**THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS IN YOUR MIDST**

**(The Visible King and His Invisible Kingdom)**

October 25, 2015

Luke 17:20-37

Key Verse 17:21 “...nor will people say, ‘Here it is,’ or ‘There it is,’ because the kingdom of God is in your midst.”

Today people are fascinated by the end of the world. There were a lot of talks on the blood moon on September 28, 2015. There are many movies dealing with the end of the world such as “2012; The day after tomorrow.” This trivializes the second coming of Jesus Christ, and makes people take Jesus’ coming lightly. We have to know that Jesus’ second coming is not some kind of adventure. It is not some kind of a fascination. It is not some kind of a curiosity. We long for Jesus’ second coming because we want to see Christ glorified and the Father is glorified and in Christ we are glorified as well. But many Christians do not seem to understand it today. We live in a very self-centered, very personalized narcissistic world. People are programmed to believe that they are the center of the universe, and that the whole universe revolves around them. And even God is one of those revolving planets that moves around them to serve them somehow. Today evangelism efforts in the church have been mostly sinner-centered; namely, God loves you unconditionally. He loves you so much he wants you to be happy. He loves you so much he wants you to be healthy. He loves you so much he wants to deliver you from all disappointment and all pain and to take you to heaven. In other words, you are the key to God’s fulfillment. It is as if the salvation of the sinner is the goal of redemption and God is the means to that. That is the very opposite of what the Bible teaches. The glory of God is the goal of redemption and the salvation of the sinner is the means to that. We are saved only that we might forever give glory to God, that we might forever exalt Christ. It is about being consumed with the honor and glory of God and Christ.

When you live in a world where all the emphasis is on personal fulfillment, and then you devise a gospel that simply fits into that world of personal fulfillment, you cheat people out of understanding the very purpose of salvation, the very essence of worship and the very reason why we hope for the return of Christ. The gospel then becomes about what Jesus will do to fulfill you as the center of your universe, so that the well-being of the sinner becomes the goal of God’s plan. That is why many people are not interested in the glory of God and Jesus’ second coming. They are happy to be interested in it as a fantasy, or a fiction, as a fascination. They really don’t care whether he comes or not, as long as they are happy, satisfied. And if they die, they get to go to heaven. So you embrace Jesus as the means to your own personal fulfillment. If Jesus doesn’t deliver what you think he should, you have a problem then in trusting him, and doubt, anger, disappointment and disillusionment come in when he doesn’t perform to your satisfaction. In this kind of an environment, there is real shallowness, there is no deep understanding of the nature or the character of God, and so it is hard to get excited about the return of Jesus Christ. The second coming is about Christ. It is about his glory and his honor and it is about the end of sin and the beginning of righteousness. That is why we long for it. And if you love the Lord, then you have that longing for him to be glorified. The second coming is the culmination of the life and work of our Lord Jesus. It is his exaltation. It is where he sets aside his long humiliation and is exalted before the whole world. As those who love Christ, we long for that day to come. We wait for the coming of the Lord Jesus from heaven. But it is not just that we wait. We wait with anticipation. We don’t just wait. We plead for his return. We pray for his return. We cry out like the apostle John, “Come, Lord Jesus.” Any time we pray, “Your Kingdom come,” we are praying that Jesus will return to earth as King of kings and Lord of lords. We want him to take over the kingdoms of this world and make them the kingdoms of our Lord and the kingdom of his Christ.

Look at verses 20-21. In reply to the question when the kingdom of God would come, Jesus begins by teaching: “The coming of the kingdom of God is not something that can be observed, nor will people say, ‘Here it is,’ or ‘There it is,’ because the kingdom of God is in your midst.”

The Jews had an immense expectation for the coming of the kingdom. They were waiting for the Messiah like King David and establish the earthly messianic kingdom and rule the world. When Jesus came to this world, he came as a baby in a manger. He just didn’t look like a king, He didn’t act like a king and there was no pomp and circumstance to indicate the establishment of any kingdom. As he spoke those words to the Pharisees, they didn’t recognize that the King was standing right in front of them!

