



Seventh Day Baptist Week of Prayer

January 3-9, 2016

Sponsored by the
Seventh Day Baptist World Federation
Meet us at: www.sdbwf.org

During the first full week of January since 1967, Seventh Day Baptists around the world unite in prayer, sharing meditations centered on a theme chosen by each year's author. This year's theme "The Kingdom of God is Like..." is found in several accounts of Jesus' parables.

Purposes of the SDB World Federation are:

1. **To provide increased communication** among Seventh Day Baptist groups around the world.
2. **To promote projects of mutual interest** which will benefit from international cooperation.
3. **To stimulate fellowship** among Seventh Day Baptist Christians through periodic meetings of representatives between Conferences or groups and programs of mutual aid.

Contributions: The Federation delegates recommend that all member Conferences designate an offering at least once a year for the World Federation, and also that all member Conferences consider designating ten percent of their annual budgets for the Federation. Contributions may be sent to the Treasurer, Mr. Gavin Fox, PO Box 7755, Silver Spring, MD 20907 USA or via PayPal at treasurer@sdbwf.org

Sessions: The last General Session was held in the United States (Carthage College in Kenosha, Wisconsin), July 28–August 1, 2008. During 2011 an Executive Committee Meeting of SDB World Federation was held August 7-13 at Camp Wakonda, Milton, Wisconsin. The next General Session is planned to occur in Brazil, January 22-28, 2017.

Officers for the World Federation include General Secretary Andrew Samuels (general.secretary@sdbwf.org); President Dale Thorngate of the USA (president@sdbwf.org); Treasurer Gavin Fox (treasurer@sdbwf.org); Assistant General Secretary C. Justin Camenga; Recording Secretary Karen Umana, and Vice Presidents Marlo Siolo (Australia/New Zealand), Claudia Ferguson (Caribbean), Jonas Sommer (South America), and Al Paypa (Asia).

About the Author



Dale D. Thorngate was elected President of the World Federation in 2008, having earlier served as General Secretary from 1981 to 2003. Sessions were held in Westerly, Rhode Island, USA in 1986; in Auckland, New Zealand in 1992; in Passley Gardens, Jamaica in 1997; and in Bocaiuva do Sul, Brazil in 2003. Retired from the Seventh Day Baptist (SDB) ministry, Rev. Dr. Thorngate serves on the General Council of the USA & Canada Conference and as Elder (retired pastor) of the church in Salem, West Virginia.

"My education experience would be considered non-traditional," Thorngate says.

"I felt that God's call to me included that I be the best qualified pastor/teacher that was possible." He completed his Bachelor's degree in Business Administration and Management and a Master's degree in Education (Administration and Counseling) while still on active duty in the Army. After retirement from the Army in 1975, he earned a Master of Divinity degree while pastor in Ohio. Following service as Executive Director of the SDB Conference, he did a year of Clinical Pastoral Education at Meriter Hospital in Madison, Wisconsin and while pastor in West Virginia completed a Doctor of Ministry degree through North American Baptist Seminary, Lombard, Illinois.

Thorngate was raised in a Seventh Day Baptist home in Battle Creek, Michigan, the son of Ernest and Leona Thorngate. At age 10, he accepted Jesus Christ as his Lord and Savior and was baptized and became a member of the Battle Creek SDB Church. He is married to Janet Van Horn Smith Thorngate and they have three children, nine grandchildren and seven great-grandchildren.

"My first assignment in the Air Force was in Tokyo, Japan," Pastor Thorngate says, "and I have never been the same since. In that experience, God began preparing me for an international Christian experience. My personal vision for the SDB World Federation is that God's Holy Spirit will work through us to bring the Gospel message of forgiveness and salvation through Jesus Christ, our Lord, complete with the blessings of Sabbath observance. As we share that message, I pray that Seventh Day Baptists will become world leaders in the growth of God's Kingdom here on earth."

The Kingdom of God is Within You

Luke 17: 20-36

The Pharisees have asked Jesus, “When will the kingdom of God come?” This was a major concern of the Jews of Jesus’ time. It also seems to be a major concern for some people in our time.

As we read through this passage, we observe that Jesus has identified many of the expected “signs” that have been stated by the prophet Daniel and others in the Bible, as to the coming of the Messiah and/or the “Son of Man.” But even before he points out these signs, he tells his listeners that looking for these signs won’t reveal anything.

