

God's Kingdom Is Within You
Luke 17:20-21

In the early morning hours of each day, as I sit quietly in the comfort of my chair and I ponder these scriptures, it would seem that all the world could be at peace, everyone in harmony, especially our families, all of us enjoying the blessings and the comforts of well-provided-for homes and families.

But sadly, I know that thoughts such as those are not the reality that is actually taking place in our world. While yes, it is quiet and comfortable in my little home and even in my neighborhood. But that's not so in most homes and most neighborhoods and most communities.

And I believe that the same might have been true in the days that these scriptures are describing here in our passage that we'll study today.

Yes, there was relative peace within the homes and the neighborhoods in the land of Israel during those days that Jesus walked among the people. And the Roman occupiers made sure it stayed that way, using whatever force necessary to keep the peace.

But the hearts of men will never be satisfied with that kind of peace and provision. We all seem to have an unquenchable thirst for complete freedom and we'll always be yearning for it.

And that seemed to be the underlying motive within the question that the Pharisees were asking the Lord Jesus here in the scripture passage that we'll study today.

Those Pharisees knew from their Old Testament scriptures that God had promised that there would come a time when He would return to the earth and that He would bring peace and harmony and freedom to them. And they yearned for that day to come. And here, they were asking Jesus if He knew when that would take place.

But we know from these and other scriptures like these that this answer that Jesus gave to them was not the answer they wanted to hear.

Let's pause for a moment and listen to this conversation that Jesus had with these Pharisees. We read here in Luke chapter 17 beginning in verse 20,

²⁰ Now when He was asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, He answered them and said, "The kingdom of God does not come with observation; ²¹ nor will they say, 'See here!' or 'See there!' For indeed, the kingdom of God is within you." (Luke 17:20-21)

While we may often find fault with the motives and behaviors of the Pharisees that Jesus encountered each day, and rightfully so, we still must not cast too many stones at them, especially as it regards their concept about God's plan for His people.

Because, as with this question that they asked of the Lord Jesus, "When will the Kingdom of God come", we, you and I also do yearn to see God's kingdom come, and to see it much in the same way that they were wanting it to be, in full and complete magnificent glory reigning throughout the whole world.

And God's kingdom will surely come in exactly that way, someday! Someday! And perhaps soon!

But as Jesus explained to them here in these words, for now, and for a little while longer, the "Kingdom of God" must manifest itself in a much quieter, more unseen way. It must first come within the hearts, the souls, the minds and the spirits of believing Christians.

And folks, that is the way that our God intended it to be from the beginning, God's Holy Spirit living and abiding within us, guiding and directing our thoughts and behaviors in all the many activities of our daily lives, and us fully satisfied with His presence and His provision.

But sadly, as those Pharisees stood there in front of Jesus that day asking those questions, we know that God's original plan for mankind had been altered and now He was bringing about the next part of His plan for us.

May we pause here and consider for a moment how we, as a people, got from where we were in the beginning of our world to where we were on those days that Jesus walked on the earth, and also to where we are today, how we took part in altering those first plans that our God had for us, and then to arrive at the condition that we are in even now.

I like the explanation that one of my favorite bible scholars, Aurelius Augustine, gave to us about how our human condition got from where it was in those first moments of creation to where we are today, in desperate need of God's Kingdom to return to this earth.

Augustine said that the first people, Adam and Eve, came into this life there in the Garden of Eden with souls and spirits that were pure and holy, endowed in every way with the ability to make good and right decisions about all the matters of life that would take place all around them.

In their innocence, they actually had the ability to make choices, good and right choices, and they especially had the ability to "choose to not commit sin". May I say that again. There, in the very beginning, Adam and Eve were endowed with the ability to "choose not to commit sin". What a blessed condition!

However, along with that ability to "not commit sin", God had also given them the ability to make other choices, even wrong choices, very wrong choices. He had given them the ability to "choose to commit sin".

Why God chose to give Adam and Eve the ability to choose to commit sin, we will never, during this lifetime, know. Many bible scholars have given their opinions, but none of their opinions are adequate.

But nonetheless, it was still true. Adam and Eve were able to make those wrong and pitiable choices. And with that being so, sadly, in their naivety, they foolishly made a wrong choice. They chose to commit sin.

And once Adam and Eve made that wrong choice to commit sin, everything changed! Everything in existence changed! And not only for them but also for the whole world. From that moment forward, Adam and Eve were then unable to make the choices they once were able to make, unable to choose right from wrong.

Then and for that moment forward they were only able to make one choice. Then and for that moment forward, they were controlled by an innate desire that would forever cause them to "want to" sin.

