

Intro: Do you ever wake up early enough to see the sun rise out of the night sky? Though many of you probably do not wake up early enough to take in the beauty of the sunset (you would have had to beat 5:41am this am), my assumption would be that more than photographers and hopeless romantics appreciate the peacefulness, the power, and the hope producing effects of the dawning of a new day. There is something great about new beginnings (dawn of a new baseball season; dawn of new love...) The Kingdom of God can be likened to the rising sun. So this teaches tells us that the kingdom is already here. The kingdom dawns in the first coming of Christ. It is rising now, slowly until Christ returns again and brings it to complete fulfillment and consummation.

“Receiving the Kingdom” Luke 17:20-18:17

The Point: Receive the kingdom through perseverance and faith in the work of Christ.

I. Realize the kingdom is already and not yet here (17:20-37).

- Two sections frame Jesus’ discussion on the coming of God’s kingdom. The first is found in 20-21. The second in 22-37. Let’s read 20 & 21 together.

The kingdom is Here! (20-21)

- In verse 20, Jesus is approached by the Pharisees with another question: “When will the kingdom of God come?” They were confident it would come, but they wanted to know when they could expect it.
- Jesus answers by telling them the kingdom is not coming with observation. The Pharisees were looking for cosmic signs to be fulfilled. *“Jews demand signs... Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified.”*
- *“for behold...”* Pay attention! Look...! It is in your midst. Hello!
- With these words, Jesus says, “the kingdom is already here.” It is “in the midst of you.”
- There are a few ways to interpret this phrase “in the midst of you.” 1) The NKJV translates the phrase “within you” / meaning “inside you” (Errnn) Pharisees... 2) “in your grasp or power” this depends on our response. 3) “in your presence/ before you” or as the ESV captures “in the midst of you.”
- Pic: Have you ever looked for something and realized it was right there all along... Have you ever misplaced your keys or cell phone ... go look on the counter, in the bathroom, on the dresser, scrambling, your blood pressure is rising, and then.. (in my pocket!)
- Pic: This past Wednesday, we took advantage of the beautiful weather, finally, and made our way up Winthrop St. to Victory Park. Our girls love going to the park to swing and slide. Parker has graduated to the big girl swing and Kesed can now slide down without assistance, so life is good for the Turley girls. I also love going to the park, not only to spend time with my girls, but also to meet other parents who are there with their kids. Wednesday was no different. Parker chose a swing next to the cutest brown headed girl, and eventually I said hello to her mother and we got into a brief conversation. . . .(Marsha & I: man to man coverage. She was zone with man-to-man principles... She had a four, a three, and a two year old under her care. All of the sudden, those 8-10 seconds seem like eternity and I look over to the right, 10 feet away, and there he is in the kids’ swing.
- Ironically and tragically, the Pharisees were missing the kingdom when it was right before their eyes!
- How is that? [Jesus is the sign!] He is the one pointing to what the kingdom will look like and doing the work of the kingdom right in front of them. Jesus brought the presence of the kingdom in their midst. In the first coming of Christ, the kingdom [of God] they all longed for finds its inauguration.
- The kingdom arrived in his person and work of Christ. The blind see, the deaf hear, and the good news is preached to the poor, BUT they missed it! Don’t miss the work of Christ. If you want to know what the kingdom is like, look at Jesus.
- Question: if Jesus is no longer here physically, then has the kingdom departed? No. The kingdom now is displayed through his Spirit at work in the hearts of God’s people, the church. Let this sink in: the kingdom of Christ is made visible through us. Where the Spirit is moving the kingdom is in our midst. So the call for us is to be filled with God’s Spirit and bear the fruit of the Spirit.

The kingdom is coming! It is not yet here in its fullness (22-37)

- Verse 22: Context: You will long to see that day...
- We should long for the return of Christ. We should in our hearts and even with our lips say, “Maranatha, Come, Lord Jesus.” The events of this past week remind us of the fallen world in which we live in and cause us to long for a better day, a day when all of these wrongs, even all of our own wrongs, will be made right.
- This was the desire of the disciples. But they will not see it.
- I want you to see three truths about the coming of Christ’s kingdom:

The return of Christ will be unmistakable. (23-24)

- Jesus warns us that many will say, “The kingdom has come. Here’s the Messiah or there’s the Messiah.” But he says not to pay attention to that. Why? Because the return of Christ will be as visible as the lightning that lights up the whole sky. It does not matter where you’re looking, when lightning flashes across the sky, everyone sees it!
- In the same way, Christ’s return will be unmistakable. Concerning the timing Jesus let’s his disciples know, now for the 5th time in the gospel of Luke, that he will suffer. He set his face to give his life as a ransom for many. #2...

