

“The Imminence of the Kingdom”

// Luke 17:20–35 //

Kingdom Come, #9

I have a topic that is going to interest a lot of you this weekend—the end times.

Every few years we seem to cycle through some round of excitement about when the end of the world is coming. Somebody comes up with some chart, or Hebrew code... Next year, even the Mayans are even getting in on it. 2012.

People are always interested in this stuff... I’ve always heard that the two ways to beef up your attendance is to a) talk about sex or b) talk about the end times, and if you really want to blow it through the roof talk c) about sex in the end times.

Jesus gives us His version of how to view all that (not sex in ‘the end times’) in **Luke 17:20–35** (by the end of today I guarantee you will know when Jesus is coming back)

[20] Being asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, (Jesus) answered them,

- (In just a few years I will be raise up my servant Tim Lahaye who will write the *Left Behind* series, and he will answer all of your questions. If you don’t want to read the books, don’t worry, my servant Kirk Cameron, will put them into movie form. Disciples are like, “The guy from Growing Pains?” Yes).

“The kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be observed, [21] nor will they say, ‘Look, here it is!’ or ‘There!’ for behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you.”

- Some of your Bible translations may say “in you.” Mark that out. Technically the words there could be translated that way, but it’s a bad translation. Jesus would never have said, “The kingdom of God is within you” to the Pharisees. His favorite term for them was sons of the devil.
- The better translation is: *“The Kingdom of God is in the midst of you.”* What’s He talking about?
 - Who was standing right “in the midst” of them? He was. He was the essence of the Kingdom.
- They were looking for the Kingdom of God “out there”—as some big spectacular smack down—moon turns to blood; the Messiah comes in riding on the clouds of glory or a white horse, slaying all the bad guys with a light sabre... and Jesus doesn’t deny that the 2nd coming will be spectacular, but you see what He says, “Guys, you actually missed the essence of the Kingdom—ME.” See? Not even I will bring the Kingdom, but I am the Kingdom.
- The most important part of the Kingdom is knowing Jesus, and when you know Jesus the Kingdom enters into your life.
- Now, there are dimensions of His Kingdom that still await the future, but in Him you get the beginning of it.
- The Kingdom works on what we call the **“already/not yet”** principle.
 - Over the last few weeks I’ve explained to you that the Kingdom of God is like a party. When you know Jesus, the party begins. He puts joy in your soul. There’s a lot more to come, but it starts now.
 - One of the criticisms of Christianity is that it’s all pie in the sky. It is pie in the sky—a bigger and better tasting pie than you’ve ever realized; but not just pie in the sky; you get a little piece now.
 - ***What Jesus did through His miracles was give us pictures of what His Kingdom reign would look like one day, that also had some implication for our lives right now.***

- He healed the lame. He opened blind eyes. He raised the dead. What do those show you? In His Kingdom, one day, there will be no blindness, no lameness, no sorrow, no death.
 - But, there's a dimension to those miracles that we experience now, as well: coming to know Jesus releases you from spiritual blindness; your lame soul begins to leap; your dead soul has life again.
 - Contrary to what some will tell you, the point of Jesus' miracles is NOT from that point on He would heal all the blind and sick whenever they named it and claimed it. He'll do that one day—in His coming kingdom—but right now He does that, even more importantly, in our souls.
 - Give you an example: Luke 8, Jesus is asleep in this boat with the disciples and a terrible storm takes over the boat, so bad that it makes the disciples sure they are going to drown (which is significant since they are professional fisherman), and so they wake Jesus up and say, "Don't you care that we're going to drown?" (Which, has to constitute as one of the dumbest questions ever asked of Jesus.) It says that Jesus stands up, rebukes the wind or the waves. I love the word, **"Rebuke."** Rebuke is what you do to a kid, or an employee. I hear my kids hopping off their bunk-beds at night, and so I yell, "Cut it out!" He treated the wind and waves like that. He treated it like it was a car alarm.... Loud alarm going off in the parking lot and some guy walks out and says, "Sorry. That's my car. Beep beep." Jesus says, "Oh, sorry. That's my storm. My Geo Storm. Beep beep."
- What's the point of that miracle? Twofold. In His Kingdom, the wind and waves would no longer bring destruction. No more tornadoes or hurricanes or tsunamis. One day. But, just as importantly, He was showing us that when we know Him, He stills the storm in our hearts that comes from thinking life is out of control and that God doesn't care.
- Knowing Jesus is to enter into the Kingdom of God, and those who know Jesus live in an **"already, not yet"** dimension of the Kingdom.
 - Some of you may remember Joni Eareckson Tada... she broke her neck in a diving accident and become a quadriplegic. God used that accident to open her eyes to Himself. She talks about shortly after her accident being in church and everyone around here kneeling in prayer... and she was overwhelmed with despair because she thought, "I'll never be able to kneel again."

