

## **The Kingdom Of God Does Not Come With Observation.**

Text: Luke 17:20-25

1) A warning

Suggested Hymns:

2) Its comfort

Sheet 140ET364, 1, 18, 4, 508

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Luke 17:20-25, <sup>20</sup> *Now when He was asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, He answered them and said, “The kingdom of God does not come with observation; <sup>21</sup> “nor will they say, ‘See here!’ or ‘See there!’ For indeed, the kingdom of God is within you.”*

<sup>22</sup> *Then He said to the disciples, “The days will come when you will desire to see one of the days of the Son of Man, and you will not see it. <sup>23</sup> “And they will say to you, ‘Look here!’ or ‘Look there!’ Do not go after them or follow them.*

<sup>24</sup> *“For as the lightning that flashes out of one part under heaven shines to the other part under heaven, so also the Son of Man will be in His day. <sup>25</sup> “But first He must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation. (NKJV)*

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

We greet one another on the first day of the civil year with “Happy New Year!” “Happy New Year!” we could also greet each other today. This Sunday is the Church’s New Year, being the first Sunday in Advent.

The arrangement of the Christian church-year is not of divine ordinance, but is observed by common consent in Christendom. As early as in the days of the apostles the first day of the week was chosen as the day of worship.<sup>1</sup> Later Christians began to feel the need of festivals celebrated in special remembrance of the wonderful works of God. Thus the three festival days of Christmas, Easter, and Pentecost, together with their church seasons, gradually came to be observed.

The first is the Christmas season, prepared by the four Sundays in Advent, Advent meaning “coming.” Then follows Christmas proper, with the celebration of Christmas Eve, Christmas Day, the festival of the Circumcision of Christ on

January 1, and the festival of Epiphany, also called the Christmas of the Gentiles, on January 6, with its instructive lesson of the Wise Men from the East. The Christmas season is closed with the after-season, consisting of up to six Sundays after Epiphany, the last being “The Transfiguration of our Lord.”

The next is the Easter season, also consisting of three sections: the fore-season, Easter proper, and the after-season. The fore-season is made up of the Sundays Septuagesima, Sexagesima, and Quinquagesima, followed immediately by Lent. Lent begins with Ash Wednesday and terminates with Holy Week.

Palm Sunday with its triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem, Maundy Thursday commemorating the Lord’s Supper, and Good Friday solemnly impressing upon our minds the death and burial of our blessed Redeemer on Calvary.

Easter proper consists of Easter Sunday and the First Sunday after Easter, the lessons of both Sundays leading all Christians to rejoice: “*I know that my Redeemer lives.*” The Second, Third, Fourth and Fifth Sundays after Easter constitute the after-season.

The third and last great season of the church-year is that of Pentecost, which is made up of Ascension Day, the fortieth day after Easter, the Sunday after Ascension, Pentecost, on the fiftieth day after Easter, and the Festival of the Holy Trinity.

The after-season of Pentecost consists of the long succession of Sundays after Trinity. This section is also known as the non-festival half of the Christian church-year because there is only one festival that we observe in this season, namely, the Reformation Festival on October 31.

Beautiful and profitable is this order of the Christian church-year. Wherever its ancient arrangement with its seasons and festivals and its assigned lessons for each Sunday is conscientiously observed, it will redound to great spiritual benefit.

It permits God’s people to review in the course of one year all the important facts and doctrines of the Christian religion, all the marvellous works of God for our salvation. In this way each important event and doctrine of our faith is in its proper place and application. It also helps the pastor from overemphasising one truth or event at the expense of another, preaching the full counsel of God for the salvation of man in one year.

This, by the way, is a good reason why during the coming church-year you ought to attend church regularly. There is a well-ordered spiritual program laid out for you, in which all Scripture will be preached as it is *“profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, <sup>17</sup> that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.”<sup>2</sup>*

May the new Church-Year bring to you all the richest blessings of God’s grace — pardon, peace, and joy, life and salvation! The Saviour in our text gives us instruction and comfort valuable at the very beginning of the New Church-Year. It is a grand truth, which must stand out in bold type before your mental eye throughout the whole New Year if you are to have the full spiritual profit of the preaching of the Word.

The lesson is that *“The kingdom of God does not come with observation.”* May the Lord bless our meditation.

