

We have been taking a close look at the description of Paul and Timothy's prayer for the Colossian church that is recorded in the first chapter of the letter to the Colossians. Paul was in prison for his faith and Timothy was spending time with him at least during the time that this letter was written. Together they spend a lot of time in prayer for the churches. And in the part of the letter they wrote to the Colossian church that we have been studying, they tell the Colossians something of the content of their prayers for them. That is helpful for us because it gives us instruction concerning what we should be praying for the church and also for our own lives and because it gives us a lot of insight into the Christian life as Paul and Timothy understood it.

Last week we looked at verses 11 and 12. Verse 12 tells us that Paul and Timothy were praying that the lives of the Colossian Christians would be characterized by "giving thanks to the Father" and what particularly they were to give thanks for was that the Father had "qualified [them] to share in the inheritance of the saints in light." The next two verses are a continuation of this thought. They give more detail concerning one of the main reasons for giving thanks to the Father – namely salvation. And this is how they continue to describe salvation. "He [the Father] has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins." These words are a wonderful description of the salvation that is one of the main themes of the Bible. And it is given here as the reason that believers are to give thanks to the Father.

There is a direct relationship between the depth of our thanksgiving and our understanding of the terrible situation we are saved from. If we are saved from some little inconvenience, then our thanksgiving will be perfunctory. If you drop something on the floor and the person standing next to you is quicker than you and reaches down to pick it up for you, you say "thank you" but that gratitude is not going to dominate the rest of your life. It was a nice gesture and you gave a polite thank you and you get on with your life. But salvation is on the other end of the spectrum. God in Christ has saved us from the worst possible situation and transferred us to the best possible situation. And the thanksgiving that is appropriate is the meaning of the rest of your life and it will be a dominant theme of your life throughout eternity.

So it is worthwhile to dwell on what we are saved from. There are many different aspects to this. We will consider the one that Paul mentions here. He says that God the Father "has delivered us from the domain of darkness." So before we are delivered, we are in "the domain of darkness." And we are not able to get out of that domain on our own. We need to be delivered from it. That is, Paul says, what God the Father has done. He has delivered us from the domain of darkness."

The domain of darkness is an awful place to be. We saw last week that the term "inheritance" that Paul uses for salvation in verse 12 is rooted in the idea of the promised land of the OT. The whole Exodus story of the deliverance from Egypt to the gift of the promised land is a foundational story for the whole biblical teaching about salvation. Much of the language and imagery that helps us to understand salvation in Christ is rooted in the OT story of God's deliverance of his people from the slavery in Egypt and his bringing them to the

promised land. The slavery in Egypt typifies what we are saved from. And is in that light that we are to understand this term “the domain of darkness.” It is the kingdom of Satan and by nature we are slaves in Satan’s evil kingdom.

The Greek word that is here translated as “domain” literally means authority. If we are in the domain of darkness we are under the authority of the prince of darkness. Douglas Moo in his commentary on this passage has a helpful description. “People who have not been rescued by God in Christ live in a power structure that is characterized by the forces of chaos, evil, and judgment.”

One of the ways that the Bible refers to this domain of darkness is using the terminology of this age and the age to come. This present age is the domain of darkness and the age to come, which begins with Jesus and the resurrection, is the age of salvation. Galatians 1:4 says that Jesus “gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age.” This present evil age is in some way under the authority of the devil. Not in the sense that the devil is ever on the same level as God in authority, but in the sense that at the time of the fall the devil was given a level of authority over mankind to hold them in bondage.

2 Corinthians 4:3 refers to Satan as “the god of this world [who has] blinded the minds of unbelievers....” Jesus just before he went to the cross said in John 12:31, “Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast out.” And in Ephesians 2:2 Paul refers to the devil as “the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience.” Verse 3, “among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.”

