

## **Luke Study 10 - When Does The Kingdom Come?** **17:1-18:8**

### **Introduction**

Jesus told his disciples to pray, 'Father . . . your kingdom come.' (Lk 11:2). That is, 'Father, bring your sovereign, loving rule on earth.'

But when will it come? When will God bring his kingdom on earth?

On the one hand, it feels like it's already here. Jesus is the king of God's kingdom, and even before his death and resurrection, Jesus exercises God's royal authority. He proclaims the kingdom of God (Lk 4:43) and does its works: healing the sick (9:11), driving out demons (11:20), forgiving sin (5:20) and raising the dead (8:54). These are signs that the kingdom of God is here: *"If I drive out demons by the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you."* (11:20)

But on the other hand, it feels like the kingdom is still a long way off. The world is still full of sin and suffering. It doesn't feel like God has total control of it yet, like his kingdom has completely come.

So when does the kingdom come? Now? Or not yet?

How we answer that question will set the tone of our Christian life: it will determine how much we expect of God now, and how much we wait for. It's also a question Luke has been wrestling with for ages. So it's good news that, in today's passage, Jesus explicitly answers it: 'When does the kingdom come?' Let's get into it.

### **Read Luke 17:1-10**

Before Luke gets to the big theme of this passage, it's worth noting he includes here some general teachings of Jesus on a variety of subjects. There doesn't seem to be any order to them. Rather, they're like proverbs: helpful but standalone teachings about what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. So, before we get to the main passage - Lk 17:11-18:8 - we'll pause briefly here to consider them.

1. Choose one of the following sections of this passage:
  - a. 17:1-3a
  - b. 17:3b-4
  - c. 17:5-6
  - d. 17:7-10
2. What do you think it means?
3. What does it mean for you?

### **Read Luke 17:11-19**

4. Where is Jesus travelling? Why is he travelling there? (9:51; see also 13:33)
5. What happens as he is going into a village? (vv.12-13)
6. What does Jesus do? (v.14)
7. What happens next? (vv.15-16)
8. How does Jesus react? What do you think Jesus means by v.19? ('Made you well' is lit. 'saved.')

Luke reminds us again of where Jesus is going: Jerusalem, where he will be taken up into heaven (9:51), but not before he dies (13:33). As he's traveling there, he's approached by ten lepers, asking him to heal them. He does. But only one comes back to thank him. More, he's a Samaritan, one of Judaism's hated enemies. And yet, Jesus says it is this person - the one who came back to thank him - who is not only physically healed but also 'saved;' that is, made right with God. The point? Anyone can receive a kindness from God (in this case, the healing of an illness). But only those who respond in faith - in this case, by responding with gratitude, recognising where that kindness has come from - receive the full benefit of what God offers through Jesus: salvation.

### **Read Luke 17:20-21**

9. What do the Pharisees ask Jesus?
10. How does Jesus reply?
11. Jesus has said beforehand that the coming of the kingdom of God can be observed in some ways (e.g. through miracles: 11:20). So what do you think he means here? What sort of things might people be pointing to when they say, 'Here it is' or 'There it is'? (See also 17:22-24)
12. What does Jesus mean by saying 'the kingdom of God is in your midst'? How might what he has just done with the lepers be a sign of this?

This is a tricky passage, but it's worth getting our heads around because in some ways it's the key to Jesus' understanding of the kingdom.

The Pharisees ask when the kingdom of God will come. As evidence of its coming, they're probably looking for spectacular, end-of-the-world type signs: the types of signs that will happen in particular locales ('Here it is,' 'There it is;' v.21) and be amazing (like lightning; v.24). We know that people often wanted Jesus to give them 'signs from heaven' (11:16).

But Jesus says the coming of the kingdom of God isn't something that will be observed by those types of signs. Rather, it will come with the sorts of signs they've already seen: Jesus driving out demons, forgiving sin, and healing the sick - like the ten lepers he's just healed! In other words, if they only had the eyes to see, the Pharisees would see that the kingdom of God has *already* come; that it's standing in front of them, in Jesus, 'in your midst.'

In this sense, the answer to the question 'When will the kingdom come?' is: now. It already has come, in Jesus. Jesus is God's king and has already started re-establishing his rule over a sinful and suffering world. We've seen the signs of that in his preaching, healing, driving out of demons, and forgiveness of sins. Climactically - sitting on this side of his journey to Jerusalem - we've seen it in his death, resurrection, and ascension. Jesus' kingdom is here, and we can experience some of its benefits now.

Of course, that's not all there is to say about God's kingdom: as we're about to see, it is not yet fully consummated. But before we move on, a couple of reflection questions:

13. When are you tempted to despair over the presence of sin in your life? How might the fact that the kingdom of God has come and is at work be a comfort?
14. When are you tempted to feel crushed by suffering in your life? How might the fact that the kingdom of God has come and is at work be a comfort to you?

### **Read Luke 17:22-37**

15. What do you think Jesus means by 'one of the days of the Son of Man'? (vv.22-24)
16. Why mustn't the disciples go 'running off' to find it? (v.24)
17. What will it be like 'in the days of the Son of Man'? (vv.26-37)
18. Who will escape? (v.33; see also 9:24)

Jesus teaches that, though the kingdom of God has already come in one sense, it is still not complete. It still has to be consummated, by Jesus' return in judgment.

The disciples will long for Jesus' return. It will be hard being his disciples and they will be persecuted. But they will have to wait for their rescue. There is no point looking for signs of Jesus' return or following those who've said they've seen them: when he returns, it will be obvious for everyone to see. Before then - even just before then - life will look just like it did before other acts of God's judgment: people will be living life as usual, oblivious. But then, judgment will come, and it will be pointless trying to flee. The only people who will be saved are those who have already decided to lose their lives, by following Jesus (9:24).

So Jesus teaches that there is also a 'not yet' element to his kingdom coming: it has started to break into this world now, but won't have fully come until Jesus has returned and saved his people.

So what should his people do now, while they wait? Pray!

**Read Luke 18:1-8**

19. Jump ahead to v.8b: how does this parable tie in with what Jesus has already been talking about?

20. Now go back to v.1 and read the rest of the parable. What is the point it makes?

Jesus tells a parable about an unjust judge who, though he is unjust, still gives justice to a widow because of her persistent nagging. His point is: if this is how an *unjust* judge reacts to persistence, how much more will *God* - who *is* just - react to persistence too, answering your prayers for vindication?

In other words, as disciples wait in the painful 'now but not yet' time of the kingdom, they should not give up, thinking that God has forgotten them while they wait for him to return. Rather, they should pray, knowing that he will return to save them soon, and trust him in the meantime.

21. What are some ways you find it hard to trust in God while you wait for him to come back?

22. Spend some time praying for Jesus to return to bring justice to the world, and for patience now while you wait for him.