

# The Kingdom of God Is in the Midst of You

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## Introduction

### The Text

<sup>20</sup> Being asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, he answered them, “The kingdom of God is not coming in ways that can be observed,<sup>21</sup> nor will they say, ‘Look, here it is!’ or ‘There!’ for behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you.”

<sup>22</sup> 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.<sup>23</sup> And they will say to you, ‘Look, there!’ or ‘Look, here!’ Do not go out or follow them.<sup>24</sup> 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.<sup>25</sup> But first he must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation.<sup>26</sup> Just as it was in the days of Noah, so will it be in the days of the Son of Man.<sup>27</sup> 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.<sup>28</sup> Likewise, just as it was in the days of Lot—they were eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building,<sup>29</sup> but on the day when Lot went out from Sodom, fire and sulfur rained from heaven and destroyed them all—<sup>30</sup> so will it be on the day when the Son of Man is revealed.<sup>31</sup> 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.<sup>32</sup> Remember Lot’s wife.<sup>33</sup> Whoever seeks to preserve his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life will keep it.<sup>34</sup> I tell you, in that night there will be two in one bed. One will be taken and the other left.<sup>35</sup> There will be two women grinding together. One will be taken and the other left.”<sup>37</sup> And they said to him, “Where, Lord?” He said to them, “Where the corpse is, there the vultures will gather.” (Luke 17:20–37)

### When Will the Kingdom of God Come?

- A. Our text begins with reference to a question from the Pharisees as to when the kingdom of God would come. It is a good question, and I don’t think we should imagine anything sinister lurking behind it as we often suspect when it comes to these Pharisee types. I think they’re being genuine here.
- B. And, really, though we might not put it in these exact words, it’s a question we all ask and wonder about in one way or another.
  - 1. Haven’t you ever, when looking out at the mess of this world or your life, wondered, sometimes with angst, frustration, confusion, and longing: Where is God?! Where is the evidence of His rule and reign? Where is His kingdom? When is it coming? Don’t you turn on the evening news and wonder such things? I do.
    - a. Well, the verses before us are given to address these kinds of questions and help make sense of the matter for us.

- C. We shall divide what is here under three headings (and though they might not make all that much sense to you up front, I trust you shall come to understand what I mean by them as we go along): (1) The Already (vv. 20-21); (2) The Not-Yet (vv. 22-30); and (3) The In-Between (vv. 31-37).

## (1) The Already (vv. 20-21)

### One Kingdom in Two Phases

- A. When it comes to the kingdom of God and its arrival in this world, one of the things that so perplexed the Jewish people in Christ's day was the fact that—while, from perspective of the OT Scriptures, the coming kingdom as it was promised and prophesied looked to be a single, dramatic, even cataclysmic event that would be ushered in by the Lord's anointed, the Messiah—when it actually begins to break into this world in the person and work of Jesus Christ we come to realize that there are, in fact, two phases to it, as it were—two advents, two comings.
1. Christ comes first at Christmas—which we shall soon be celebrating, of course—and He's coming again later on the last day.
- B. We might say, as theologians have long before me, that the kingdom is at once already here in some ways, and yet not-yet here in still others. The already. And the not-yet.
1. And these two aspects or phases of the kingdom of God's arrival are brought out in our text this morning—the first of which emerges in these opening verses.

