

**Title:** What Do We Mean by, “The Kingdom of God?”

**Text:** Luke 17:20-37

**Date:** November 28, 2021 at FBCW

**INTRO.** When I read the Gospels, here’s my simple (and sobering) understanding when it comes to the Kingdom of God:

- Sometimes I am shocked *who gets in* → drunks, tax collectors, prostitutes, outsiders...in a word: sinners.
- Jesus spoke often about going into the highways/rural roads and compelling the lost, far-off sinners to come and respond to His Gospel.
- But other times, I am shocked *who is not in* → scribes, teachers of the Law, Pharisees, Sadducees, members of the Sanhedrin (the religious leaders of their time).

**Remember (and this is almost haunting)** Matt 7:21-23, Jesus said on the last day → *Not everyone who says to me, “Lord, Lord” will enter the kingdom of heaven...but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven. On that day many will come to me and say, “Did we not prophesy in your name and drive out demons and do miracles in your name?” Then I will announce to them, “I never knew you. Depart from me, you lawbreakers!”*

**The truth is – from a human perspective – only God in heaven completely/fully knows who is saved, and who is not.**

I think of the Parable of the Wheat and Tares.

- Matt 13:30, *Let both grow together (wheat and tares in the field) until the harvest. At harvest time I’ll tell the reapers: Gather the weeds first and tie them in bundles to burn them, but collect the wheat in my barn.*

Salvation is an individual, personal decision between each person and the Lord Jesus.

- We are not saved by works or effort.
- We cannot inherit salvation from our parents, pastors, or friends.

**Q:** Can we know that we are saved?

**A:** YES! There is glorious peace in knowing that we are saved!

**How then, are we saved?**

- We are saved by calling on Jesus (Rom 10:13) and putting all of our hope, trust, and faith in His work on the cross, and also His bodily resurrection (Rom 10:9).
- Eph 2:8, *For you are saved by grace through faith, and this is not from yourselves; it is God’s gift.*

When we are saved, there is a new nature (righteousness) put inside of us that will produce new desires for Christ...but also...we will feel strong conviction/remorse when we know we've sinned and disappointed God!

- 2 Cor 5:17, *If a person is in Christ, he is a new creation...*
- John 16:8, *When (the Spirit) comes, he will convict the world about sin, righteousness, and judgment.*

**I like to think of it like this → when it comes to being a born-again Christian:**

1. I celebrate my personal assurance. Christ saved me and is keeping me. (dependence)
2. But I also never stop pursuing holiness/Christlikeness in every area of life. (discipline)

**Our Bible teaches each of these truths/verses:**

1 John 5:13, *I have written these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life.* → (assurance)

Phil 2:12, *Not only in my presence but even more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.* (humbly, soberly keep seeking the Lord!) (2 Cor 13:5, *Test yourselves*)

**Ok, Jeremy what's the point? This is basic, biblical theology that we all need to embrace:**

- On the one hand, I am already saved. I cannot get more saved.
- I am elect in Christ...and He has put his Holy Spirit in me as a deposit (Eph 1:13-14).
- But I do not yet look like what I'm going to look like in heaven (for eternity).

I have been saved from hell...and God is taking me to glory...but I am still on the journey!

Though I am already saved, yes...but, I am still being saved...and my salvation will not be eternally complete until I receive my glorified body at the return of Christ...when He transports me through the pearly gates of heaven!

- I'm not what I ought to be yet...I'm not what I will be yet...
- But I'm also not what I was!

Rom 8:30, *And those he predestined, he also called; and those he called, he also justified; and those he justified, he also glorified.*

1 John 3:2, *Dear friends, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet been revealed. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him because we will see Him as He is.*

**Background of Luke 17:20-37.**

In the Gospels – there is a tremendous amount of sad irony with the Pharisees.

- They were the religious experts. They knew the Old Testament very well.
- But they knew it with their *heads*...and not their *hearts*.

Luke 17:20, *Being asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come...*

- Pharisees are likely mocking Jesus.
- They were always trying to “catch him” – to trip him up.

V20 – where is the Kingdom of God?

V21 – ironically, the Kingdom of God (Jesus) was standing right in front of them, but they failed to see it!

Pharisees → reportedly looking for a strong Messiah, as predicted in the OT ... but the true Messiah was right in front of their eyes, and they didn't recognize Jesus!

