

WHAT EVERY CHRISTIAN NEEDS TO KNOW

Lesson 31

The Kingdom, End Times, Jesus' Return

INTRODUCTION

Five days before his Presidential Inauguration in 1961, John F. Kennedy was in West Palm Beach, Florida on a working vacation. One of his invited guests was none other than Rev. Billy Graham. As the two men got into the car to drive to the golf course Kennedy turned to Graham and said, "Billy, would you tell me about the Second Coming of Jesus Christ? I don't know much about it." [quoted in David Aikman's book, Billy Graham, His Life and Influence, Thomas Nelson publishers, 2007, page 193] Wow – what a question! Man's interest in the future is legendary; we all have a built-in curiosity about what the future holds especially when it comes to the return of Jesus and the end of the age. About one fourth of the Bible deals with prophecy – the predicting of future events. Many of those prophecies have already been fulfilled and many OT prophecies were fulfilled in the life of Christ.

A class in Bible doctrine would not be complete without a lesson or two on the end times. Today and next week we will explore this topic. Today we will look at the concept of the Kingdom and how it relates to the return of Jesus Christ to the earth. Next week we will look at the End Times Judgments. A disclaimer: we recognize that there are differing opinions among godly, Bible believing Christians as to how the end times including the Second Coming will unfold. We definitely believe that, as Scripture teaches, Jesus Christ will return. In these two lessons we will do our best to major on the majors and steer clear of controversy. Be assured that we will NOT try to predict the day and time of Jesus' return!

Today's Lesson: "WHAT ABOUT THE KINGDOM?"

The Baptist Faith and Message states, "The Kingdom of God includes both His general sovereignty over the universe and His particular kingship over men who willfully acknowledge Him as King...The full consummation of the Kingdom awaits the return of Jesus Christ and the end of this age." (page 15)

Key Text: Luke 17:20-36

I. WHAT IS THE KINGDOM?

Mark Driscoll and Gerry Breshears, in their book Doctrine, state: "The kingdom of God is about Jesus our king establishing his rule and reign over all creation, defeating the human and angelic evil powers, bringing order to all, enacting justice, and being worshiped as Lord." (page 411)

Let's break it down to its simplest elements. To have a kingdom, any kingdom, you need three things:

- A king – an absolute ruler.
- Subjects – loyal followers.

- A realm – either land or a realm of authority, a sphere of influence.

In the Kingdom of God:

- The King is the Lord Jesus Christ; He rules.
- The subjects are loyal followers of Jesus Christ – true believers, true followers.
- The realm – this is where it gets a bit complicated...

There are two aspects of the kingdom of God presented in Scripture:

- (1) – the present or inward aspect in which the believer in Jesus Christ submits to Jesus as best he can in all aspects of his life. In Luke 6:46 Jesus asked, “And why do you call me ‘Lord, Lord’ and do not do what I say?” With this question Jesus reveals the hypocrisy of someone calling Him “Lord” but then doing whatever they want. “Lord” means “master”. Whoever is the Lord is in charge – He doesn’t make suggestions, He gives commands. Jesus is King and we as believers are His subjects. In the present aspect of the kingdom the realm is our own lives in the here & now. This is the aspect stated in *The Baptist Faith and Message* as “...His particular kingship over men who willfully acknowledge Him as King.” Where Jesus Christ is, there is the Kingdom!
- (2) – the future or outward aspect. This refers to the King, Jesus Christ, returning to earth to set up His Kingdom. *The Baptist Faith and Message* refers to this aspect: “The full consummation of the Kingdom awaits the return of Jesus Christ and the end of this age.” This is the area where scholars and theologians differ as to the timing and fulfillment of the events.

