

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.”

In the last passage Jesus healed ten men with leprosy who cried out to him with a loud voice. But only one of them returned to thank Jesus, and he was a Samaritan. Jesus was heartbroken because of the unthankfulness of his own people, the Jews. But Jesus was happy to bless one Samaritan who returned to give thanks. Jesus is pleased by thanksgiving. Jesus pours out his blessing continuously on those who are thankful. One secret of Dr. Lee’s happy life of faith was his thanksgiving to God. Once, he fell on a stairway and a deep gash was cut into his cheek. He had to receive emergency treatment with many stitches. Even then, he was thankful to God for his grace. He was also thankful to his doctor because her stitch work was so artistic that his cuteness was maintained. Those who thank God for his grace can grow continuously in the image of God and receive the kingdom of God.

In this passage Jesus teaches us more about the kingdom of God. From beginning to end, Jesus focused on the kingdom of God. Jesus’ message was the kingdom of God. Jesus taught the kingdom of God through parables. Jesus trained his disciples to proclaim the kingdom of God. In this passage Jesus teaches two things. First of all, the kingdom of God must be within us. Secondly, the kingdom of God will come on earth when Jesus comes again. Let’s accept the kingdom of God in our hearts and have a living hope in this dark world.

First, the kingdom of God is within you (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 is surprising that the Pharisees asked Jesus when the kingdom of God would come. It seems that they were really interested in the kingdom of God. But when we see Jesus’ answer, we learn that their concept of the kingdom of God was not right. Jesus corrected their thinking on two points. First, Jesus said, “The kingdom of God does not come with your careful observation.” The Pharisees carefully observed current events in light of Bible prophecy to detect the signs that the kingdom of God was coming. To them, the kingdom of God meant a worldwide empire with Israel at the center. Their hobby was to chat about current events as signs of this coming utopia to soothe their weary souls. The Pharisees studied the Bible with a spectator’s attitude.

Down through the generations, so many people have been like the Pharisees. They think that through careful observation they will perceive the coming of the kingdom and be prepared for it. Some have made predictions about the dates and have gained many followers through their bold assertions. Recently, one of them predicted that Jesus would come on a certain date. That date came and went, but Jesus did not appear. Rather, the bank balances of foolish investors disappeared. Some time ago, a high school student fell into the illusion that he had special power to interpret the Bible and perceive the coming of the end of the age. He thought Jesus would come again before the end of his school semester. So he did not study. Just before final exams he longed for Jesus’ return. But it did not happen. Those who study the Bible with a spectator’s attitude miss the point. Jesus said, “The kingdom of God does not come with your careful observation.”

The second thing Jesus corrected was the concept of the kingdom of God as a place. The kingdom of God is not a place we can point to and say, “Here it is,” or “There it is.” It is not the result of a social movement or a political revolution. In the early 1980s Republicans claimed to be the party for Christians and promised to stop abortion on demand and to restore prayer in public schools. Many Christian voters supported them. But after getting Christian votes, they did not advance Christian causes. The kingdom of God will not be voted in to America or come about as the result of legislation. In the past, many people from many nations wanted to come to America, thinking that America is paradise. But recent events reveal that America is not paradise.

Look at verse 21 again. Jesus said, “...because the kingdom of God is within you.” Jesus did not mean that the Pharisees had the kingdom of God within themselves. Rather, Jesus was making a general statement that the kingdom of God starts within our hearts. If we don’t have the kingdom of God in our hearts, we should not be too eager for it to come on earth. Jesus knew the Pharisees so well. They looked dignified and special because they were

well educated, well disciplined and well decorated. Ordinary people were impressed by them and gave them honor and respect. Yet the Pharisees' hearts were not ruled by God, but by wretched sinful desires. They were also under the power of death. When Jesus said, "The kingdom of God is within you," he wanted them to realize they must have the kingdom of God in their hearts.

How can we have the kingdom of God in our hearts? In Mark 1:15 Jesus said, "The time has come. The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!" When Jesus is near, the kingdom of God is near. Jesus is God. Jesus is the King of the kingdom of God. When Jesus comes into our hearts we have the kingdom of God in our hearts. Jesus comes in when we repent of our sins and believe the good news.

