21:8; 22:1-7

Hymn 63:3

Text: Lord's Day 48

Amen-song: Hymn 45:1,2,3

Dear children of God, brothers and sisters in Christ, and guests, during the afternoon services we are learning how to pray properly, how to pray as God commands, to pray for the things, all the things, we need for body and soul. Two weeks ago we saw how our number one need is that God's glory be evident in our life. We were created in God's image: we exist to rule creation so as to reflect God's character of love and loyalty. We need to know what God is like to do that, and praise Him in all our activities, so that everyone will praise God because of us. God is to be number one in our lives and so our number one need in life is that we live for God.

This afternoon we turn to the number two thing we are to ask of God. Now this second request is not separate from the first. God's person is considered special, God's Name is hallowed, when God is recognized for who is. Who is God? The most important person who has ever existed, all-powerful, ever-loving, ever-loyal. God is the best king there is, the strongest, the most fair, the most kind. For God to be praised, He is to be recognized and acknowledged as almighty, righteous, and merciful. That's why the second thing we've been taught to pray by our Saviour is "Your Kingdom Come". Our second-most-basic need in life is that God be recognized and acknowledged, by ourselves and by all people, as Ruler Supreme. As we heard this morning, our focus needs to be on God's Kingdom, not our earthly kingdom.

We listen to God's instruction to pray for the coming of His Kingdom with this theme: Pray for God's Kingdom to be victorious. We will consider (1) the war; (2) the enemies; and (3) the battles.

1) The war

War. We may not all have personal experience with war, we can all vividly imagine what it's like. Our world has been at war for so long now. We hear of wars in South Sudan and Syria, of the war against Isis, of the tensions that continue in eastern Europe since Russia claimed Crimea, of the seemingly never-ending war between North and South Korea, of the forgotten wars of Africa. War is horrible. War rips families apart. War submits individuals to indignities. War uproots. War destroys. No one likes to think of war. No one wants to be at war.

Our reality though is that we are at war. A war of cosmic proportions. A war that involves every single human being, not just the ones who are alive on earth today, but even the ones who continue to live with Christ. It's the war we find described in Revelation 19 & 20. Revelation is the Bible book that reveals, that makes known. According to its opening verses, it makes known what must soon take place. It began pretty much after John had seen the Revelation. The destruction of Jerusalem marked how serious we have to take God's judgment. However, the war did not end there. Revelation spans all of history, and history continues. The war continues, the war of Revelation 19. The reign continues, the reign of Revelation 20 over a war-torn creation. The final victory of Revelation 19 and the final judgment of Revelation 20 have yet to take place. The new creation of which Revelation 21 and 22 tell does not yet exist.

This cosmic war, as Revelation 19 tells of it, began with Pentecost. However, the reason for this war goes back much further in history. Pentecost began a new phase in the war, but the war itself goes back to the beginnings of time. This war began when God Himself, as Almighty God, devoted in love and loyalty to His creation, placed enmity between evil and good, between those against God and those for God (Genesis 3:15). The Old Testament recounts for us how God's people were pushed back, time and time

again, and how only by God's miraculous intervention those who seek good were saved from being conquered by evil. The Flood of Noah's time, the building of Babel, the liberation from Egypt, the Return from Exile. The Old Testament is the phase of the war where God's Kingdom was on the defensive.

Then, in the history of time, came the battle that turned the war. The Son of God was born a human being, to be the Christ, the anointed king of whom Psalm 2 had spoken. He fought against demons, against outsiders, and against a disobedient covenant people. He was despised and rejected, hung on a cross as one cursed by God. That's where the battle was fought that turned the tide in that cosmic war. When our Lord Jesus Christ cried out "It is finished" all had been done to secure the victory.

Direct access was gained to God's throne, the victory over hell.

Christ arose from the dead, the victory over the grave.

Christ ascended to heaven and was seated at the right hand of the majesty of God, the victory over all opposition.

With the ascension, a portion of God's Kingdom had been liberated from evil. Satan and his armies were banned from heaven, what one might call the capital city of God's Kingdom.

Now, Golgotha was the battle that turned the war from a losing one to a winning one for God's people. But the war wasn't over yet.

True, earth is not the same as it previously was. Earlier, God's people had become limited to just the people of Israel. But now, in view of the fact that Christ has all authority in heaven and on earth, the commission is to make *all the nations* students of Christ. As we read in Revelation 20, Satan was bound so that he could no longer deceive *the nations*. However, the powers that are against God still do their utmost to thwart the advance of God's Kingdom. With Golgotha the fighting of God's people changed from defence to offence, from protection to attacking. But it's still war. Golgotha was the decisive battle but it was not the last battle. When John wrote (Rev. 19:19): "I saw the beast and the kings of the earth with their armies gathered to make war against him who was sitting on the horse and against his army" he spoke of the time that stretches from his day all the way to today and for whatever time yet remains before the beast is captured.

