

THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS IN YOUR MIDST

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 in your midst.”

We just completed 8 weeks of 1 Peter study. May all of us who heard the words of 1 Peter not forget what we heard and learned, but hold on to it and put it into practice. From today we begin a 3-week series on an important Christian belief: the Second Coming of Jesus Christ, also known as his “return” or “appearing” or “revealing.” This is not a minor or trivial belief held by Christians. Rather it is mentioned hundreds of times in the New Testament. It is mentioned in the Apostles’ Creed: “He [Jesus Christ] ascended to heaven and sits at the right hand of God, the Father Almighty. From there he shall come [again] to judge the living and the dead.” Jesus is coming again! Amen? The second to last verse in the Bible, Revelation 22:20 says, **“He who testifies to these things says, “Yes, I am coming soon.”** Amen. Come, Lord Jesus. What we believe about the second coming of Jesus Christ most definitely influences the way we live our lives. Today we begin our series in Luke 17. Here, Jesus is making his way toward Jerusalem, where he will die on the cross. May God bless our study we three important truths to prepare us for our Lord’s coming again in glory.

First: “The kingdom of God is in your midst (within you)” (20-21).

Once, on being asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, Jesus replied, “The coming of the kingdom of God is not something that can be observed, nor will people say, ‘Here it is,’ or ‘There it is,’ because the kingdom of God is in your midst.”

The Pharisees were religious leaders among the Jews. They followed rigorous religious rules and ceremonies. As we know, the Pharisees were not Jesus #1 fans. Actually, they were not fans of Jesus at all, but critics, and hostile critics at that. They often confronted Jesus to try to trap or humiliate or discredit him in some way. In fact, they were the ones largely responsible for Jesus’ arrest, trial and execution. So they came and asked Jesus a question

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about when the kingdom of God would come. Why did they ask this question? There could be many reasons.

Perhaps they asked Jesus to test him, so as to verify or falsify Jesus' words, like a prophet. This would be like asking Jesus to give them a sign from heaven to prove the authority of his message. Many of the Hebrew prophets of the Old Testament planted hope in the Jewish people of a coming King and kingdom. Daniel 2:44 prophesied, **“In the time of those kings, the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed, nor will it be left to another people. It will crush all those kingdoms and bring them to an end, but it will itself endure forever.”** Here, if you trace this prophecy, this kingdom would be set up during the time of the Roman Empire, which was contemporary to Jesus' audience. Again, Daniel 7:13-14 prophesied, **“In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all nations and peoples of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.”** So the Jews were looking forward to a coming King and kingdom. There are many more prophecies in the Hebrew Scriptures (our Old Testament) which we could look at that spoke of a coming King and kingdom. The Pharisees were interrogating Jesus about this kingdom. Of course, as leaders of the Jews, they assumed they would play an important role in any such kingdom.

How did Jesus reply? Look at verses 20-21 again. He said, **“The coming of the kingdom of God is not something that can be observed, nor will people say, ‘Here it is,’ or ‘There it is,’ because the kingdom of God is in your midst.”** First, Jesus said the kingdom's coming cannot be observed. People will not point and say, “Here it is. There it is.” We must be careful about trying to observe detailed evidence of the kingdom's coming. Of course, we should hope and long and pray for Jesus' coming again. But we must be careful not to assume we can observe his coming. Some people spend too much time comparing their Bibles with world news. Some even set a date when they believe Jesus will come again. Until now, they have all been wrong.

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One Bible scholar warns: "...if your interest in the return of Christ becomes a consuming fixation with what is happening in this world, you have utterly missed the point. The knowledge that Christ's return is imminent should turn our hearts heavenward, 'from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ' (Php 3:20)."—John MacArthur (1939-present)¹. Another Bible scholar cautions, "This is a good warning to believers who do nothing but study prophecy. Certainly we should look for His return and long to see Him come, but at the same time, we should be busy doing His work when He comes."—Warren Wiersbe (1929-present)²

The second thing Jesus replies is "the kingdom of God is in your midst." The footnote and the old NIV says, "the kingdom of God is within you." The Greek word "entos" can be translated "in the midst" or "within." So which is it? There are two valid biblical understandings of what Jesus is saying. But first we can say what it doesn't mean. It doesn't mean that the kingdom of God was within the Pharisees' hearts, since they rejected Jesus. Luke 7:29-30 tell us: "(All the people, even the tax collectors, when they heard Jesus' words, acknowledged that God's way was right, because they had been baptized by John. But the Pharisees and the experts in the law rejected God's purpose for themselves, because they had not been baptized by John.)" The Pharisees did not accept Jesus nor John, because they didn't want to repent.

