

**Jesus' Kingdom: You ain't seen nothing yet**  
Luke 17:20-37

**Introduction:** The idea of a monarchy is intriguing to us, maybe even romanticized as Americans. Though no one raised under our current Republic has never experienced life with a king or queen, we are aware of the lives of Queen Elizabeth, Prince Charles, and the boy princes. We've heard the most likely mythical story of George Washington declining a kingship when the new nation gained independence, opening the door to the grand experiment known as America. I have been raised with a president who is "the most powerful man in the world", yet who does not, cannot, operate unilaterally but has to get approval by Congress and who is checked by a judicial system designed to keep balance. Even our largely two party system allows for disagreement, change, and a voice of the people living under its influence. Though we like the romance of monarchy, we are decidedly committed to rebuff the thought of one person making decisions for everyone.

Perhaps this is the reason we either do not think much of the *kingdom of God* or of **Jesus being King**, since it outside of our cultural experience, as well as our desire for independence. But for the people of Jesus day, particularly those that had held the line of keeping the OT law, the idea of the **Kingdom** dominated their thinking. They longed for the day that God would send a king to sit on the throne of David, rule over His people, cast out the oppressors, fulfill all promises, and reinstitute worship in the Temple the way it was intended. They were not wrong to think this. In fact, reading the OT literally (and rightfully), we see that God made everlasting covenants with Israel: the **Abrahamic Covenant** (Gen 12:11-3), which promised that Abram's descendents would possess the promised land and live under God's authority and rule, **Davidic Covenant** (2 Samuel 7) which promised a descendent of David would always sit on the throne, and the **New Covenant** (Jeremiah 31), which promised restoration and forgiveness. Tracing the events of redemptive history, we see that after Abraham passed down his blessing to Isaac, Jacob, and then his sons, Israel ended up growing in strength in Egypt, where God saved them out of slavery through a redemptive act, **the blood of the Passover Lamb**. Israel entered the land with Joshua at the helm, possessing it and growing in strength with God as their King. Yet that was not enough. They wanted to be like other nations, and asked for and received a king. Saul, then David, and Solomon reigned for over 100 years in the pinnacle of influence in the world. This, however, did not last long as division in the monarchy led to a split nation, and judgment by Assyria in the North in 722 B.C and Babylon in the South in 586 B.C. Israel was deported, taken captive, and scattered.

It was during this captivity that pre-exilic prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel) prophesied of a future great day when the perfect, **everlasting kingdom** of God would come. The post exilic prophets continued this message with uniform passion as they waited in expectation of this coming kingdom that God promised. Not only this, but it is clear from extra biblical writings that the Jewish people at the time of Jesus were NOT looking for two comings of Messiah, but one triumphal return.<sup>1</sup> Between the ending of the OT canon in Malachi and the birth of Jesus, there were **400 years of prophetic silence** (like there had been 400 years of slavery awaiting redemption). So the people waited, longing for the Kingdom. When Jesus came claiming to be the awaited Messiah, there was thus excitement, wonder, and intrigue, but also disappointment, wariness, and disbelief. **What does all this matter?** It helps us understand why the Pharisees had such a problem with Jesus, a carpenter's son born in a lowly manger that was visited by lowly shepherds, and why even the disciples asked questions about the coming kingdom.

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<sup>1</sup> Emil Shurer, *A History of the Jewish People in the Time of Jesus Christ*

We pick up the narrative of Jesus explaining His kingdom that both clears up the misconceptions people had as well as **how** someone can see it, and **how people miss it**.

### The Present Reality of the King's Arrival (20-21)

**Luke 17:20-21** Being asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, he answered them, "The kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be observed,<sup>21</sup> nor will they say, 'Look, here it is!' or 'There!' for behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you."

#### Missing the Kingdom by missing the King (20)

Right after healing 10 lepers, which once again showed Jesus' supernatural power over illness, clarifying His claims to being Messiah, the Pharisee's approached Him to ask the **real question** that was bothering them: **when will the Kingdom come!** Jesus had talked about it, demonstrated it, and teased that He would lead them there, but they wanted to know when the party would start! This was the sentiment of people around Jesus at this time, especially since he had raised Lazarus from the dead (John 11). As He neared Jerusalem, "*they supposed that the kingdom of God was to appear immediately*" (Luke 19:11). This kingdom would usher in amazing peace (Isa.11:6-7), topographical changes, like the Mount of Olives being split in two (Zech. 14:4), along with comfort (Isa. 40:1-2), prosperity (Amos 9:13-15), and health (Isa. 35:5-6). They wanted to know when they would begin to see all of that. The sadness of this question lies in the fact that they were asking the One who would actually bring the Kingdom.