### The Kingdom of God Is in the Midst of You

- A. Look at vv. 20-21 again: “<sup>20</sup> Being asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, he answered them, ‘The kingdom of God is not coming in ways that can be observed,<sup>21</sup> nor will they say, ‘Look, here it is!’ or ‘There!’ for behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you.’”
- B. When Jesus says here that the kingdom of God is not coming in ways that can be observed, don't misunderstand. There are most certainly signs and miracles and observable facts that mark His first coming—Jesus just miraculously healed 10 lepers a few verses ago, that's got to count for something.
1. But, and here's the point, these are not the kind of signs that the Jews, especially the Jewish leaders expected nor are they the ones, if they were to be honest, that they really wanted.
    - a. “Yes, okay, help the poor, help the lame and the blind and the leprous, alright, but what about the ruling and the reigning, what about the throne, what about political liberation, what about overthrowing the Romans—getting them off of our backs and out of our land? What about vindicating us before the nations and making all right again in Israel? That's what we want the king to do. That's the kind of kingdom we want!”
- C. And Jesus is saying: “Phase one of the Kingdom's arrival isn't going to look like that.” Christmas doesn't look like that. It's a helpless little baby lying in an animal's feeding trough in the back of a

forgotten barn in the middle of a cold, dark night with no one but some mangy shepherds to celebrate.

1. That's how the kingdom of God is breaking in. It may seem small and insignificant to you, so much so that it may even escape your notice . . . but, make no mistake, the kingdom of God is already here nonetheless!
- D. And that's what Jesus means when He goes on to say to them: "[B]ehold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you" (v. 21).
1. The Greek is difficult to translate here, but most commentators agree the essential meaning is that the kingdom of God is present right here, right now, in the person of Jesus Christ. "You say, 'When is the kingdom going to arrive.' I say, 'You're looking at!'"
- E. And this makes sense when once we really think about it. If Jesus is, in fact, the King of this kingdom of God, well, then where the King is so is His kingdom.
1. This is why Jesus says things like He did back in [Luke 11:20](#) after casting a demon out of a man: "[I]f it is by the finger of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you." "I am bringing My kingly authority to bear on this broken world: 'Satan, get off of my land!'"
  2. Or back in Matthew's gospel, we read that after being baptized in the Jordan and anointed with the Spirit, He went about preaching: "[Repent, for the kingdom of heaven \[or God\] is at hand](#)" ([Matt 4:17](#)).
    - a. The King is here and He's bringing His kingdom with Him.
- F. But, again, it's not with all the signs and wonders and fireworks that they were expecting. This, as we'll soon see, is what is coming in phase 2 of the kingdom's arrival.

## (2) The Not-Yet (vv. 22-30)

### The Longing and the Letdown

- A. So, in one sense then, Jesus is saying that the kingdom of God is already present—it is in the midst of you. But in another sense it is not yet here in full.
1. And that is why Jesus goes on to clarify some things, not just for the Pharisees now, but for His disciples in particular, lest they (lest we) get confused in all of this.
- B. Look now at [vv. 22-24](#): "<sup>22</sup> 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."<sup>23</sup> And they will say to you, 'Look, there!' or 'Look, here!' Do not go out or follow them."<sup>24</sup> 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."

