

# THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS IN YOUR MIDST

Luke 17:20-37

Key Verses: 17:20-21

*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."*

In this passage, Jesus teaches us two things about the kingdom of God. First, the kingdom of God is in our midst now. Second, the kingdom of God will come on earth when Jesus comes again. The kingdom of God is our ultimate hope; it is our permanent home. Let us think about the kingdom of God and how we should prepare for it.

## I. ON THE KINGDOM OF GOD (20-21)

Look at verse 20a. *Once, on being asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, Jesus replied, ...* We know that the Pharisees were no fan of Jesus. In fact, they were highly critical of Jesus and his teaching. Except a few open-minded ones, these religious leaders were deadly against Jesus, often plotting to kill him. But in this occasion, they asked Jesus a question about the kingdom of God. Even they noticed that Jesus preached the kingdom of God as of first importance from the very beginning of his ministry. Jesus also healed many sick people, and this made him popular. The Pharisees were jealous of him. And they probably wondered why Jesus would preach the kingdom of God instead of focusing on the popular healing ministry. But of course, Jesus wanted the people to receive the gift of eternal life in the kingdom of God much more so than the healing of their sicknesses.

Notice that the question the Pharisees asked was "when the kingdom of God would come." They were interested in the timing. Now, we should know that Jewish people had a political understanding of the kingdom of God. Many of them hoped that God would raise up a messiah who could liberate them from the evil Roman Empire and establish a theocratic kingdom, just like the kingdom of David. And this wasn't just the Pharisees' idea. Jesus' disciples had the same hope. After his resurrection, Jesus appeared to his disciples and spent over 40 days with them, again speaking to them about the kingdom of God. Then the disciples asked him, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?" (Ac 1:3-6) They thought Jesus meant the kingdom of Israel when he spoke them about the kingdom of God. And they were also interested in the timing.

What was Jesus' answer? Look at verses 20b-21. *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."* In his answer, Jesus said three things about the kingdom of God. First, the coming of the kingdom of God is not something that can be observed. Second, the kingdom of God is not a location that

we can point our finger on a map and say, “Here it is,” or “There it is.” Third, the kingdom of God is in our midst.

Jesus told the Pharisees that they asked a wrong question. The kingdom of God is not a physical place that you can see and touch. They had a mistaken notion about the kingdom of God. The question should not be when or where. It is because the kingdom of God is not physical, but spiritual. The kingdom of God is not of this world but from above (Jn 18:36). In fact, the kingdom of God is in our midst.

What does it mean that the kingdom of God is “in our midst”? Mark 1:14-15 give us a clue: *After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. “The time has come,” he said. “The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!”* The first message Jesus preached as he began his messianic ministry was: “The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!” The kingdom of God came, because God came down to earth to give us the good news of salvation. So when Jesus said, “the kingdom of God is in your midst,” he was telling them, “You should look no further. The kingdom of God is right in front of you.” The kingdom of God was in their midst, because Jesus was in their midst. The kingdom of God, by definition, is where God is the king. The kingdom of God is where Jesus rules as the king. If Jesus is the king in heaven, the kingdom of God is in heaven. If Jesus rules on earth, the kingdom of God is on earth. If Jesus rules in your heart and your life as the king, the kingdom of God is in your heart.

Do you remember the two robbers who were crucified with Jesus? One of them repented his sin and accepted Jesus as his Savior. The man said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” Jesus answered him, “Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise” (Jn 18:42-43). Jesus told him, “You will be with me in paradise.” When we are with Jesus, we are in heaven wherever it may be. We are in the kingdom of God when we are with Jesus. Without Jesus, heaven would be only a place with empty streets of gold.

Jesus told the Pharisees that the kingdom of God was not coming in the manner they were expecting. In fact, he told them, the kingdom had already begun, right under their noses. The Son of God was ruling in the hearts of some people, and the king himself was standing in their midst, though many of them refused to accept him.

Knowing that the kingdom of God is in our midst, we should search our hearts to invite the king to our lives. We have the kingdom of God in us when we have a personal relationship with Christ. So the right question to ask is “Is Jesus the king of my life, or am I the king? Am I walking with Jesus everyday in obedience to his words?”

The kingdom of God is in us when we have Jesus ruling as the king in our lives by submitting ourselves to him. How can we have this? Jesus said to Nicodemus, “Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit” (Jn 3:5). We must repent our sins and accept Jesus as our personal Savior so that we may be baptized by the Holy Spirit. Jesus said, “Blessed are the poor in spirit,

for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Mt 6:3). We must repent our pride before God and come to Jesus humbly. Again Jesus said, “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God” (Mt 6:8). We must repent the sinful desires in our hearts so that we may see our king.

There was a young scholar who worked very hard to advance his career. He traveled to several colleges to lecture as an adjunct professor. His dream was to be successful in career, marry a pretty girl and buy a house. Then he fell in love with a pretty girl. But two days before their wedding, his fiancée had an accident and died. He became distraught and began to drink heavily. He behaved like a mental patient. One night, his apartment was burned down by fire. He lost all his cherished books. Among the charred remains, he found a Bible that he used to keep on his bookshelf as decoration. He began to read it for the first time. To keep the story short, he studied the Bible diligently and eight years later became a missionary. His human dreams were gone, but he gained eternal life. Jesus was in his life. He had the kingdom of God in him.