Now we know that there are two phases or two aspects to our Lord’s rule, to our Lord’s Kingdom. There is, first of all, the spiritual Kingdom which has to be established, and then there can be the physical kingdom. There is, first of all, the personal kingdom, and then there can be the universal kingdom. The first time Jesus came, he came to establish his spiritual kingdom which he continues to build one soul at a time. The only way the Kingdom of Christ, the Kingdom of God advances in this age is one soul at a time, one person at a time embracing Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. That is the only way the Kingdom moves forward. And it is moving forward spiritually in the world. Daily people are being added to the church who are being saved. Jesus is building his Kingdom. And as we pray “Your Kingdom come,” we are praying that the kingdom of God may come to each and every person on earth. Right now, the spiritual kingdom is invisible. The world doesn’t see it. They have no idea who they are looking at. They have no idea that we are citizens of the kingdom of God. The Kingdom of God is in this place, it is in your midst. It is the invisible Kingdom.

The second time Jesus comes, however, the Kingdom will be worldwide...it will be universal,...it will be visible. The glorious manifestation of the children of God has not yet occurred. And so the world does not see us for who we really are, and sadly, very sadly, there are people who claim to be Christians who are not at all Christians, who skew people’s understanding of what the Kingdom of God really is. But the Kingdom advances invisibly in the hearts and souls of those who truly are regenerated and converted through the gospel of Jesus Christ. This Kingdom will continue to expand, continue to grow until the Lord gathers in all whom he has chosen, all whom he has predestined, are called and justified. And when they are all called in and the time is right, then Jesus will come a second time and establish the visible, universal, earthly Kingdom. However, that Kingdom will be only for those who are in his spiritual Kingdom. When the earthly Kingdom of our Lord is established, only those who are part of the spiritual Kingdom will be taken into that Kingdom. He will create the new heaven and the new earth in which eternally and for the first time since the Fall the spiritual kingdom and physical kingdom are merged into one. We will live in a Kingdom under King Jesus, we are to worship him and to honor him as well as to love him and to trust him. And to be blessed both now and forever by his unimaginable kindness, mercy, grace and goodness.

After giving a reply to the Pharisees’ question, Jesus next turns his attention to his disciples. Even though the kingdom of God is advancing among us, we cannot overlook the fact Satan’s kingdom is still a reality in this fallen world. Top on Satan’s mission list is to deceive those who have repented and confess Jesus as Lord. In verses 22-25 Jesus warns his disciples specifically how Satan’s servants will try to deceive them: “Then he said to his disciples, “The time is coming when you will long to see one of the days of the Son of Man, but you will not see it. People will tell you, ‘There he is!’ or ‘here he is!’ Do not go running off after them. For the Son of Man in his day will be like the lighting, which flashes and lights up the sky from one end to the other. But first he must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation.” After Jesus suffered many things and was crucified, we know that God raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand. Since that time there has been people both men and women going about with great zeal and excitement proclaiming to sincere people: “Jesus has come back again! Follow me and I’ll show you!” According to Wikipedia, there are at least 35 who through history have claimed to be the Christ. According to Jesus’ own words in this passage, none of us needs anyone to inform us of Jesus’ second coming. Look at verse 24. “For the Son of Man in his day will be like the lightning, which flashes and lights up the sky from one end to the other.”

I learned some interesting things about lightning in the internet that helped me understand the aspects of his return. First, lightning strikes when there is storm. When Jesus returns, he will come into a stormy world of political and economic chaos. When there is a storm, you should be cautious about lightning; when you see a political and economic storm, watch out for his return!

