
“Behold, The Kingdom Of God Is Within You”

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— Keith R. Blades

20 And when he (Jesus) was demanded of the Pharisees, when the kingdom of God should come, he answered them and said, The kingdom of God cometh not with observation:

21 Neither shall they say, Lo here! or, lo there! for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you.

Luke 17:20-21

You could probably get rich if you were given a dime for every time someone brings up these verses in connection with questioning whether the “kingdom of God/kingdom of heaven” spoken about in God’s program with Israel is really the literal and physical establishment of God’s kingdom on this earth. And for those who do not merely question this, but are determined to deny the literal, physical reality and nature of that kingdom in favor of a spiritual ‘in-the-heart’ type reigning of God, these verses are a stronghold. Since the Lord says that “the kingdom of God is within you,” then the argument is that it cannot be a literal, physical, external kingdom, but only a spiritual one in men’s hearts.

Now though these verses from Luke 17 are commonly cited as such, it should be obvious that there is something amiss in such thinking. For if the Lord’s words here actually do call into question, or deny, the literalness and physical nature of God’s kingdom being established on this earth, then they do that at the expense of dozens upon dozens of passages in God’s word testifying to the contrary. For example,...

2 And it shall come to pass in the last days, *that* the mountain of the LORD’s house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it.

3 And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.

Isaiah 2:2-3

7 And I will make her that halted a remnant, and her that was cast off a strong nation: and the LORD shall reign over them in mount Zion from henceforth, even for ever.

8 And thou, O tower of the flock, the strong hold of the daughter of Zion, unto thee shall it come, even the first dominion; the kingdom shall come to the daughter of Jerusalem.

Micah 4:7-8

44 And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, *but* it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever.

Daniel 2:44

31 And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS.

32 He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David:

33 And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end.

Luke 1:31-33

If God means what He says and says what He means, then clearly these verses, (and many others like them), describe a literal, physical kingdom of God on this earth. And again in view of the abundant testimony, if the Lord's words in Luke 17 referred to a spiritual reigning in the heart, then they would call into question more than just the literalness of the kingdom. They would call into question the overall veracity of God's word itself.

Amazingly with those who want to deny the literal, physical reality and nature of the kingdom, and instead only want to see a spiritual 'in-the-heart' type kingdom, this one passage in Luke 17 is supposed to upset and overturn these dozen upon dozens of other passages. It makes little or no difference to them that these other passages plainly and clearly testify to, promise, and prophesy about, the literal and physical establishment of God's kingdom on this earth in the land of Israel. Yet such is the way of a man when he determines with himself (for whatever reason) to see only what he wants to see, and not to be completely honest with God's word.

A Common Problem

Now in truth this is also exactly what the Pharisees of Luke 17 were doing when they demanded of the Lord when the kingdom of God should come. They were not being honest with the evidence that had been set before them, nor with the testimony of God's word. And it was their dishonesty behind their demand that made the Lord respond to them as He did.

The fact is that the Pharisees were determined to think about the coming of "the kingdom of God" only in the way that they thought it should come and wanted to see it come. Regardless of what God's word said, and regardless of the overwhelming evidence that had been set before them concerning the fact that "the kingdom of God" really was "at hand," just like the "gospel of the kingdom" had been declaring, the Pharisees refused to deal with either the evidence or God's word honestly. Consequently they refused to believe that "the kingdom of God" was "at hand."

Now recognizing that this is just what the Pharisees did is really the key, so to speak, to understanding and appreciating the Lord's response to them. The "kingdom of God" was not "within" them as a spiritual reigning of God in their hearts. After all, these Pharisees were God's enemies and were not of God. As the Lord said later on, they hated both the Father and Him. However the "kingdom of God" was "within" them in another sense. It was "within" them in the sense of the effectual working of the abundant proofs that had been given to them, testifying that the climactic stage in Israel's program had indeed arrived and "the kingdom of God" truly was "at hand."

The Background To The Lord's Words

It first of all needs to be noted that the things set forth in Luke 17 do not occur at the beginning of the Lord's earthly ministry. Therefore they do not

take place at the beginning of the climactic stage in God's program with Israel when the "kingdom of heaven" began to be preached to Israel as being "at hand." Rather by the time the events of Luke 17 occur, the three years of the Lord's public ministry are nearing their end. Hence the truth about the arrival of the climactic stage in Israel's program, along with all of the confirming signs of the kingdom, have been saturating Israel for almost 3 and one half years.

