

Guest Preacher - Rev. Donald A Macdonald

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Preacher: Rev. Donald A. Macdonald

[0 : 00] Let us now turn to the passage of Scripture that we read, the Gospel according to Luke, chapter 17, and reading again at verse 20.

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, nor will they say, Look, here it is or there.

For behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you. Particularly these words, When will the kingdom of God come?

I'd like just to highlight three thoughts. First of all, the request of the Pharisees. Secondly, the response of Jesus.

And thirdly, the requirement to be ready. The request of the Pharisees, the response of Jesus, the requirement to be ready.

[1 : 19] The request of the Pharisees. He was asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come.

In reading the Gospel narratives about the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ, one thing that comes across is the emphasis that Jesus places on the kingdom of God.

In fact, you might say that it is the central theme of the whole Bible. Jesus himself states, I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns as well, for I was sent for this purpose.

And then soon afterwards, he went on through cities and villages, proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God.

He sent out his disciples, and he sent them out with a specific purpose in mind. And what was the specific purpose that was entrusted to his disciples?

[2 : 41] And the answer of the Bible is, to proclaim the kingdom of God. People were urged to seek the kingdom of God.

He asked the question, what was it like? And he gave comparisons with regard to what it was like. In fact, he taught his disciples to pray for the coming of the kingdom. Your kingdom come. And that, of course, involves the flourishing of the church of Christ in the world, of the rolling back, of the frontiers, of the forces of darkness, and the expansion of Christ's kingdom in this world.

And a kingdom, of course, implies that there is a king and that there are subjects. And then you ask the question, well, who is the king?

And the answer that the Bible gives us is that the king is the Lord of lords and king of kings. In the economy of grace, that title belongs solely to Christ Jesus.

[4 : 05] It is an honor bestowed upon him for the work he has accomplished. You remember how the psalmist reports God speaking in Psalm 2, I have set my king on Zion.

And then the psalmist goes on to write these words, as if he were hearing what God the Father says to God the Son. The Lord said to me, You are my son.

Here is proof that this king is none other than the unique, only begotten Son of God. And you remember how his sonship is confirmed at his baptism.

You remember the voice that came from heaven. This is my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased. Again reaffirmed on the mount of transfiguration.

This is my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased. And when the psalmist reports the next statement, Today I have begotten you, what does this statement say to us?

[5 : 21] Does it refer to his eternal generation as God the Son? Well, I think not. Remember how Paul applies these words.

God raised him from the dead. And for many days he appeared to those who had come up with him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are now his witnesses to the people. And we bring you the good news that what God promised to the fathers, this he has fulfilled to us, their children, by raising Jesus.

As also it is written in the second Psalm, You are my Son. Today I have begotten you. And Paul sees these words spoken by the psalmist prophetically, fulfilled in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. He sees them as referring to the enthronement of Christ. When did that occur? In the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Jesus died for the sins of his people and in rising from the dead he is publicly acknowledged as God's anointed king, the saviour of his people, and for that matter the only saviour of the world.

[6 : 36] That's why Paul writes in his letter to the Romans he was declared to be the son of God in power according to the spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead.

This king then, he is different from every other king that was or ever will be in the history of the world.

This king, he can never be deposed. He can never be removed from the throne. He will always be king. Every other king, they are not removed by hostile forces or ill health.

They are ultimately removed by death. But not this king. He has conquered death and the grave and risen triumphantly and victoriously.

He is a king forever. And then this promise is given from the father to his son. Ask of me. I will make the nations your heritage and the ends of the earth your possession.

[7 : 45] And there Christ is saying that his father has promised from before the foundation of the world to give him the nations. Just think of that.

From before the foundation of the world. Not when the world came into being. but before the world came into being that he has promised to give him the nations.

And the Bible tells us a great multitude that no one could number from every nation from all tribes and peoples and languages.

they will assemble ultimately around the king of kings in the new heavens and the new earth when this world this present order will be folded up.

So these people are his for the asking. So then you might say that people were hearing frequent references to the kingdom of God.

[8 : 45] The coming of the kingdom was evidently of great interest to this group of people known as the Pharisees. I suppose you could say that for them it was a burning issue.

The Pharisees were a group of people who had knowledge of the scriptures of the Old Testament. They believed in the advent of a Messiah.

Hence the question. Now it's not made clear by Luke why they asked the question at that particular time.

we know at least that some of them believed that the person of whom they asked the question was a teacher. In fact one of their number we know visited this person Jesus by night and made the admission Rabbi we know that you are a teacher come from God for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him.

that was a significant admission on their part but it was made by a man who had not then been spiritually enlightened.

