

The Kingdom of God is Within You

Luke 17:20-37

Key Verse: 17:21

“...nor will people say, ‘Here it is,’ or ‘There it is,’ because the kingdom of God is within you.”

On his way to Jerusalem, Jesus constantly taught about the kingdom of God. Jesus was giving his life to usher in the kingdom. It was the one thing he wanted his people to understand and accept. Though it was difficult to understand, even for his disciples, Jesus persistently taught the kingdom of God. In this passage he tells two things about the kingdom of God: It is invisible but real at present, and it will come visibly on a definite day in the future. Knowing the truth about the kingdom of God is more important than knowing how to make a lot of money or how to marry well. Let's pay close attention to Jesus' words and ask the Spirit to help us.

I. The kingdom within (20-21)

Look at verses 20-21. **“Once, having been asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, Jesus replied, ‘The kingdom of God does not come with your careful observation, nor will people say, ‘Here it is,’ or ‘There it is,’ because the kingdom of God is within you.’** It should not surprise us that the Pharisees asked about the kingdom of God. We should try to understand them. We can surmise that they longed to be freed from Roman oppression. They loathed paying taxes to Caesar, and must have hated having to obey secular Roman authorities, who even appointed the Jewish high priests. They longed for a king like David to lead them to victory over Rome and restore their nation's glory. Though they had such longings, there was not much they could do practically. Rome was simply too strong. However, they hoped that God would act, as he had during Isaiah's time. God's angel put 185,000 menacing Assyrian soldiers to death overnight on account of their commander's arrogance (Isa 37:36). It could happen again. So the Pharisees carefully observed current events and Scripture, seeking the kingdom's approach. They were spectators of history, longing for a miracle.

Jesus did not answer their question. It was because their concept of the kingdom of God was different than what Jesus had been teaching. To have a meaningful discussion, Jesus first corrected them. Jesus corrected their concept of how the kingdom comes, and of where it is. Jesus said that the kingdom of God does not come with careful observation. Jesus chided them for being aloof spectators, and not active participants. This speaks to us today. Many cultural

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Christians have longed for the restoration of 1950's America, a time of peace and prosperity in which our nation seemed to embrace a Christian identity. Such people are not interested in sacrificing to send missionaries to the world; but they treasure the intangible benefits of living in a Christian nation. So they observe current events through television and the Internet, hoping for some signs that wicked influences will subside and Christianity advance, but do not evangelize the lost. Others engage in theological speculation, about times and dates, yet do nothing to preach the gospel. This kind of careful observation does not bring the kingdom.

Then how does it come? Jesus said in Mark 1:15, **“The time has come. The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!”** When a person repents of his sins and accepts the gospel, the kingdom of God comes into his or her heart. The Pharisees' problem was that they did not repent. When they did not repent, they had no spiritual insight to recognize Jesus as Savior (Lk 7:29-30). Although Jesus drove out demons, healed the sick, raised the dead, and taught the truth with authority, they refused to acknowledge God's work through Jesus. Without accepting Jesus, they could not enter the kingdom of God. To the Pharisees, it was most urgent to repent and believe in Jesus. They needed to stop speculating and believe the good news!

Jesus also warned that the kingdom of God would not come visibly in a way in which people could say, **“Here it is,”** or **“There it is.”** Man who lost paradise has a primeval longing for its restoration. So people have tried in many ways to make a paradise on earth. In the past, feudal lords wanted to make kingdoms of peace and prosperity within the realm of their territory. When Charlemagne conquered Europe, his followers regarded him as the new David, and the lords and ladies of his court took Biblical names. I once saw the ruins of a castle in Heidelberg in which several thousand people lived at one time. The artwork exalts Jesus, the apostles and saints. But the castle was run in a strictly authoritarian manner. Royalty was a birthright, as was slavery. In order for a few to enjoy privilege, many others suffered terribly. Communism promised economic equality through the elimination of the class struggle. But it failed miserably. The American dream of the mid 20th century has turned into a ghoulish nightmare. Human efforts to establish the kingdom of God have all failed. Despite all this, many people think it is most urgent to improve their situation: to enter the best school, to marry the right person, to land the right job, to improve health care, and so on. But Jesus clearly tells us not to look for the kingdom of God in a place or a system. Jesus said, **“the kingdom of God is within you.”** God's reign begins in one's heart, when he or she repents and accepts Christ as Lord and Savior.

