

## A PRAYER TO PREPARE

*Our Father in heaven,  
hallowed be your name,  
your kingdom come,  
your will be done,  
on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us today our daily bread.  
And forgive us our debts,  
as we also have forgiven our debtors.  
And lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from the evil one.  
(Matthew 6:9-13)*



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Refer to the *Illustrated Bible Life*  
commentary for further insights into this  
week's passage.

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## SESSION GOALS

**TO UNDERSTAND** that we live in a world that is hostile to the gospel.

**TO ACKNOWLEDGE** that the Holy Spirit empowers God's people to live at the intersection of the kingdom of God and the kingdom of this world.

**TO EXPERIENCE** the sanctifying power that Christ offers as a resource against the forces of this world.

## Living at the Intersection

Unit 1: Kingdoms in Conflict

SESSION

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*As Jesus shared His last meal with His disciples, He asked His Father to “protect them from the evil one” for “they are not of the world, even as I am not of it” (John 17:15, 16). Because all of creation has fallen into sin, Christians must stand in opposition to the things of this world.*

### Scripture Focus

John 17:13-19; 18:33-38

### The Word to Live By

*I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world (John 16:33).*

### Session Truth

Jesus came to assure those who live at the intersection of conflicting kingdoms that He is King and that God is always faithful.

### The Cross-Cultural Experience

Several years ago, I went to Shanghai, China, to teach English for the summer. I had a great time visiting interesting places, making great friends, trying new foods, and, I hope, doing some good for my students. At no point, however, did I forget that I was in a foreign land. I was among a people who spoke and read a different language, had different beliefs and priorities, and had different ways of doing some of the things that we did have in common. Similarly, those who live in the kingdom of God have a different culture from those who don't. However, the differences are over spiritual matters rather than the kinds of food we eat.

## Notes

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## Scripture Exposition

When Jesus was born, He entered the flow of history. More specifically, He entered the flow of salvation history—as a participant and as its culmination. For a very long time, God had been preparing a group of people whose beliefs and way of life made it possible to receive and understand His self-revelation in Jesus the Messiah, Savior, and King. In fact, Jesus' role as King is a major emphasis in the Gospels, and His call to prepare for the kingdom of heaven was the overarching theme of His preaching. In our study this quarter, we'll take a closer look at what life in God's kingdom entails, especially in contrast to the kingdom of the world.

### The Full Measure of Joy

**John 17<sup>13</sup>** “I am coming to you now, but I say these things while I am still in the world, so that they may have the full measure of my joy within them.”

**H**AVING the full measure of Christ's joy? If that's Jesus' goal, He has our attention right away. Who doesn't want a life full of joy? Life in God's kingdom is sounding pretty good right about now. However, we're getting a little ahead of ourselves. What, according to Jesus, makes this joy possible? Our passage begins partway through Jesus' prayer, so we'll have to go back to the beginning of the chapter to get the answer. When we do, we find that: Jesus has authority over all people and will give eternal life to His own (v. 2); eternal life consists of knowing the only true God and Jesus himself (v. 3); Jesus has done/is about to do what He set out to do (v. 4); He is going to receive His eternal glory (v. 5); the disciples have received a true revelation of the Father from Jesus and are confident that it is trustworthy (vv. 6-8); Christ's disciples belong to God and are protected by the

power of His name (vv. 9-12); disciples participate in glorifying Christ (v. 10); and disciples experience oneness with each other (v. 11). This gives us a good picture of the characteristics of the kingdom of God and what life in that kingdom entails. When these truths sink in and touch every aspect of our lives, we experience joy. It is important

### WORDpicture

*In the weeks leading up to Christmas day, Christians celebrate a season called Advent. Advent is designed to prepare worshipers for “the coming” of the Lord—of Christ's first and second comings. We'll be exploring Christ's “First and Second Advents” in this week's Illustrated Bible Life article.*

## ENGAGE INTEREST

### Cross-Culture

- ▶ Describe an experience you've had with another culture. What differences did you notice? Which differences did you like? Which seemed strange or made you uncomfortable?

### Transition:

“Culture” can be defined as “the shared beliefs and behaviors of a group of people.” Encountering cultures different from our own can be enjoyable and enriching, but it can also be confusing, unpleasant, and a cause of conflict. Of all the different sets of beliefs and behaviors, none are more at odds than those of the kingdom of God and the kingdom of the world. In this, and the next few sessions, we will take a closer look at what sets these two kingdoms apart.

## EXPLORE THE WORD

### What in the World?

*Have someone read John 17:13-19.*

- ▶ What outcomes does Jesus want to see in the lives of His followers (vv. 13-19)? Based on this, how would you summarize the kind of life we can expect as subjects in His kingdom? (Christ's presence in our lives is cause for joy. It is His desire that nothing interfere with that joy, not even the conflict of kingdoms. The conflict of kingdoms provides a perspective for living between Christ's first and second comings. Those who identify with Christ's kingdom are certain to be at odds with the kingdom of this world.)