What this means is that outside of salvation human beings are slaves of Satan which means that they are slaves of sin. In 2 Timothy 2:26 Paul expresses his desire that certain people who are opponents to leaders in the church “may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will.” Sin is slavery. It is slavery to Satan. In Romans 6:16 Paul writes “you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience which leads to righteousness.....”

This is some of what lies behind the term “domain of darkness.” Believers in Jesus have been delivered from “the domain of darkness.” The domain of darkness is the place of slavery just as Egypt was the place of slavery for the people of Israel before God delivered them.

A good way of understanding this is to compare the sin of the unsaved to an addiction. People who are addicted to drugs or alcohol are addicted to something that gives them short-term pleasure, but which is destroying them. So it is with people who have not yet been delivered from the domain of darkness. Satan keeps them in the state of addiction to sin which gives short-term pleasure, but which is ultimately destructive. Paul speaks of slavery to sin as leading to death. Sin is a form of death and it leads to eternal

death. Sin separates from God who is the source of life and light. There is a certain pleasure in sin, but Satan blinds the minds of unbelievers so that the truth of its destructiveness is hidden from them.

It is so important that we all view the life of the unsaved world in this way. There is a certain attractiveness to it. Live as you please. Satisfy your urges any way that you please. Indulge in all the pleasures that suit your fancy. Fit in with the surrounding culture. Escape the disapproval of the surrounding culture for holding views that are considered to be intolerant and bigoted. There is an attractiveness to joining the world around us in following the desires of our hearts. And there are many who succumb to the temptation.

The Bible gives us the truth. The Bible gives us God's perspective on what is really going on. And he calls the realm of unbelief "the domain of darkness." There is short term pleasure. There is a certain attractiveness. But it is the realm of darkness. It is the realm of the lie. Satan blinds the minds of those who do not believe. He makes the life of following your own desires to look exciting and the life of following Jesus look constricting and boring. But the reality is that it is the domain of darkness. Satan is the God of this world and his goal is your destruction. The unsaved are slaves of sin and the life of sin is sub-human and a form of death that leads to eternal death. Do not go there.

Paul here is speaking to Christians and he says that God the Father "has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son." In this description of salvation we are passive. God is the actor in this verse, and we are the acted upon. We have been delivered. We have been transferred from one kingdom to another.

This does not mean that we are completely uninvolved in moving from the domain of darkness to the kingdom of Jesus. We are helpless to make this move in our own strength, but God's way of delivering us and transferring us involves bringing us from slavery to freedom so that we turn away from the domain of darkness and turn to the kingdom of Jesus. We reject the lordship of Satan and submit to the lordship of Jesus. But because we can do none of this apart from God's grace, the Bible can speak of it as it does in these verses. **We are delivered from** the domain of darkness and transferred to the kingdom of his beloved Son if we are living as Christians. No matter how much we are involved in moving from the domain of darkness to the kingdom of God, we know that ultimately God has delivered us and transferred us. Without him we can do nothing. And so we celebrate salvation as a gift of God to those who were in helpless slavery to sin and Satan.

We are transferred to the kingdom of his beloved Son. It is very significant that Paul describes salvation in terms of the kingdom of God. What this means is that salvation is part of something that is much bigger than us in our individuality. It is a wonderful thing that God loves every single one of his people individually and, because he is God, he is able to give them his full attention while giving his full attention to every other believer and to running the universe and unfolding his plan of salvation for the renewal of the whole creation. God is infinite in his presence and his awareness so that he can have an intimate relationship with each of his people while continuing to do everything else that he has chosen to do.

But the fact that being saved involves being transferred into the kingdom of Jesus means that each believer is part of something much bigger than themselves. Salvation is not individualistic. The overarching point of salvation is not saving you from hell and getting you into heaven. That happens, but it is part of something much bigger – something that believers are part of but not the focus of. That is the significance of this kingdom language in Scripture.