#### The offer of the Kingdom by the King (21)

Jesus answered them by saying **2 profound truths**: 1) the kingdom they were asking about, the kingdom in the present would not come the way they thought. There would not be the dramatic signs they were expecting, even though they were given plenty of miraculous signs during Jesus' public and teaching ministry (including the healing of 10 lepers right before!) 2) **The kingdom of God was there, because the King Himself was right in front of them.** This last part of the verse is important for us to unpack to understand what Jesus was saying, since the implications for the kingdom .

Jesus said that the kingdom was *in the midst of you*. There is much debate over the meaning of this phrase. The word used here is used only one other time in the NT, in **Matt. 23:26**, in reference to cleaning the *inside* of a cup. There is another Greek phrase *en meso* that is used regularly in the NT to refer to *in the midst of* (Matt. 10:16; Luke 2:46, 8:7, 10:3, 22:27, 24:36; Acts 1:15, 2:22; Heb. 2:12), so if Luke was communicating the idea of being around, he could have been clear using that term. *Did Jesus mean the Kingdom was present "inside" of them, or standing there in their midst?* To answer that question, we must look at the realities that we know for sure.

- **The consummation of the Kingdom --- Christ's ruling on the throne of David --- is still future** - The next section of verses will make that clear. Jesus is not reigning physically on this earth right now, He is not sitting on a throne in Jerusalem, and He has not set up a government over the earth
- **Jesus has authority right now, since He is seated at the right hand of God after His ascension** - Ephesians 1:20-21 says that Jesus is sitting at the right hand of God, which gives Him authority over all rulers, authorities and dominions, since everything has been put under His feet (and we are seated with Him! - Eph. 2:6)
- **Jesus has left us the Spirit to indwell us as a down payment** - Ephesians 1:13-14 says that the Holy Spirit is not simply given to **seal our salvation**, but also as a *guarantee* or *down payment* of our inheritance in the future. The Spirit is an **invisible Helper** given by Jesus to convict, guide in the truth, and illumine our minds. He lives in us. But He is also the down payment of a future

Kingdom, one that we possess by promise but not yet by fulfillment. He's like putting a down payment on a house that you won't own outright until later. He is like the **engagement ring** that promises a future marriage consummation, and though there are aspects of marriage experienced beforehand, only after the marriage ceremony can a full marriage be enjoyed. We experience aspects of a future kingdom today: relationship with Jesus, forgiveness, His sovereignty, worship, restoration, righteousness, joy, and peace in the Holy Spirit (Rom. 14:17) but we experience these in *invisible ways*, or ways that happen internally rather than overtly when Jesus reigns.

- **There is no way to see the Kingdom without being born again** - This is what Jesus told Nicodemus in John 3:3, 5. Unless he was born again by water and the Spirit, he could not **see**, nor **enter the Kingdom of God**. Though the Kingdom is not yet, we still can see it and enter it in the future.
- **The point of the Kingdom is the King** - This is what the Pharisees miss, and what we can easily miss today. The Spirit that dwells in us points us to Him. Jesus is Lord, He reigns, and has authority. We worship Him in faith, awaiting the day that we will see Him for who He is (1 John 3:2), where we will reign with Him. We get a taste of some of those realities today, when we take communion, when we fellowship together, when we love each other, forgiving each other, but they simply wet our appetite for something future. We miss the Kingdom when we miss the King. The Pharisees wanted the Kingdom and its benefits, but missed the fact that they truly needed the King, who offered the blood of a Passover Lamb to bring restoration to a people in their bondage to sin, the light to those in darkness. Today, we have the same call, since Jesus has made Himself known through His Word and calls people to follow Him, but they are looking for their own *kingdoms*. Jesus is not looking to promote or validate the artificial kingdoms we create. He is calling us to **repent and turn to Him, yielding ourselves to HIM, and following Him to His kingdom to come**.