Second, lightning occurs suddenly. Lightning usually travels from cloud to ground and then flashes back upward at a speed of 1/10,000 of a second. 1 Corinthians 15 tells us that Jesus comes in a “twinkling of an eye.” You won’t have time to repent when he comes, so you’d better be right with God BEFORE he returns. Third, lightning possesses awesome power. In the split-second lightning flashes, the air in its channel is heated to 1,400º F. This rapid heating creates such a shock, there is an audible sonic wave we call thunder. The energy discharged in a single stroke of lightning is enough to lift a two ton weight (like your car) 62 miles straight upward. What power! When Jesus returns, he won’t come as gentle Jesus meek and mild–he will come as the all-powerful King. He came the first time as the Lamb of God to bear the sin of the world. But when he comes again, he will be the mighty King! Finally, you never know exactly when lightning will strike–it is always unexpected. People who have been struck by lightning, and survived, say they never expected it to happen. They were shocked, literally. Had they known it was going to happen, they would have taken precautions to avoid it. The return of Jesus is going to happen when people least expect it, they will literally be shocked.

Jesus predicted that his coming will happen when world conditions match those during the time of Noah and Lot; we should start paying attention because God’s Judgement will happen soon. Two important conditions existed during the days of Noah and Lot.

First, during the time of Noah and Lot, there was extreme immorality and wickedness. Genesis 6:5 says, “The Lord saw how great man’s wickedness on earth had become, and that every inclination of the thought of his heart was only evil all the time.” In Genesis 19 we read perverted sexual behavior was widespread in Sodom and Gomorrah. When the two angels (who looked like men) visited Lot’s house to warn his family to leave, the homosexual men of the city wanted to rape them. In Genesis 19:5 we read, “They call to Lot, ‘Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us so that we can have sex with them.’” Lot went out and begged the men of the city not to do this “wicked thing.” Then they got angry at Lot and shouted, “Who do you think you are? How dare you say what we do is evil! It’s our right to act this way if we want. You are an intolerant religious fanatic!” When they tried to break down the door, the angels had to supernaturally intervene and rescue him.

So the first condition was extreme wickedness. A second condition existed. While they were surrounded by immorality and wickedness, the people lived their lives as if nothing was wrong. They accepted that kind of behavior as normal. Instead of the public being alarmed or outraged at the wickedness, Jesus said they kept on eating and drinking, and marrying and being given in marriage. Even if they didn’t personally participate in the wickedness of their culture, they condoned it by acting as if nothing was wrong.

In verse 32, Jesus said, “Remember Lot’s wife!” As they were fleeing Sodom, Lot’s wife looked back and turned into a pillar of salt. In Genesis 19 we learn even after the angels warned them to leave, Lot and his family hesitated. So the angels forcefully put their hands on them and dragged them out of the city. God strictly warned them not to look back while the city was being destroyed. But as they climbed the mountain, Lot’s wife either didn’t believe God, or couldn’t resist the temptation, so she disobeyed God and turned back to look, and she was ionized. Why did Jesus warn us to remember her? I’m sure Mrs. Lot was basically a good person. Her mistake was that she still loved Sodom so much she couldn’t resist one last look. Sadly, many people are religious on Sundays, but they are still fascinated and enamored with this world. 1 John 2:15-17 warns: “Do not love the world or anything in the world…For everything in the world, the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does–comes not from the Father...the world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever.” Before Lot moved into Sodom, there is no record of him being married, so we assume that he found a wife in Sodom and lived there long enough to have a family. Mrs. Lot married a righteous man and probably accepted his religion, but she never fully got over her love for Sodom. On the mountain that day, she was out of Sodom, but Sodom was not out of her. Mrs. Lot represents people who have a superficial interest in God and the Bible, but they never truly commit themselves to him.

Today the spiritual invisible kingdom is advancing one soul at a time. But Jesus will come again to establish the universal visible kingdom. We long for the day when Jesus comes to destroy all injustice and bring righteousness. Until then we live as ambassadors of Christ in the invisible kingdom to expand his kingdom one soul at a time.