

LUKE 17:20 - 19:27

Along this portion of his journey to Jerusalem, Jesus teaches about the kingdom of God, a concept that draws together various aspects of his mission. The basic meaning of the 'kingdom of God' is closer to 'reign', 'rule' or 'fellowship' of God and does not simply refer to some realm or domain. Yet the Pharisees and even the disciples continue to picture something more concrete (a geographic entity or political structure) that would become a physical reality at a certain time. Jesus, however, refuses to define or confine God's kingdom in terms of space or time. Instead, he teaches about the present and future, healing and telling stories about how to live faithfully and creatively as those who already live in the kingdom of light in the midst of darkness.

Luke 17: 20-37 - The Coming of the Kingdom

The kingdom of God is here now, and it is coming in the future. Wherever God's love rules among people, God's kingdom is there. The fact that Jesus is being rejected by his people means the kingdom of God is also rejected. When Jesus leaves, so will the kingdom, except for those groups who will continue to remain faithful in the midst of opposition. Rejecting Jesus and his vision of God's kingdom as forgiving love, even to enemies, will lead to judgement. The judgement will come in the form of the Roman onslaught against Israel which took place in 70AD (40 yrs after these words are spoken by Jesus). Rejecting the kingdom leads to terrible consequences. What you reap, you sow. Jesus will come again, but it will be after judgement has fallen. The key for his followers is to remain faithful, vigilant and steadfast under persecution.

18: 1-8 – The Parable of the Widow and the Unjust Judge

In times of injustice, faith as perseverance and prayer are called for. Perseverance holds on to hope and doesn't give up. Eventually, justice will come, even in contexts of severe injustice and corruption. But will there be any faith left when Jesus comes again?

18: 9-14 – The Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector

To follow Jesus is to follow as a humble learner, recognizing that we are sinners. The joy is in discovering a God with an infinitely rich heart of love. The Pharisees represent a hardened heart and a judgemental spirit, creating a hate-filled spiritual climate among the people. They don't realize how far they are from the true God and God's true kingdom fellowship.

18: 15-17 – Jesus Blesses Children

Humility is also a child-like quality. To enter God's kingdom and share in its fellowship of love, one has to do so in a child-like way rather than in a superior, holier-than-thou, arrogant judgementalism.

18: 18-30 – The Rich Ruler

Some of the ruling class were sympathetic to Jesus. And yet, they were attached to their status and wealth, and therefore, unwilling to oppose the established faith. To serve justice in a context of vast inequality between rich and poor, a rich man must make big sacrifices to be free and whole. He is not prepared to do so.

But the disciples hear themselves judged in Jesus' words as well. Even if they don't have riches, they crave them, just like many poor people crave wealth. Unless our heart is changed, it doesn't matter how much or how little we have. Jesus ends by challenging them to re-envision what true wealth is all about. Even if you give up a lot for following Jesus, you will gain the fellowship and communion of brothers and sisters in faith as well as a spiritual inheritance in the kingdom of God.

18: 31-34 – Jesus foretells his Death and Resurrection a Third Time

Jesus tells them what he has told them before and they continue to fail to understand.

18: 35-43 – Jesus Heals a Blind Beggar Near Jericho

Jesus heals a blind man. The man's persistent faith engages Jesus whose healing power is responsive to such faith alone. **Healing is never guaranteed, but without faith it is guaranteed that there will be no healing.**

19: 1-10 – Jesus and Zacchaeus

Once again, Jesus sees possibility where the religious authorities have closed the door of their hearts. Even though Zacchaeus is someone whose commercial practice is oppressive to other Jews, he is open to change. Jesus reaches out to him in love. Gratitude for such love transforms Zacchaeus so that he spontaneously commits to giving back what he has taken and more. Like the parables of the lost sheep, lost coin and lost son, Jesus rejoices that this lost son is restored.

19: 11-27 – The Parable of the Ten Pounds

A version of this parable is told in Matthew's gospel (the parable of the talents). This parable is directed to Jesus' followers. How will they share what they have received? How much will the seeds grow and produce fruit? Jesus will return and expect to receive a bounty from the good things love will produce. But the thing with love is if it is not shared it will die. Love is a relational quality. It starves in isolation. God's kingdom will come on earth as it is now in heaven. Only those who live love can be part of it. Anything other than love poisons its purity. Only those who have grown in love will welcome it and share in it. The judgement is based on the choices we will make here and now. Will we ask for God's love to fill us in child-like humility and perseverant faith? Those who have love can keep growing it. Those whose love wavers will lose it when times are tough. To those who have more will be given, but from those who have little, even what they have will be taken away in the coming onslaught.