



Remember Lot's Wife

Luke 17:20-37

Here's a verse I'm sure many of you have read many times.

"The kingdom of God does not come with your careful observation, 21 nor will people say, 'Here it is,' or 'There it is,' because the kingdom of God is within you."

Kingdom of God is within you. The Pharisees were expecting the Kingdom of God to be like all other kingdoms they knew about. Territory. As good Jews they had an expectation that the Messiah was going to come and return the kingdom to Israel and looked at the various prophecies to see when that might be.

And Jesus immediately latches on to that and gives us two pictures of how God was ushering in His kingdom. The Pharisees were looking out, but they should have been looking in. In fact the kingdom was establishing itself as they spoke - in people. The term used for within can also mean amongst. Rather than the kingdom being established by conquest, it was being established in hearts and minds.

How may we understand that? The Stuarts were perhaps the most infamous of the British monarchs. We all know about Charles I who lost his head. We've heard about Charles II who was a bit of a playboy - had lots of illegitimate children but no official male heir. So it was James II his brother who succeeded him. He was a Catholic and tried to restore Catholicism to Britain. He was almost universally unpopular except in parts of Scotland and the American colonies. He was opposed by Parliament and people generally in the country who wanted another kind of king - a Protestant one which would restore and extend the freedoms won in the Civil War. In 1688 Parliament invited William of Orange (who was married to James' daughter Mary to be king in his place. James was incensed - he was king but unfortunately he realised that the country was already going to be faithful to William, not him. William's kingdom was there. When William invaded in 1689, James fled to France and William met little resistance and was greeted in London with rapturous applause.

The invader did not have to win hearts and minds - to them he was king before he set foot in England. Those that did not want to follow William and resisted were jailed or fled with James to France.

The same is true of the Kingdom of God. We have come here to celebrate communion again - to remember the way Jesus won a great victory on the Cross. His body was broken and His blood shed so that He might conquer sin and death and Satan, and score a massive victory. And now the Kingdom of God is established, first in hearts and minds. Why? To give men and women the opportunity to make up their minds to follow Him, before, as William, He will to claim what is rightfully His.

The problem with the Pharisees was that they were waiting to see when the Kingdom of God was coming - looking for signs so that they could decide when and more importantly, what to believe. I reminds me of some French during the Second World War who fought with the allies before Dunkirk, collaborated with the Germans and then when they saw D Day coming, joined those welcoming their liberators. Their duplicity was usually found out. The Pharisees were like that. Hedging their bets.

That's not the way the Kingdom of God works. The Kingdom of God starts long before people can see signs of the invasion. When Jesus scored His victory on the cross, when He rose again and when God exalted Him, He gained the rights of sovereignty over creation (scripture). Like William of Orange, He's not invaded and finished things off yet, which give men and women the opportunity to pledge the allegiance to Him and follow Him.

But when He does come they won't have an opportunity to make their mind up. In fact Jesus says: *"The time is coming when you will long to see one of the days of the Son of Man, but you will not see it.* It will happen so fast that they will be caught out and they'll wish for the more peaceful days when they had all the time in the world to make a decision. . Jesus gives the example of Sodom where the fire of judgement fell before people had time to get out - except of course Lot and his family who were warned and they fled.

This is an important message to us. I know many Christians who love looking at Bible prophecy to try to work out the time of Jesus' return. Jesus is cautioning against this. Don't hedge your bets. When Jesus returns he wants us to be looking forward rather than looking back at what should have been. If you've never trusted Jesus, the time is now. Why? Because even if it is a long while before Jesus returns, we never know the length of our days and how fast our exit from the world may be. Jesus is calling on people to be ready. Allow Him to establish the Kingdom of God in you by finding forgiveness and new life in Jesus as you decide to turn and follow Him. But this is a message to believers to. Yes, we have accepted Christ, but have we made the most of allowing God's Kingdom to be established in us?

When the time comes for Jesus to return or the time comes for us to leave this world and enter eternity, will we have regrets? Jesus gives the example of Lot's wife who just about made it out of Sodom but rather than follow the instruction to run and not look back, she stopped and turned to look, perhaps thinking of her friends or her home which were all being destroyed. Perhaps she didn't really want to go, or was harking back with sadness. She ended up as a pillar of salt for her disobedience. Perhaps she was an unsavoury character!! She escaped the judgement of sorrow but unlike Lot and their daughters, never received all the blessings of God because she disobeyed.

The message is clear here.

Don't wait to believe - do it now because maybe you'll never get the chance to do it later.

For us believers, we should see the imperative to believe in the lives of those who don't know Jesus. We have no idea of Jesus' return or the length of our days. Let's commit ourselves to making the most of the time before us.

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