### **1. This Truth Is A Warning**

*“The kingdom of God does not come with observation.”* That is evident from its very nature. This the Saviour emphasises in our text. The Pharisees with a sneer had asked Jesus when the kingdom of God would come. They were in effect asking, *“Is this the coming of Your promised kingdom? Are these common fishermen of Galilee Your princes and noblemen? Are these the days for which prophets and kings waited so long?”* “Yes,” Jesus tells them, “these are the very days. *“The kingdom of God does not come with observation; <sup>21</sup> “nor will they say, ‘See here!’ or ‘See there!’ For indeed, the kingdom of God is within you.”*

This Kingdom pertains to the mind and heart. It is the rule which Christ personally exercises over the minds of the faithful by means of truth. It is the kingdom to which our Lord refers to when He said to Pilate, *“My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here.”<sup>3</sup>*

In this kingdom the Lord rules by the force of truth over those hearts which feel the power of right and truth and therefore willingly yield themselves to His guidance, believe His Gospel, and are governed by His will. *“Other kings rule*

*our bodies, but Christ our souls; they govern by force, but He by the attractions of righteousness; theirs is, to a great extent, a fictitious royalty, but His is true and finds its source in truth.”*

When Caesar Augustus sent out a decree that all the world should be registered, he registered a worldly kingdom. There were so many cities, so many inhabitants, so many armies, so much personal property, great national wealth; the boundaries extended over much of Europe, the middle East, and the top of Africa.

His was a kingdom of power, pomp, and glory. This was a kingdom that came with observation, a kingdom to be observed with the eye, a visible realm. But ***“The kingdom of God does not come with observation,”*** it is not a physical entity. It cannot be measured or seen with the eye. It is a kingdom within the hearts of the believers.

Even all external signs of the presence of the kingdom and its power in the hearts of the believers are not infallible, since these same signs may be given by people who are hypocrites. Take the case of Judas Iscariot. Although at first a disciple of Jesus, he later lost faith and became a hypocrite. He had enjoyed the full confidence of his Master and the other disciples. He was even an officer among the followers of Jesus, for he was the treasurer entrusted with the funds of the flock.

For many months Judas deceived his fellow-disciples. He loved money and became a thief. He conspired with the enemies of Christ to betray Him. Yet outwardly he was still a member of the flock, even though the kingdom of God had long departed from him. ***“The kingdom of God does not come with observation.”*** Its boundaries, its limits, its membership, cannot be discerned with the eye. ***“The kingdom of God is within you.”***

We ask, *How does this kingdom come into the hearts of people?* Since it does not come with observation, it cannot come by force. Peter indeed thought that Christ’s kingdom was to be increased by the sword. At the gate of Gethsemane, on Maundy Thursday night, he drew the sword and struck the high priest’s servant and cut off his right ear. But Jesus reprimanded him, saying, ***“Put your sword in its place, for all who take the sword will perish by the sword.”***<sup>4</sup>

Christ does not set up His kingdom by force of arms. Mohammed drew the sword and “converted” men by giving them the choice of death or “conversion”; but Christ said, ***“The kingdom of God does not come with observation.” “Put your sword into the sheath.”***<sup>5</sup>

No compulsion ought to be used with anyone to lead him to accept any opinion, much less to induce him to espouse the truth. — The Roman Catholic Church sought to extend the boundaries of Christ’s kingdom by the cruel tortures of the Inquisition. The inquisitors would burn men at the stake, rend their bodies to pieces on the rack, or in some other manner cruelly maltreat those who would not accept the dictates of “Holy Rome.”

Napoleon once said, *“I have founded an empire by force, and it has melted away; Jesus Christ established His kingdom by love, and it stands to this day and will stand forever.”* This kingdom comes by the power of the Holy Spirit through the Word. When Christ gave His disciples the Great Commission before ascending into heaven, He said, ***“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,*** <sup>20</sup> ***“teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you.”***<sup>6</sup> ***“Preach the Gospel to every creature.”***<sup>7</sup> In this kingdom, Christ rules by grace through His Word.

It is true that our Lord also rules with great power. He is the King of three kingdoms: the Kingdom of Power, the Kingdom of Grace, and the Kingdom of Glory. In the Kingdom of Power all creation must bow to His will. Even the ungodly must do His bidding. For in this kingdom His divine omnipotence enforces His will.

But it is not so in the Kingdom of Grace, of which our Saviour speaks in our text. In this Kingdom, Christ rules by His mercy. Having crushed the hearts of people by the hammer-blows of the Law, He woos their hearts by the Gospel. In the Kingdom of Grace He will not take anyone by force and compel him to come to faith. This kingdom comes by the gentle ministry of God’s Word and the Sacraments.

The hymnist writes,<sup>8</sup>

Still He comes within us,  
Still His voice would win us

From the sins that hurt us;  
Would to truth convert us  
From our foolish errors,  
Ere He comes in terrors.

Yes, Look, daughter of Zion, your King is coming to you. A New Church-Year is beginning, a new season of grace is opening, in which Jesus wishes to enter our hearts anew by the preaching of the Gospel. Resolve, then, to be in the Lord's house every Sunday in order that the coming season of grace may bring you the blessings of this kingdom — forgiveness, peace and joy, life and salvation.

