

## ***THE PETITION FOR GOD'S KINGDOM***

Lord's Day 48

The Lord's Prayer, stanzas 3 & 10

Reading: Daniel 2:25—49

Psalter 182, stanzas 1, 2, 3, 6 & 7

Psalter 198, stanzas 1, 2 & 3

Psalter 187, stanzas 1, 2, 3 & 4

Beloved, the subject matter which we wish to consider at this time, you may find in Lord's Day 48 of our Heidelberg Catechism.

*Question 123: Which is the second petition?*

Answer: **"Thy kingdom come"**; that is, rule us so by Thy Word and Spirit, that we may submit ourselves more and more to Thee; preserve and increase Thy church; destroy the works of the devil, and all violence that would exalt itself against Thee; and also, all wicked counsels devised against Thy holy Word; till the full perfection of Thy kingdom take place, wherein Thou shalt be all in all.

The content of this Lord's Day is: *The petition for God's Kingdom*. With God's help we wish to consider three thoughts:

In the first place, *how this Kingdom begins*;

In the second place, *how this Kingdom continues*, and

In the third place, *how this Kingdom comes to perfection*.

Our first thought, *how this Kingdom begins*. "Thy Kingdom come". What is God's Kingdom?" Is that the same as heaven? No, because then it would not have said: Thy Kingdom *come*. Is then God's Kingdom the same as God's visible church? No, this also is not true, even though God's church has much to do with God's Kingdom. This is also noticeable in the answer. Nevertheless, we still may not say that the Kingdom of heaven is exactly the same as the church.

What then is that Kingdom of which the Lord Jesus said to Nicodemus: "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a man be born again, he cannot see the Kingdom of God?" What is that Kingdom of which Jesus preached, saying: "Know ye that the Kingdom of God is nigh at hand?"

In another place He said: "Behold, the Kingdom of God is within you." What is that Kingdom of which He said to Pontius Pilate that His Kingdom was not of this world, for then His servants would have fought for Him?

"Thy Kingdom come." God's Word speaks about the Kingdom of God in different ways. In Psalm 103 it speaks of *God's omnipresence*. His Kingdom ruleth over all. That means that the LORD is the King of kings and the LORD of lords. He is the Commander of everything. In that way He rules over heaven and earth, over man and beast, yes, even over the devils. The Kingdom of His power and of His omnipresence, however, are not meant in Lord's Day 48. No, here it speaks of the Kingdom of *God's grace*. That is a spiritual Kingdom with spiritual laws, with a spiritual King and spiritual subjects. It is the Kingdom of God's grace that the second petition speaks of: "Thy Kingdom come."

Who is the King of this Kingdom? God is King of this Kingdom, but in a very special sense it is Christ, the Mediator between God and man. He spoke these words: "All power is given unto Me in heaven and in earth." Here we see a great difference in the Kingdom of God's omnipotence, because in the Kingdom of God's omnipotence that power is not *given* unto the Lord. God had this power eternally and He will have this eternally. But this spiritual Kingdom of God's grace belongs to a King to whom the power was *given* Him by His Father. He was anointed to be King over this Kingdom. We read in Psalm 2 that the Lord says in His wrath to the raging of the heathens: "Yet have I set My King upon My holy hill of Zion."

So Christ is the King of that Kingdom. And who are His subjects? The subjects of that Kingdom are God's children here on earth but also the redeemed in heaven. This Kingdom is still divided. The Church here on earth is part of that Kingdom, but there is also a worthy part of this Kingdom in heaven. The subjects of this Kingdom are those, in whose hearts the Lord erected the Kingdom of His grace by regeneration.

"Thy Kingdom come." That is why that Kingdom begins in the heart of God's child. Our first thought was that we would consider how that Kingdom begins. Well, that Kingdom of God is formed when the Lord makes one from being dead alive and erects His spiritual Kingdom in the heart of His people. That is why that the Kingdom of God is not the same as the church, as the visible church. We find the Kingdom of God in that church and it is closely related with that church, but it is not the same. The Lord erects His Kingdom in the hearts of His children when He finds them in the hour of His good pleasure, when He finds them as enemies who have turned their backs to Him. When He finds them as vessels of the strong man armed—of the Prince of Darkness, then the Lord begins to erect the Kingdom of grace in their hearts with two weapons.