- ▶ What is the “word” that Jesus gave to His disciples? (The word is God’s message to us about who He is and His desires for humanity. This message has been passed on to us through the biblical record and is most fully expressed in Jesus Christ. This is why we refer to the Bible as “God’s Word” and Jesus as “the Word.” They work together to show us who God is.)
- ▶ What does it mean to be “of the world”?
- ▶ How are Christians not of the world? How does Jesus’ not being of the world help us understand the way in which we are not of the world?
- ▶ Why do people who are of the world often hate rather than welcome those who are not?
- ▶ Why didn’t Jesus pray that Christians would be taken out of the world? (The world was created as the place where humans were meant to live, so we are not to be taken out of it in its earthly sense. We are to participate in God’s mission of saving as many people as possible, so we are not to be taken out of it in terms of being quarantined from those who live sinful lives.)
- ▶ What kind of protection from “the evil one” should we expect and not expect? (We can expect spiritual protection and the salvation of our souls. We cannot expect protection from all physical manifestations of evil or pain.)
- ▶ What do you think it means to be sanctified by the truth? (When we hear, believe, and live by God’s revelation, we are set apart for His service. By grace, we become more like God—we become holy.)

## Notes

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to recognize, however, that this joy is not the result of naiveté or being pampered and protected from difficulties

and conflict. Rather, it runs deeper and stronger than the very real trials we face.

### *What in the World?*

**John 17**<sup>14</sup>“I have given them your word and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world. <sup>15</sup>My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. <sup>16</sup>They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. <sup>17</sup>Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. <sup>18</sup>As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. <sup>19</sup>For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified.”

**NOW WE TURN** our attention to what stands in contrast and opposition to the kingdom of God: “the world,” or what we might call “the kingdom of the world.” This terminology can be confusing, so it is important to point out that “the world” is being used in two different senses. First, remember that God created the physical world as a good thing. Second, note that it is good to be “in the world” but not “of the world.” These two points help us understand that the issue is not about being located on the earth, but about what spiritual forces shape us. In other words, Jesus isn’t condemning this

earth and our physical existence; He is condemning a sinful way of living and being. The world was created to be in harmony with God, so when our earthly life is conditioned by godly beliefs, behaviors, and desires—by heavenly things “above”—it is good. However, we and the rest of creation have fallen into sin, and this has placed us in disharmony with the things above. Being “of the world” or “worldly” describes people and ways of thinking, behaving, and desiring that come from “below” and stand in opposition to God. If we have a top-down perspective in which the world is subject to God and we live accordingly, we have a godly life in the world. If we have a bottom-up (or a “bottom only”) perspective in which our beliefs, behaviors, and desires are shaped without reference to God or in opposition to God, we live a sinful life that is “of” the world.

Jesus’ prayer, therefore, is that Christians would continue to live holy

### WORDsearch

*In this unit, we are discussing the kingdom of God. Matthew uses the phrase “kingdom of heaven” instead of “kingdom of God.” These terms are interchangeable.*

## WORDpicture

When Jesus taught His disciples to pray the Lord's Prayer, He concluded the prayer with a request: "Deliver us from the evil one" (Matthew 6:13). And when Jesus prayed for His disciples in the Garden of Gethsemane, He asked God to "protect them from the evil one" (John 17:15). Apparently, the Lord regarded this evil one as a threat to believers. In both the Old and New Testament his name is Satan, which means, "adversary."

lives on this earth under His kingly rule, in spite of the opposition they will face. Conflict between the kingdom of God and the world is inevitable because the world's defining characteristic is rejection of its sovereign Creator and Savior. Yet there are limits to the harm that Christians will face. Each day we have spiritual protection. As we go about our business in God's kingdom, we need not fear the evil one. Jesus is our King, and He is faithful to lead us through spiritual battles with victory.

Though the world's negativity may

## WORDpicture

Jesus did not pray for His disciples to be taken out of this world but that they would be protected from the evil one. It was not a prayer for their escape, but a commitment to their victory. Our faith is to be lived out in the real world. While Jesus acknowledges that there is trouble in the world, He also reminds us: "I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).

have a legitimate impact on our emotions and some of our methods, joy—not sadness or despair—characterizes the life of those who are sanctified by the truth of God's Word. God's message of self-revelation is expressed through the scriptural record and most fully in the person of Jesus Christ. We are set apart to become holy people when God's self-revelation shapes our lives. No matter what earthly losses we face, we can't afford to compromise God's sanctifying truth to accommodate the world's desires. It is impossible to abandon God's Word without abandoning God and His kingdom as well.

## Contrasting Kingdoms

**John 18**<sup>33</sup>Pilate then went back inside the palace, summoned Jesus and asked him, "Are you the king of the Jews?"

<sup>34</sup>"Is that your own idea," Jesus asked, "or did others talk to you about me?"

<sup>35</sup>"Am I a Jew?" Pilate replied. "Your own people and chief priests handed you over to me. What is it you have done?"

<sup>36</sup>Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would

- ▶ How did Jesus sanctify himself and how does this contribute to our sanctification? (Jesus lived the way the Father wanted Him to live and His character reflected the Father's. Christ's example and teaching clarify how we are to live as well. When we are joined to Christ by grace, His holiness is expressed in our lives.)