[10 : 12] I'll repeat that. It was made then by a man who had not been spiritually enlightened. enlightened. How do we know?

And it shows you how far a person can go without being spiritually enlightened. He believed that Jesus was different. He believed that Jesus was a teacher come from God.

But how do we know that he wasn't spiritually enlightened? For the simple fact that Jesus told him he needed to be born again. you may remember how that on the face of it a simple statement and yet a very profound statement how it caused that visitor who came by night no end of problems as he struggled to understand the concept of the new births.

For many people that can be a difficulty. How is one born again? And you remember the questions he asked.

Perhaps they may seem foolish to us but you can see how this man's mind was wrestling with the statement that Christ made.

[11 : 40] A statement that is simple on the surface and so profound because it is a statement that affects the lives of every person who comes into the world and it applies to us all.

You must be born again. There is no getting out from it. We cannot enter the kingdom of God unless we are born again.

So Jesus reminded this man of it and he struggled with it. Well, it was members of this grouping to whom that man belonged who are asking the question, when will the kingdom of God come?

Now, for some of these people, I believe the question probably had a political thrust to it. As a people, they were under the dominion of Roman occupation and rule.

And like any people oppressed under the rule of another nation, they long to be delivered from the oppression of Roman power.

[13 : 00] They wished to know when God would restore the fortunes of his people and righteousness prevail. And so they asked the question, when will the kingdom of God come?

Did they expect Jesus to provide a day and a date? Possibly. But I cannot be sure of that. It is obvious from their request that they weren't thinking of a spiritual concept, but more of a physical entity.

there is in my view a lack of clear understanding about the nature of the kingdom in their request. Their concept of the kingdom is not as a spiritual kingdom, and that I would submit is borne out by the response of Jesus.

And that brings me to my second point, the request of the Pharisees, when would the kingdom come? The response of Jesus, the kingdom of God, he says, is not coming in ways that can be observed.

[14 : 16] Nor will they say, look, here it is or there, for behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you. I get the impression that this group of people wanted a definite answer to their question.

and the response of Jesus must have bitterly disappointed them. Jesus states, the kingdom of God is not coming in ways that can be observed.

In other words, it will not come in the way in which people expect. They obviously thought that it would be accompanied by some kind of great publicity and fanfare that often accompanies earthly kingdoms.

Maybe they were looking for supernatural signs that they might observe and so predict God's future. They obviously thought this teacher could tell them, perhaps from prophecy, when the kingdom would be.

and Jesus begins to correct their views. Rome would not be overturned, at least the power of the Roman Empire at that time.

[15 : 36] Israel would not be vindicated and an earthly kingdom would not be established. And you know, this kind of question, when will it be, is still with us to the present day, leading at times to wild and even embarrassing speculation, as people try to identify dating for the end of the world and the consummation of the kingdom.

How often have you heard, for example, predictions made at times of cataclysmic events, it's the end of the world?

Often have you heard that? People stating, it's the end of the world. But you know, no created being is in possession of that knowledge.

No created being is in possession of that knowledge, not even the angelic beings. It reminds me of, I think it was way back last September, there was an earthquake in Mexico City.

And the residents there feared the apocalypse was happening after seeing blue flashes of light across the sky.

[17 : 06] I think the earthquake was probably about level seven on the Richter scale. But these blue lights that they saw were probably an unexplained phenomenon known as earthquake lights.

But what I drew from it was this, at the back of people's minds, despite the bravado, despite the lack of preparation, there is something at the back of people's minds which says, maybe, maybe.

not that it has a lasting effect on the way they live or their relationship to the living God.

But it does cause fear for a time, maybe. And then it is banished. Well, note what Jesus says, the kingdom would not come with any signs, at least not the kind of signs that people were looking for.

No one is able to predict when it would come or point to it by their own wisdom. No one sees the kingdom of God by outward observation.

[18 : 29] There is a mystery about the coming of the kingdom. And the only way to enter this kingdom is by faith in Jesus Christ. But that is not all that Jesus states.

Behold, he says, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you. In other words, Jesus is saying, it has already come in one sense. It is right before your eyes.

Some would contend, and I think rightly, that the kingdom appeared at the time when the Lord stated that the seed of the woman would bruise the head of the serpent.

So that during the Old Testament days, the kingdom was there, but it only appeared in its brightness and its fullness in the appearing of Jesus Christ in the world.