We tend to forget how prominent the kingdom is in the NT. In Matthew 4:17 as Jesus kicks off His public ministry, His first recorded statement is, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” He did not just preach the gospel but “the gospel of the kingdom” (Matthew 9:35). He said “I must preach the kingdom of God...” (Luke 4:43). Jesus taught us to pray “Thy kingdom come...” (Matthew 6:9). After Jesus was raised from the dead, Acts 1:3 says that He spent time with the apostles for 40 days “...speaking of the things concerning the kingdom of God.” At the end of Acts it says that Paul was in Rome “...preaching the kingdom of God” (italics mine). The term “kingdom of God” or “kingdom of heaven”, which are interchangeable terms, are mentioned 38 times in Luke’s Gospel alone!

II. WHAT IS THE NATURE OF THE KINGDOM?

Read Luke 17:20-21

Jesus was questioned by the Pharisees as to when the kingdom was coming. Most of the time the Pharisees tried to trick Jesus and make Him look bad but this was a legitimate question. Jesus had been preaching that the kingdom was “at hand” or near. Their question was logical.

Norval Geldenhuys, in his commentary on Luke, states: “There was no more burning question, especially to the Pharisees, than that concerning the time when the kingdom of God would be called into being by the Messiah.”(page 440).

Jesus responded to their question with two points:

1. The kingdom would not be coming with signs to be observed, that is, with loud fanfare. The Pharisees were looking for a kingdom to be set up in which the Messiah would put down the political oppression of Rome. They had misunderstood the outward future aspect of the kingdom – they expected that it would come immediately in glorious triumph.
2. Jesus told them that the kingdom was “in your midst” (NASB). This refers to the present aspect of the kingdom. The NIV translation says “within you” which is unfortunate. Jesus was addressing the Pharisees . He did not mean it was “within” the Pharisees because they were not believers; they were self-righteous hypocrites. He meant that the kingdom was in their midst, right in front of them, in the form of the King Himself. The Kingdom will come in the hearts of men.

APPLICATION: Through trusting Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord we become His loyal followers. We participate in the kingdom now through submitting to the King and His rule over our lives in all aspects. This is what Jesus meant when He said to seek the kingdom in Luke 12:31 (Matthew 6:33). He meant for us to seek or pursue after kingdom priorities as we follow Him.

III. WHAT IS THE NATURE OF THE ARRIVAL OF THE KINGDOM?

Jesus turns to His disciples to give them several facts about the future/outward aspect of the kingdom...

Verse 22 (read)– Jesus states that there will come a time when they will long for the kingdom, the Second Coming, but they will not see it. Is that not our attitude today? We look forward to Jesus’ return but we do not see it because it is not yet time.

Verse 23 (read)- Don’t follow after false prophets who say they know when Jesus will return. Don’t be misled by the date setters! In Matthew 24 Jesus said that many false prophets will come and try to mislead many.

Verse 24 (read) – When He comes, it will be open, public and unmistakable. Everyone will know when the Messianic Kingdom begins. Jesus uses the illustration of lightning: when it flashes, everyone knows it and everyone knows what it is.

Verse 25 (read) – Before He comes, He must suffer and be rejected. This is the First Coming. The Messiah was presented as a suffering servant in Isaiah 53:4-6, written about 600 years before Christ. Jesus had given His disciples details of His suffering in Luke 9:22.

Verses 26-27 (read) – Jesus compares the time just before His Second Coming to the time of Noah. He stresses the judgment aspect of the coming of the Kingdom. Before He sets up His Kingdom people will be judged to see if they will be allowed to enter. Before the flood, in addition to building the Ark,

Noah was a “preacher of righteousness” (2 Peter 2:5). Noah preached of a coming judgment but the people were unresponsive. That is the meaning of verse 27 – “...eating, drinking, marrying” - in other words, it was business as usual – no one really paid attention to the warnings of Noah. They were terribly short-sighted in thinking that life as they knew it would go on forever. So it is today and so it will be just before Jesus returns. People will mock and ignore messages of warning and the preaching of the gospel. They will be totally unprepared for the coming judgment. And, just as in Noah’s time, judgment will be swift, sure and final. No two minute warning, no second chances!