Jesus essentially says: Don’t waste your time expecting the kingdom of God to come in this way, because “the kingdom of God is within you.” Another key phrase in this passage is: “Whoever tries to keep his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life will preserve it.” This is an important message, not only for the Pharisees, but also for the disciples. They also asked these same questions at other times.

Yes, the kingdom of God will not be fully realized until the end of the age (or of our lives). But Jesus is trying to tell the disciples that it can be experienced right now if they will pay attention and observe him in action. Even Jesus was unable to get through to the disciples while he was here on earth. It wasn’t until they received the power of the Holy Spirit, as revealed in Acts 2, that they got the message. As we wrap up this week of prayer together concerning the Kingdom of God, this is my main point: Wherever Jesus is, the kingdom of God is.

This week, it has been my intention to help us be mindful that God’s kingdom is not just something we are going to see and be a part of in the future. I continue to be surprised at the number of people who are still looking for the “signs” of the end of the age, in spite of what Jesus had to say on the subject.

It is my prayer that all Seventh Day Baptists will be able to understand that the potential for the kingdom of God is within us, right here, right now. And that each of us will begin to find ways to live out this kingdom of love, forgiveness and power in our everyday lives. Have a blessed Sabbath.

Pray for God’s Kingdom in:

USA and Canada, New Zealand, Kenya

Introduction

“Seeking God with all your heart” — God has a plan for us.

As Seventh Day Baptists begin this New Year together, I want us to be reminded that God has been with us in the past and will always be with us in the future. The passage of scripture that I want us to keep in mind throughout the week is this one from Jeremiah 29: 11-14a.

“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you,” declares the Lord.

This was written around BC 587 at the beginning of the exile of the Israelites in Babylon that lasted about 48 years. The letter in Jeremiah 29 was written early in this exile and was Jeremiah’s effort to encourage the people not to give up, but to take advantage of the situation. Yes, this is a promise to the people of Israel. God, through Jeremiah, is reassuring the Israelites that all is not lost. But I believe that this is a universal promise that God makes to all those who believe in Him.

Jeremiah’s point is that God does not plan evil for anyone. God’s plans are only to prosper and to provide hope. I believe that if I will spend time in Bible Study and prayer, and will listen for God’s instruction, that His plan for me will take very specific direction. This passage contains the admonition to be more diligent in prayer; not just talking, but also listening, because God wants to reveal His plans for us.

In this New Year, I believe that God has a new plan for Seventh Day Baptists. I sense that God’s Holy Spirit is already at work among us, sewing seeds of ideas. It is time for us to let the Holy Spirit work among us to come up with that new plan.

It is a little scary for us to think that God has only us to do His work in the world. But if we allow His Holy Spirit to work we can’t miss. As we begin this Week of Prayer together and as we begin to hear what Jesus said about God’s plan for His kingdom right here on earth, let us remember that God’s plan will work for us in 2016 and as we begin to think about our SDB World Federation Sessions next year in Brazil. May God grant you wisdom and a new vision for His plan for ministry for you where you live.

Sunday, January 3, 2016

**Jesus' Teaching on Prayer:
"Father, Your Kingdom Come"
Matthew 6: 9-15 (NIV)**

"Father, your Kingdom come." Early in Jesus' ministry life, we encounter Jesus teaching about prayer. In this passage Jesus is teaching his disciples how to pray:

"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.
Forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation,
But deliver us from the evil one.

For if you forgive men when they sin against you,
your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But,
if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not
forgive your sins."

As we begin this Week of Prayer, we are reminded that Jesus understood his main purpose for his life on earth was to tell his disciples and others about God's kingdom. I believe this was not an emphasis on God's kingdom in heaven, but for how his disciples are to live on earth. This includes us disciples living now in the 21st century.

The foundation of God's kingdom is established in a daily prayer life that helps us focus on God's sovereignty, His desire for us to live in His kingdom, doing His will. We are to understand that all we have is a gift from God, including our daily food. In his prayer, Jesus also emphasizes the importance of forgiveness. For most of us this is a challenge. Nevertheless, Jesus is very clear here about the necessity for us to understand that the foundation for God's kingdom is based on forgiveness. Not only are we to forgive others, but if we don't, he says that God won't forgive us.