Though the process sounds simple, it is so profound, meaningful and important that heaven rejoices when one sinner repents. It is a life-changing event to each person. The Bible calls it "new birth." Peter said, "For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God" (1Pe 1:23). Peter was once a smelly fisherman. Probably he told many lies about how many fish he caught. Maybe he swore uncontrollably from time to time. He was a mere physical man who worked hard to feed himself and his family. But one day Jesus said to him, "Put out into deep water and let down the nets for a catch." It didn't make sense to this veteran fisherman. But he obeyed Jesus' word because he honored Jesus more than his own idea. Then he experienced a miraculous catch of fish. His spiritual eyes opened to see God in Jesus and to see his own sin before the holy God. Then Jesus said, "Don't be afraid; from now on you will catch men" (Lk 5:10). The kingdom of God was planted in Peter's heart and grew steadily. When we obey one word of God by faith, we can have the kingdom of God in our hearts.

The Pharisees needed to learn from this simple fisherman. They needed to learn from the tax collectors and sinners who repented at the preaching of John (Lk 7:29-30). But they had rejected Jesus' words because they were too proud of their educational backgrounds and their human pedigrees. So they did not have the kingdom of God in their hearts. They had the power of sin and death in their hearts.

There was a young Pharisee named Saul of Tarsus. He was brilliant and well disciplined. He mastered the Jewish law and the philosophies of east and west. He had matchless zeal to advance the cause of Judaism. Outwardly he was impeccable. But inwardly he was wretched. He could not overcome covetous desire in his heart. His sinsickness grew to the point that he consented to the stoning of Stephen. After that he began to breathe murder; hell was growing in his heart. But Jesus had mercy on him. When he was riding to Damascus to carry out further persecution of Christians, the Risen Christ met him, in a light from heaven that flashed around him. Jesus said to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" Saul asked, "Who are you, Lord?" Jesus answered, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting" (Ac 9:3-5). Saul was immediately converted and began to preach that Jesus is God in the nearby synagogues. The kingdom of God grew in his heart from that time.

Young intellectuals in America need the kingdom of God within them. Last week the University of Chicago had a suicide prevention day, canceling the regular class schedule. U of C students study so hard to be the best. But without the kingdom of God in their hearts, there is only the power of sin and death. They have no meaning in their hard study. In their emptiness, some commit suicide. Thank God for sending humble men and women of God to serve U of C students with the gospel message. May God plant the kingdom of God in even one U of C student.

Second, the Son of Man will be like the lightning (22-24).

In this part Jesus turns his attention to his disciples. Jesus' disciples had accepted the kingdom of God in their hearts (Lk 8:10). They had made confessions of faith that Jesus is the Christ of God (9:20). They had followed Jesus with life commitment, denying their human desires and willingly participating in his work. They loved Jesus and were happy to be with Jesus. To them, Jesus spoke plainly about the coming of the kingdom of God. In brief, the kingdom of God comes when Jesus comes again to this world.

Look at verse 22. "Then he said to his disciples, '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.'" Jesus would soon leave this world and go to the Father. The disciples would long for his return with great yearning in their souls. While the disciples were vulnerable, false messiahs would appear to lead them astray (23). Jesus wanted to protect his disciples. So he explained the nature of his Second Coming. It will be much different than his first coming. It will not be a local event spread by word of mouth.

It will be a global event, visible throughout the world. 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.” Jesus’ Second Coming will be awesome. He will come again in such a spectacular way that every eye will see him and every tongue will confess that he is God. No one will have to be told by others that Jesus has come again because everyone can see it for themselves.

St. Paul described the Second Coming of Jesus in 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17. It 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” (1Th 4:16,17). Again, 1 Corinthians 15:51-52 says, “Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed—in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.” What a great hope we have in the Second Coming of Jesus. Amen! Come Lord Jesus!

Third, but first he must suffer and be rejected (25).

Look at verse 25. “But first he must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation.” Before coming in glory, Jesus had to suffer and be rejected. Why? It was God’s will for Jesus and it was the only way to save men from their sins. Isaiah 53:3-5 says, “He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed.”