It's war. It's war in our hearts as sinful desires do battle with the desires of the Spirit. It's war in our lives as God's will and human wills clash in private and public life. It's war in creation as those who seek the good and right do battle with those who are self-seeking and evil, believers and angels led by Christ doing battle with unbelievers and demons led by Satan.

That war is the focus of our request to God "Your Kingdom come." It's the prayer request that we may serve God as our King, that God's Kingdom might be protected and grow, and that God's enemies might be destroyed.

2) God's enemies, who are they?

"I will put enmity" God said as the consequences of the Plunge into Sin became clear. There's public enmity. Enemy number one of God's people would be those who are not human but sought to take the place of humans in defiance of God's created order. They are the fallen angels, the devils or demons, the evil spirits, led by Satan (Rev. 20). They are the rulers, the authorities, the cosmic powers over this present darkness, the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places (Ephesians 6:12). They are also any human force that openly fights the Kingdom of God. They are the beast and his prophet (Rev. 19).

During the time soon after the Exile Haman the Agagite, in all likelihood an Amalekite by ethnicity, was such an enemy. He was an instrument in the hands of Satan to destroy God's special people. Today, such an enemy is Islam. Satan uses Islam to oppress Christianity, to destroy it by brutal force or by government oppression. Another such enemy is a totalitarian government that makes no allowance for true Christianity. I think of North Korea and China. These are public enemies, easily recognized as enemies of

Christ. These are works of the devil, powers that raise themselves against God.

Besides such public, easily recognized enemies there are those who operate in a subtler way. They are guerilla fighters and terrorists, lone cells that are ideologically connected to the enemy, but not directly, not in an immediately obvious way.

Such an enemy might be a philosophy, a way of thinking, that does not correspond to the world as God made it. For example, the idea that the future is always better than the past. It suggests that the faith of our fathers is outmoded and we need to update our religion in every way, by, for example, deconstructing the family and tolerating all forms of gender identity and sexual practice. Today the idea is becoming more common that everything is relative, that absolute truth and absolute reality cannot be known with certainty. As a result, the absolute claims of God through recorded revelation are ignored. Another enemy that seems to be more on our radar these days are new ways of reading and applying Scripture. The clear message of Scripture is obscured by, is hidden in the fog of cultural interpretation. That's how people figure they can justify women in office.

Publicly recognizable enemies: anti-Christian powers. Less easily recognized enemies that look like friends: false ideas and heresies. There's one more type of enemy. They are spies and infiltrators. It's the enemy that literally dwells in our hearts. For it's the desires of the flesh.

Hypocrisy would be such an enemy. You pretend to live according to all the commandments of God and yet you don't. You're big on doctrine, dotting the i's and crossing the t's, and spend many a late night gambling or on pornography websites. Indifference is such an enemy. You live the Christian life when you feel like it, and usually you don't feel like it, so often you don't. You come to church when it suits you, you don't care about growing in Bible knowledge, you don't become enthusiastic about church activities, the fact that many people around you will eternally perish, you just don't care. Another such enemy is smugness, elitism. You've got it all in order: you go to church twice a Sunday, you wear that fine dress, that sharp suit, you confess the Reformed doctrine with all its details, pay your contributions. It's the smugness of the Pharisee who thanked the Lord he wasn't like the tax collector. It's the smugness of the church at Ephesus, faithful in doctrine but it had lost its first love, its zeal. Smugness turns God's Kingdom of love into a dictatorship of judgment and small-mindedness.

Beloved, God's Kingdom has many enemies. Many types of enemies and many enemies of each type. External enemies that seek to prevent God's Kingdom from expanding. Internal enemies that seek to turn God's Kingdom into an empty shell. Enemies that look like wheat, good Christians, but prove to be weeds, children of the devil.

God is at war with these enemies. How that war goes and will end we know, we read about it from Revelation. We know for a fact that God's kingdom will prove victorious in the end. Thus the Catechism also says we are to pray this request *until* the fullness of God's Kingdom is a present reality. *Until*. Not so *that*, as if it might still be up in the air. No, *until*. We know the victory is ours because the decisive battle has been won by Christ. Golgotha lies behind us.

But again the war is not yet over, there are still battles that have to be fought. We're all called to be soldiers of the cross.

3) Let's pay attention, in the third place to the battles being fought.

A question up front, who exactly is doing the fighting on behalf of God's Kingdom? And how do they fight? Scripture gives us clear answers to these questions.

The charge is led by a general seated on a white horse. The colour white here points to both purity and victory. He is called "Faithful and True", which is parallel to the description "faithful witness". He wears a robe dipped in blood – that would be His own blood. He's been injured in the battle. His name is "Word

of God” and His title is “King of kings and Lord of lords.” Boys and girls, it’s not hard to figure out who this is, right? This is obviously the Lord Jesus Christ. The Saviour of the World has been enthroned as King of the Universe and is now establishing His Royal Rights on the earth.

