



Luke 17:20-37: True Kingdom Focus

Opening Discussion Question: How would America have been different if George Washington had set himself up as a king? Would there be any positives? What would be the negatives? Did kings make Israel better than it was before Saul? Why do you think God allowed “the kingdom” to take shape?

- Here is the point of application this morning: the tangible, observable and physical will not help you remain faithful in your heart toward God.
- Remember the context of Luke 17: Faithfulness exhibited through humility, faith and gratitude; understanding we are like a samaritan leper in our worthiness.
 - Jesus was leading the people of his day (through teaching and illustration) toward an understanding of a kingdom he was building; but not the kingdom the people were anticipating and hoping for.
- Goldsworthy, in his book Christ-Centered Biblical Theology stated this important view of scripture: **“The central theme of Scripture is the kingdom of God defined simply as God’s people in God’s place under God’s rule.”**¹

Discussion Question: Reflect on Goldsworthy’s statement. Do you agree fully? Do you have any reservations about this statement?

- The kingdom Jesus was promoting was not the kingdom a descendant of David would have promoted. The concept of the kingdom helps us see through the eyes of many of Jesus’ followers.
 - They wanted release from an oppressive kingdom.
 - They wanted to be victorious in God’s tangible and physical kingdom.
- Jesus was constantly trying to present a different idea about the kingdom: the spiritual kingdom of God was the primary concern, not the physical!
- **[20] Being asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, he answered them, “The kingdom of God is not coming in ways that can be**

¹ Graeme Goldsworthy, Christ-Centered Biblical Theology: Hermeneutical Foundations and Principles. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press. 2012) 75

observed, [21] nor will they say, ‘Look, here it is!’ or ‘There!’ for behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you.”

- The OT law had always included the idea that the law of God was first a heart issue, and then flowed into the physical.² God’s kingdom, according to Jesus, was no different. This is why Jesus said he would not fight to preserve the physical idea of a kingdom.³
 - This is why Jesus told the Pharisees to "clean the inside of the cup and dish" as an illustration of dealing with their heart condition, not just their external behavior.⁴
- We must read the rest of the chapter through the lens of verses 20-21, keeping in mind that Jesus is trying to focus our eyes to see more deeply than the mere physical! This is what Jesus intended within the context of His teaching!

Question: Are there ways we still struggle not to make Christ’s kingdom about government and soil today? In what ways might we struggle not to make church about “earthly kingdom” stuff?

- **[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. [23] And they will say to you, ‘Look, there!’ or ‘Look, here!’ Do not go out or follow them. [24] 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. [25] But first he must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation.**
 - Jesus gave his followers a warning: “don’t be deceived by those who want to make Christ’s kingdom about the physical!”
 - His spiritual kingdom work would be just as powerful, yet intangible as lightning!
 - He used lightning as a description because it is powerful and visible, yet ungraspable. Lightning has incredible power to set the world ablaze, yet we cannot contain it. Of course, the Holy Spirit illustrated this through tongues of

² Deuteronomy 4:29, 4:39, 5:29, 6:5-6; Jeremiah 31:33; Romans 2:14-15; Hebrews 10:16

³ John 18:36 [36] Jesus answered, “My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world.” (ESV)

⁴ Matthew 23:26. Greek word entos (ἐντός, Strong’s G1787) means “what is with-in”

fire on the day of Pentecost as He brought great power and authority to the church.⁵

- Jesus spoke prophetically in this statement that some day (our day) he would no longer be present on the earth, and people would use that as an opportunity to say things on behalf of Jesus that he didn't say. People were going to mis-represent Jesus and his teachings. This is what the Bible calls the "spirit of anti-christ".⁶
- The spirit of anti-christ sometimes takes a little truth, and wraps it in a lie. Other times, the spirit of anti-christ takes a lie and wraps it in truth.
 - Example: "the joy of the Lord is my strength", therefore God wants me to pursue happiness.
 - I don't want to preach a "mini-sermon" here, but this statement from Nehemiah 8 is actually about the remorse of realizing one's sin, and then remembering the joy of God's forgiveness and faithfulness. It is about pursuing repentance, not happiness. Happiness comes with knowing I've been redeemed, forgiven and loved by God.
 - As I said last week, this is why John Piper's statement on Christian Hedonism is so important: "God being most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in him."⁷

Question: Where do we tend to see the "spirit of antichrist" most prevalent today?

- This is why I continually warn our fellowship to be careful about what you are consuming on social media, television and in books. I used to be able to promote certain publishing houses as trustworthy, but I can no longer do that without concern. I would advise everyone to read everything with your Bible open. Listen to everything with your Bible open. Know your Bible so you can spot the spirit of antichrist.
 - The importance of this truth can be illustrated well with the importance of a field-guide when learning what plants and mushrooms are edible.