- C. Here we see that, even these disciples now, shall soon find themselves in a similar place as the Pharisees. They will, when Jesus has died, risen, and departed from this world, begin to wonder: “Where is He?” They shall, as Jesus puts it here, “[desire to see one of the days of the Son of Man . . .](#)” They shall long to see the King of Kings revealed in all His glory at last.
1. And yet, Jesus says, for a while at least, though you desire to see one of these days . . . “[you will not see it.](#)”
- D. O there is something so critical, so life-giving, so reorienting, for the Christian in these words. We must hear Jesus on this point.
1. In between the first and second advents of Christ, in between phase one and phase two of the kingdom’s arrival, He is saying, brothers and sisters, we will be confused. We will find ourselves dejected, let down, longing for God to do something that it seems He is not doing.
    - a. Another school shooting? When are you going fix this, Lord?
    - b. Another wildfire ripping through our state? When are you going to heal our land?
    - c. Another fight with my spouse? When are you going restore the years that the locusts have eaten?
    - d. Another 80 hour work week? When is the ground going to stop bearing thistles and thorns? When am I going see the fruit of my labor and get to rest?
      - i. Name your trial. Name your struggle. I might not know what it is for you, but I know you have one. I know there’s a place in your life right now where you are saying: “I want to see the kingdom come but it feels like the King is long gone.”
- E. I was listening to worship music the other day and just started crying, because the songs were touching on this very reality, and I realize, I’m in it:
1. Leland’s version of the song [Way Maker](#) goes like this: “[Even when I don't see it, You're working / Even when I don't feel it, You're working / You never stop, You never stop working / You never stop, You never stop working / Way maker, miracle worker, promise keeper / Light in the darkness, my God / That is who You are.](#)”
  2. Or there’s that song [Do It Again](#) that we sang here a couple of weeks ago, where at the beginning it recalls Israel’s great triumph over Jericho but then bemoans the fact that it doesn’t seem to be happening for us: “[Walking around these walls / I thought by now they'd fall](#) [I read it in the Bible, they walked around in faith and the walls just fell—I read that in the Bible! But I’m walking around and around and around and these walls are still standing, not a brick has so much as twitched.] / [But You have never failed me yet / Waiting for change to come / Knowing the battle's won / For You have never failed me yet / Your promise still stands / Great is Your faithfulness / I'm still in Your hands / This is my confidence, You've never failed me yet.](#)”
    - a. You’re there aren’t you? You see, we often wish God would do in one step what He’s actually purposed to do in two. And we’re waiting, we’re longing to see the

one of the days of the Son of Man—“Come in glory, come in power, come and make all of this right already!”

## Lightning Flashes and Vulture Circles

- A. And one of the things that we learn here, is that, in our desire to see such things we may be vulnerable, as the Pharisees and Jews were, to twists and distortions and false leads. Some will come saying the Messiah is here or He is there, but Jesus is saying: “When I come, you will know.”
1. And this is interesting. For, while we are subject to the same disorienting mixture of longing and letdown as the Pharisees and Jews were, we are susceptible to different errors.
    - a. For them looking to the first coming, they thought the kingdom would be big and glamorous, but it was small and secret.
    - b. For us, looking to the second coming, we are prone to chase after secret knowledge, rumors, and timelines and things, but He is here saying it will be big and unmistakable.
      - i. It will be like a bolt of lightning that flashes from one side of the heavens to the other. You will not be able to miss it.
- B. I remember backpacking with my buddy in the Rocky Mountains of Colorado and thunderstorms could just roll in at any moment. One time we were well above tree level and a nasty storm closed in on us and, I kid you not, we just took off sprinting, literally running along the continental divide and the trail that follows it. And we’re trying to get down and away from these bolts of lightning crashing all around us. It was crazy.
1. But here’s the image Jesus gives us. We were praying that the bolts would miss us, but we certainly weren’t going to miss them. And the second coming of Christ will be like that. You’re just not going to sleep through it. You’re going to know.
    - a. The drama, the cataclysm, the power—all that was expected in His first coming—will finally arrive in fullest expression in the second.
- C. If I could just say quickly, I think this is the meaning of that somewhat enigmatic saying that comes later down in [v. 37](#) where the disciples seem to be asking essentially the same question as the Pharisees were back up in [v. 20](#): “Where is this kingdom stuff going to be? When is it going to be?”
1. To which He responds: “[Where the corpse is, there the vultures will gather.](#)” It’s gruesome imagery, pointing us perhaps towards the sort of thing we read about in [Rev 19:17-21](#). But it makes the point.
    - a. Just as you know something’s dead, when you see vultures circling high overhead, so you’ll know the day of the Lord when it comes. The signs will be clear.