What are those two weapons? The first sentence of the answer to question 123 speaks about them: “Rule us so by Thy Word and Spirit.” They are the weapons by which King Jesus convinces His people: His Word and His Spirit. That is the sword that the mighty One from Psalm 45 girds upon His thigh, with which He rides prosperously because of truth and meekness and righteousness.

“Rule us so by Thy Word and Spirit.” It is the prayer of a heart that is born again. Those weapons have such an all conquering power. Listen closely, Word and Spirit, those two together. Those two have such an all conquering power that they changed a Paul of Tarsus, who was breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, from an enemy into a friend in less than a split second. These two weapons have such power that they can even work an about face in the most hardened enemy of God.

“Rule us by Thy Word and Spirit, that we may submit ourselves more and more to Thee.” To *submit* oneself to the Lord is one of the first-fruits of the new life—that is so Divinely simple. We make conversion so terribly complicated and so difficult at times, that it is almost impossible for man to follow. But in essence the work of conversion is so Divinely simple. If the Lord would convert someone at this moment, do you know what would take place in the heart of such a person? Such a person would submit himself to the Lord. Then that person would submit himself to His ordinances—to His will. Then the question is born: “Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?” It is hard to believe that Saul of Tarsus asked this of the same Jesus Who he was persecuting a few minutes *before*! “Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?” Then with ropes on their heads they come at the feet of Israel’s King. Then there is submission. God’s children do not become troublesome established people. They desire only *one* thing at such moments: mature

*Lord, to me Thy ways make known,*

*Guide in truth and teach Thou me;*

*Thou my Saviour art alone,*

*All the day I wait for Thee.*

Where these two weapons are used, the Word and the application of the Holy Spirit, then there is always a falling down before God, and a bowing before the Lord. Then our will is united with His will, and there is an asking after His law and a desire to walk in His ways. Really, these are the first fruits of the new life. Do we know something of that falling down before God, of that being in agreement with God, to prostrate oneself before God? It is such a good thing when one may kneel at the blessed feet of this King.

“Rule us by Thy Word and Spirit, that we may submit ourselves more and more to Thee.” That is one of the first fruits. When referring to “Thy Kingdom come”, then the instructor explains it in such a way that he does not first begin to speak about the church, neither about mission work, nor about the conversion of sinners. No, he first begins to speak about his personal life—about *his heart*. That is the beginning of God’s Kingdom on earth, that is where the Lord converts His people. Therefore Christ said to the Pharisees, when they asked Him when the Kingdom of God should come: “Behold, the Kingdom of God is within you.” In those days they expected the Kingdom of God to appear in such a way that the Lord would come as an earthly Conqueror to chase the Romans out of their country. Even though there were also other expectations of the Lord, the coming of the Messiah was, even with the disciples, mixed with such earthly thoughts about the Kingdom of God! Therefore the Lord deemed it necessary to say to the Pharisees: “The Kingdom of God is *within* you.” What He wanted to say with this was that His Kingdom was erected in the hearts of the disciples, who stood amongst the Pharisees, by His Word and Spirit. And when the Lord Jesus was about to leave the earth, the disciples could not but ask once more: “Lord, wilt Thou at this time restore again the Kingdom to Israel?” But the Lord Jesus, as He taught His disciples, constantly pointed out to them that His Kingdom was there. Do you know where? That Kingdom is there, where there are a people who bow in the dust before God.

Let us also hold on to that in this day and age! It is true, today we do not think about the earthly kingdom of the Messiah, of which the disciples dreamed, but many do think today that they can erect this kingdom with their own hands. There are many who exclaim that we have to begin to erect that Kingdom of God with our hands here on earth. But the Lord says that this Kingdom is within. He erects it. That is where it begins. The prayer of the Church is: “Thy Kingdom come”; that is, rule us by Thy Word and Spirit, that we may submit ourselves more and more to Thee.” God’s child wants to say: “Lord, there is so much in my heart that speaks out against Thee, even though I may not deny that Thou became too strong for me and that a moment has come into my life that I came into an agreement with Thee. There is still so much that rises up against Thee, also in my heart. There are so many high places that oppose Thee. There are so many things that I have to be won over for yet. And therefore: “that we may submit ourselves more and more to Thee.”