The return of Christ will surprise many. (25-37)

- Many will be caught off guard and unprepared. He uses two OT examples. The first is the account of Noah & the Flood to teach his disciples that many will be going about life with little to no concern for eternity. It is amazing how casual we can be with our

eternal destiny. I'm cool. I've got plenty of time to figure that out. I'll do my own thing for the time being, and so we continue eating and drinking and going about life. They were not prepared for the flood and their life ended quickly.

- So Jesus confronts his hearers again by asking: "Will you be ready for my coming?"
- There is an implicit call to loyalty to Christ (31-33). Jesus is gracious to tell his disciples that they will need to endure, because his return, though imminent, will not be immediate. This is why he gives the example of Lot's wife. With three sobering words, Jesus calls them to keep their eyes fixed on him and persevere. "Remember Lot's wife." The days of Lot in Sodom & Gomorrah were like the days of Noah, judgment upon the rampant rebellion of people against God.
- So Jesus warns, "keep your eyes fixed on me and don't look back!" (Luke 9:62) Loyalty, complete commitment...

II. Seek the kingdom through persistent and faith-filled prayer for justice (18:1-8).

Knowing Our Need:

- What's the connection with Jesus' words on the kingdom in ch. 17? Verse 1 tells us Jesus' shared this parable to encourage perseverance and prayer. He just told them his coming would not be immediate, that they would face trouble and have need for perseverance even as they long for justice.
- Persistent Widow; Once again Luke chooses someone to represent the outcast, the uncared for, the neglected. She did not have money. She did not have influence or power. But she had two things: a cause (justice) and persistence!
- Sadly, the unjust Judge is also persistent in turning a blind eye to her demands. Verses 2 & 5 tell us why: 1) He did fear God. His life was devoid of love for God, and on top of this, #2) though his job was to care for and serve the people under his jurisdiction, he "neither feared God, *nor respected man*" He failed to keep the two greatest commandments, neither loving God nor loving people!
- Thankfully, the widow persisted. Verse 3 says, she "kept coming to him." And eventually, he caved in: he said to himself: "Though I neither fear God nor respect man, yet *because this widow keeps bothering me*, I will give her justice, so that she will not beat me down by her continual coming."
- Jesus says, "Learn a lesson from a this." And arguing from the lesser to the greater he teaches his disciples to go to God with their every concern. If this unjust judge eventually grants justice, how much more will your perfectly loving, perfectly just, heavenly Father grant justice to you, who cry to him day and night."
- You see, the immensity of our need motivates prayer, but the character of God should serve as the greater motivation for our prayers.

Knowing His Character

- He has both the heart and hands... (windslow?)
- When I have a need, I could walk down the street and knock on a neighbor's door.... Roll the dice. OR I could call my father, or ___ to help me with my need. Why would I choose ___? Because of our relationship.
- Once again, the love of God motivates our prayers to God. God has a desire for our good because he loves us.
- Jesus asks: "Will he delay long over them . . . ?" He will give justice and give it "speedily," with the quickness.
- How do we reconcile this with the fact that 2,000 years have past? (2 Peter 3; our perspective on this side of eternity and judgment) "Though the delay seems long, after the vindication it will seem short." (Bock)

Trans: Remember that Jesus tells this parable to strengthen their resolve to persevere and pray. How should we pray?

With persistence

- Verse 1: "to the effect that they ought *always to pray and not lose heart*." We are to pray continually, "night and day," The idea is *not* continuous, nonstop prayer but continual prayer, a lifestyle of prayer. So please don't email your boss and call in for the week.
- This is also what Paul meant in 1 Thess 5:17 when he said, "pray without ceasing." Does prayer mark your life? How constant are you in prayer? How bold are you in prayer? Do you ever just stop to pray? Why wait?
- Let me ask a more searching question: Where have you lost heart? I know many here, in some key area of your life are probably losing heart. You are growing weary. Where? Where have you lost heart? Where do you need to persevere in prayer? Marriage. Parenting. With a Family Member. With Work. Maybe you're praying for Healing. Are you discouraged and looking for hope & peace. [Contentment. Evangelism.]

With faith

- Look back at verse 8: "Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?" This is not a question of doubt, but a call to faith. Jesus knows he will find faith, but he asks whether or not those present will persist in faith.
- As we journey through this troubled world, our faith will necessarily be tested. Jesus understood this and that is why he is calling his followers to remain steadfast in looking to him through prayer.
- Listen to what Oswald Chambers says about this: "**Seeing is never believing: we interpret what we see in the light of what we believe. Faith is confidence in God before you see God emerging; therefore the nature of faith is that it must be tried.**"

Pray For Justice: that all wrongs would be made right... Ultimate justice and vindication will be served in the return of Christ.