## As in the Days of Noah and Lot

- A. So now in vv. 26-30 He starts to talk about that day and it's arrival (buckle your seatbelts): “<sup>26</sup> Just as it was in the days of Noah, so will it be in the days of the Son of Man. <sup>27</sup> 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. <sup>28</sup> Likewise, just as it was in the days of Lot—they were eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building, <sup>29</sup> but on the day when Lot went out from Sodom, fire and sulfur rained from heaven and destroyed them all—<sup>30</sup> so will it be on the day when the Son of Man is revealed.”
1. Two quick things to say about this . . .
- B. First, the last day, the day of the Lord, the day of the Son of Man, the day of Christ's return, will be a day both of salvation and of judgment.
1. Noah and Lot find themselves preserved by God in grace and brought out to safety, but the evil generations around them are decimated with flood and flame.
    - a. So when Jesus returns it will be a day when all wrong is made right, when all wickedness is finally snuffed out, when all righteousness is finally made to flourish.
- C. Second, so many people will find themselves caught unawares and unprepared.
1. The interesting thing, perhaps you noticed, is that Jesus doesn't talk of these people busy with all sorts of depravity. They are busy with good things to the neglect and ultimate rejection of the most important thing.
    - a. In Noah's day they are “eating, drinking, marrying and being given in marriage” (v. 27). In Lot's day they are “buying and selling, planting and building” (v. 28). But in both instances they are distracted, even idolatrous, and they are swept away in God's judgment.
- D. One commentator describes it well: “They were attentive to daily business as though it would last forever, and neglectful of eternity as though it would never come” (PNTC).
1. Certainly, we understand Noah must have looked like an idiot to the surrounding people, building an arc in the middle of nowhere however many miles from a body of water. You don't just hitch it to your truck and drive to the nearest lake or whatever. It just sits there and he looks like a madman, out of touch, a laughingstock. And then . . . flood!
  2. In Gen 19:14, we're told that Lot warns his sons-in-law about the impending judgment and they just laugh at him: “Up! Get out of this place, for the Lord is about to destroy the city.’ But he seemed to his sons-in-law to be jesting.” That's a good one Lot. And then . . . fire!

### “But First . . .”

- A. Now, I skipped over v. 25 until this point, and I'm ready to bring it in now.

1. You see, in vv. 20-21, you have the already of the kingdom of God.
  2. And here in vv. 22-30, you have the not-yet of the kingdom of God.
  3. But up in v. 25 we are, in essence, given the reason for this two phase, two step, two advent structure. Before Jesus can usher in the kingdom in all its glory and power, there is something He must do “first”, He says. Read back up from v. 24: “<sup>24</sup> 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.<sup>25</sup> But first he must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation.”
    - a. In other words: Before He’s come to reign, He’s come to die. Before He’s come to sit on a throne, He’s come to hang from a cross. Before He’s come to wear a crown of gold, He’s come to wear a crown of thorns. Before He’s come to bring in the final judgment, He’s come to be judged in our place!
- B. And this is so important brothers and sisters. You see there’s this place in the book of Amos, where the prophet is just railing on the people of Israel because they are longing for the coming day of the Lord as if it would be a good day for them, as if God would come with His kingdom and they’d be in the right.
1. But he says, clearly you don’t get it. God’s holiness, man’s sinfulness. There is no one on earth who would be in the right on that day. We like to imagine we are innocent, God will vindicate. But we are not innocent, and we too deserve His righteous wrath.
    - a. Amos 5:18–19a: “<sup>18</sup> Woe to you who desire the day of the Lord! Why would you have the day of the Lord? It is darkness, and not light,<sup>19a</sup> as if a man fled from a lion, and a bear met him . . .” “You flee from the lion thinking the day of the Lord will be your salvation, but it will be like a bear coming to meet you. It is not going to go well.”
- C. Unless v. 25: “But first he must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation.”
1. Jesus takes the lion and the bear.
  2. Jesus takes the flood and the fire.
  3. The lightning bolt of God’s anger reserved for me strikes down upon Him.
  4. The vultures are circling over His dead body.
    - a. And He does all of this “first”—so that sinners like you and I can come into the kingdom of God and find not judgment but salvation! That’s my King!