"And then," she writes, "I remembered the Kingdom resurrection. Just before the party gets going in heaven, the wedding feast of the Lamb, the first thing I plan to do on my resurrected legs is to drop on grateful, glorified knees, kneel quietly before the feet of Jesus. And then I'm going to be on my

feet dancing. Can you imagine the hope," she writes, "that this gives someone with a permanent spinal cord injury? Can you imagine the hope this even gives one who is a manic depressive? No other religion promises new bodies, a new material universe. Only in the gospel of Christ do people hurting like me find such enormous hope to live."

- Her legs are still crippled, but her soul is already leaping and dancing. Her soul is in the Kingdom, and one day soon her body will catch up. *Already, not yet.* Some of you are like that. Your body is in pain; you're in a storm, and you're not yet healed, but Jesus has entered your life and you are already living in the peace of His Kingdom.

[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.

- Jesus is now referring to that future coming of His Kingdom. The time when He comes and punishes the bad guys and heals the earth. And He seems to understand that there's going to be a lot of claims that that is happening.
 - Religious leaders do this: the new Messiah is here: His name is Mohammad. His name is Joseph Smith. David Koresh.
- His words, "Don't believe them." My 2nd coming will not be a secret movement that you wonder if you should join.
- Religious people are not the only ones to get swept up in this hysteria... politicians promise a new world order, a

certain political philosophy or regime that is going to bring the peace and justice and utopia we all hope for. Or some kind of education or technology that will bring peace on earth.

- Jesus says, "Don't believe them."
- Two adjectives that will describe the coming of the real King:
 - **(1) Sudden.**
 - No advance warning. Like lightning. You don't see it coming from the sky... they say it comes up...
 - **(2) Unmistakable**—it's like lightning.
 - If someone shows up at my house and says, "Someone grew a 3 headed donkey down in Cary." To know if it's true, I've got to go see it. If there's lightning in Cary, I can see it here. Jesus said that's how the 2nd coming of His Kingdom will be. Big. Public. No mistaking. Everybody will see it and know it.
- The point: "It won't be a secret movement you might miss out on."
- Now, I want you to notice something real quick here, because it almost appears that Jesus has contradicted Himself.
 - At first, He tells the Pharisees. You missed the Kingdom; you were looking for something flashy, but it's me.
 - But then, He says, "The future Kingdom is not subtle at all. You'll know it. There's no missing it. It's like lightning. There's no mistaking it."
- **Jesus is the only movement you ever need to join. He's the only boundary.**
 - Can I tell you why this is important? Every cult says, "You've got to join us or you're going to miss out. " "Oh, you know Jesus? Oh yeah, well, you've also got to be a part of this. This other leader. This other denomination."

- **No. Jesus is the only movement.** The only question is whether you are inside Him or outside Him.
 - You say, why do you tell people to join a church? The local church is just a community of Jesus-followers. It's not some secondary group gathered around a new leader or organization. We do this because Jesus commanded. A good church is a group of people gathered around Jesus and really nothing else.
- Make sense? You say, "Why you making a big deal out of this?" Mormons #1 source of converts are still people in churches like this. I'm sick of it. Don't follow it!