Pray for God's Kingdom in:
Malawi, Zambia, South Africa

Friday, January 8, 2016

**The Kingdom of God and The Great Banquet
Luke 14: 15-24**

The man in Jesus' parable, who is hosting this feast, is not identified. But somehow we just know that he is talking about a feast that is being hosted by God. The meal has been prepared but when it is time to come, the invited guests all seem to have excuses for not being able to attend. The food is hot, the wine is chilled—let's eat. But, the invited guests all have an excuse to not come, even after initially saying they would be there.

The man holding the feast is not happy. When he receives the word that his invited guests are not coming, he tells his servant to go out to the streets and invite anyone who can come. When this does not fill up the banquet hall, the servant is then sent out into the countryside to invite all the people there until the banquet hall is full. Then he says about those with the excuses: "Not one of those men who were invited will get a taste of my banquet." These men have just missed the opportunity of a lifetime.

The meaning seems quite clear for Luke's Gentile audience. We are getting his post-resurrection perspective. So now those who were thought to be unclean and unworthy of God's great gifts, are not only invited to be part of God's banquet, but the good news of Jesus' sacrifice for salvation has come to all people—the lame, the poor, the blind and the crippled.

In the gospel of John, there is a familiar passage that I use a lot. Jesus tells them: "In my Father's house are many mansions" (or rooms). So we know from much of what Jesus teaches, that God's house is a big place—there is plenty of room for everyone.

Today, as we think about God's kingdom, it is important for us to see ourselves in the role of the servant. God has told us to go out to the most unlikely places, to people who are not like us, and bring them all in to enjoy His banquet. God has prepared a banquet. Not just for us, but for all people. We, as Jesus' disciples are challenged to bring a friend or family member, or anyone. Obviously, from this parable, we are not to be choosy. God wants everybody. May God be with you as you seek to share His love and the invitation to His banquet today.

Pray for God's Kingdom in:
Haiti, Uganda, Indonesia, Rwanda

Thursday, January 7, 2016

The Kingdom of God (Heaven) is Like a Mustard Seed **Matthew 13: 31-32**

Jesus compares the beginning of God's kingdom on earth to a mustard seed. Notice that Matthew, because his original audience was Jewish, used the word heaven to describe God's kingdom. I believe that Jesus was talking about a "heavenly" kingdom here on earth.

As we think about the beginning of Jesus' ministry, we remember that he began first with three men: Peter, James and John. But as his ministry progressed, Jesus gathered 12 men, who followed him wherever he went. But even then, as we follow the development of his teaching and healing ministry (the progress of God's kingdom, while Jesus was here on earth), we can envision the growth of the mustard seed plant, from a small seed to a large plant, able to send out more seeds to make more plants.

Since our beginnings in the mid-1650's in England, Seventh Day Baptists continue to be small, even though we have been described as "weighing more than we count." I believe that we continue to model Jesus' understanding of how God's kingdom develops here on earth. Just because we continue as a small group of churches around the world doesn't mean that God does not continue to develop His kingdom through us. Remember, Jesus didn't convince all the people that he met while he was here, that living in God's kingdom was a valuable enterprise for earthly inhabitants.

My wife Janet, as she writes her book about the Newport, Rhode Island Seventh Day Baptist Church, has helped me understand God's work among SDBs in the USA since 1671. I have been truly amazed at the humble individuals God called to begin and grow our conference of churches across the frontier of this country. I'm sure it is the same in every country.

In the 21st Century, God is definitely challenging us to begin as we are, but grow to demonstrate God's love for us in action. As we pray together this week around the world, I am asking God to fill us anew with His Spirit so that we will, in fact, experience a new vision for God's kingdom here on earth.

Pray for God's Kingdom in:

Philippines, Australia, India (Andhra Pradesh) (Kerala) (Manipur)

Monday, January 4, 2016

Seek God's Kingdom First **Matthew 6: 25-34**

*"But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness,
and all these things will be given to you as well."*

This admonition comes after a long list of things that God provides daily: food, clothes, birds, and lilies. "So do not worry saying, what shall we eat or what shall we drink, or what shall we wear? For pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly father knows that you need them. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself."

As we begin a New Year, some people are making resolutions to do some things better this year. Some Christians are trying to set new goals for their spiritual lives. These activities seem timely considering all the turmoil in our world today. Whether it is the economic recession that is causing so much anxiety all over our world; or the many conflicts and wars in Iraq, Afghanistan, Israel, Palestine, Sudan, Syria, Nigeria, Kenya, Burundi...

I interpret today's scripture as instructive for how we should deal with these issues. And what our behavior should say about the pattern of discipleship that Jesus would have us think about in the 21st Century.