The kingdom is what salvation is all about. When we are saved we are “transferred ... to the kingdom of [God’s beloved Son.” That means that we become part of something that not all about us and our pleasure and our goals. The kingdom becomes the priority and the focus. In the domain of darkness, the god of this world blinds us so that we think that our lives are what we want them to be when in fact we are his slaves. People in the domain of darkness think they are free, but in reality they are slaves to sin and they are serving Satan’s agenda. When God delivers us from the domain of darkness and transfers us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, he does not hide the truth from us. He tells us up front that that we become part of his kingdom. That means that we do not exist for ourselves but for the king.

Just think of these words of Jesus from Matthew 6:3. Jesus says “[S]eek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness....” The kingdom of God is the priority. That is a huge part of what it means to be “delivered from the domain of darkness and transferred ... to the kingdom of [God’s] beloved Son.” When we are in the domain of darkness, we are focused on ourselves and we don’t understand that being focused on ourselves is slavery to Satan and leads to death. We were not created to be focused on ourselves. That is the way for a shriveled life that that is in fact a living death. When we are delivered from that and transferred into God’s kingdom, we are delivered from the focus on self and transferred to the kingdom where life is about serving the king. And that is actually freedom in biblical terms. We are created to flourish by living for God rather than living for ourselves. And the biblical language of kingdom is a powerful way of making that point.

The kingdom of God is one of the big themes in Scripture. The term is not used much in the OT, but the idea is everywhere. The story of the Bible is about how Satan set up a rival kingdom to God’s kingdom and how God is at work through history to bring the whole creation back under his rule. There is a sense in which God still and always is the king of the universe, but since the fall there is Satan’s kingdom which rejects God’s rule and there is God’s kingdom which God is growing through time with the end-goal being delivering a people from Satan’s kingdom and then finally condemning Satan’s kingdom to the lake of fire.

Jesus spoke of his mission in terms of the kingdom of God or the kingdom of heaven. He had an awful lot to say about the kingdom. He had come to bring God’s kingdom. What that meant was that he had come to defeat Satan’s kingdom and establish the rule of God on earth. What that meant in practice is undoing what Satan had done. Satan had tempted Adam and Eve to sin and so had brought sin and death in the world. Jesus came to undo the curse of sin and death and in so doing win the victory over Satan.

And Jesus invited sinners to reject Satan's kingdom and enter the kingdom of God by submitting to the reign of God. His message was the good news of the kingdom. And the good news was that by repenting of their sins and trusting in Jesus, sinners could be made right with God and become part of his kingdom. That would mean being delivered from the wrath of God that the coming of the kingdom will bring upon those who reject God's rule over them, and it would mean turning away from living for self to living for the kingdom of God. The focus of life now is seeking the kingdom. The priority their prayers is now "Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven...."

These words of Jesus about the God's kingdom in the Lord's prayer give us quite a bit of important information about the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God is about God's rule. It is about God's will being "done, on earth as it is in heaven." The kingdom of God is about God establishing his rule on earth as it is in heaven. And that is a good thing. Where God rules there is blessing. That is why the idea of kingdom is one of the ways that the Bible speaks about salvation. When God's rule is followed, people flourish. That is one of the great points that the Bible makes. We and the whole world are created to flourish when God's rule is followed.

Jesus' words about the kingdom in the Lord's prayer also teach us that God's kingdom has to do with everything. It has to do with God's will on earth, so it is about all of life. It is about God's will in every part of our lives. So it is about God's will for work and family and art and recreation and politics and education as well as God's will for church and evangelism and helping the poor. When we pray God's kingdom come, we are praying that God's will will be done in every aspect of life on earth. If you think of God's kingdom in the light of the whole biblical story you see that it is related to God's original intention for life on earth. It is about restoring life on earth to function according to God's will.

So when we are told to seek first the kingdom of God, we are being told to promote God's will being done on earth as it is in heaven. We are to seek to live our lives in such a way as to demonstrate by our whole lives what God's will being done on earth looks like. That is what it means to let our light shine before men.