Verses 28-30 (read) – Jesus uses a second illustration to reinforce the first: the situation of Lot and his family (Genesis 19). There was ample warning of coming judgment on the wicked city of Sodom. Very few heeded the warning. Lot and some of his family escaped. In verse 30 the word translated “is revealed” is where we get our word “apocalypse” which means “a revealing”. Jesus’ sudden appearing at the Second Coming will constitute the greatest apocalypse in history!

TRANSITION: Jesus gave His disciples and us ample warning and instruction as to the nature of His Second Coming and the setting up of His Kingdom. How are we to respond? Should we quit our jobs, put on white robes and just wait for it all to happen? Should we try to predict the date & time?

IV. HOW SHOULD WE THEN LIVE?

Luke 17:31-36 gives us both instruction and negative examples of how we should live in light of His coming...

- A. *Do Not Cling to This World* – verses 31-32 (read). Lot’s wife (Genesis 19) underestimated the power of God’s judgment on Sodom and she sought to preserve her former way of life. She disobeyed because her priorities were tied to worldly things and she perished. When that day comes we should not be thinking about our “goods”, our “stuff”. 1 John 2:15 says, “Do not love the world nor the things of the world.” We own goods; it is OK to enjoy the things of this life but things should not own or rule us. At any moment we should be able to give up material possessions for the sake of godly values. On that day when our Lord returns, the only thing that matters is our relationship to Him. We should cultivate our walk with Christ as if He could return at any moment – because He could!

- B. *Cling To Jesus Christ* – verse 33. The opposite of clinging to worldly things is to cling to Jesus Christ. Matthew 10:39 is a parallel idea in which Jesus says, “He who has found his life shall lose it, and he who has lost his life *for My sake* shall find it.”(italics mine) True meaningful purposeful life is found in a relationship with Jesus Christ – not in worldly possessions. In verses 34-36 Jesus describes how it will be at His Second Coming. People will not have a chance to go back and get their stuff! It will be a time of judgment. Those taken are taken into judgment; those left are ushered into the Kingdom.

SUMMARY: What follows is an excellent summary of this section from *Dr. Constable's Notes on Luke* (page 196):

“...Jesus' appearing and the beginning of the kingdom [on earth] will be sudden and unexpected by most people who are alive then. It will be an unmistakable event in history and will involve physical danger for earth-dwellers because divine judgment will follow immediately. No one will be able to miss it when it occurs. Jesus did not say exactly when it would occur, but clearly it would not happen immediately. An interval of time would have to elapse.”

APPLICATIONS/CONCLUSION

So, where does that leave us? You may be thinking, “OK, but I still have kids to raise, bills to pay, school to finish, etc. How do I get my head around the coming Kingdom but still live every day firmly planted on earth?”

Some Suggestions...

1. Be sure of your own salvation. Do you believe that Jesus Christ died on the cross for you? Do you trust in Him alone for forgiveness of your sins and for eternal life? Salvation is a gift and today is as good as any to receive that gift!
2. Talk to the Lord in prayer every day. This is one way to deepen your relationship with Him. You can't have much of a relationship with someone if you never talk to them. Following this section in Luke on the coming Kingdom, Jesus gave 2 parables on prayer (Luke 18).
3. Read your Bible every day to know the Lord better. Develop a consistent, daily discipline of reading the scriptures. If you aren't sure where to start, begin with the Gospel of John. There is no spiritual growth apart from a steady intake of the word of God.
4. Worship, fellowship and serve in our church family. It is like a 3-legged stool: you need all 3. Join the church, be baptized, join a Bible study class – get on the team and get in the game. The Christian life is not a spectator sport and it is not to be lived in isolation!
5. Tell others about Jesus Christ. As His representative to a needy world, demonstrate your love and concern for others.

The great reformer Martin Luther said, “I live as though Jesus Christ died yesterday, rose again today and is coming again tomorrow.” Amen – come Lord Jesus!