Now this needs to be noted for 2 main reasons: 1.) to underscore the fact that if the "kingdom of God/kingdom of heaven" was to be rightly understood as only a spiritual, 'in-the-heart' type kingdom, then the Lord naturally would have been teaching about a spiritual only kingdom right from the beginning and would not allow the misconception to exist for three or more years. And 2.) the issue of the time needs to be noted to underscore the fact that the Lord's response to the Pharisees is in view of the fact that they were in possession of over 3 years worth of testimony and infallible evidence verifying the reality of the "kingdom of God" being "at hand." Yet though this was the case, they had not honestly dealt with it.

The Pharisees' Dishonesty

As verse 20 relates, near the end of His ministry the Lord "*was demanded of the Pharisees when the kingdom of God should come.*" Notice that the Holy Ghost has Luke say that the Lord "was demanded" of them. This is something the Pharisees did out of dishonesty of heart and not with sincerity of inquiry at all. They did not make this demand as ones who genuinely believed "the gospel of the kingdom." They did not believe that it was truly "at hand," having been persuaded by both the preaching and the evidential signs of the kingdom and "signs of the times" that had been given. Honesty was not what was behind their "demand." Instead, their "demand" was part and parcel of their continuing scorn, ridicule, and denial that the climactic stage in Israel's program

actually had arrived and that the "kingdom of God" therefore really was "at hand."

The Pharisees made this demand in the same scornful and scoffing vein as when they tempted the Lord and "desired him that he would shew them a sign from heaven." And they did this in the same vein as when they had earlier on denounced John the Baptist.

It was therefore a hypocritical and scornful "demand" based primarily upon their firm refusal to honestly deal with the evidence that had been set before them. However it was also based upon their own preferred ideas as to how they thought the "kingdom of God" should come. And these preferred ideas carried more weight with them than the testimony of God's word. In fact, what they preferred to think caused them to reject the overwhelming testimony that God gave to them.

In connection with this the Pharisees thought that the "kingdom of God" should come with great pomp and circumstance, and with great fanfare, and that they would be able to observe it as such. The Lord, however, was well aware of this. In fact, He took their misconception to task earlier on when He reproved the people for not responding properly to John the Baptist.

24 And when the messengers of John were departed, he began to speak unto the people concerning John, What went ye out into the wilderness for to see? A reed shaken with the wind?

25 But what went ye out for to see? A man clothed in soft raiment? Behold, they which are gorgeously appavelled, and live delicately, are in kings' courts.

Luke 7:24-25

It was the contrary teachings of Israel's apostate leadership, headed up by the Pharisees, that taught the people that if John was the true herald of the kingdom he would have been "gorgeously appavelled." To their way of thinking God's herald of the kingdom should naturally 'look the part.' That is, he should look like a royal emissary in dress, conduct, and ministry. He

should at least rival, if not outdo, those in "kings' courts." This, however, was only the imaginative and preferred ideas of the Pharisees. The prophets described the herald of the kingdom and his ministry in no such terms.

Again, the Lord was well aware of the Pharisees' preferred ideas. He knew with whom He was dealing and what was behind their "demand."

The Lord's Response

Now the Lord's response to the Pharisees' "demand" takes all of this into account and is also consistent with all of it. Hence the Lord responded by first of all saying, "The kingdom of God cometh not with observation." In so doing He reprov'd their misconception of how they thought the kingdom should be coming, which was based upon their own imagined and preferred ideas.

Therefore the kingdom wasn't coming with the "observation" and the prestigious sorts of signs the Pharisees looked for. Likewise when the Lord went on to say, "Neither shall they say, Lo here! or, lo there!" He reprov'd any idea that it would be the way they imagined in the future either. No one was going to come to them in the future and tell them to 'Look here' or 'Look there' and so have them observe the kingdom coming with the pomp and circumstance with which they thought it should come.

Again, what the Pharisees imagined about the way in which God would announce and bring His kingdom to the earth was all wrong. None of what they imagined was what God had set forth in the prophets. Instead the "signs of the times" and the mechanics of the kingdom's coming described by God in the prophets was entirely different from what they imagined and preferred to believe; including the dress, conduct, and message, of the herald of the kingdom.

