

BUT FIRST HE MUST SUFFER

Luke 17:20-37

Key Verse: 17:25

"But first he must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation."

People are extremely distressed and suffering and staring at one another with dreadful premonitions. Today Jesus tells us what kind of mission we must accomplish in this world as the children of God.

First, the kingdom of God is within you (20-21).

Once, the Pharisees asked Jesus when the kingdom of God would come. When the noble Pharisees asked about the kingdom of God to Jesus, obviously they had an ulterior motive. For example, even during the time from Abraham to Jesus, there had been an Arab world. Now, there are 19 Arabic countries. Among them, we sent missionaries to eight Arabic countries. Geographically speaking, Israel is part of the Arab world. Strangely, it is where Abraham bought a piece of land from Ephron the Hittite, one of the hundreds of petty kings of the Arab world at that time. In view of history, all the civilizations and people of the Arab world, even the civilizations of Egypt and Mesopotamia and Greece, were buried in the earth and they are now being excavated little by little. Because of this, classical scholars, who had believed the Bible was a kind of myth or episode, began to believe that the Bible is the written word of God. The most striking fact is that Abraham bought the land and Abraham's descendants preserved it. It has been preserved for the last 4,000 years. As we know well, the

Arabic world is aggressive and belligerent. In the ancient world, Israel could not racially flourish because of enemies' constant attack. The modern time is the same. Arab nations in 1929 attacked Israel ferociously. They again attacked in 1936 and virtually wiped it out. When Israeli soldiers entered Hebron during the Six-Day War in 1967, not one Jew had lived there during one generation. But a modest settlement was reestablished in 1970. God was with his people Israel. Because of unbearable hardships, within and without, the majority of Israelites emigrated and lived outside the country. But there were always remnants who kept God's covenant with Abraham and lived in Zion.

When Jesus was on the earth to do the Messianic ministry, the people of Israel were under the Roman rule. Most religious leaders could not but compromise with Roman authority so as to maintain their own faith. At that time it was good, but their children were corrupt. They were like modern Christians in China. But because of their unbearable suffering, they fell into hallucination. Most Pharisees who wanted to keep their national identity and their faith heritage had to have a realistic hope. It was the earthly messianic kingdom; and it was their sheer hallucination. They were like drowning people who want to grab a piece of ice on the surface. Anyway, they formulated the messianic kingdom by quoting many Old Testament Bible verses. Their hope in the earthly messianic kingdom was the power source to overcome their hard lives. We know how Romans oppressed Israelites. But they never curbed their pride and belief, because they had an idea that the messianic kingdom would come.

How did Jesus answer them? 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" (20-21). Of course, in Bible terms the kingdom of God comes after death as well as after the judgment of God. Therefore, the kingdom of God is spiritual and it is forever. The kingdom of God is invisible. Yet the kingdom of God is perceived by those who believe in God who is spirit (Jn 4:24). There are two kinds of people.

The first kind says that the earthly kingdom of God is coming. The second kind is those who claim that the kingdom of God came and that "he" or "she" is the Messiah. They mainly deceive naive and fearful Christians. Three years ago, there was a noisy commotion. Many sincere Christians were deceived by psychological witches. They insisted that Jesus would come on October 28, 1992, at 9:00 p.m. Then they could enjoy rapture. But it did not happen. They cried because they again had to go back to the realities of the world. Historically this has been repeated from the first century to the twentieth century, repeatedly and persistently.

The Pharisees wished that the messianic kingdom would come and Jerusalem would be the political power center and rule the whole world. Of course, we understand that their hallucination painfully stemmed from endless suffering. What was Jesus' answer to them? Jesus answered them very clearly, "the kingdom of God is within you." Jesus' answer was not what they had expected. They wanted political power. But Jesus answered that one man's spiritual growth is the beginning of experiencing the kingdom of God. Of course Jesus could tell them many

things about the coming of the kingdom of God. But to the Pharisees it was a proper answer. Jesus is saying that they should receive the spirit of repentance, repent and grow spiritually until they can see and enter the kingdom of God.

We can see many examples of those who saw the kingdom of God and obtained the qualification of entering the kingdom of God. There was a Roman centurion under whom 100 soldiers were allotted. It is easy for us to understand a centurion when we think about Massala in the movie, "Ben Hur." He could have been very arrogant and he could have treated his servant like spoiled food when he became useless. But this centurion was different. His joy was to see his slave boy polish his boots and hear him say, "Good morning Captain, sir!" But one day, the slave boy buried his head between his legs; he was having breathing difficulties due to a high fever. The centurion saw that the slave boy was dying. Suddenly, his tears flew down, streaming on his cheeks. He was inspired to visit the elders of the synagogue to ask their favor to go to Jesus and ask him to heal the boy. The elders were happy to grant the centurion's request, because they knew that he was a good man. Usually, the Pharisees would fully dress up when they went out somewhere. But this time, they ran to Jesus in their pajamas and explained the situation of the centurion. Jesus was happy to see the kindness of the centurion toward the sick slave boy and healed the boy. To this centurion, his Roman citizenship or his position of centurion or himself was less than nothing. In other words, he was a humble man. He loved and valued one slave boy's life because he loved God in his heart. Maybe he heard the gospel of Jesus by the mouth of others.