Our second thought, *how this Kingdom continues*. We will closely follow the explanation of the Catechism: “Preserve and increase Thy church.” You see, now it speaks about a Church. Even though we may not say that the Kingdom of heaven is the church, the instructor speaks here with great and hearty love about the Church of God. “Preserve and increase Thy church.” What is the difference between God’s Kingdom and the church? Why, God’s Kingdom is connected with the church, we find God’s Kingdom in the church, but it is not the same. We make a distinction between a visible and an invisible church. Well then, thus there are within

the church of God a people, in whose hearts the Kingdom of God is erected, but there are also those in the church, who are strangers of this Kingdom. The Lord Jesus used the example of the tares between the wheat that grew up together until the time of harvest.

“Preserve and increase Thy Church.” What does the instructor mean with the word ‘Church’? “Church” here refers to the way it is described in Lord’s Day 21. This is that congregation that was chosen from all eternity by the Father, which is gathered by the Son of God out of the whole human race, united in true faith and whom He will have until the end of days. Notice how the instructor says this. He does not say: “Preserve and increase our church”, but: “Preserve and increase Thy Church.” Oh, if we only would understand this. We can be so zealous for ‘our’ church at times. Oh sure, a hearty love for the congregation where the Lord has placed you, is always commendable. I always think that is it so sad when people leave the church where they were born and raised, and where, year after year, they heard the pure Word of God administered. Then they turn their back to it and sometimes change churches the way you change a coat, without shedding a tear. No, that is not right. That does not declare a warm association. It also does not affirm the seriousness of our life.

Nevertheless, let us not fight too much for ‘our’ church. When the Lord Jesus placed Peter in the office of apostle at the Sea of Tiberius, he received a three-fold mandate. Jesus said: “Feed My lambs”, “feed My sheep” and “feed My sheep”. The word ‘My’ is the same in all three mandates. It is as if the Lord Jesus wanted to say: “Oh Peter, never think that they are *your* lambs and that they are *your* sheep—they remain Mine! May that live in our hearts also. How weighty it is for an instructor to realize that he is not standing in front of *his* congregation, but in front of *God’s* congregation. “Preserve and increase Thy Church”.

What an amiable love is proclaimed to that Church in this answer. When the Lord in rebirth changes a dead sinner to one that is alive, then that sinner receives love towards God, love towards God’s day, love towards God’s Word, but also love towards God’s statutes and God’s Church.

“Preserve Thy Church”. But he also asked something else: “Increase Thy Church”. That also lies in the words: “Thy Kingdom come”. May we still pray for God to ‘increase His Church’ today? After all, the Lord has said that in the latter days it would not look so good. He clearly said in His Word that in the last days there will be few who will want to gather under that Word. In the letter to the Thessalonians Paul speaks of a great falling away on the earth, which will be in advance of the coming of the antichrist, that horrible revelation of Satan, the devil incarnate. He will sit in the temple upon God’s throne and he will say of himself that he is god. He will seduce all the earth after him. Ah, when we look around us, should we then not fear that the great falling away has already begun? Should we not fear that we are living in the midst of it especially when we look at the part of the world we are living in? I will not deny, that

in other parts of the world, flourishing congregations are coming into being, in which the Lord clearly gives testimony of His own work. But must we not say that as a whole, that it seems as if God's Church is drying up? That God's Word is being fulfilled concerning the great falling away? Did the Lord Jesus not ask His disciples if He would yet find faith on the earth at His coming again? He did not say that He would not find faith; He only *asked* whether He would find faith on the earth. This is a meaningful question. In other words, that true, saving faith will be so scarce when He comes.