Jesus continues. [25] But first he must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation.

- This was the mystery everyone tripped over in Jesus' day. B/c before he could the Kingdom, He had to die.
- In order to bring the peace of God on earth, He had to make peace between us and God, and that would happen through His death. In His death He would absorb the wrath of God for our sins and create in us a new heart to know and love God.
- Great example of this:
 - Previously I referred to Luke 8, the miracle of Jesus speaking to the wind and the waves. I told you that the point is that one day He'd do this for all of creation. For now, He can calm the storm in our hearts by making us at peace with an all-controlling God who we are assured loves us and accepts us.
 - Right after Jesus teaches them that He explains that He's going to be like Jonah (Luke 11:31). Remember the story of Jonah? Storm... he was thrown out and swallowed in the belly of a great fish for 3 days and nights.
 - Jesus taught that He would calm the storm in our hearts of feeling alienated from God. How would He

do that? Like Jonah, by being thrown into the sea of God's wrath. Jesus would absorb the wrath of God and bring the peace and calm of being accepted by an all-controlling God into our hearts. His death was necessary to bring that peace.

- This was the mystery that no one got, because no one realized that the problems in the world begin in our own hearts, and before God could calm the storms of destruction on earth, He had to calm the storms of rebellion in our hearts.

OK, vs. 26: he starts again to refer again to His coming Kingdom:

[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.

- A 3rd adjective describing the 2nd coming of the Kingdom
- **(3) Unexpected** God had warned the people of Noah's day he would send a flood, but He didn't tell them when. And they went on about life and forgot about and then, all of a sudden, it came. Genesis 7:10 says that Noah believed God, built and Ark. They entered it, then God shut the door. They were in it for 7 days, then the floodgates of the earth burst open and the sky opened up and then it rained. When you felt the first rain drop, it was too late.
 - **We don't get to know the day or the hour. Not even the angels.**
 - No matter how clearly stated this is, some fool thinks he can figure it all out.
 - It's the Hebrew code... cross your eyes
 - (My story in 1988)
 - J.D. you get the equipment
 - May 22, 2011. Billboards and RV's. #1 sign an end of the world prophecy campaign is not true—they commission an RV tour
 - Same guy predicted it in 1994 (wrong calculations—forgot to carry the 1)

- You know what is going to happen on May 23? Confess some mathematical error and raise money to get all the billboards and RV's changed.
- Wonder what worship is like there this morning? Right now that guy is like, 'I want you to worship like it's your last Sunday. Because it is.'
- No. You can't do that. Jesus showed us this over and over. The coming is sudden. Unexpected.

[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.

- Same thing here.
- **What strikes you is how “normal” life seemed to be when the judgment came and swept people away.**
- It doesn't say that the people of Noah's day or Sodom's day didn't believe in God, just that the imminence of His coming was out of their mind.
 - On one level, it sounded so strange that they scoffed. “A real flood... that will drown us all? Seriously, Noah?” Or, in Sodom. “Oh, fire from the sky, you say. Yeah, sure.”
 - Same thing today, right? It's so far out there, people don't even think about it. It seems too far outside the specter of “normal” life. Oh yeah, Jesus coming back on the clouds? On a white horse? You ever try to explain this to people? A real hell for unbelievers?
 - And then, on another level, the people of Noah's day and in Sodom just got distracted with what they saw as other, more pressing things: like getting married; making money; pursuing hobbies. Not bad things, they just weren't thinking about the judgment of God.

- A lot of people miss the Kingdom of God because they don't pay any attention to it. It's not that they say, “No, God. I'm siding with Satan.” They postpone the decision.
- **More people miss the Kingdom of God because they neglect it, not reject it.**
 - Do you remember the parable we went over a few weeks ago about the people who didn't come to the Master's party because of excuses? This is a pretty common theme with Jesus.
 - Most people miss out on the Kingdom of God not because of outright rejection, but because of the distractions of day-to-day life. They never give it the proper weight. They postpone the decision.
- **It's kind of crazy when you think about it. Pascal's *Pensees*. How most people seem to be able to ignore their death is a mystery.**
 - You are in a room and every once in a while a savage beast comes in...
 - You're coming up on a cliff... distract yourself with trees and signs. Why would you live ignoring the one thing you absolutely know to be true—you're going to die and enter into eternity!