And to make matters even worse, that change that took place within them was so profound that it caused the very essence of their souls to change, their very "being" itself became corrupt and "totally depraved". It was a change that was so profound that as they then begat children, that same corruption, that inability to "not sin", that same "want to" sin was passed along from the depths of their souls, into the souls of their children, causing their children and their children's children to be born "totally depraved" and "unable to not sin".

And it was that new condition of mankind's "corrupt soul" that formed the basis for what Augustine and other bible scholars called the "Doctrine of Original Sin". Simply put, we, you and I and every other human being are all now born into this world "totally depraved" and with a natural inclination to sin, a natural "want to" within us that gives us a natural "bent" toward sin and toward disobedience to God.

Much as each of us have inherited biological maladies from our parents and grandparents, we have also inherited their "bent towards sinning", a "bent" that cannot be overcome by human effort, but only cured through a return to our beginning "state of being" by the power and the presence of God Himself.

And thanks be to God, He did have that very remedy in store for those sins and for that "bent" toward sinning that had taken control over men's souls. It was God's "Gift of Grace" that would make it possible, the "Gift of Grace through the "gospel", through the death, the burial and resurrection of the Lord Jesus.

And yes, even and mysteriously extending back even to Adam and Eve. And then extending forward to all the children and the children's children born to mankind in future years. For everyone who would receive Christ as their Savior and Lord, their "bent to sin and to disobedience" would change.

And beyond their salvation, those who receive Christ would also receive the added blessing of the Holy Spirit coming to live and abide within their soul.

And Augustine went on to say that with the Holy Spirit abiding within a person's soul they would then be able to return to that condition that Adam and Eve enjoyed in those first days there in the Garden of Eden. For the person who would receive Christ as their Savior and Lord, they would now, once again, be able to make a choice "not to sin".

Are you listening to those words dear Christian. For each of us who receives Christ as our Savior and Lord, we are now, once again, able to make the choice "not to sin". Isn't that wonderful! We are now actually able "not to sin". Sin no longer has control over a person who has the Lord Jesus as their Savior abiding within them. That promise given to us in Romans chapter 6,

12 . . . do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its lusts,
13 and do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness; but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God.

14 For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law but under grace. (Romans 6:12-14)

Oh dear Christian, these words are a powerful promise to you and to me. These words are telling us clearly that once we have received Christ as our Savior and Lord, we are able from that moment forward and for all of this lifetime to make the choice "not to sin", the ability to actually "say no" to every sinful temptation.

Why? It's because, as these words of scripture tell us, sin no longer has control over us. Through the sacrifice that Jesus made for us, we have been freed from the power and the control of that sinful nature that was born into us. Now and forever more, sin is no longer our master!

Augustine went on to say that yes, and also, an even better "condition of soul" still awaits us when we go on into the eternities of heaven. When we breathe our last in this life and go on into heaven we will then enjoy an even greater and eternal separation from sin and from sin's control. Once we enter the presence of God in heaven, we will enjoy a condition of soul where we will be "unable to sin", unable even to have the slightest of temptations and "want to" regarding sin. Isn't that the most wonderful thing you can ever imagine? It is for me.

But for now, while we are still in this life, we, you and I, have a part that we must do within this change that will have taken place within our souls. Our part is "to believe it", and "to believe it" with such conviction that we will do all of the next things of life with the firm belief that we truly can "say no" to any sin that is tempting us.

And dear Christian, that was what the Lord Jesus was announcing to us in the words of this scripture passage. For us, as we yet live and breathe, this part of

God's Plan begins the moment that the "Kingdom of God" comes to live within us, the moment that the Lord Jesus becomes our Savior. That is the moment that the very person of the Holy Spirit begins to abide within our heart, within our soul, within our mind . . . bringing with Him the power and the ability for us to not give in to the sins that tempt us.

But again, and to the disappointment of those Scribes and Pharisees, as the "Kingdom of God" comes, it will not at first come with observation. It will not be with the Lord Jesus bursting through the clouds, riding on a "great white horse" and declaring freedom for every soul.

For them, for those Scribes and those Pharisees, and for all those other people of that day, especially the secular world, the "Kingdom of God" would remain unseen and unrecognized by the human eye.

It would be as Jesus was telling these men that day,

20. . ."The kingdom of God does not come with observation; 21 nor will they say, 'See here!' or 'See there!' For indeed, the kingdom of God is within you." (Luke 17:20-21)

But again folks, those were not the words the Pharisees wanted to hear from Jesus. It all seemed plain and clear to the Israelite people and especially to these Pharisees that God's return would be with pomp and glory, with easy-to-see "observation".