## The Future Promise of the King's Return (22-37)

### Unmistakable nature of the King's coming (22-25)

**Luke 17:22** And he said to the **disciples**, "The days are coming when you will desire to see one of the days of the Son of Man, and you will not see it. <sup>23</sup> And they will say to you, 'Look, there!' or 'Look, here!' Do not go out or follow them. <sup>24</sup> For as the lightning flashes and lights up the sky from one side to the other, so will the Son of Man be in his day. <sup>25</sup> But first he must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation.

### A Desire Deferred

Jesus then shifted from speaking to the Pharisees to addressing the disciples, moving from confronting to comforting, from exhorting to preparing. He knew His disciples would have similar questions about the Kingdom, so He anticipated those questions, clarifying realities for them. He knew they would be eager to cry "Maranatha", Lord come quickly, since life was going to get difficult and they would long to see their savior. But they, like us, would have to wait for God's perfect timing, patiently establishing our hearts until then (James 5:7-8)

### Waiting, not chasing the return

Instead of chasing the Kingdom, or trying to bring it on, the Kingdom to come will be unmistakable. There will be those who will falsely declare that it is coming or has come, but when Jesus returns, it will be like lightning throughout the whole sky. This kind of phenomena cannot be unseen, and just like the

lightning in the sky, we can only watch for it, we cannot make it happen. We must remember that this world is NOT the kingdom and must not treat it as such, nor should we try to find some hidden meaning or way of figuring out when. When Christ returns it will be like the fire alarm going off in the office: no one anticipated it, but everyone knows its time to go.

### First things first

Before His glorious return, however, He would have to be rejected and suffer. This would happen in a few months time as He offered Himself as King at the Triumphal Entry, yet was beaten and put on a cross. Jesus will not return to reign until the last of Israel's rejection ends, when times of refreshing and restoration can take place (Acts 3:19-21). This is the time we find ourselves in today, waiting for God to bring repentance and restoration to His people Israel. When that time is completed, His reign will come.

### Indifference abounds before the King's coming (26-30)

**Luke 17:26-30** Just as it was in the days of Noah, so will it be in the days of the Son of Man. <sup>27</sup> They were eating and drinking and marrying and being given in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all. <sup>28</sup> Likewise, just as it was in the days of Lot- they were eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building, <sup>29</sup> but on the day when Lot went out from Sodom, fire and sulfur rained from heaven and destroyed them all- <sup>30</sup> so will it be on the day when the Son of Man is revealed.

To prepare his disciples for what life would be like leading up to His appearing, Jesus brought up two other times of judgment from the OT, well known passages of God's wrath being poured out on wickedness. Both of these examples, the days of Noah and Lot, had many similarities. 1) They both were men who walked by faith and were preserved by God - Noah through building an ark and Lot by leaving a city before it burned. 2) They both lived in the midst of extreme wickedness, so much so that God took extreme measure to deal with the earth. Noah's day was described as "*every intention of the thoughts of mens hearts were only evil continually*" (Gen. 6:5), while Sodom was marked by sexual perversion (Genesis 19:4-11), where not even 10 righteous people could be found (Gen. 18:32), and were prideful and prosperous but did not help the poor or needy (Ezekiel 16:49). 3) Both men tried to call out to the wicked world around them to compel them to turn, 4) both men found an indifferent world around them, indifferent to coming judgment, indifferent to their own sin, and indifferent to God.

It is important to notice that Jesus does not call out the **overt wickedness surrounding these men, but rather the fact that they went about normal life without God**. Indifference kills. In their plummeting wickedness, they also lived "normal lives". There was marriage, hanging out, buying, selling, living, laughing, get together's, and all regular activities of any civilization. This is telling and admonishing for us. The Kingdom of God is coming, it will be unmistakable, and will bring with it both joy and judgment. Those who love Christ now will welcome it, but for others it will be like the wrath of a flood or the fire of Gomorrah. We live in a day that is inundated with activity, where busyness rules, and where God is simply squeezed out. We like to think that we are not that bad since the things we are doing are not like Sodom and Gomorrah, but the reality is MANY on the day when Christ returns will THINK they are saved, but will realize they were so preoccupied with THIS earth that they missed the one to come. We see this with not only materialism, but also with an over-heightened to fight to preserve this world, to try to redeem it APART from Christ, and to hold on to what we have. This world, as we know it, will burn in refining fire (2 Pet. 3:10), ushering in a purified kingdom. *Are we indifferent to the future because we are so captivated with the present world?*