There was another centurion who was dispatched to Judah. According to gospel narratives, he was possibly the captain of the soldiers who were appointed to execute Jesus on the cross. In the world of soldiers, "order is order" and "duty is duty," that's all. As a centurion, he had to execute the order for the crucifixion of Jesus. Humanly speaking, he was the one who nailed Jesus on the cross and shed his blood. But through dying Jesus, he saw the Son of God. And through Jesus' prayers on the cross, he could hear the divine voice from heaven. Luke 23:47 says, "The centurion, seeing what had happened, praised God and said, 'Surely this was a righteous man.'" In other words, he meant he is God, for no one is righteous in the world. The centurion saw righteousness in Jesus. He saw the kingdom of God in Jesus. His occupation was killing and destroying and nothing else. But he had spiritual eyes to see the Son of God in Jesus, because God made him one of his precious sons. In this part, we are greatly moved by the fact that Jesus really wanted his chosen people to repent and take care of God's flock with all their hearts. So he said, "The kingdom of God is within you."

Second, but first he must suffer many things (22-25).

Then Jesus said, "The time is coming when you will long to see one of the days of the Son of Man, but you will not see it" (22). This tells us that the kingdom of God comes at God's appointed time. But the disciples of Jesus were not privileged to see the coming of the kingdom of God. The disciples were startled because they had the same idea as the Pharisees that the earthly messianic kingdom would come through Jesus, because it had been long awaited. After saying this, Jesus warned them, "Men will tell you, 'There he is!' or 'Here he is!' Do not

go running off after them." When the world is extremely evil, most people despair. After they come back to their senses, they hope for messiahs to come. Then clever people disguise themselves and claim to be messiahs. Jesus told his disciples not to be deceived by these people. We must know that there was a danger even for Jesus' disciples to be deceived by the false messiahs.

Jesus said in verse 25, "But first he must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation." This indicates that before the coming of the kingdom of God, God's will for world salvation must be fulfilled as was promised. For this, Jesus must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation. Most people think that when they believe in Jesus, they would be abundantly blessed and their lives would be like paradise. But Jesus said, "But first he must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation." When he saw the world, Jesus could have despaired and abandoned the world as it was. But Jesus said in Mark 13:10, "And the gospel must first be preached to all nations." Jesus did not see the vicious world situation. But Jesus had on his mind God's will for world salvation. The gospel must be preached to the whole world. Jesus said in Matthew 24:14, "And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come."

When we think about Jesus' words, "he must suffer many things," we learn that the children of God also suffer much to proclaim the gospel of salvation to the whole world. When we do so, instead of paychecks, we receive much persecutions. The children of God, however, must be willing to participate in the remaining suffering of Jesus to save the

world. This was quite contrary to the wishes of the disciples. Jesus clearly told them that they must participate in the suffering of Jesus. They must be despised and rejected by men in order to proclaim the gospel of salvation to the whole world. What a ridiculous idea compared with the earthly messianic kingdom.

Jesus taught them that the proclamation of the gospel of salvation is not easy because the world is evil. He gave two examples. First is the time of Noah. The characteristic of Noah's time was that people were slaves of the social consensus. They did not listen to the gospel of salvation through Noah. They enjoyed physical pleasures until the water of judgment came up to their necks and soon to their breathing noses. Jesus explained to his disciples the hard world in which the proclamation of the gospel of salvation is difficult. But Jesus encouraged his disciples to participate in the remaining suffering of Jesus and fulfill God's world salvation purpose. Now we pray that God may make America a kingdom of priests and a holy nation and raise 10,000 Bible teachers in our generation. Jesus knows that it is not easy for us to carry out this mission. But we did not choose God, God chose us and appointed us to bear much fruit (Jn 15:16). For this, we must suffer and give our hearts.

Third, one will be glorified, the other will be condemned (30-37).

Why did Jesus order this impossible task to his disciples as well as to us? Because of the living hope of the kingdom of God. Verse 24 says, "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." Again, verse

30 says, "It will be just like this on the day the Son of Man is revealed." These verses tell us that Jesus comes again to take us back to his kingdom. These verses also give us clear direction how to live in this generation. We should not live like Lot's wife. We should not despair. We should suffer to proclaim the gospel of Jesus as Jesus did.

There are many people who say, "I am a born-again Christian." These kinds of people are countless like the stars in the sky. But Jesus warns in verse 34, "I tell you, on that night two people will be in one bed; one will be taken and the other left." May God take up everyone to heaven together with your coworker. Verse 35 is the same example. Jesus said this so that we may have a personal faith and a living hope of the kingdom of God and the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. Jesus said this so that we may be right with God as pilgrims on earth. The disciples were surprised to hear this. But Jesus replied, "Where there is a dead body, there the vultures will gather" (37). It means that holy pilgrims finally enter the kingdom of God. But ungodly people will be under the power of death.

In this passage, we learn that the world is very hard. But we must believe that the kingdom of God comes at God's right time. We must proclaim the gospel of salvation and rejoice to live as the holy pilgrims until the glorious day comes.