## EXAMINE LIFE

### Kingdom Life

- ▶ What makes it most difficult for us to live in the world among people who don't have the kingdom's perspective? How can we strengthen ourselves in this context?
- ▶ What are some ways we can respond to conflict with the world that testify to the kingdom?
- ▶ Why do you think sanctification is an important part of being a part of God's kingdom? (It is important to clarify what Jesus is talking about when He uses the word "sanctification" without losing the primary focus of the lesson. Sanctification is not an add-on, but defines the essence of what it means to be a citizen of the kingdom of God. Sanctification means "set apart," "called out," "exclusively belonging to Christ.")
- ▶ What role do we play in our sanctification by God's Word? Give examples from life.

## EXPLORE THE WORD

### Contrasting Kingdoms

Have someone read *John 18:33-38*.

- ▶ What does it mean that Christ's kingdom is from another place (heaven)? What difference does this make? (One implication is that to identify with Christ is a counter-cultural worldview that requires purposeful life choices, knowing that the world isn't going to like it.)
- ▶ How does Jesus open the kingdom to Gentiles in verses 33-38?
- ▶ In light of verse 37, how should we understand the relationship between "the truth," generally speaking, to the truth of God's self-revelation through Scripture and the person of Jesus?

## EXAMINE LIFE

### The Kingdom and Truth

- ▶ Self-interest and political concerns were strong motivating factors behind Christ's crucifixion. How do these forces influence people to reject Christ today? In this season of Advent, how can we respond to these forces so as to give our King and His proclamation of the truth the highest authority in our hearts and lives?
- ▶ How might Jesus' statement, "Everyone on the side of truth listens to me," impact the way we live, interact with non-Christians, and witness to them?
- ▶ How might Jesus' statement that He was born for the purpose of testifying to the truth shape the way we view and celebrate Advent?

### Notes

**fight to prevent my arrest by the Jewish leaders. But now my kingdom is from another place."**

**<sup>37</sup>"You are a king, then!" said Pilate.**

**Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. In fact, the reason I was born and came into the world is to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me."**

**<sup>38</sup>"What is truth?" retorted Pilate. With this he went out again to the Jews gathered there and said, "I find no basis for a charge against him."**

**JESUS ENGAGED** Pilate on a personal level, in effect asking him for his own conclusion about who Jesus was. Pilate deflected this question, saying that as a Gentile it didn't matter and he didn't care—he was responding to political concerns and pressures. He wanted to protect his own interests without losing control of the volatile situation with the Jews.

Jesus' words also highlighted another aspect of His kingdom: it is not in opposition to earthy governments and political systems per se. This echoes His

teaching on giving "back to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's" (Matthew 22:21). In the present age, the kingdom of God overlaps the kingdoms of the earth. Like individuals, earthly governments can be grounded in the ideas, values, and principles of God's kingdom or grounded in those of "the world." Jesus wasn't trying to stir up political revolt; He came to testify to the truth that leads to God.

This may be a good time to note that the kingdom of the world isn't much of a kingdom in the conventional sense. God's kingdom places Christ on the throne and requires trust in Him and obedient faithfulness to Him, whereas the world only requires rebellion against God. Harmony, love, and unity are not necessary—only that you place anything or anyone except God in the place of God. This raises the question of ultimate allegiance. To whom or to what do you turn to guide your life, order your priorities, set your goals, provide meaning, and shape your thoughts and desires? Your favorite philosophy, author, or artist? Financial security, career

### WORDpicture

*The season of Advent focuses our attention on Christ's coming in all of its dimensions: past, present, and future. Jesus came as a babe in Bethlehem to provide for our salvation. He comes to us now through the power of the Holy Spirit to empower us to triumph over the evil one. And He will come again to take us to be with Him at the end of the age.*

## EXERCISE FAITH

### Prayer of Affirming Commitment

In closing, invite your group to silently join you in the following prayer. Pause after each sentence to allow time for your group members to affirm it in their own hearts.

*Lord Jesus, I acknowledge You today as King. This Advent season, as we prepare to celebrate Your birth, I affirm my commitment to live under Your loving rule. I resolve to open my heart to whatever truth You want to reveal to me. Please continue to protect me from the evil one as I strive to keep Your commands. Help me to bravely share Your word with those who need to hear it. In Your holy name, Amen.*

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### WORDpicture

*Pontius Pilate was appointed by Roman Emperor Tiberius to be the fifth procurator on the Province of Judea (AD 26). Judea was such a hotbed of trouble that Pilate was directly responsible to the emperor. Pilate proved to be a weak and inept leader.*

things are forces for good because they serve God's purposes and enrich our lives. In the kingdom of the world, they are replacements for God and are often employed in opposition to His character and will. The prime maxim of the kingdom of darkness is "Do as thou wilt." Putting oneself in the place of God is by far the most common expression of life in opposition to the kingdom of God.

by **RYAN R. PETTIT**

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aspirations, or social acceptance? Your spouse or children? To what do you look for salvation from the fears and troubles that plague your life? Self-acceptance through psychology? Modern medicine, technological advances, or the government? In the kingdom of God, these