It is here among you. Without those kinds of observable signs that they were looking for, even though the Roman imposed rule will not be overthrown or an earthly kingdom set up as they desired.

[19 : 41] Do you remember what is told about the teaching of John the Baptist and the particular emphasis and thrust of his message? Was it not repent?

What did he say after that? For the kingdom of heaven is at hand. And do you remember the thrust of Jesus' own teaching? In Mark's gospel, Jesus came into Galilee proclaiming the gospel of God and saying, the time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is at hand.

Repent and believe in the gospel. The kingdom of God is at hand. You may also remember that the Pharisees accused Jesus of casting out demons by the power of Beelzebub.

And he responded with another clear statement about the presence of the kingdom recorded for us in Mark chapter 12.

If it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. In Luke's gospel it is, but if it is by the finger of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.

[20 : 58] The finger of God, the power of God, the Holy Spirit who ushers in the kingdom. But note what is said.

The kingdom of God has come upon you. But he is not stating that it has come within you. And you see, the kingdom of God has to come within us.

His kingdom. And the psalmist reminds us in his kingdom, that his kingdom is an everlasting kingdom. There are warnings about the kingdom.

In fact, very solemn warnings are given in the Bible about the kingdom. For example, the kingdom of heaven. It's like a net that was thrown into the sea and gathered fish of every kind.

When it was full, men drew it ashore and sat down and sorted the good into containers, threw away the bad. So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous and throw them into the fiery furnace.

[21 : 59] In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. The mystery of the kingdom again is that as the net, the power of the kingdom draws men into its sway, draws good and bad.

And only when the net is up on the shore, at the close of the edge, will the good and the bad fish be separated. Notice carefully, the separation described there, it's not between the fish which didn't get caught in the net of the kingdom.

And those which did, maybe that's what we might expect. But that's not the point of the parable.

The separation there is between two kinds of people who are swept into the net of the kingdom.

One kind is kept and the other is cast into the fire. The mystery of the kingdom is that the people who come under the power of God's kingdom are, as we say, a mixed bag.

Some are true disciples, some are hypocrites. And from that I think we can make the deduction that there are two aspects to the kingdom, visible and invisible.

[23 : 15] The kingdom is represented by the church of God in the world, as one theologian expressed it from the human standpoint. It is a visible organization.

but from the divine standpoint, it is not an organization but an organism. It consists of God's elect from the beginning to the end of time.

Whereas the church in the world is made up of those who profess Christ, but as Jesus himself states in the Sermon on the Mount, and it's very scathing and in some ways, very searching, not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of the Father who is in heaven.

On that day many will say to me, Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and cast out demons in your name and do many mighty works in your name? Then I will declare to them, I never

knew you.

Depart from me, you workers of lawlessness. how searching that is. And it ought to bring every one of us to our knees before God.

[24 : 35] And the parable of the net, which I quoted, I believe bears that out. That's the response of Jesus. And it is a very searching response.

I don't know how the Pharisees took the response of Jesus. Did they regard it as being extremely searching or did they dismiss it out of hand?

Because often that's what we are inclined to do. When the Bible challenges our hearts and our lives, and when we don't like what the Bible says to us, we are apt to reject it out of hand and to put it out of the way.

It's not as it were slapping our back and telling us how well we're doing. It's searching our lives and it's going into the secret places of our lives and exposing us to the holy eye of our righteous God.

Well, the response of Jesus, the request of the Pharisees, thirdly and finally the requirement to be ready. Did you note that Jesus addresses his comments in this section on the requirement to be ready, first of all, to his disciples?

[26 : 04] I think that's very significant. He's not, as it were, addressing the need to be ready, first of all, to the unevangelized.

He's addressing it first of all to his disciples. There will be days in the world when they will long to see a day of the Son of Man.

God's to be blessed. And it may be on account of the increasing hostility and opposition to the kingdom. Would that Christ come in his glory?

But the main thrust of the message is that the kingdom of God is present and future. There has been fulfillment, but there has not yet been consummation.

We are living between the already and the not yet. And that leads to the requirement to be ready. That begs the question, why is there a need to be ready?

[27 : 16] Is it not because of the danger that we become immunized to the coming of the kingdom and are therefore unprepared?

prepared? Everyone needs to get ready for this awesome reality. Note how Jesus points to this necessity of being ready or prepared by drawing to two particular examples from the Old Testament.

You know, there's nothing flippant about the teaching of the Lord. It is exceptionally serious. And that's how we are to take it.