[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.

- Jesus tells His people to do the opposite of what the people of Noah's day and Sodom and Gomorrah did. Live every second of your lives focused on the coming Kingdom; the imminence of eternity—it could break through at any

minute. It could break through by Jesus coming back, or by your death. Either one puts away this life and ushers you into eternity.

(4) Imminent

- **You should be ready at any moment to meet God;**
- **Your life should be light and mobile and focused on eternity,** and not super attached to things here and now.
- Let me make kind of a dramatic statement: **If the return of Jesus is not imminent in your mind, your attitude toward things down here will be wrong.**
 - Every one of his letters, and he ties every moral command to Jesus' coming.
 - Give you an example:

1 Corinthians 7:29-31 ²⁹ What I mean, brothers and sisters, is that the time is short. From now on those who have wives should live as if they do not; ³⁰ those who mourn, as if they did not; those who are happy, as if they were not; those who buy something, as if it were not theirs to keep; ³¹ those who use the things of the world, as if not engrossed in them. For this world in its present form is passing away.

- What on earth does Paul mean? *"From now on those who have wives should live as if they do not;"* Is this like Paul prescribing a "hall pass" for Christians? Not at all.
- He's saying, "Whatever situation you're in, you need to realize how temporary it is."
- People treat their situation in life like it is so final.
 - You only get one shot down here, so get all you can, because you'll never have a chance again.
 - You've got one shot to be married. One shot to experience the beauties of this world. We make bucket lists. If I don't

do this now, I'll never get the chance again.

- **I've showed you this several times: Jesus' kingdom is NOT an ethereal experience; it's a resurrection. He eats fish. The resurrection, His Kingdom, is creation at it's fullest. That's what His miracles showed us. It's what His resurrected body shows us. People were more alive, not less alive.**
- Paul is saying that whatever you miss out on down here is insignificant because the eternal Kingdom looms large.
- Bucket lists don't make much sense for Christians.
 - Some of you are really depressed because you're still single. And you're like, "I'm never going to get to experience marriage...." Or, even if I do get married now, I've wasted the best years of my life." Or, maybe you're in a bad marriage and you say, "I'll never know what it's like to love and be loved." Paul says, "No, no. Let him with a wife be like someone without one, and the one who doesn't have a wife be like the one who does, because this present world is passing away, and eternity looms large in the present. Jesus gives you the marriage feast of the lamb, with real food and wine. It will be the feast of all feasts. You'll be held by real arms. We don't really even know how to describe it. But the point is that what you're going to get in eternity trivializes marriage. Marriage is just a dull symbol of the eternal thing.

- I was talking with someone recently... Bitter because they had one childhood and her parents screwed it up... let those with good parents be like those who had none. The point is not that childhood; the point is heavenly Father.
- I really think that one of the things that keeps us from really being able to sacrifice and focus on eternity is this idea that we get one chance at the world and what we don't get this time around, we lose forever.
- EAT PRAY LOVE
- **I've got to see the Alps...** What if I die and never see the Alps? (heaven, with the out of tune harp) The Grand Canyon? If Jesus' resurrected body was recognizable, but it was also supercharged so that He could walk through walls... **What does the heavenly, resurrected Alps look like?** What I miss out on down here, no big deal. I get to experience the resurrected one.
- **Space shuttle.** No big deal. I don't know if we'll have space shuttles in heaven. Maybe we won't need them. Maybe we'll be able to fly to the moon. I told him in heaven he could come and watch me take off.
- What's on your list of things you have to experience before you die?
 - I've got to have a wife; owning a home; want to have a house at the beach; want to sky-dive; want to own Porsche; taking the Lord Rings Tour in

Switzerland; running with the bulls; streaking in the Super Bowl; wouldn't you be content to not make those things you're obsession and instead make God's Kingdom your obsession, knowing that in eternity you'll have ample time to enjoy those things?