### (3) The In-Between (vv. 31-37)

#### Three Action Steps to Take

- A. So now, in view of the already and not-yet of the kingdom of God, and the cross of Christ that’s been interposed between, how then ought we to live in the present?! What are we to do?!
1. For this, I’d turn your attention to vv. 31-37 and I’m just going to boil down what we see here into three action steps which I’ll give you quickly now one at a time . . .

## Action Step #1: Release

- A. The first thing we must do it seems to me is let go of earthly treasure and pursuits, and instead prioritize the realities of God’s kingdom both present and future.
1. Here is at least part of what is meant there in v. 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.”
    - a. We recognize something of what Jesus means here when we consider the fires that have burned around our state as of late. Surely we’ve heard the stories, of people having to flee the flames in an effort to save their lives. How foolish we would think if a person were to run back in to save a laptop or a video game console or a favorite painting or something.
      - i. No! There needs to be all out abandon for the purpose of preserving your life or you might not get out at all.
- B. This is why Jesus comes out in v. 33 and says: “Whoever seeks to preserve his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life will keep it.” If you want to save your life, it begins with releasing it for Jesus’ sake.
1. And with this we come to Action Step #2 . . .

## Action Step #2: Receive

- A. It is important to note that, in all of this:
1. We’re not just running from something terrible, we’re running towards something wonderful.
  2. We’re not just running from God’s wrath, we’re running towards God’s grace.
  3. We’re not just running from destruction, we’re running towards salvation.
  4. We’re not just releasing all our earthly treasures, we’re receiving an even greater one—we’re receiving Christ—His grace, His love, His righteousness, His protection, His fellowship, His Spirit, His inheritance.
    - a. Here is a treasure immeasurably more valuable and precious and satisfying than anything this world has to offer.
      - i. As one commentator puts it: “The kingdom of God is more than escaping wrath; it is receiving eternal life from the hand of the Son of Man, and whoever receives that life can no longer yearn for the life the world offers” (PNTC).
- B. Make no mistake, brothers and sister, it is no loss to give up the kingdoms of this world to gain the kingdom of God!

## Action Step #3: Reorient



- A. I don't have much time for this now, but I think it's quite significant. You might hear what I've said up to this point and think: "Okay, so if people in Noah's and Lot's day are too busy and distracted with everyday affairs, if we're to release all earthly treasures and run after Christ, surely this means we must stop the everyday sort of things that people are usually given to. Surely such things are a waste of time at best, and sinful idolatries at worst."
- B. But [vv. 34-35](#) come in to correct our thinking on this point. Let me read them again and I'll show you what I mean: "<sup>34</sup> I tell you, in that night there will be two in one bed. One will be taken and the other left. <sup>35</sup> There will be two women grinding [flour] together. One will be taken and the other left."
1. And here's the point that I think is so profound: In each of these illustrations, both sets of people are doing common, everyday things—sleeping in bed, grinding flour for dinner—but in each case one is saved in the day of the Son of Man and the other is condemned. Externally there is no difference. So the difference must be on the inside.
    - a. In other words: In each case, the two individuals are doing the very same things, but clearly they are doing them for radically different reasons.
- C. The meaning here, plainly, is not that sleeping, or working, or (to add onto this) eating, or drinking, or marrying are wrong in themselves. No! The critical factor in all of this is the heart with which one goes about such everyday activities.
1. The one is doing such things with the intention of preserving his life—building his own little kingdom here and now.
  2. But the other goes about such things with concern not for the advancement of his own kingdom but of Christ's. His hope is to lose himself for Christ's sake as he sleeps and works and eats and drinks and marries. It is to Christ's glory and honor and praise that He does such things, not his own.
    - a. You see, the gospel does not remove a person from common everyday activities, it reorients him within them.
      - i. Sleep isn't ultimate. Work isn't ultimate. Food and drink are not ultimate. Marriage isn't ultimate. Christ is!
- D. And, that's how we live in the in-between—in the space between the already and the not-yet of the kingdom of God. We release, we receive, and we let that reorient in all that we do!