Did the Lord not depict the Church as ten virgins, of whom there were only five that had oil in their lamps? But even those five virgins were sleeping at the coming of the bridegroom! Therefore I ask: "and may we ask also now 'Increase Thy Church'?" Yes! We may pray for that until the last day. Even though we know that hard times will come over God's Church, and even though John Calvin has said that grievous times will come in the last days that the whole visible church will become a heap of rubble (think about this for a moment!). Perhaps there will be no public worship services anymore, probably no catechism classes, perhaps only a few offices. Such times are to come. But nevertheless, the Church may continue praying this second petition: "Increase Thy Church". But why? Because the Lord has left His Church clear promises. Even though that church will become poor and scarce, afflicted, oppressed and will probably be destroyed, it will be true what we read in Psalm 72, Psalter 198:3:

*Then shall Thy fear on earth be known  
Long as the sun and moon shall shine;  
While endless generations run  
Kingdom and glory shall be Thine. (Psalter 198:30)*

This will be true, but also what we read in Psalm 22:

*Both rich and poor, both bond and free,  
Shall worship Him with bended knee,  
And children's children shall proclaim  
The glorious honor of His Name. (Psalter 49:3)*

What does the instructor have in mind when he asks: "Increase Thy Church"? Does he ask for more church buildings? Or that the membership numbers in the church directory may increase? No, that is not what he means. We often concentrate too much on church buildings and membership numbers. We can so be busy in this in a worldly way. But the instructor has something else in view. He first means to say: Lord, add to the congregation those that will be

saved. May children be born yet in Zion. Remember our younger generation. Lord, remember our children. May it become true what we sing at times from Psalter 199:3:

*His Name shall evermore abide,*

*In Him shall all the world be blessed;*

*By all the nations far and wide*

*His praise shall ever be confessed.*

May I ask a question of those who have learned to pray? You do not have to answer here, but you may answer it secretly before the Lord. “May you receive strength from these words spoken by God? Does it ever weigh heavy upon your soul whether the Lord might bring forth from the youth of the congregation, those who would love, serve and fear Him? People of God, do you ever pray for the youth of the congregation, for the boys and for the girls, “Increase Thy Church”? Ah, I know that there are many who with Esau would sell their birthright for a dish of lentils. There are many who would give up the sign of the covenant for the dregs of the world. But, people of God, over against this, that there may be supplications at the throne of grace, if the Lord would make true His own Word, that His seed shall worship Him. At a time of deep discouragement I received strength and courage from what it says in Psalm 22 verse 30: “*A seed shall serve Him: it shall be accounted to the Lord for a generation.*” Did you hear it?—“A seed shall serve Him.” And the Lord also has confirmed that He would do this.

“Increase Thy Church”. That question does not only refer to whether *children* may be born in Zion, but the question also refers to whether the Lord will take care of His *offices*. Do you know how you can recognize when the Lord takes away the candlestick of His Word? It has happened that God does not give any office bearers or that no servants are called into His service; that we do not find elders who fear the Lord. Congregation, then we can begin to appoint, but it is such a great difference whether *we* appoint or whether *God* appoints. And when the Lord wants to keep His candle stick, there He will also take care of the offices. Then He will see to it that there will be office bearers. Then He will see to it that servants will be called. The second petition also points to this: “Increase Thy Church.” What else does the second petition point to? That the Kingdom may continue to the ends of the earth and till the end of the world. The Gospel of the Kingdom has to be preached to all people, for a testimony unto them, and then shall the end be. For that reason, when the second petition lies heavily on the heart of a person then he will also have love for the work of *mission*. Although perhaps there are many faults that cleave to the mission work, nevertheless, may it have the love of our soul that His Kingdom might be extended unto the ends of the earth.

There is yet another part to the second petition: “Destroy the works of the devil”. If we let Holy Scripture speak, then I believe that the Prince of Darkness has tried to achieve four matters in the course of history. The works of the devil had their beginning in heaven. First he attempted to push God from His throne so that he could ascend it. After the seventh day a terrible revolution took place in the blessed regions of heaven—incomprehensible and not to be explored in our thoughts. There Lucifer was thrust out of heaven like a bolt of lightning. There the Lord with His mighty arm thrust Satan and his henchmen out of those glorious regions. His first attempt had failed.