## II. THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS COMING (22-37)

Look at verses 22-25. *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. But first he must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation.*

The kingdom of God begins in our hearts when we accept Jesus as our personal Savior. The kingdom of God grows in us as we walk with Jesus. In the second part of today’s passage, Jesus teaches us about the kingdom of God as our permanent home, that is, the kingdom of God that will come when he returns. He told his disciples that he must first suffer many things and be rejected. He would be crucified to take away all our sins. Then God would raise him on the third day. He would be ascended to heaven to sit at the right hand of God. And he will return as the Judge of the living and the dead. So his disciples would not be able to see him for a while (22).

Then Jesus told his disciples what would happen when he comes back to establish the kingdom of God. **First**, people would try to confuse his disciples by saying, “There he is!” or “Here he is!” We should not run after these false messiahs. **Second**, on his day, Jesus would be like the lightning, which flashes and lights up the sky from one end to the other. Jesus’ Second Coming will be awesome. It will be much different from his first coming. It will not be a local event. It will be a global event, visible throughout the world. He will come again in such a spectacular way that every eye will see him. We will not find it out from Facebook or Twitter feed. We don’t have to watch Fox News or read Washington Post to learn about his return, because we will see it with our own eyes.

**Third**, Jesus will come at a time when people do not expect him. 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 says that life will be going on as usual on the day of his return. People will be going about their everyday business, totally indifferent to the coming judgment. They will be as surprised as the people in Noah’s time were by the great flood (Ge 6-8) or the people in Lot’s day by the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (Ge 19). We don’t know when Jesus will come. No one knows the time, not even Jesus himself. We only know with 100% certainty that he is coming. He may come today, tomorrow, or centuries from now. We don’t know. So we must live each day as if Jesus were coming today.

**Fourth**, there will be separation of people between those who believe in Jesus and those who don’t. 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.”* On the Judgment Day, there will separation between people. Two people from seemingly similar situations in life will not necessarily end up in the same place. This will be true even among church members. In the church on earth, there are both the genuine believers (the sheep) and the fake believers (the goats). They cannot be separated now without causing damage to the number of good people who genuinely believe in Jesus, as he explains in the parable of the weeds (Mt 13:24-30; 36-43). Thus they are allowed to grow together until the judgment. But time will come when they will be separated. Jesus will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left (Mt 25:33). Two people will be doing the same thing in one moment, but in the next moment, they will be headed to totally different places to spend their eternity. One group will go to eternal life and the other to eternal punishment (Mt 25:46). This is a sobering truth that Jesus tells us in advance.

### III. HOW TO PREPARE FOR THE COMING KINGDOM (31-33)

Based on Jesus’ words, we believe that this world we live in now will end someday. Jesus will come back at an unexpected time to establish new heaven and new earth. And there will be separation of people. One group will be taken and the other will be left. One group will be with Christ in paradise and the other will be condemned to the fiery lake of burning sulfur suffering non-stop pain for eternity. The choice should be clear to us. That is the reason Jesus is telling us now, while we still have the time to decide. Now the big question—how should we live our lives in this temporary world as we wait for the second coming of Jesus?

**First**, from Jesus’ words in today’s passage, we learn that we should not be like the people of Noah’s time or the people of Sodom and Gomorrah. What did they do? They were “eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building” up to the day of the judgment of God. Wait a minute! These things are exactly what we are doing today, day in and day out! God saw them eating and drinking, and marrying and being given in

marriage and he was so sad that he decided to wipe them out. Why? It was because they were doing these things apart from God, their Creator. They also engaged all kinds of violence and sinful activities, but their biggest sin was that they abandoned God. They had no relationship with God. No doubt many of them said, “I don’t need God in my life. I can be happy without him.” Sadly, there are many people around us today who are just like the people in Noah’s time. They are not much different from those who lived in Sodom and Gomorrah. It is a tragedy that they are storing up the wrath of God.

**Second**, “Remember Lot’s wife!” (32). Lot’s wife was told to flee Sodom and not look back. But she thought about her new sofa, her new mink coat, the shiny new car in the garage, and she looked back. She became a pillar of salt. Look at verse 32. *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.* Jesus warns us against being too attached to material life in this world. We must remember that we are holy pilgrims in the world. We are just passing through this world on our way to heaven.

**Third**, whoever loses life will preserve it. Look at verse 33. *Whoever tries to keep their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life will preserve it.* To put this in a context, let me read Mark 8:34-35: Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it.” As we make a pilgrim’s progress towards the kingdom of God, Jesus wants us to make small sacrifices for him and his gospel. Yes, we feel like dying when we have to give up what we want in order to serve the Lord. But we should not feel sorry. We should think about the eternity we will spend with him in heaven.

Our life here is a preparation for our eternity in heaven. It is only a dress rehearsal. It is just a practice for the real thing. May God help us to live each day with this in mind so that we may not become like the people in Noah’s time! May God help us to walk with our Lord Jesus daily, serving him as our king! Praise God for the kingdom of God that is in our midst!