How does He do that? We read in Revelation how the weapon of war is a sharp sword that comes out of the mouth of the general. Again, it isn’t hard to figure out what that refers to. For what comes out of a person’s mouth? Is it not words? And isn’t the Word of God referred to as a sword in many places in Scripture? And wouldn’t it make sense for the general of God’s armies who goes by the name “Word of God” to have the preaching of the Gospel as His weapon of choice?

The general of God’s army is King Jesus and His weapon of choice is the Gospel proclamation.

That’s the general. Who make up His army? Revelation 19 and 20 make that clear to us. Chapter 19:14: “The armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses.” That “fine linen, white and pure” was spoken of just a few verses earlier as being what the Bride of the Lamb wears. That suggests the armies of heaven is the church of God. Chapter 20 suggests the same. Verses 4&5: “Then I saw thrones, and seated on them were those to whom the authority to judge was committed. Also I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus and for the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended. This is the first resurrection.” So the people who sat on the thrones – that’s a way of saying they are rulers – are people who partake in the first resurrection. What is the first resurrection? It’s what happens when a person turns from unbelief to faith, when a person who is dead in sin becomes alive unto God.

The army of God’s Kingdom is God’s church. Revelation 19 calls them the armies of heaven. But that’s not because all the soldiers come directly from heaven. That’s because all the soldiers are part of an army that is commanded from heaven. Heaven is where God’s throne is. Heaven is where Christ, the general is. Heaven is the headquarters from where the battles for God’s Kingdom are coordinated. Hence “armies of heaven”. However, the church on earth is as much involved as the church in heaven.

Christ is the general. His weapon of choice is Gospel proclamation. And all who belong to the church, past and present, are soldiers in God’s army. You and I are soldiers in God’s army, called to fight the enemies of God’s Kingdom. The more recognizable enemy, the less recognizable enemy, and even the enemy that resides among us, even in our own hearts. You and I and all God’s people are called to fight God’s battle.

How do we fight? With the sword of the Spirit. That’s the Word of God. With Gospel proclamation. As such, the second petition ties in directly with our home visit theme for this year. “Be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast and holding forth the word of life.” It is by reaching out with the Gospel, in word and deed, that you take part in the battles being fought by God’s Kingdom.

And do note, brothers and sisters, those battles aren’t just being fought to *defend* what we have. No. We don’t live in that era when God’s people were on the defensive. That’s how things were in the Old Testament. That’s not how they are today. It’s been Good Friday. It’s been Easter Sunday. It’s been Ascension Day. It’s been Pentecost. Christ has all authority, all authority [where?] in heaven and on earth. And that’s why “Go and make students of everyone without distinction.” And how? Christ promises to be with us and made good on that promise by sending us the Holy Spirit, who empowers us to do what needs doing, what needs doing *by us*.

What needs doing by us. Ah, now we see why “Your Kingdom come” is our second request to God. We, you and I, have a role to play in the victory of God’s Kingdom over evil. I exist to glorify God – that was the

first petition. I glorify God by fighting God's battles – that's the second petition.

But I don't like fighting. I don't feel comfortable fighting. Fighting myself, my selfish lusts. Fighting others. Not just to defend myself. But to win others out of darkness into God's light. I don't like fighting. But I'm called to be a soldier. I need help.

No wonder Christ had me pray "Your Kingdom come." It's a prayer, first of all that I might be a willing soldier in God's Kingdom. It's a prayer also that all our fighting for God's Kingdom may be successful. In these three ways. That the church may be preserved. That the church may grow: that's Gospel outreach. And that the enemies might be destroyed: that would include being a visible presence in the public square.

And all of that is to go on until the complete victory is obtained. The complete victory. We read much of what Revelation tells about the war from Pentecost onwards. Have you ever noticed there is no final battle? Revelation 19:19 tells us how the enemies assemble together. And verse 20 tells us how the beast was captured. No mention of a battle. Revelation 20:7-9a tell us again how the enemies assemble together and head out to battle. Verse 9b tells us that fire consumes them, it never comes to a battle. (Cf. Revelation 16:12-21). The victory is ours, before the enemies of God fully realize it they are defeated and destroyed.

Pray for God's Kingdom to be victorious.

This is our request in relation to the church. It's the prayer for mission and evangelism, for outreach in every way, shape and form. When you pray "Your Kingdom come" you're asking God to have you be those shining lights of Philippians 2 that hold onto and hold forth the word of God.

"Your Kingdom come": "God, make me an able and willing soldier in your army."

For it's by expanding God's Kingdom that we, in this day and age, bring glory to God's Name.

Amen.