In all three chapters, 5, 6 and 7 of Matthew (that we call the Sermon on the Mount), we encounter Jesus' teaching about God's kingdom here on earth. All three chapters challenge the disciples to rethink how they are to live; to rethink all the rules they have been taught in the past.

Today, I want us to think about the kind of place in which God's model for community can be established for us, His people, in the 21st Century. Then maybe we can be relieved of our fear and anxiety, and become instruments of God's peace where we now live. May God's love for you be more apparent and our ability to relax and enjoy peace of mind that He intends for all those who follow Jesus. It is my prayer that we can experience God's kingdom right now, so that we can live faithfully in the present and discover the peace and happiness that is available right now.

Pray for God's Kingdom in:

The Netherlands, Poland, England

Tuesday, January 5, 2016

The Kingdom of God and a Farmer **Mark 4: 10-20**

In the 4th chapter of Mark, Jesus begins by telling the disciples a parable, in which he talks about a farmer who plants seeds by hand. Then Jesus describes how different kinds of soil receive the seeds and what happens when the seeds begin to grow. In verse 10, Jesus begins to explain how the farmer's sowing seeds is like his using words to tell about God's kingdom. In Jesus' parable the seed is the same as Jesus teaching about God's kingdom and how people respond when they hear his teaching. The message is this: "When God's word is heard correctly and when the people hear it, accept it, and produce a crop, then God's kingdom grows—thirty, sixty or even a hundred times larger."

Sometimes we get discouraged because, in spite of our conscientious efforts to share the "good news" we sense that some people ignore it or don't really care. We know that in our everyday world we really are flooded with a lot of words, both good and bad, and with ideas that challenge our understanding of God's will for us. We wonder how we should live out our understanding of God's kingdom, when there are lots of people, who call themselves Christian, who disagree with us.

So what can we understand from this parable? First, if people are going to hear about God's kingdom, then someone has to be telling them. Second, we learn that the message of God's kingdom needs hearers of the message who are prepared to respond. When the seed finds fertile ground, many of the seeds produce a very fruitful crop. Those who have the secret of the kingdom are challenged to continue to share the secret with others. If they do, some will hear and develop their lives around sharing it as well.

So, how does one live in God's kingdom in the 21st Century and be a good citizen of a worldly nation? Today, as Disciples of Christ, we are challenged to continue to speak of God's kingdom as a present reality and to share God's love in an authentic and compassionate way. That is how we find good soil, so that others can hear about God's kingdom, accept it, and produce lives that demonstrate God's love for many others.

Pray for God's Kingdom in:
Nigeria, Burundi, Jamaica

Wednesday, January 6, 2016

The Kingdom of God and the Rich **Mark 10: 17-31**

"What must I do to inherit eternal life?" This question comes from a rich young man, who seems genuinely concerned about his eternal status. Jesus confirms that the man knows the foundation of his faith by reviewing the basics—those principles contained in the Ten Commandments that deal with the relationships between people. The man indicates: "All these I have kept since I was a boy," but he knows instinctively that this is not enough. That's why he has come to Jesus.

Jesus is aware of the man's material wealth and indicates that there is one more requirement. We sense that he is unable to accept Jesus' challenge to, "Sell everything [he] has and give to the poor, so that [he] will have treasure in heaven." "How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God," is Jesus' evaluation of the man's situation. So often this is interpreted as the main message about God's kingdom and for many that is the main reason to reject God's kingdom, even if it is considered to deal only with life after death.

I think the real message in this passage comes after the rich young man turns away, and the disciples ask: "Who then can be saved?" Jesus' answer: "What is impossible with man is possible with God." My understanding is that salvation or forgiveness and eternal life are not something we can earn. It is a free gift from a righteous, loving father, and is received when we accept Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior. However, being a disciple/follower of Jesus does have some expectations. The main requirement is getting our priorities straight. Remember, in Matthew 6: 33, Jesus said: "Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all other things will be given to you as well."

The kingdom of God will be available to all those who make it a priority. If we can fully grasp this then we can say, "If God is running the universe and ruling my life, I no longer have to save myself, prove myself or justify myself." If we transfer from our dependence upon our personal wealth, to the more firm dependence upon God and the riches of his eternal kingdom, and get over our greedy motivations, God will then get us back on track. But we must seek God's kingdom first.

Pray for God's Kingdom in:
Brazil, Chile, Guyana