And folks, even we modern day believers also cling to similar beliefs and hopes. In the New Testament scriptures, such as those in the Book of Revelation, we read about and we hope for a very visible and glorious return of Jesus, with Him bursting through the clouds, riding on a great white horse, putting all our enemies under His feet.

Listen to the words of that promise given in the Book of Revelation chapter 19,

11 Now I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse. And He who sat on him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and makes war. 12 His eyes were like a flame of fire, and on His head were many crowns. He had a name written that no one knew except Himself. 13 He was clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God. 14 And the armies in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, followed Him on white horses. 15 Now out of His mouth goes a sharp

sword, that with it He should strike the nations. And He Himself will rule them with a rod of iron. He Himself treads the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. ¹⁶ And He has on *His* robe and on His thigh a name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS. (Revelation 19:11-16)

Folks aren't these some of the most exciting words you could ever hear, our righteous and Almighty God, coming to save us and to establish His forever kingdom here on the earth. I confess to you that I look forward to, and hope for, this very thing to take place, and soon, very soon.

So again, as we consider this question by the Pharisees, and their hopes and desires for a more visible coming of the Kingdom of God, their hopes then were really very little different from our own hopes now.

Here in our passage, Jesus said to those men that the Kingdom of God has come but not with much observation. And yes, His Kingdom has done exactly as Jesus said! But may I hasten to add that though it is without much observation, His coming is nonetheless with great power, a quiet invasion yes, but with great power and might, with His Kingdom taking up residence and indwelling the hearts, the souls, the minds and the spirits of everyone who will receive Him.

In John chapters 15, 16 and 17, we read where the Holy Spirit of Christ does actually come to live within us, to take up residence and abide within each one of us who receive Him as Savior and Lord, one soul at a time, person by person. And as each person quietly surrenders control of their lives, over into the care and control of Christ, the "Kingdom of God" will truly be among us, reigning within our souls.

And it is God's intent and desire that as His Kingdom abides within us, it will grow into vast communities, taking up full and complete and permanent residence within all of us who call upon His name, Him abiding in us as we abide in Him.

It is God's intent that as and to the degree that we individually do truly join ourselves with the Spirit of Christ in His abiding presence, our personal lives can and will begin to change, and completely so.

We will begin to live the kind of lives that Augustine spoke about, lives that are not controlled by a “bent to sinning”, but lives that truly can “say no” to the temptations that beset us each day.

We will begin to exhibit attitudes and behaviors that would not have before been seen in us, attitudes and behaviors such as love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness and self-control.

And as more and more souls join into the salvation and into the abiding presence of the Spirit of Christ within them, then a great and vast Kingdom of God can be put into place here on this earth.

And no, while there will not be much outward sign of pomp and pageantry, and no parades with a conquering hero at the head of the march, great changes really will actually be taking place within people’s souls. Their behaviors and their lifestyles becoming more and more like Christ.

And again, yes, as we read in the passage from the Book of Revelation, someday there surely will come a time of great outward advancing of the Kingdom of God, a time when He will burst through the clouds with pomp and Glory. But for now, and for a little while longer, the Kingdom of God will look somewhat ordinary, with people simply participating in the daily activities of life, traveling to and fro from work, doing family things, shopping and enjoying their children and all the many activities of life.

But praise be to God, their inmost lives will have been changed. With the Kingdom of God reigning within them, they will now be very, very different. Now the corrupt attitudes and the behaviors that were once there before the Holy Spirit came to live in them will be gone from them. Each person will be a “new creation” and they will show it by their actions and their behaviors. Those words in 2 Corinthians chapter 5,

¹⁷ Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new. (2 Corinthians 5:17)

And no, unless you knew those people before their salvation, there might not be much “observation” to declare that the Kingdom of God has taken up residence within them. That is part of the reason why Jesus said here that the kingdom of God does not come with observation.

But nonetheless, the Kingdom of God will surely have come. The Kingdom of God even now reigns within your heart and my heart, and within every other heart, soul, mind and spirit that has received the Lord Jesus as Savior.

And truly, this is the more perfect way of God, the way He intended our lives to be from the beginning.

So then, for us today, as it was for those Pharisees, we can and we should hope for, with earnest expectation, the coming of the full and complete Kingdom of God with pomp and glory. And it surely will come!

But for now, and for a little while longer, the Kingdom of God must manifest itself in this quieter, more unseen way, within the hearts, the souls, the minds and the spirits of believing Christians.

Our lord's words again,

²⁰ . . . "The kingdom of God does not come with observation; ²¹ nor will they say, 'See here!' or 'See there!' For indeed, the kingdom of God is within you." (Luke 17:20-21)

May we pray.