Then Satan tried to achieve his second goal. He tried to strike God in the crown jewel of creation, in man. That must have been something for the holy angels that Satan was able to tear man loose from God. But Satan shouted and rejoiced too soon, for he had not taken into account the secret of salvation that the Lord was ahead of Satan by an eternity and that also the fall was recorded in that Divine decree. We may therefore say, that in essence, he also did not achieve his second goal, because the Lord, out of the fallen race, had chosen Himself a congregation, that will in due time, give Him all the honor. Satan tried to achieve his third goal, namely, preventing the coming of the Messiah, upon Whom the Church had hoped for centuries. When the Messiah was on earth Satan tried to tempt Him with his corrupt temptations. He tried to ruin the Surety-ship of the Mediator. Neither did he achieve his third goal, for the Mediator cried out: “It is finished”. At that time Satan’s head was bruised.

Today Satan is trying to achieve his fourth goal, but neither will he succeed there. We read about his fourth goal in Revelation 12, where there is written that “the dragon was wroth with the woman”... and...“with the remnant of her seed, which kept the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ.” His fourth attempt is to destroy the living Church here on earth, which lies in the heart of the living Child. That is the time that we are living in at the moment! “Destroy the works of the devil”. Three times the Lord saw to it that his works were destroyed; He will also destroy the fourth effort.

“And all violence which would exalt itself against Thee”. The instructor refers in particular to dictators, to the magistrates and powers who try to obstruct the Kingdom of God and who oppress the Church of God. “All violence which would exalt itself against Thee.” Casper Olevianus and Zacharias Ursinus wrote these words in the year 1563. They lived in the midst of the violence that exalted itself against God: the violence of Philip II of Spain, the violence of the Roman antichrist and the violence of the Inquisition and the Jesuits. Also in the Netherlands there came a time that the Council of Disturbances was instituted by Alva. That was a period of terror where the people were burned at the stake and the martyrs numbered into the ten thousands. “All violence which would exalt itself against Thee.” Never forget that



the drops of blood of the martyrs fell on the booklet of our Catechism. That at the stake, on the scaffold, in the flames many people died with this booklet pressed firmly to their heart.

What violence will exalt itself yet against the poor sheep of the Lord Jesus? Only read the book of Revelation, where the apostle John speaks of the vials and about the woes that will go forth over the earth. We are only living in the beginning of sorrows. Then the future will become dark for God's Church. Then violence will come whose ultimate goal is to go after the living Child, after the seed of the Child, after that woman, after the Church that brought forth the Child. But then I also read in Revelation 12 that when the dragon persecuted the woman, she was given two wings of a great eagle, so she might fly into the wilderness, and that those wings would keep her away from the face of the serpent. They are the wings of prayer. The second petition also belongs to these wings of prayer. "Destroy (...) all wicked counsels devised against Thy Holy Word." Yes, because the enemy is not only after God's *people*, but throughout the ages his aim was at the *Word* of God. We are not going to pursue this extensively, but the attacks took place in the Old Testament. Think about King Jehoiakim, who threw the roll of Jeremiah's prophesies in the hearth of his winter house, so that it burned up. Think about all the devices in the old church; so many hand written Bibles were burned. I think of the sixteenth century in the Netherlands, where it was strictly forbidden to have a Bible in the house. Many people were burned, because they had a Bible in their possession. Today most people have four or five Bibles. Do you think that the devil has stopped giving his wicked counsel against the Word? Oh, I believe that there has never been a time were God's Word has been more burdened under the devices of the Prince of Darkness than it is now, except, that now he does it in a different manner. You will not be burned at the stake for having a Bible in your possession, but now the Word is being dissected by human reasoning. Now the first three chapters of the book of Genesis have to be torn out of the Bible, because they are not in line with our human understanding. In the last century all the wonders in the Bible had to be eradicated, because enlightened man could not prostrate himself to these wonders. Today we are told that Jesus of Nazareth perhaps existed, but that He is still lying in the grave in which He was buried. The resurrection of Christ was only a figment of the apostle's imagination. Today they try to make us believe that the Bible is a book written by man interspersed with some Divine elements. Do you see that we are living in a time that is just as dangerous as the sixteenth century was? The petition: "and also, all wicked counsels devised against Thy holy Word", is still very valid.