**LESSON.** This is not unlike many people today → “I wish God would show me his power” – and it's not that God's power is weak...it's that our faith/vision are small.

- Or we are mentally trying to hijack Jesus and make him the kind of God he was never intended to be.

**So when the Pharisees ask the question**, “*When is the Kingdom coming?*”

**Jesus answers them with this response**, “*The Kingdom is already here...though it's not yet fully here...but you can be assured it's here, and more is coming.*”

Bible teachers call this – The Already, Not Yet – tension that is taught all across the Scripture.

- The Kingdom of God is *already here* (through Christ's First Coming).
- The Kingdom of God is *not yet fully here* (it will culminate in Christ's Second Coming).

So, in Luke 17:20-37, Jesus is speaking of the sudden, yet unexpected nature of His coming Kingdom.

**First, Christ's Kingdom is not primarily about signs that are observable (Luke 17:20).**

- We should not be looking for spectacular, cosmic signs.
- The Kingdom of God is not like an earthly kingdom with geographical boundaries.
- Resist looking to institutions, programs, politics, or social activism.

Jesus is not contradicting what He said in Mark 13 and Matthew 24 about the evidence, like birth pains, that will precede His return:

- Wars, rumors of wars, famines, earthquakes, natural disasters.
- “*All these are the beginning of birth pains.*”

**LESSON:** God's Kingdom is coming rather quietly, evident only in the change in people's hearts and lives. The real progress of God's Kingdom → is expressed in heartfelt transformation!

**Second, Christ's Kingdom is something His disciples' hearts long for (Luke 17:22).**

- “You will long to see it...but you won't see it...”

Imagine how much those 1<sup>st</sup> century disciples “missed” the physical Jesus after His ascension.

- Yes, they had the Holy Spirit and were doing greater works (John 14:12).
- But I'm sure they missed the physical Jesus...they longed to see him again.
- (ILLUS: nostalgia of being around family at the Thanksgiving table)

There's something about getting “older” in Jesus! You don't necessarily want to go back...but heaven gets sweeter! And unbroken fellowship with Christ in heaven is what we long for!

The disciples missed Jesus...and we long to see Jesus...true disciples “long” for Jesus!

**Third, be aware: many false Messiahs will rise in the last days (Luke 17:23-24).**

- There have always been religious charlatans! Those who want to copy Jesus for profit!
- Many claim to be Jesus (they are not).
- Many claim that He's returned already (He has not).
- Do NOT believe these false claims!

V24 – like lightening across the sky...when the real Jesus returns...the whole world will see it!

**Fourth, Christ's coming Kingdom will catch many unprepared. They will be surprised (Luke 17:26-35).**

- As in the days of Noah (vv 26-27).
- As in the days of Lot (vv 28-29).
- On the roof or in the field (v 31).
- In the bed or at the mill (vv 34-35).

**LESSON.** The point here is that when Christ returns, there will be no time to prepare at His Second Coming. Prepare now! When He comes...it will be too late.

**Fifth, the paradox of the Kingdom of God (the Gospel) is this: if your security is in worldly/material things, you will lose. But if your security is in Christ alone, you win (Luke 17:33).**

- “Make his life secure” = to preserve, or to try and keep something perishable alive.
- Isaiah 40:8

This is our heartbeat at FBCW: *to deny ourselves, and live for Christ* → it's the only thing that matters...it's the only thing that lasts!

**CONCL.** I want to be careful not to over-interpret Luke 17:37, *Where the corpse is, there also the vultures will be gathered.*

When buzzards (scavenger birds) are circling → it means something is dead.

- It could foreshadow the widespread spiritual death at the coming of the Lord.
- It could foreshadow that it will be visible, obvious, predictable when the Lord returns.

It's interesting here that Jesus speaks of "the end" – the same exact way the Prophet Simeon spoke of Jesus at His birth! Simeon told Joseph and Mary (while holding Jesus in his arms):

- Luke 2:34, *Indeed, this child is destined to cause the fall and rise of many in Israel and to be a sign that will be opposed...*

Those who oppose Jesus – will be forever separated from him in hell.

Those who embrace Jesus – will be gathered with Him into heaven for eternity.

**Q:** What and where is the Kingdom of God?

**A:** It's wherever the King is residing and reigning! Is he in your heart today?

**Q:** What do we mean by the Kingdom of God?

**A:** The Kingdom of God is wherever Christ reigns – it is here now, and more is coming soon.