## 2. This Truth Is A Comfort.

*“The kingdom of God does not come with observation.”* Jesus applies this truth secondly as a comfort to His disciples. They as yet had many carnal notions about the coming of Christ's kingdom. Often during the past years they had asked questions showing their ignorance in this respect.

Even after Christ's resurrection, immediately before His ascension on the Mount of Olives, they asked, *“Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?”*<sup>9</sup> They expected Christ to establish the old Kingdom of Israel with temporal pomp and power and drive out the Romans.

Therefore Jesus said to His disciples in our text, *“The days will come when you will desire to see one of the days of the Son of Man, and you will not see it.”*<sup>23</sup> *“And they will say to you, ‘Look here!’ or ‘Look there!’ Do not go after them or follow them.*

The Jews looked for a glorious earthly kingdom. Jesus tells his disciples that depressing times constitute the immediate prospect. *“The days will come”* again and again, many of them, when you shall long to see *“one of the days of the Son of man.”*

But all such longing must necessarily be denied: *“you will not see it”* our text says. The visible, glorious consummation of the kingdom must wait until the spiritual work has been completed on the Last Day.<sup>10</sup>

There will be times when the Christian will long for the coming of Christ. Like the martyred saints he will cry out, ***“How long?”***<sup>11</sup> But he will need to learn to light a candle of patience and wait. God takes His own time.

The coming of Christ is certain, but its time is unknown. Speculation is vain. People will come with false prophecies and false predictions; but we must not leave our ordinary work to follow them. The best way that Christ can come upon a person is when he is faithfully and humbly and watchfully doing his duty. As a great commentator said, *“No man will foresee it, and all men will see it.”*

When that day comes the judgements of God will operate, and of two people, who all their lives lived side by side, one will be taken and the other left. There is a warning here. Intimacy with a good person does not guarantee our own salvation. *“No man can deliver his brother”*<sup>12</sup> Scripture tells us.

Is it not often true, that a family is apt to leave the duties of church membership to one of its members? Is it not often true, that a husband leaves the duties of the church to his wife? The judgement of God is an individual judgement. We cannot discharge our duty to God by proxy nor even by association. Often one will be taken and the other left.

When the Disciples asked Jesus when all this would happen, He answered by quoting a well-known proverb. <sup>28</sup> ***“For wherever the carcass is, there the eagles will be gathered together.”***<sup>13</sup> That simply means that a thing will happen when the necessary conditions are fulfilled. That means for us that God will bring Jesus Christ again in His own good time. We cannot know that time; we dare not speculate about it. We must live so that whenever He comes, at morning, at midday or at evening, Jesus will find us ready.<sup>14</sup>

Christ comforts His disciples with the certainty of His second advent. <sup>24</sup> ***“For as the lightning that flashes out of one part under heaven shines to the other part under heaven, so also the Son of Man will be in His day.”***

After the long waiting of the bride the Bridegroom will return. The Saviour thereby comforts His disciples: “No matter how long the delay, how terrible the persecution, how great the trial, how heavy the cross, there certainly will come the day when believing will be turned into seeing, when persecutions will cease forever, and when sorrow shall be turned into eternal joy.

Therefore lift up your heads, for your redemption draws near. Let us also note the suddenness of His coming. <sup>24</sup> *“For as the lightning that flashes out of one part under heaven shines to the other part under heaven, so also the Son of Man will be in His day.*

Consider finally the glory of His coming. As the bright flash of lightning that illuminates the dark night, so the Lord’s second coming will be in glory. *When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory.*<sup>15</sup>

In this way our Saviour also comforts us. Should sorrow and trouble encompass you in the new church-year, be not dismayed. Remember, *The kingdom of God does not come with observation.* Do not look for its coming with outward pomp, power or success.

Yet it will certainly come to you in God’s precious Word. Therefore take every opportunity in the New Church-Year to hear more of it, understand it more fully, and believe it more firmly.

Do not be discouraged under the cross, knowing that in the end your sorrow shall be turned into eternal joy. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

---

<sup>1</sup> 1 Cor. 16:2; Rev. 1:10

<sup>2</sup> 2 Timothy 3:16

<sup>3</sup> John 18:36

<sup>4</sup> Matthew 26:52

<sup>5</sup> John 18:11

<sup>6</sup> Matthew 28:19-20

<sup>7</sup> Mark 16:15

<sup>8</sup> Hymn 4 v2

<sup>9</sup> Acts 1:6

<sup>10</sup> Lenski, R. C. H. (1961). *The Interpretation of St. Luke's Gospel* (883). Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House.

<sup>11</sup> Revelation 6:10

<sup>12</sup> See Psalm 49:7

<sup>13</sup> Matthew 24:28

<sup>14</sup> *The Gospel of Luke*. 2000, c1975 (W. Barclay, lecturer in the University of Glasgow, Ed.). The Daily study Bible series, Rev. ed. (220). Philadelphia: The Westminster Press.