The character of Jesus’ ministry is to suffer much and be rejected at present with a glorious future hope. Jesus’ disciples must participate in his sufferings to share in his glory. Jonathan Edwards came from a devout Christian family and was well educated. He loved Jesus and devoted himself to preaching the gospel at Northampton, Connecticut. A spiritual revival sprang up which is known as “the Great Awakening.” Some people were really changed inwardly by the gospel. Some only had the outer trappings. Mr. Edwards wanted to restrict communion to those who publicly confessed Jesus as their Christ. Then some church members became very rebellious. After a long struggle he was cast out and became a missionary to Stockbridge where he served a small white community and some Indians. Jonathan Edwards was used greatly by God. Yet he was falsely accused and rejected by his people. This is not unusual. It is normal for Jesus’ people. Jonathan Edwards’ last words were, “Trust in God, and you need not fear.” He reminds us of someone.

When we go fishing on the campuses, sometimes students say, “No” to us. Then we feel that we have been rejected by the entire generation. This is good. It is the evidence that we are Jesus’ people and that we are following his lifestyle. Jesus promises that those who share his suffering and rejection will also share his glory. So let’s keep up fishing and one-to-one Bible study on the campuses. It is our badge of honor in the sight of God.

Fourth, whoever loses his life will preserve it (26-37).

Look at verses 26-30. “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. 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. It will be just like this on the day the Son of Man is revealed.” Jesus’ main point here is that his Second Coming will be sudden and unexpected by the people of the world. Jesus also implies that his Second Coming is the day of God’s judgment for those who did not accept the gospel. It is a day of the destruction of ungodliness and all unrighteousness. This week we heard the tragic news of two nightclub disasters, one here in Chicago in which 21 people perished and another in Rhode Island in which 96 people perished. They just wanted to have some fun and forget their agonies of life for a while. But just like that they perished.

How then should Jesus’ disciples live? First of all, we must live as holy pilgrims, not too attached to the things in this world. Look at verses 31-32. “On that day no one who is on the roof of his house, with his goods inside, should go down to get them. Likewise, no one in the field should go back for anything. Remember Lot’s wife!” When Lot’s

wife was told to flee Sodom and not look back, she failed. She thought about her new sofa, her new drapes, her lovely garden, and the artwork on the walls, and she looked back. She became a pillar of salt. Jesus tells us to remember Lot's wife to warn us against being too attached to material life in this world. We must always remember that we are holy pilgrims in the world. We are just passing through to the kingdom of God.

Secondly, Jesus' people must give their lives for their holy mission. Look at verse 33. "Whoever tries to keep his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life will preserve it." Jesus boldly gave his life for God's holy mission on a daily basis. Jesus wants his disciples to do the same. The best way to prepare for the Second Coming of Christ is to live a sacrificial life for the sake of the gospel every day. When we lose our lives for Jesus and the gospel, we really save them. Missionary Maria Ahn Jr. interrupted her medical studies to go to Mongolia for six months and teach the Bible to Mongolian students. She is also serving second-generation missionaries. Each moment she is there is a precious treasure in the sight of God.

Finally, Jesus tells what will happen to people on earth when he comes again. Look at verses 34-35. "I tell you, on that night two people will be in one bed; one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding grain together; one will be taken and the other left." Suddenly, God's people will disappear from the earth. In some places it will be nighttime. As they are sleeping, some will be taken to be with Jesus. Others will be left. At that moment, if a husband is a genuine Christian and his wife is not, he will be taken and she will be left—and vice versa. In other places on the earth it will be daytime. Secretaries will be typing in their offices. Suddenly one of them will stop making a typing sound. In fact, she will be taken to be with Jesus. In the Chicago area, suddenly many high school teachers will be taken away and some of their students will be left wondering what happened. Across America many Ph.D. shepherds will suddenly be taken away and some of their students will be left wondering what happened. Hopefully, the Chicago center will be emptied and no one will remain here.

In this passage we learn that the kingdom of God is within us when we repent and believe in Jesus. In his right time, Jesus will come again like the lightning that flashes across the whole sky and take us up in glory with him. But first we must participate in the remaining suffering of Jesus Christ. In view of this glorious hope, let's give our lives as one-to-one Bible teachers to pioneer 561 American campuses and send one million missionaries to the world.