We will sing now from Psalter 198: verses 1, 2 & 3.

Our third thought, *how this Kingdom comes to perfection*. We observed that the petition: "Thy Kingdom come", points in the first place to the spiritual Kingdom that the Lord erects in the heart of His children. The Church asks here whether the Lord by His Word and

Spirit will have this Kingdom come into their hearts, so that they would be more and more in subjection unto Him. In the second place prayer is made for the Church of God that it might be spared and may increase, and that the Lord may destroy the works of the devil and all violence which would exalt itself against God. But when it comes down to it, the petition "Thy Kingdom come," is a prayer for the timely coming again of the Lord Jesus on the clouds of heaven. "Thy Kingdom come" actually wants to say: *the King cometh!*, the anointed King of this Kingdom. There is a quivering in the words of this second petition for that anticipated longing of the Church, for the coming of her King upon the clouds of heaven, so that this Kingdom will be complete. As long as He does not come, it will only be a partial. Until He comes, there will always be a Church militant here on earth and a Church triumphant in heaven. It will be divided, even though there is the deepest communion. Here everything is in part. In the *world* it will be in part. Regardless of how the Lord may increase His Church, it will be in a world that lays in wickedness, where the Prince of Darkness has much to say. In the *church* it will be in part, because although there is wheat on the field of the church, there will also be chaff, and that will always be there. Also in the *heart* it will be in part. Thus it will all be in part: "Till the full perfection of Thy Kingdom take place, wherein Thou shalt be all in all."

The completeness of this Kingdom will take place when that mighty, anointed King appears upon the clouds of heaven, in the midst of the worldly woes, in the midst of the judgments and plagues that are recorded in God's Word, to deliver His Church. Then He will take His militant Church from the earth up into the clouds, to meet the Lord. Then the Church militant will be united with the Church triumphant. On the other hand, then the New Jerusalem will descend from God upon the earth. Then God will be all in all. Then the Lord Jesus according to the words in 1 Corinthians 15 will give back to His Father the Kingdom He received from His Father, because His Church no longer has a need for His Prophetic, Priestly and Kingly Mediatorial ministry. But then God will be all in all. Then there will be the perfection of that Kingdom.

Then the Stone, Who was not cut out by men's hands, will finally loose Himself from the mountain and will finally break into pieces that mighty image of these kingdoms of the world (whether it is the golden head of the Babylonish kingdom, or the silver head of the Persian kingdom, or the copper belly of Alexander the Great, or whether they are the iron legs of the Romish kingdom) because in essence that mighty image stood upon a clay bottom. A mixture of iron and clay has no foundation. But do not forget that the Kingdom of King Jesus does have a foundation! It is built upon the foundation of apostles and prophets, of which Christ is the utmost Cornerstone. Then that Stone, that simple Stone, will consume the kingdom of this world. Then that Stone will inhabit this world and the glory of that Kingdom shall have no end.

Well then, all that is in part will be destroyed. There will be no chaff among the wheat. There the Church triumphant will be united with the Church militant. It will be *one* Body. Satan will not disturb this world, but he will be cast into the bottomless pit, and the cover will be upon it.

Neither will there be strife anymore in the heart of God's child. There will be nothing in part anymore, but there God will be all in all. Oh, bear in mind, unconverted friend that will only be the portion of the subjects of that Kingdom who are incorporated by regenerating grace into God's Kingdom. Therefore, above all and every sermon ends this way: we must be born again, shall we see this Kingdom of God.

Then God's people will receive their heart's desire. God will be all. Is that not the desire of God's child, that the Lord may be all? That He may receive all love, all honor all adoration and all thanksgiving? There the Lord will be all in all! *Amen*