"**The kingdom of God is within you**" is also misinterpreted in New Age thought these days. They say things like, "We don't need God out there, since God is within every person. We are gods." That's not what Jesus meant at all. So here are two valid interpretations of Jesus' words.

(1) The kingdom of God is Jesus, who was right there, in their midst. This is biblically sound and true. According to Mark's gospel, the first thing Jesus preached was, "**The time has come. The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!**" (Mark 1:15) Jesus brought the message of the kingdom of God because he is the King of heaven. Actually, that's what "Christ" means, "anointed One of God" or "King of heaven." Jesus said in Luke 11:20, "**But if I drive out demons by the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.**"

¹ From John MacArthur's "Grace to You" website: <http://www.gty.org/resources/print/articles/A368>

² From "The Bible Exposition Commentary" by Warren Wiersbe

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(2) The kingdom of God is within those who repent and believe in Jesus. Colossians 1:12-14 declares good news for Christians: **“the Father...has qualified you to share in the inheritance of his holy people in the kingdom of light. For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.”** Jesus said to Nicodemus that to see and enter the kingdom of God one must be born again from above with a spiritual birth (Jn 3:3,5). John 1:12 tells us that new birth comes to all who receive Jesus and believe in his name. Based on this Bible truth, we can say: **If you have repented of your sins and received Jesus as your Savior and Lord, then the kingdom of God is within you. This is the good news of the kingdom of God. So we who have believed can urge anyone to repent and believe this good news.**

Second: Do not run after false messiahs (22-24). Jesus then turned his attention to his disciples. Look at verses 22-24.

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. People will tell you, ‘There he is!’ or ‘Here he is!’ Do not go running off after them. 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.

Here, the phrase “Son of Man” alludes back to the prophecy of Daniel 7:13-14, the Son of Man who comes on the clouds and is worshiped by all nations. Jesus also referred more commonly to himself not in the first person (“I”) but in the third person (“he”) as “the Son of Man,” as his favorite title for himself. The disciples would long to see one of the days of the Son of Man. This means they would long for Jesus to return. But his return would not come as quickly as they wanted. In fact, we now know that his return did not come in their lifetimes, for Jesus Christ has not yet returned. How do we know that? Because he said that his coming will be like lightning that is seen by all. In fact, it will be greater than localized lightning. Revelation 1:7 says it will be on a global scale: **“‘Look, he is coming with the clouds,’ and ‘every eye will see him, even those who pierced him’; and all peoples on earth ‘will mourn because of him.’ So shall it be! Amen.”**

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But before he comes, we must watch out not to be fooled by false messiahs. Jesus warned in verse 23, **“People will tell you, ‘There he is!’ or ‘Here he is!’ Do not go running off after them.”** When life is difficult, people are more prone to deception and false remedies. They want a quick cure, a ‘get-rich-quick’ scheme. Jesus warns, **“Do not go running off after them.”** Wow! They tricksters even get people to run off after them. Maybe they are like rock stars or Hollywood stars or some kind of miracle workers. Don’t be fooled. There is only one Messiah, Jesus Christ. Don’t fall for any other false messiah. Don’t put your trust in any other. Jesus’ coming will be like lightning. Everyone will see. Everyone will know.

Third: Hope in Jesus, more than worldly things (25-37). Jesus went on to say more about his coming and how we can be more prepared. Though Jesus will come again in glory like lightning, he first had to suffer the cross. See verse 25.

