

Apocalypse: What Next for Those in the Kingdom of Jesus?

Luke 17:20-21

Reflections Covenant and Doctrine 4 December 2019

Luke 17:20-21 (quoted)

Romans 8:7

John 12:32 (quoted)

Ephesians 2:8-10 (quoted)

Romans 2:13 (quoted)

Matthew 5:19-20 (quoted)

Luke 22:28-29 (quoted)

My previous post pointed to two classes of Christians, and dealt, very briefly, with the state of those who are on the fringe. The other class comprises Christians who are already within the Kingdom of Jesus — do not be surprised to read that. In Luke 17:20-21 we read: "And when he 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: Neither shall they say, Lo here! or, lo there! for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you." To grasp this in its full context, one ought to read the whole of Luke 17:20-24, then the rest of the chapter, then the rest of the Gospel of Luke, then the whole of the New Testament, and, indeed, the whole Bible. One point I should like to emphasise here is that Jesus, whose pre-eminence is beyond dispute, is in the creation, and the creation is in Him; space is in Him, and He is in space. This is a Divine mystery, and, as such, inexplicable. By the same token, those whom He has redeemed, and those who choose to live upholding the values Jesus has taught us, and who are willing to set their seal upon His New Covenant, are within His Kingdom, and the Kingdom is within them.

Whether we realise it or not, our minds and our thinking are hostile to God and to His law of love (Romans 8:7); we have all been stained by sin. So long as we remain in this rebellious attitude of defiance and disobedience, we are unfit for the Kingdom of God. As a first step towards embracing the road to eternal life, we must understand what has already gone awry within us. Sin stands in the way of God's great plan and purpose for human life, directly opposed to our eternal Salvation as potential sons and daughters of the everlasting Kingdom of Jesus. Sin remains so stubborn, so implacable, so deep-rooted an enemy, that only the death of God's Son could cancel and blot out its dreadful consequences. The sinful nature of our present existence places two conditions upon us: since our eternal existence within the Kingdom of Jesus will come about only when we pass into a pure spiritual form, we may, if we fail to sustain absolute faith, backslide into being a Christian upon the fringe, outside the Kingdom of Jesus; we must therefore continually purge the sin within us — especially the

hidden sin, the sin we refuse to acknowledge — and make ever more room for God the Holy Spirit to work within us, and through us. Jesus said, "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me" (John 12:32). Yet the fact remains that divine forgiveness can come only to those who repent.

It is well known to every Christian that Salvation comes only through the Grace of God. Paul summarised this in Ephesians 2:8-10: "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them." It is not works, but the living of Jesus's teaching, that keeps a Christian within His Kingdom. Romans 2:13 further emphasises this point: "For not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified."

I do not believe that we ourselves can "win souls"; but we can prepare souls, and make them ready, so that the Holy Spirit may save them. A teacher must know what he or she is imparting to others; a teacher must believe in what he or she teaches; a teacher must internalise, and live according to, the very principles he or she teaches; and, where the Bible is concerned, all teaching and preaching should be confined to Scripture, using a clear, sound, and tested interpretation, rather than straying into the realm of self-taught philosophical speculation. Jesus spoke of this in Matthew 5:19-20: "Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven."

Jesus is careful to stress that a person's standing within the Kingdom of Heaven relates directly to his attitude towards God's Commandments — how willing he would be to obey them, even at personal inconvenience. Whilst the Jews had expanded the Ten Commandments into more than six hundred sub-commandments, Jesus compressed all of these into just two. Once we accept that Jesus was teaching upon the Ten Commandments, we may realise that obedience to them was a matter of honouring our Heavenly Father: even a minor departure from His teaching would be a great disappointment to God the Son, Jesus Christ, just as even the keeping of a minor Commandment is worthy of praise. And yet even those committed to keeping the Commandments are, perhaps, incapable of keeping them well enough, by their behaviour alone, to be granted entry into the Kingdom of Heaven, or to remain within it in this present life. Jesus was underlining that, if one wished to enjoy the favour of God, it was not simply a matter of trying to keep rules; something more was required, and that was precisely what Jesus

came to reveal, as the Gospels record.

Our human bodies age, and run down, with time; we cannot exist for ever in the material flesh. All physical matter, however long it takes, remains in a process of change towards disintegration and decay. But Jesus, at the Last Supper, said, "Ye are they which have continued with me in my temptations. And I appoint unto you a kingdom, as my Father hath appointed unto me" (Luke 22:28-29). He was not speaking of a Kingdom in some untold future, but of something present. I am of the view that Jesus was speaking of a literal Kingdom, with literal people, in which those already within it would lead, guide, train, and teach those who are not. Furthermore, Jesus's emphasis that "the kingdom of God is within you" opens up the possibility of citizenship of His Kingdom to every person on earth — a fact we should always bear in mind, rather than confining our teaching to our own small church gathering.

Amen.