Now a big part of that is preaching the gospel because it is through the gospel that people are changed so that they see that doing God's will is the way of fullness of life. Surely seeking God's kingdom means proclaiming to the world that God is King and that he is provided a way for his enemies to be forgiven and included in his kingdom. But seeking God's kingdom also has to do with living all of life according to the rule of the king and promoting that way of life by our lives and by our words.

So Jesus' model prayer which includes "Your kingdom come; your will be done on earth as it is in heaven," teaches us quite a bit of the meaning of the God's kingdom. And it helps us to see the blessedness of being delivered from the domain of darkness and transferred to the kingdom of God's beloved Son. The fact that Paul refers to it as the kingdom of God's beloved Son means that from the time of Jesus' resurrection, ascension and being seated at the right hand of God, Jesus is the member of the Trinity who is at the forefront

of bringing the kingdom and ruling it. Remember what Jesus said, just before he gave the great commission to his disciples, in Matthew 28:18, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.” God the Father does not vacate the throne, but he has put the rule of the kingdom in the hands of his beloved Son to bring to completion the work that he has begun by his life, death and resurrection. And when that work is done, according to 1 Corinthians 15:24-25, Jesus will deliver the kingdom to his Father. “Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet.”

All of this helps us to see what an exhilarating thing it is to be “delivered from the domain of darkness and transferred ... to the kingdom of his beloved Son....” Paul mentions it here as a reason for “giving thanks to the Father.” And these few thoughts about the kingdom help us to do that. What a glorious thing it is to have been rescued from Satan’s tyranny and transferred to the blessedness of the kingdom of God.

Paul ends this thought by reminding the Colossians and all believers that in Christ “we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.” This is also reason for thanksgiving.

The term “redemption” in Christ describes how believers have been delivered from the domain of darkness and transferred to the kingdom of God’s beloved Son. It was to do with the idea of being ransomed from captivity – from slavery. These ideas are all related to one another. The domain of darkness is the place of slavery to the one who seeks our destruction through the enslavement of sin. Redemption has to do with Jesus delivering us from the slavery by means of his death and resurrection. Jesus told his disciples that he had come to give his life as a ransom for many. (Mark 10:45) Paul in Titus 2:14 teaches that Jesus “gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous of good works.” And Paul in our text connection redemption with the forgiveness of sins.

Because of our sins we are under the curse of the law. Satan has power over us because of the spiritual deadness that is the penalty for sin. Jesus by dying in our place has exhausted the penalty for our sins and so we are set free from the curse of sin and the power of Satan. The forgiveness of sins is at heart of us being set free and redemption in Christ is the way that that happens.

And all of this is reason for thanksgiving. Paul in this passage gives us this rich description of salvation to stir up our thanksgiving. One of the ways that we are to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him is by “giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified [us] to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.”

This is a wonderful description of what it means to be saved and it is here so that we can dwell on it and savor it so that our thanksgiving may be roused. Thanksgiving is a key part of the Christian life and the way to grow in thankfulness is to dwell on what we are saved from and what we are saved to. And what a blessing that is!

You know, for those who are not believers there are invitations and commands to turn to Christ and be saved along with warnings of what will happen if they refuse. They should be thankful for what God has given them, but as long as they are refusing Christ, they have cause to fear what lies ahead of them. And their final state will be one of regret and suffering and misery.

But believers in Jesus are called to thanksgiving. And that thanksgiving is a response to the greatest possible gift and blessing. We have considered some of the facets of it. We are to be thankful because we have been delivered from the domain of darkness. We are to be thankful because we have been transferred into the kingdom of Jesus. We are to be thankful because we have redemption the forgiveness of sins. Thanksgiving is a form of joy. It is a form of worship. It is a form of relating to God. It honors God. And it is wonderful for us.

What reason then to dwell on the words and the phrases in Scripture that describe our salvation and God's plan of salvation for the whole creation! And to follow the example of Paul and Timothy in praying that our lives will be characterized by that thanksgiving.