

Kingdom Come

November 10th, 2013

Luke 17:20-37

²⁰Being 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, ²¹nor will they say, 'Look, here it is!' or 'There!' for behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you." ²²And 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. ²³And they will say to you, 'Look, there!' or 'Look, here!' Do not go out or follow them. ²⁴For 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. ²⁵But first he must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation."

In 1952, Florence Chadwick got into the Pacific Ocean off of Catalina Island, determined to swim to the shore of mainland, California. She had already become the first woman to swim the English Channel both ways. It was a chilly, foggy day, so much so that she could hardly see the boats just in front of her that were accompanying her. After fifteen hours of swimming, she begged to be removed from the water, but at her mother's encouragement, she pressed on.

Finally, emotionally and physically exhausted, she simply quit swimming, and was lifted on to one of the boats. It wasn't until she was safely on the boat that she could look ahead and see that she was only ½ mile from the shore. At the press conference the next day, she said, "All I could see was the fog...I think if I could have seen the shore, I would have made it."

Her story is, I believe, a sort of parable of the Christian life. We are on a long, agonizing at times, wearying journey in this life. At times the weather is so filled with fog, chill and clouds, that we barely feel we have the strength to press on in faith and worship of Jesus. And what we need in those times is to keep our eyes set on our destination, the shore, which is the consummated splendor of the worldwide rule and reign of Jesus, in the New Heavens and the New Earth.

Another way to put it is that our destination is the Kingdom of God, and that is the theme of this passage in Luke 17. Yet Jesus unfolds a

mystery here surrounding the Kingdom. On one hand, it's a reality that is already present, something that is in the midst of us. On the other hand, it's a reality that is yet to come, something we are waiting for. Digging into that mystery is our goal this morning, for the sake of helping us persevere through fog towards this amazing shore.

The Kingdom is Here Now

Verse 20 says that Jesus' teaching here was initiated by a question from the Pharisees concerning when the Kingdom of God would come. Before we can look at Jesus' answer, we need to zoom out the lens and get the broader picture, so we know what they were looking for. Luke begins his gospel with a statement that describes Jesus as the King, ushering in the Kingdom that God's people had been awaiting for centuries:

"³²He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, ³³and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."

To understand this we must go back to the beginning. When God created the world, He placed Adam and Eve in the garden to live under His good, loving, wise rule. It was a picture of God's Kingdom: God's people, in God's place, living joyfully and fruitfully under His rule and reign. In the Garden God reigned, and His reign was one of blessing and freedom and peace, shalom, the way things ought to be. It was good news!

But under the influence of the Serpent, Adam and Eve reject God's rule, and in eating the forbidden fruit make a declaration of independence from God. They choose to rule themselves, to determine for themselves what is good and evil, and the result is devastating. The peace of Eden is fractured, and God subjects the created world to a curse. Where once there had been no suffering or pain or death, now every human dies, every human suffers innumerable pain and hardships before death: super typhoons with 235 mph winds, hunting accidents

which leave men paralyzed, women shot and killed after their car breaks down and they knock on a door looking for help. Things are broken, and all this bears witness to the horror of human rebellion against our King!

Amidst the brokenness, there is a promise of hope. As God pronounced the curse over all creation, He held out the hope of redemption, promising that an offspring of Eve would crush the serpent and undo all that had gone wrong in the world. As time unfolded (through the covenant with Abraham and his offspring, with the twelve great-grandsons of Abraham becoming the twelve tribes of Israel), it became clear that this Redeemer would be a son of David who would rule over an eternal kingdom of peace and righteousness:

"⁶For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. ⁷Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this."

Daniel describes Him like this:

"¹³"I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man (4x in these verses in Luke 17), and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. ¹⁴And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed."