Trans: Verses 9-17 give us a picture of what faith should look like in those who receive the kingdom of Christ.

III. Receive the kingdom with great humility and dependence (18:9-17).

Read 9

- Wow. Jesus has a word, some teaching, for those who verse one says: “trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and treated others with contempt.” The NIV: “To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everybody else”
- Once again, Jesus cuts to the person through parable, and he loves to setup contrasting characters to help his hearers discern where they stand before God. Verse 10 tells us that he introduces a Pharisee and a Tax Collector. (Refer back to Luke 15...)
- And in the process he introduces two forms of righteousness... **The Righteousness of Man: Two options – Self Righteousness or Alien (Imputed/Distributed) Righteousness**

Read 10-12

- Self Righteousness is exemplified in the Pharisee and his actions are depicted in verses 11-12.
- It says he “Stood by himself” what we will read in v. 13 about the tax collector “standing far off” seems to imply that the Pharisee is standing at the front, so that he can be seen.
- “God, I thank you . . .” There is no petition/request in his prayer. He has no needs!
- He is grateful that he is not like “extortioners [or robbers], the unjust, and adulterers.” The actions of the first and third (robbers and adulterers) are clearly forbidden in the Ten Commandments: “Do not steal (number 8 and do not commit adultery (number 7). The middle term is a general term for unrighteousness, possibly inserted by Jesus to provide an ironic contrast for this one who thought they were righteous.
- His apparent righteousness is found in his religious practices of fasting and giving to others.
- He is thanking God, not for what God has done, but for what he has done. Note all of the “I’s” I thank you, I am not like, I fast, I give: He might as well have said: “God aren’t you so fortunate to have someone like me on your team?”
- This would be comical if it weren’t so heinous.
- Are we righteous? No! **“None is righteous, no, not one.” Romans 3:10**
- But how do you explain the acts of goodness and kindness we see on a daily basis? Common grace to all made in the image of God.
- Though we are depraved and unrighteous, that does not mean we are as bad as we could possibly be. Doing right things and being right before God are two different conversations.
- We assume that we are inherently righteous, that we possess righteousness inside of us, *BUT* the Bible teaches us that we need righteousness to enter us from the outside. We need an alien righteousness! This is what we see with the tax collector in v. 13

Read 13

- His posture is humble. He stood at a distance and “would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast.” This indicates a sense of personal unworthiness. To beat his breast would have been an outward sign of grief and contrition. His posture is humble, and . . .
- His words are humble. “God, have mercy on me, a sinner.” In light of the enormity of his sin, he cried out for God’s mercy.
- The verb translated “have mercy” means to cover over his sins and remove divine wrath (Stein, 450). Mercy withholds that which we deserve!
- *The Pharisee sought righteousness through merit, but the tax collector seeks righteousness through mercy.*
- If we were righteous, the life, death and resurrection of Christ are superfluous. They are unnecessary. They actually become irrational!
- **“For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” (2 Corinthians 5:21)**
- Interrogate the Pharisee within.
 - If we could, in this church and in our lives, undercut the nasty habit of comparing ourselves to others, we would grow exponentially in grace.
 - In our pride, we elevate ourselves (our ideas, our knowledge, our wisdom, our moral superiority) over those around us, and we begin to really buy into the notion that we are better than others.

Trans: What is the result of these two prayers?

Read 14

- “I tell you, this man (the unrighteous tax collector) went down to his house justified, rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted”
- He was justified. His standing before God had been altered. The tax collector was forgiven and declared righteous.
- Those who humble themselves before God will be exalted in his presence, but the proud and self-exalted will be humbled before God. They will miss out on the blessing of the kingdom.
- The Pharisee sought self-justification.
- This point is further emphasized in vv. 15-17.

Read 15-17

- [Placement] Our city has been captivated by the cry “Boston Strong.” I am all about that. This is a time to come together and be strong for one another. BUT, paradoxically, the Bible says we are only as strong as we are weak... We find strength in weakness... We find wholeness in being incomplete. We find healing in our brokenness.
- The kingdom belongs to those who receive it like children. Infants are completely dependent. They have nothing to boast about but are dependent on the kindness and generosity of others. This was exemplified in the humility of the tax collector and this is the kind of humility we are called to display.

Conclusion:

There is not one person here that does not need to cry out: “God, be merciful to me, a sinner.”