The teaching of the Bible is serious. It's not, you know, when we're coming to hear the Bible, we're not coming to a concert. We're coming to hear the Word of God. God's God's God's life- God's life-changing teachings set before us.

And both of these examples that Jesus quotes show how unexpected the second coming of Christ will be. The first of these examples is from the days of Noah.

[28 : 33] What was true then? Well, the Bible states that the Lord saw. we are told that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.

Now the earth was corrupt in God's sight, and the earth was filled with violence. And God saw the earth, and behold, it was corrupt, for all flesh had corrupted their way on the earth.

And God said to Noah, I have determined to make an end of all flesh. a serious conversation between the holy God and his servant.

And you remember how Noah was given instructions to build an ark according to the specifications that God gave to him.

He didn't bring up the plan himself, or decide on the specifications. They were given to him by God. It wasn't the work of a year or two, or even the work of a few years, but the work of many years, a hundred and twenty years.

[29 : 46] It was a mammoth task. Trees to be chopped and trimmed, and remember, no mechanized tools. And during that period, Noah probably experienced the mocking and the jeering of those who witnessed this massive project, and heard his explanation, which would have amounted to preaching.

The New Testament speaks of Noah as a herald of righteousness. He had a message of judgment to come. And to anyone who asked him why he was engaged in this huge building project, Noah

had a response.

There is judgment to come. man. And the sad thing is, this good man, he was ignored. People were indifferent to God's word as it was proclaimed by Noah.

They were indifferent to Noah's faith that condemned them for their unbelief. There is absolutely no indication that there was any change of you on the part of those who saw and heard.

The servant of God, Noah. Jesus states, this is how it will be when the kingdom is consummated.

[31 : 10] Just as it was in the days of Noah, so will it be in the days of the Son of Man. 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.

And in that statement, Jesus is emphasizing the sheer normality of daily life.

That's what he said in the words. The sheer normality of daily, everything is going on as it was. And the implication is, why worry?

Why worry? Why worry? Why? What's the frightening thing, isn't it? When the realization of the truth of the message spoken by Noah began to dawn, it was too late.

It was too late. Those who perished were totally unprepared. They had continued with the day-to-day routines of daily life.

[32 : 24] But when the floods came, they were totally unprepared for the devastation that followed as they were swept into the eternal well.

water. And then you have the second example that Jesus uses, the judgmental act of God on the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah.

And in that context, he reminds us of Mrs. Lot. Remember, he says, Lot's wife. She was connected to a godly family.

Some would say that she was connected to the most godly family in the whole earth. And you can see where such a claim arises from.

But I would prefer not to be so dogmatic about that. She was certainly connected to a godly family, given that her husband was a nephew of Abraham.

[33 : 32] However, the Bible makes it very plain, I believe, that whatever connection we may have in family ties to godliness, without being in possession of saving faith, then that connection cannot save us in the day of judgment.

Remember Lot's wife, says Jesus, not because she was renowned for godliness, but for the fact that she ignored the precise instructions given to them as a family.

When the Lord was about to bring judgment on the cities of the plain, do you remember the instructions that they were given? Escape for your life.

Do not look back or stop anywhere in the valley. Escape to the hills, lest you be swept away. There was no ambiguity about the warning that was given.

It was a stark, clear warning to get away from the place of impending judgment, and they must not look back. And Jesus states, remember Lot's wife.

[34 : 49] She was diligent in her adherence to obeying the warning. Was that it? No. Sadly, that was not it. You remember the description that is given?

The sun had risen on the earth when Lot came to Zor. Then the Lord rained on Sodom and Gomorrah sulfur and fire from the Lord out of heaven. He overthrew these cities and all the valley and all the inhabitants of the city and what grew on the ground.

But Lot's wife behind him looked back and she became a pillar of salt. In flagrant disregard, of the warning.

We may speculate as to why she looked back, but it seems obvious that the seriousness of the warning did not penetrate into her mind. After all, was she not out of the cities of the plain?

Perhaps she felt safe, but not safe enough. She didn't listen. Was it because she loved what she was being asked to leave? Was that why she looked back? Well, it could be.

[35 : 53] But whatever, there is the emphasis on the suddenness of judgment, we can be so close to someone who belongs to the kingdom and is ready and prepared for the return of Christ, whether it be a husband or wife or a parent or brother or sister or son or daughter, and yet we ourselves not ready.