When the Pharisees ask about the coming of God's Kingdom, and Jesus has the audacity to say: "The kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be observed, ²¹nor will they say, 'Look, here it is!' or 'There!' for behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you (not, 'within you')." He's saying two things: first, I'm the King; the Kingdom of God is in your midst because *I'm* here. I am the King who the angel Gabriel announced will be born to Mary. I am the Prince of Peace, sent to

liberate God's people from their enemies, restore all things and make the world right, undoing all that went wrong when Adam and Eve (and all of us, in Him) defied God's rule and chose to rule themselves. (what a claim! Is this a "good moral teacher"?).

Second, He's saying, "I'm not building My Kingdom now in the manner that you expect it." The Kingdom is present in Jesus, and He is gathering a people for Himself, calling them to repent of self-rule and turn back to Him in faith. But He is not building His Kingdom in the kind of powerful, unmistakable, grandiose manner in which they were expecting. Rather it's small, hidden, seemingly insignificant (like a mustard seed, or a little pinch of yeast, cf. 13:18-21)...for now.

The Kingdom is Yet to Come

But it won't be that way forever: 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." There is a day still to come when the King and His Kingdom are revealed not in obscurity, but in unmistakable glory and splendor, like flashes of lightning, from one side of the sky to another.

It will be sudden and unexpected (v.26ff). The point of the two illustrations from the days of Noah and Lot are the same: it's not mainly referring to the grossness of their sin, but their "business as usual" way of living in the world. The point is that none of us know when Jesus will come in the fullness of His glory and in the fierceness of His judgment, so what folly it is to go about the normal stuff of life and never get prepared to meet King Jesus. And it will be calamitous for those who aren't prepared to meet Him (v.34-37). The imagery brings to mind what John said of Jesus' return in Revelation 19:

¹⁷Then I saw an angel standing in the sun, and with a loud voice he called to all the birds that fly directly overhead, "Come, gather for the great supper of God, ¹⁸to eat the flesh of kings, the flesh of captains, the flesh of mighty men, the flesh of horses and their riders, and the flesh of all men, both free and slave, both small and great...and all the birds were gorged with their flesh."

This is what the Kingship of Jesus will one day look like! That is the final and eternal way in which He will bring peace: by obliterating all rebel powers under His righteous rule. And so many (some in this room?), carrying on with life business as usual, will bow in terror before Him screaming that boulders would fall on them rather than bear the wrath and indignation of the King of kings. And on that day, when the Kingship of Jesus appears in the skies like that, it will be too late to switch sides.

But First...

But the Kingdom of God is not just a kingdom of righteousness (meaning He must and will punish all sin and rebellion), but also a Kingdom of mercy (meaning He is willing to come and personally bear the judgment of God on our behalf, so that we might be spared on the day when the Son of Man comes with great power and glory).

*"²⁴For 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."*

Why *must* Jesus suffer and be rejected? Because He is a King who delights in showing mercy towards rebellious traitors who deserve to be eaten by vultures. Only through the King's suffering and rejection on the cross could rebels to the Kingdom like you and me be brought into the glory and joy of what is coming. For all who will repent of their treason (v.33) and cast themselves upon Christ for His mercy, Christ's death counts as their punishment and His obedience counts as their righteousness. Then, after rising and ascending and giving His people the Spirit to herald the good news of the Kingdom and salvation through faith in Jesus, He will return in power and great glory, to establish His sovereign rule forever in the consummated splendor of the New Heavens and New Earth.

This is why Jesus delays. Why is the Kingdom not here (in full) now? What you long for is Jesus to come, and yet we wait, and wait, and

wait. Jesus is patient, giving all people time to repent, lest they be swept up in the coming day of vengeance, to experience the Jesus' return as a glorious day, and not as a terrifying nightmare. Aren't you glad He didn't return the day before you trusted Christ? So bear with the heartaches, fix your hope on this coming glorious day, and spend yourself declaring the good news of the Kingdom: that God is in fact making all things new, that He is setting the world right, and that through Christ He is turning enemies into beloved sons and daughters.