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There was a young woman in Uganda who enjoyed a happy family life with her parents and four siblings. Then, within two years, she watched her father, mother and siblings die of AIDS one after the other. She was left all alone. She was fearful, insecure and cynical about life. Living with other relatives who were unkind, her only escape was to go to church. One day, by a turn of events, she was seated very near the pastor. During the message, he looked right at her and said, “Are you ready to repent of your sins and accept Jesus Christ as your Savior and Lord?” She was shocked and could not respond. But this question remained in her mind. The Holy Spirit worked in her to help her repent of her bitterness and to accept Christ as Lord and Savior. When she did, she was freed from the power of sin and death. New life and joy and hope came into her heart. She dedicated her new life to Christ and began to teach the Bible to Ugandan women. She believes her future is bright because she has the kingdom of God in her heart. Her situation has not changed, but she has changed on the inside.

John Perkins was born in New Hebron, Mississippi in 1930. An African American, he and his family were sharecroppers who ran a moonshine business on the side. When Perkins was 16, his older brother Clyde, a decorated World War II veteran, was shot three times by a white deputy on the town's main street, simply for raising his voice in public. Clyde later died in John's arms. At that moment, “blackness” came in to Perkins’ heart. It was hatred against racial injustice and toward white law enforcement officers. He confessed that if he could have, he would have shot that deputy dead. To keep him from such a mistake, relatives sent him to California, where he married and prospered. One day his son Spencer seemed to glow with hope and joy. It came from his Bible study at a local Sunday school. So his dad also began to read the Bible and attend worship service. One day, the Holy Spirit spoke to him through Galatians 2:20 and Romans 6:23. He accepted Christ as his personal Savior and Lord. Almost at once, he became a fruitful evangelist in California. Then, in obedience to the Spirit, he returned to Mississippi. He preached the gospel to bring about racial reconciliation, even in the deep south. He was persecuted. He endured unjust arrest, imprisonment and torture almost to death by white sheriffs. But in Christ, he was able to forgive them and pray for them and to keep working for racial reconciliation. His ministry has made a great impact on the entire nation of America. The kingdom of God began within him and spread through him.

Jesus’ point is clear. The kingdom of God begins in the hearts of those who accepts him as Savior and Lord. It is real and powerful. But it is also invisible and

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personal. Those who receive Jesus are changed on the inside. Hatred is replaced with God's love. Arrogance subsides, and a humble spirit governs. Rebellion turns to obedience. Bitterness becomes thanksgiving. Sorrow turns to joy. Fears dissipate before a new courage. Selfishness gives way to a sacrificial spirit. Weakness is turned to strength. They become new creations in Christ Jesus, though their outer circumstances may not change much. The kingdom of God starts within those who believe in Jesus.

Though the kingdom of God is within us, we are not immune to the troubles of the world. Sometimes, we experience trials that can rob us of peace and joy. Sometimes we just get tired. At such times, Jesus invites us, **“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.”** In any circumstance or condition, we can come to Jesus. Then he restores his reign within us. Jesus gives peace to our souls. With Jesus in our hearts we can persevere in trials, smile amidst troubles, and go through life with a song in our hearts. The kingdom of God is within us through Jesus Christ.

Look again at verse 21. According to the footnote, the verse can also be rendered, **“the kingdom of God is among you.”** We can experience the kingdom of God relationally. As Christ reigns over individual people, he joins them together in a bond of love and peace. Though it is also invisible, it is as real as the kingdom within. Christian brothers and sisters love one another dearly. We can also experience the kingdom of God as we share the gospel with the lost. When one sinner repents, God's joy overflows and he shares this joy with us. It is a joy that the world does not know. The love and peace and joy of Christian community testifies to the world that Christ is living and his kingdom is real. When we honor Christ in our relationships we experience the kingdom of God among us. So let's love one another, forgive one another, bear one another, and help one another. Let's share with those in need and comfort those who are suffering. The kingdom of God among us reveals Christ's love to the world. It invites the world to come to God before Christ's return.

II. The visible kingdom comes at Jesus' return (22-37)

Though Jesus had been speaking in response to the Pharisees, he was always thinking of his disciples. At present, they were very happy because Jesus was with them all the time. Whenever they felt a little down, Jesus did something once again that amazed them. Jesus always had a word of encouragement for them. Jesus' example inspired them. But soon, Jesus would leave them and go back to the

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Father. They would have to stand by their own faith in the midst of persecution and hardships. Though they had the kingdom of God within them, they would suffer much in the world. They would be vulnerable, like the Pharisees were, to the false hope of human dreams. Forseeing this, Jesus taught the truth of the visible kingdom through his second coming. This could be their hope. Jesus taught what that day would be like, how it affects the world, and what to do as we wait for him.