That's the frightening part. not ready. That's what happened to Mrs. Lott. And all of this is told to emphasize how unexpected the arrival of Christ in power and glory and majesty and the final consummation of the kingdom will be.

How disastrous is coming for anyone. who is not prepared. And if you are asking, how can I prepare, let me read what the apostle Paul wrote in his letter to the Philippians. And this is what he wrote. And he saw this as being of supreme importance that I be found in Christ. that I be found in Christ. Not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes from faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith. [37 : 33] The apostle considered that it was an absolute necessity in his own life that he be found in Christ then, during his life, at death and at the seat of judgment.

How do you come to be found in Christ? Is it not by trusting in Jesus Christ alone for salvation? Do we this evening share the apostles express desire? For surely if we believe the teaching of Christ on the essential requirement to be ready, then this ought to be our all-consuming desire to be found in Christ.

The whole of the New Testament speaks of the coming of Christ again. Therefore, the emphasis on being ready. His coming is a reality.

But just as I conclude, the disciples were asking when would this happen? But you notice the disciples were asking a very different question.

[38 : 54] They were asking the question, where will it happen? And that makes you ask yourself, why would they ask that?

Is it because they want to be there or they want to be somewhere else? And Jesus says, I'll tell you, he says, where? Where the corpse is, there the vultures will gather.

Now, where do you see vultures hovering? Is it not most frequently where there are dead bodies? vultures?

This great division that he speaks of will be manifested wherever there is spiritual death.

And where there is spiritual death, when he comes, nothing, but nothing can be done for the deceased. Christ. So, you see, this rather gruesome illustration with which he concludes this passage is further warning.

[40 : 06] So, that begs the question, what is our spiritual state this evening? Are you still dead in your sins?

or are you in possession of new life in Jesus Christ? I'm going to conclude with this note of a minister who went to visit a dying man.

And even on his deathbed, many people think, well, when I come to my deathbed, I'll trust in the Lord then. Oh, my friend, if you had seen the number of deathbeds I've seen, you wouldn't believe that for one minute.

Not for one minute. A lot of people on their deathbed are not even conscious, let alone having the ability to make any kind of decision.

Anyway, this minister went to see the man on his deathbed, and the man who was dying had no concern. for his eternal destination.

[41 : 25] And the minister made a request. He asked him, would it be possible for him to remain by his bedside?

And when the man asked him, why did he want to stay by his bedside, and this may sound strange, the minister said, I've never seen a man die without Christ.

Never seen a man die without Christ. And you know, that sentence alone made the man realize how ill-prepared he was to die.

and there began a conversation which resulted in prayer being offered earnestly for salvation.

Did the man find it? I don't know. The Lord knows. But the emphasis here is not on waiting until then.

[42 : 34] but the emphasis is on the now. To ask the Lord to come into your life now. Now at some future, vague, shadowy date that you have no inkling where or when or how that might take place.

But the emphasis is on the now. the request of the Pharisees. When would the kingdom come? The response of Jesus.

Oh, how searching, how piercing, and the requirement finally to be ready. How solemn, to be ready, because we know not the day nor the hour.

Let us pray. Oh, eternal God, help us to listen to your truth, to give it the consideration that we are asked to give it, that we may be found each and all this evening calling upon thee, that we might be found in Christ.

Oh, how important to be in Christ, for it is those who are in Christ, who go to be with Christ. In Jesus' name we ask it.

[44 : 06] Amen. Let us conclude by singing to God's praise from the first version of Psalm 50.

That's on the first version of Psalm 50, page 276 of the Psalter, in the Scottish Psalter. Psalm 50, the first verse on page 276.

At verse 3, Our God, says the psalmist, shall surely come. Keep silence, shall not he, before him fire shall waste, great storms shall round about him be.

Unto the heavens cleared, he from above shall call, and to the earth likewise, that he may judge his people all. Together, let my saints unto me gathered be, those that by sacrifice have made a covenant with me.

And then the heavens shall his righteousness declare, because the Lord himself is he by whom men judged out. let us sing these verses.

[45 : 23] Our God shall surely come. Our God shall surely come.

His silence shall not be. may be.

I to the heavens dear He from hubbottas are foes Unto the earth I find that He may judge His people.

Together let my sins come to me, brotherly.

Whose power is the great wise of me, are covenant with me.

[47 : 08] And then the heaven shall His righteousness be true.

The apostle of his mercy, are covenant with me.

Now may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, fellowship and communion of the Holy Spirit, rest on and abide with you all, now and forever. Amen.