

First Presbyterian Church of Birmingham  
"For Yours Is the Kingdom, and the Power and the Glory Forever"  
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Luke 2:1-14; Micah 5:2-5a

His was the kingdom, power and the glory. He was the savior for whom the people had been longing. He was the one who brought peace to the world. He was the king of kings and lord of lords. He was the one of god and perhaps even a god himself. He was Emperor Caesar Divi filius Augustus, or as we know him Caesar Augustus, the man who truly created the Roman Empire. Oh, who were you expecting me to say? That I was talking about Jesus? Not yet, but we will get to that. I am talking about Caesar Augustus, because without understanding his role in this story we cannot fully appreciate the end of the Lord's Prayer. But to understand that, we need to turn to our story out of the Gospel of Luke.

For many of us, this Luke story belongs only at Christmas. When we read about a journey to Bethlehem, angels and the birth of a child we think about A Charlie Brown Christmas in which Linus retells this story. We think about children dressed as shepherds in bathrobes and head bands and sheep in fluffy costumes. It is a cute and comforting story. Yet, for those who first heard this story, it was neither of those things. This was a radically subversive story intended to shake the Roman Empire to its core. It was a direct challenge to Augustus and those who followed him, because the story made it clear that there was a new savior in town and he did not live in Rome. In fact, this savior was a Jewish infant born in a stable in Bethlehem. And so, when the early Christians began adding the phrase, for yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever, they were making both a political and a theological statement. For us then to pray the Lord's Prayer with the intent of those who professed it in the early church, we need to understand those two parts of the story.

First, the political statement - I realize that in our highly charged, political climate, people may wonder if this is a Democratic or a Republican political statement. It is neither. Instead it is a statement concerning where one's ultimate allegiance lay. By adding, "yours is the kingdom, the power and the glory," the early church made clear that these three realities, kingdom, power and glory, belonged to the only true king, and that was God and God's Son Jesus. These attributes did not belong to Augustus nor any of his successors. This meant that the primary allegiance of God's people, of those who followed Jesus, was to God first and secular governments second. This belief is central to the entire Bible. We are taught that we are to love the Lord our God with all of our heart, mind, soul and strength. We are to proclaim that God is one and that we are to have no other gods, before this God. In other words, God is to be the one to whom we give our loyalty before anything and anyone else. I would argue that this is exactly why the early church added these words. They were a reminder to the early Christians that while they were to be good citizens of the Empire, that if it came to a choice between the Empire or Rome and the Kingdom of God in Christ, the latter always won.

Second, by adding, "yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever," the early church made clear that those three realities, kingdom, power, and glory, had taken on new meanings; that they no longer meant what Rome thought they meant. And so what I want to do is to take a few minutes and unpack these, so that as we pray them, we will have a clearer understanding of what it is that we are saying.

For thine is the kingdom - The Kingdom for Augustus meant Rome was for Romans. While this may seem like a “duh” statement, in the Roman Empire only a small percentage of people were citizens. The vast majority of people were either slaves or barbarians who had few, if any, legal rights. And even among Roman citizens there was a strict hierarchical class system with little mobility between classes. Thus, all power and privilege was only for the few. The Kingdom of God in Jesus Christ was extraordinarily different. This kingdom was a radically inclusive community in which all persons were invited to participate on an equal basis. There was no discrimination. It was open to men and women, slave and free, Jew and Gentile, Roman and barbarian, rich and poor. There was no hierarchy or class system. All were to share not only their goods, but their spiritual gifts. This was a Spirit led community whose sole allegiance was given to God in and through Jesus of Nazareth.

For thine is the kingdom and the power - power for Augustus and Rome was military power. It was legions of soldiers. It was violent invasion and conquest. It was crucifixion. It was the foundation of what brought them to power and kept them in power. The power of the God in Christ, was the exact opposite. It was peace. It was the power of Shalom. Shalom, the Hebrew word for peace, does not simply mean a lack of violence. It means the wellness and wholeness of individuals and communities. Shalom was the power of God that made it possible for the church to be the inclusive community that God desired it to be. Shalom healed broken relationships. Shalom allowed for forgiveness and reconciliation. Shalom allowed people to resist the temptations of the world. Shalom was a gift of God in and through faith in Jesus Christ which was given by the Spirit. Shalom was an attribute, according to Micah, of the coming messiah, and as such provided the power to transform the world from one of hate and violence into one of love and grace.

For thine is the kingdom, and the power and the glory forever. Glory for Augustus meant the undying adulation of the people. It meant parades of slaves taken in his conquests. It meant statues and Temples being built in his honor. It meant having everything in the Empire focused on him. Glory for the early church was the opposite. Glory was the love, grace and presence of God focused on the world. The glory of God was God’s presence that traveled with the people throughout history; watching over and protecting them. The glory of Jesus was his willingness to give himself for the life of the world. In the letter to the church in Philippi, Paul speaks for Jesus not counting ‘equality with God’ something to be desperately grasped, but that instead he gave it up to become one of us, a human being, who was willing to die on the cross. This is the glory that is God’s. It is self-giving, that becomes a model for self-giving in the church. And it is this self-giving that makes possible, shalom, that makes possible the inclusive nature of God’s kingdom.

The Lord’s prayer has been part of my life as long as I can remember. I prayed it in church. I prayed it with my parents at bedtime. I have prayed it as an adult. Yet, until this study, I had not spent much energy or effort to explore its deeper meaning. What I have come to realize is just how revolutionary this prayer is. It is revolutionary because we are giving our primary allegiance to God and to no others; Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be your name. We are praying for the inbreaking of God’s radically inclusive community; Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. We are praying for God’s shalom, God’s peace that binds all people together. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. We are praying for God’s protective and guiding presence so we might continue to the shalom community God desires us to be. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.

My challenge to you then is this, as you pray this prayer, ask yourself how am I not only seeing this as a revolutionary prayer, but how is my life reflecting this revolution in how I live, love and share my life in Christ with the world.