Nevertheless what God had set forth in the prophets was true. And in connection with this,

when the climactic stage in Israel's program arrived God began to fulfill exactly what He had set forth in the prophets. The promised "word of the kingdom" began to be preached in the very manner specified, and all of the prophesied signs that verified the reality of the kingdom of heaven being "at hand" began to transpire.

The "kingdom of God" began coming upon Israel just as had been foretold. And the proof of it had been abundantly given to all Israel, including the Pharisees, over the course of the previous 3 plus years. Hence, these Pharisees were not without legitimate proofs by any means. In fact the exact opposite was the case. The proofs were in abundance. It was their "demand" that was without legitimate foundation.

The Proof Actually Was In Their Hearts

In view of the way in which God described the effectual working of both "the gospel of the kingdom" and the signs of the kingdom, the proof of the reality that the kingdom of God had come upon Israel was actually in the hearts and minds of these Pharisees themselves. For God had put it there. Again, they just refused to believe it.

The proof was there because the "gospel of the kingdom" and its accompanying signs effectually worked within the people of Israel in the same way that the pronouncing of the Law did back in Moses' day. As is recorded in Deuteronomy 30, Moses said to the people of Israel in his day,...

11 For this commandment which I command thee this day, it *is* not hidden from thee, neither *is* it far off.

12 It *is* not in heaven, that thou shouldest say, Who shall go up for us to heaven, and bring it unto us, that we may hear it, and do it?

13 Neither *is* it beyond the sea, that thou shouldest say, Who shall go over the sea for us, and bring it unto us, that we may hear it, and do it?

14 But the word *is* very nigh unto thee, in thy mouth, and in thy heart, that thou mayest do it.

Deuteronomy 30:11-14

In view of what Moses said here, the people of Israel were without excuse when it came to being held accountable by God for the commandment Moses gave to them. The commandment, along with the very works of the Lord that they saw through Moses' ministry, effectually worked within them, (in their mouth and in their heart), and by so doing placed them in the position of full accountability to God. They had no excuse for thinking that the commandment was "hidden" from them, or that it was "far off." Rather, being "in thy mouth, and in thy heart," it was indeed within every one of them.

Now in similar manner was this the case with the people of Israel at the time of the arrival of the climactic stage of their program. God designed "the gospel of the kingdom" and its accompanying signs from Him to effectually work in them the same way, and in view of it for full accountability to be brought to bear upon each Israelite, including the Pharisees.

This *heart-set accountability factor* is a very big issue during the climactic stage in Israel's program, and as such it has a bearing upon a great many things. Consequently the Lord says a number of things in His ministry to Israel that directly make reference to this accountability factor and that enforce it. For example, with respect to the impact made by Him casting out devils He said,...

20 But if I with the finger of God cast out devils, no doubt the kingdom of God is come upon you.

Luke 11:20

Notice in particular that the Lord said this to the Pharisees. The kingdom of God truly had "come upon" them in connection with this. And, as the Lord emphasized, there was "no doubt" about it. However the Pharisees simply refused to believe it. Nevertheless and notwithstanding "the kingdom of God" indeed had "come upon" them, as the Lord pointed out. The proof was there. And with that being the case their experience of the prophesied signs of the kingdom held them accountable to it.

In like manner when the Lord spoke about the people of Israel hearing "the word of the kingdom" He said that it was effectually "sown in the heart" of an Israelite when he heard it.

19 When any one heareth the word of the kingdom, and understandeth *it* not, then cometh the wicked *one*, and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart. This is he which received seed by the way side.

Matthew 13:19

Whether the man believed "the word of the kingdom" or not was up to him. But it was effectually "sown in his heart," just like the Lord said. And as such he was held fully accountable for it.

These are just a couple of examples of the heart-set accountability factor that was strongly and purposefully in effect during the climactic stage in Israel's program. And it affected the Pharisees too.

In view of this, therefore, all the proofs for the reality of the coming of "the kingdom of God," (if the Pharisees of Luke 17 had honestly sought any proofs), were in their own hearts. They had been placed there over the course of the previous 3 plus years by the effectual working of both "the gospel of the kingdom" and the signs of it. That

therefore is the place where they needed to be looking to see the reality of the kingdom being "at hand." They needed to honestly deal with what had been placed in their hearts by "the gospel of the kingdom" and its signs. Hence, the Lord said to them, "for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you." — *K. R. Blades*