⁵ Acts 2

⁶ 1 John 4:2-3 [2] By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, [3] and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the *spirit of the antichrist*, which you heard was coming and now is in the world already. (ESV)

⁷ John Piper, Desiring God, *Meditations of a Christian Hedonist* (CO: Multnomah, 2011)

- Jesus, in his grace, gave some signs for what to watch out for in these difficult days.
- **[26] Just as it was in the days of Noah, so will it be in the days of the Son of Man. [27] 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. [28] Likewise, just as it was in the days of Lot—they were eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building, [29] but on the day when Lot went out from Sodom, fire and sulfur rained from heaven and destroyed them all—[30] so will it be on the day when the Son of Man is revealed.**
- Jesus employed a typology of Noah and Lot to help the pharisees understand what was truly going to happen with his own life.⁸
 - Noah represented Christ in entering the ark, going through judgment, and coming out to restart society.⁹
 - Lot represented Christ in coming out of evil society (Sodom), while his wife represented Israel who would continually turn back.
 - **Jesus was trying to help the people see that they were making the kingdom of God all about self gratification, so he gave a stern warning about life after His resurrection.**

Where can we see the examples of Noah and Lot's days in our culture today?

- **[31] 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. [32] Remember Lot's wife. [33] Whoever seeks to preserve his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life will keep it. [34] I tell you, in that night there will be two in one bed. One will be taken and the other left. [35] There will be two women grinding together. One will be taken and the other left." [37] And they said to him, "Where, Lord?" He said to them, "Where the corpse is, there the vultures will gather."**

⁸ Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry's Commentary: Vol. 5* (Hendrickson, 1991) 621. "That they had fair warning given them the ruin that was coming upon them for their sins. Noah was a preacher of righteousness to the old world; so was Lot to the Sodomites."

⁹ Philip G. Ryken, *Reformed Expository Commentary: Luke Vol. 2* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R. 2009) 237

- **Jesus gave a stern and prophetic warning: when life becomes really hard for the true believers, don't turn back to the tangible, hold on to and focus on the spiritual!**
 - The key to understanding this prophesy is to look back to verse 32: "Remember Lot's wife!" She was separated unto her own destruction because she could not keep her eyes off of the physical place of Sodom. Her eyes could not resist focusing on the physical place that had caused all her problems!
 - Just as God removed the influential evil of Sodom and Gomorrah from the earth, he also has a future plan to remove the evil influence of the spirit of anti-christ from this earth. These verses are not about believers being taken out of the world, they are about the eventual end of the evil influence of the spirit of anti-christ, the spirit of Sodom, along with everyone who has made their life about this false belief system!
 - Jesus talked next about the separation that will occur amongst friends and family as some would continue to pursue Christ's spiritual kingdom, and some would turn back to the physical kingdom of either law or self gratification that would become their destruction.

Discussion Question: have you ever experienced separation or loss of relationship because of your belief in the Gospel?

- Jesus gave one more clue in verse 37, as it appears he referred to the very pharisees who had asked about the kingdom as "the vultures" who would use His own death to destroy the faith of those following after Christ's kingdom.¹⁰ I believe this is the best interpretation of this passage when utilizing the context.¹¹
- The day Jesus died, He paid the physical price so that you and I could be free in spirit. He came out of the tomb to give us victory beyond our mortal flesh!
- **Romans 8:1-9 [1] There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. [2] For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. [3] For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, [4] in order that the righteous**

¹⁰ ibid. 242

¹¹ For a complete list of interpretive options, see Darrell L. Block, *Luke 9:51-24:53, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, 3B* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 1439-40

requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. [5] For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. [6] For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. [7] For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. [8] Those who are in the flesh cannot please God. [9] You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. (ESV)

- We must always keep in mind that it is God's intention for the spiritual to be revealed through the physical outflow of Christ's righteousness.
- We look forward to the physical appearance of Christ our king in the future, when He will come in the clouds like lightening to redeem all things and rid this dreadful planet of all that is evil. Romans 8 tells us that all creation groans for this, and so do we.
 - This moment is not my forever. Imagine this stage is your life, but imagine everything thing off the stage is eternity, endlessly moving on. All of that eternity will be your perfect heavenly reality. Time will be irrelevant because there will be no ending to that perfect reality in presence with our Savior.

Is there anything right now that feels like it is a forever struggle over which you can declare heavenly hope?

- Romans 8:18–25 [18] For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. [19] For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. [20] For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope [21] that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. [22] For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. [23] And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. [24] For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he

sees? [25] But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.
(ESV)

- The way to endure the physical, is to remain “in” the spiritual! A heavenly perspective is the only spiritual way to endure our earthly reality.