- The only thing on your bucket list, the one thing you can't do in eternity, is bring people now to Jesus. **That's the one thing you can't do in eternity.**
 - **Family**
 - **UPG**
- If the imminence of Jesus is not real to your mind, your attitude toward everything is off. So Paul ties everything to the 2nd coming.
- **One more example:** When Paul talks about how you treat pain, he says, Romans 8, "I've learned to see those like labor pains."
 - 18 hrs. It's nothing compared to eternity.

[32] Remember Lot's wife.

- She looked back and became a pillar of salt. Salt is a way of depicting death. It kills.
- Wealth has a way of knitting a man's heart to this world. Some of you are in her posture. You're leaving the city of destruction, but you're obsessed about what you're missing or things you've always wanted to do or to own. That's salt on your spiritual life. It's killing you.

[33] Whoever seeks to preserve his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life will keep it.

- The one who builds up life on this earth loses it; who angles everything to get it all down here will lose it. The one who gives it away for eternity keeps it.
- Like I told you a few weeks ago with your money: you can't take it with you, but you can send it on ahead!
- Leverage your life for eternity!

Let me put all this together... Two qualities:

- **Readiness**
 - **Illustration:** Me as a kid watching clouds
 - Are you ready to meet God? Is your life light and mobile
 - Illustration (**Piper**): being in a store collecting stuff? If anything it makes it harder to walk.
- **Patience**
 - Patience means delayed gratification. It means working faithfully even when you can't feel the outcome.
 - This is where most of us falter. We want to see the blessing now. I did what you asked, God, where is the blessing? I started trying to honor wife, and she quit nagging me and immediately started to rub my feet every night. I started tithing and a rich uncle I didn't know about left me a million dollars.
 - **If you are going to follow Jesus, there is so, so much that will be unfulfilled and unrewarded until the coming Kingdom.**
 - **The only way you're going to be able to do that is for the return of Jesus to be real to you.**
 - **The less real to you His coming, the more obsessed you are with the here and now. The more you succumb to temptations; the more you engage in materialism; the more you get focused on things like suffering and what you don't have.**

- **Imminent expectation of the return of Jesus is necessary for living as a disciple.**

Let me play prophet here for a minute: I think this is completely absent in most churches today. I think it's probably a reaction to all the rapture hysteria and the goofy predictions, but to the Bible writers this was paramount... he might come today!

- Literally every book of the New Testament tells you to live with imminent expectation.
- The last words of the Bible: Jesus says, "I am coming quickly." And the Bible writer, John says, "Come, Lord Jesus!" The Bible closes with John looking to the clouds, saying, "Come! We're waiting."
- I'm telling you... We just don't do that anymore. And yes, maybe it might be an explainable reaction to the goofy prediction people, but Christ's coming is supposed to be imminent to us; always on our minds.
- Here's the problem with people who think He's coming on May 22: Christ's coming is not imminent enough! They think he can't come today. They have 8-9 days to mess around. You don't have that. He might come before this sermon is over. You should worship in this service like you might see Jesus today because, you might!
- Christ's coming should be more real and imminent to you than it is even to those who think He's coming on May 22.
- **It could be today.** Jesus saves that last person and He comes. Are you ready?

One last warning:

[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 grain together. One will be taken and the other left."

- Family relationships won't save you. A couple in bed. One taken, the other left.
- Friends. The division in God's Kingdom is not between nations; not between people inside the church and outside the church; the division is within families and within groups of friends; in bedrooms; in dorm rooms.

- In this room...
- Two will be at the Summit church; one taken, the other left.
- Are you ready?

Conclusion: Can you say “Come, Lord Jesus”?

- Are you right with God?
- Have you leveraged your life for eternity, with eyes thoroughly fixed on eternity, or are you looking back, looking down, fixated, like Lot’s wife, on the here and now, and slowly becoming salt?

Are you ready for His coming?