*"I am astonished at people who say they believe in God but live as if happiness is found by giving Him 2% of their attention."* John Piper

### **Proper Responses at the King's coming (31-35)**

**Luke 17:31-35** On that day, let the one who is on the housetop, with his goods in the house, not come down to take them away, and likewise let the one who is in the field not turn back. <sup>32</sup> Remember Lot's wife. <sup>33</sup> Whoever seeks to preserve his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life will keep it. <sup>34</sup> I tell you, in that night there will be two in one bed. One will be taken and the other left. <sup>35</sup> There will be two women grinding together. One will be taken and the other left."

### **Learn from Lot's wife**

Lot's wife may get a bum rap, but her life serves as a vivid reminder and illustration to us. Lot had to take his family and leave the city they lived in, the house they had made a home, and the friends they had made when they were there. She had a lifetime of memories and experiences that she was leaving behind, and though she was following her husband to safety, longed to catch one last glimpse of the life she left behind. The text is terse. As fire and sulfur burned up the city she loved, "looked back, and became a pillar of salt" (Gen. 19:26). Lot's wife will forever remind us that we cannot make an idol of the gifts we have in this world.

Jesus' return will be the great revealer of our heart, exposing what we truly love. Christ's return will either find us leaving everything behind, like the scenes of a wife whose husband returns from war drops everything when she sees him coming. Or people will be those running back into a burning home to try to preserve the family photos, papers, and other valuables. Jesus stressed that we must be willing to lose our life, including what we hold precious here, to preserve it in the end.

### **Quick, unexpected judgment**

The day of Christ's appearing will also have two distinct features based on the two illustrations of a husband and wife in bed and two women grinding grain.

1) Jesus' return will separate relationships, even families. He had already made it clear that whoever loved father, mother, daughter or son more than Him is not worthy of Him (Matthew 10:37-39). Now it is clear that there will be a separation, not along family lines, but along lines of truly following Him

2) That at His return there will be swift and sure judgment. The picture of one being taken and one being left has been thought by some to be a teaching on the rapture, but it is clear here that the one being taken is taken in judgment, while the one left is a true follower. This is similar to the illustrations of the wheat and tares (Matt. 13:24-30) and the sheep and goat judgments (Matthew 25:31-46).<sup>2</sup>

### **Bleak setting at the King's coming (37)**

**Luke 17:37** And they said to him, "Where, Lord?" He said to them, "Where the corpse is, there the vultures will gather."

Finally, the disciples spoke up and asked for the geographical realities of the kingdom. Jesus' response shows a bleak reality. On the same glorious day of His appearing, there will also be bodies strewn about

<sup>2</sup> Note that there is no verse 36 in the ESV translation. In some later manuscripts, a third illustration was added, most likely by a scribe trying to keep in parallel to Matthew 24:40. Though it follows the same pattern, the fact that it was not in the earlier, reliable manuscripts means we do not put it at the same level of authenticity.

in judgment. The way someone will know is to follow the vultures as they circled above over the dead bodies. This is true of all of those who failed to heed the warnings Jesus gave for His return.

So where does that leave us? Why is all of this so important?

- **Jesus is still King, which means the power of sin and authority of our enemy is broken** - Because He is seated at the right hand of the Father, putting all things under His feet, and because He is the head of the church, we now have a fair fight, a choice whether to sin or not, because sin does not rule over us.
- **Jesus is still King, which means He is still able to turn the world upside down through the gospel message** - In Acts 17, Paul entered into Thessalonica after being beaten and imprisoned in Philippi. After only a few weeks, scores of people began to believe, and city was put on notice. The leaders of the city uttered:

*"These men who have **turned the world upside down** have come here also, and Jason has received them, and they are all acting against the decrees of Caesar, saying there is another **king, Jesus.**"*

Acts 17:6-7

This is because Jesus has been given all authority (Matthew 29:18) and He is with us until the end of the age.

- **Jesus is still King, which means we can be assured that He is returning to take His place on the throne of David** - This is our hope, what we wait for, and why we know that no matter how bad it gets here, no matter the political situation, no matter what rights we have, no matter how bleak it looks, Christ will return and rule!