First, the Son of Man will come like the lightning (22-25). Since the disciples would long to see Jesus, they would be vulnerable to the rise of false Christs, whose followers would tempt them to abandon their mission. But Jesus told his disciples clearly not to run after them. His disciples would not hear about his return from others. Look at verse 24. **“For the Son of Man in his day will be like the lightning, which flashes and lights up the sky from one end to the other.”** Lightning strikes suddenly and unexpectedly. It comes from above and is visible to everyone. Last Friday night we had a severe thunderstorm in our area with flashing lightning and heavy rain. No one needed to hear from another person that a thunderstorm had come. We all experienced it for ourselves. When Jesus comes again we will not hear about it from others, we will see it for ourselves. We will all see it at once. It will be a universal event. 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 says, **“For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever.”** Jesus' coming will shake the world and raise the dead. This is our Christian hope.

However, Jesus had something to endure before that glorious day could come. Look at verse 25. **“But first he must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation.”** Jesus would suffer and die on a shameful cross. He would hang naked, charged as a terrible criminal, while passers by hurled insults at him. His hands and feet would be pierced and feet and his blood would flow freely. Jesus endured this kind of suffering and death in our place, for our sins. Jesus paid the ransom price to set us free. Jesus bore the wrath of God to the full measure in our places. So we can be accepted by God as his precious sons and daughters. At the same time, Jesus' death on the cross was a judgment against the devil and all unbelievers. The verdict rendered at the cross will be executed when Jesus comes again. Revelation 1:7 says, **“Look, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him; and all the peoples of the earth will mourn because of him. So shall it be! Amen.”**

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Second, most people will be completely surprised by Jesus' coming (26-30).

The great event of Jesus' coming again will usher in the kingdom of God in a visible and universal way. It will be the end of all evil and unrighteousness. It will mark the beginning of the visible reign of Christ over all creation in the manifest fullness of his kingdom. This event will affect every person who has ever lived and seal each one's eternal destiny. We might think that everyone on earth would be interested in this event and watch for its coming. But Jesus tells us that this will not be so. Look at verses 26-27. **“Just as it was in the days of Noah, so also will it be in the days of the Son of Man. People were eating, drinking, marrying and being given in marriage up to the day Noah entered the ark. Then the flood came and destroyed them all.”** The things people were doing were not bad; they were normal human activities. Noah's family members were doing the same things. However, Noah heeded God's warning of a coming flood judgment and built an ark in obedience to God's word to save himself and his family. He tried to warn the people of his time, but they paid no attention. They were consumed by desires of the flesh and had no spiritual life at all. Their intentional spiritual ignorance did not delay the flood. The flood as God had said and destroyed them all.

To emphasize his point, Jesus gave another example. Look at verses 28-29. **“It was the same in the days of Lot. People were eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building. But the day Lot left Sodom, fire and sulfur rained down from heaven and destroyed them all.”** These historical events show that God's judgment came according to his word. Therefore we can be sure that Jesus will come again in time and space. That day will come! Those who live only for the flesh will be oblivious until it happens; then, suddenly they will perish. We must realize that the unbelieving world is godless and that it suppresses the truth. It gives off an insidious influence. It can be compared to people trying to enjoy a wild party on a sinking ship, such as the Titanic. In their willful ignorance they entice others to join them. We must not allow such influence into our hearts as we wait for Jesus' coming again. After living by the Spirit, we should not return to living by the flesh. We must heed Jesus' promise of his glorious return. We can do so when we meditate on the word of God and pray continually.

Third, live sacrificially for Jesus and the gospel (31-37). Jesus warns us not to be too attached to material things. When the time comes to leave them, we should flee without hesitation. Jesus also warns that human relationships are limited. Even close family members or working buddies will be suddenly separated. And that separation will be permanent. When Jesus comes again, those who lived selfish

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lives only for their flesh will go to eternal punishment. Those who lived a sacrificial life for Jesus and his kingdom will be abundantly and eternally blessed. Today we have learned that we can enjoy the kingdom of God within and among us when we repent and accept Christ into our hearts. We also have a glorious hope of the visible kingdom at his return. Therefore, we can live sacrificially for him.