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

Jesus knew he would rise again in glory and come again in glory as King one day. But he also had to suffer many things first and be rejected by his generation. Naturally, we like glory and want to avoid suffering. But as we learned in 1 Peter, we all have to suffer in one way or another: we can suffer for sin, or we can suffer for Jesus’ sake. We can suffer for being wicked or we can suffer for being righteous. Apostles Peter and Paul both urged Christians to join them in suffering for Christ (1Pe 2:21; 4:13; 2Ti 1:8; 2:3). This doesn’t mean we have to sign up for crucifixion. But we do have to die to our sinful natures (Col 3:5; Ro 8:13). Listen to Jesus in Luke 9:23-24, **“Then he said to them all: “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will save it.”**

In verses 26-29, Jesus gave two examples of warning from Genesis:

“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

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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.”**

God saved Noah and Lot from destruction. Their contemporaries were not as fortunate. They were all destroyed. They were just going about their lives and business as usual. They had no idea that judgment was coming. But God’s judgment came upon them suddenly and unexpectedly. God will judge the world. God will judge those who do not believe and obey him. But he will save those who believe and obey. Some people are living to eat, drink, marry, buy, sell, plant and build. They live as if there is no God, and as if their own pleasure, comfort or advancement in the world is what matters most. They lack long-range perspective. Jesus said:

“It will be just like this on the day the Son of Man is revealed. On that day no one who is on the housetop, with possessions inside, should go down to get them. Likewise, no one in the field should go back for anything. Remember Lot’s wife! Whoever tries to keep their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life will preserve it.”

Jesus gave another warning from Genesis saying, **“Remember Lot’s wife!”** Do you remember Lot’s wife? The message of God through the angels to Lot, his wife and his two daughters was: **“Flee for your lives! Don’t look back, and don’t stop anywhere in the plain! Flee to the mountains or you will be swept away!”** (Gen 19:17) The Bible tells us what happened: **“But Lot’s wife looked back, and she became a pillar of salt.”** (Gen 19:26) When Lot’s wife did not follow the Lord’s command carefully, she perished. Her own husband Lot could not save her. I’m not sure if she was just curious or too attached to her home in Sodom. Jesus warned that we must not be attached to worldly goods or anything earthly. This includes people, and even our own lives in this world. Jesus taught in Luke 9:25-26, **“What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit their very self? Whoever is ashamed of me and my words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of them when he comes in his glory and in the glory of the Father and of the holy angels.”**

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There will be a separation of loved ones and coworkers when he comes again to judge. 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.”**

This does not mean that 50% of people will be saved and 50% will be condemned. Actually, the number of saved might be smaller since Jesus said in Matthew 7:14, **“small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.”** Two women might have the same job. Outwardly they do the same work. But one has the kingdom of God inside. Probably she tried to share the gospel with her fellow worker. But her fellow worker was not at all interested. She was too busy and concerned about worldly things. One has the kingdom of God within. The other does not. Their destinies are quite different. Not only two people at the same work place, but it’s possible that even husband and wife might not have the same eternal destination. This is surprising and disturbing. One missionary had a dream that scared him, similar to Ebenezer Scrooge. In his dream, his wife was taken up to heaven to be with Jesus, while he was left behind. This dream shook him and he began to repent and really believe in Jesus. We must take Jesus’ warnings seriously. We must examine our hearts and ask: In what is my hope? Is it in this world or in Jesus?

Verse 37 closes this teaching of Jesus. **“Where, Lord?” they asked. He replied, “Where there is a dead body, there the vultures will gather.”** What does this mean? I’m not exactly sure, but dead people and vultures doesn’t sound very appealing.

The return of Jesus is 2000 years closer than when Luke wrote. Then what should we do in light of this passage?

- (1) Accept Jesus as King through repentance and faith in Him.
- (2) Don’t follow false Christs, but the true Christ, Jesus. Obey his teachings; believe his promises.
- (3) Put our hope not in worldly things, but in Jesus. Worldly things include: treasures (like a house, a car, an iPhone, etc); pleasures (either ungodly or even frivolous or petty pursuits); and people—like a boyfriend, girlfriend, spouse, or our children. This doesn’t mean we shouldn’t love them. It means not to put all our hope, effort and energy in them to make a success in this

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world. Rather, we must love all these people with godly love and prayer to lead them to deeper faith and trust in Jesus, our King.

Through repentance and faith in Jesus, we will have the kingdom of God within us and in our midst. In this way, we will be ready and eager for Jesus' return.