

HIS KINGDOM COME // Luke 17:20-37

Message from the series, The Gospel of Luke

Unlike the other two synoptic gospel writers (Matthew and Mark), Luke divides this discourse on eschatology (end times) into two separate passages. This first passage gives rise to two questions: in what sense is Christ king? And, what is the kingdom of God, or kingdom of heaven, like? In response to the first question, we think about Christ as king in two ways: he is king over physical creation and therefore all people because he is the Creator. Secondly, he is king over the spiritual kingdom, made up of his people, those whom he has saved.

In response to the second question, we must understand that the kingdom of heaven means the rule and reign of Christ, and it has two aspects: the present invisible kingdom and the coming visible kingdom. The kingdom of heaven is both “already” and “not yet.”

Main Idea: The kingdom is coming; life is a preparation.

The Invisible Kingdom (v. 20-21)

The Pharisees ask Jesus when the kingdom of God will come. His response points to the distinction between the already present, invisible kingdom, and the visible kingdom that will come in the future. His response to them, “behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you,” indicates a fundamental truth: the kingdom of God was not *in* the Pharisees, but it was in their midst, because Jesus was among them. The kingdom is here because the king is here.

The Visible Kingdom (v. 22-37)

1. The Timing of the Kingdom (v. 22-25) No one but the Father knows when Jesus will return (Mark 13: 32). We may spend time charting the clues in scripture, but it is important to make sure that our focus is on what Jesus told us to focus on; that whatever is a big deal to God is a big deal to us. Ultimately, the big deal to God is the gospel. Jesus tells the disciples that the time is not for them to know; rather their mission is to be his “witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8). It is important that we prepare our heart, not our chart.

2. The Nature of the Kingdom (v. 26-30) This passage provides two examples from the Old Testament of what the coming of the kingdom will be like: the flood in Noah’s day and the destruction of Sodom. In both cases, life was business as usual for most of humanity, but they refused to listen to those who were trying to warn them of the coming judgement. The kingdom of God will come unexpectedly and people will be unprepared.

3. The Response to the Kingdom (v. 31-33) The coming of Christ will expose our hearts and show what we really love. Lot’s wife was on the road to safety, to salvation from the destruction of Sodom. Her mind knew that she must go to Zoar, but her heart and her eyes were still set on Sodom (Genesis 19). She was among the “almost-saved” who missed salvation due to a heart ensnared by worldliness. Is this a commentary on your life? Do you want heaven, but still have a heart set on the world?

4. The Judgement of the Kingdom (v. 34-37) This passage paints a picture of the great separation that will happen when Jesus’ kingdom comes—those who follow him will join him; those who have not followed will be left. The final image of the corpse and the vultures points to two truths about this moment—first, as a circling buzzard is visible in the sky, the kingdom of heaven will be visible; secondly, it will be too late for those who were left. Death is fixed; it will be too late to come into the kingdom.

We want Jesus’ kingdom to come because we love him; we want others to come into his kingdom while there is still time because we love them.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What does it mean to live in an “already but not yet” kingdom? How does this give us motivation to share the gospel?
2. Why is it tempting to focus on “charting” the coming of the kingdom? How can we prioritize preparing our hearts instead?
3. Do we have friends and family among the “almost saved”? How can we pray for and engage with those whose hearts are still on the world?