

DAY 6 | LUKE 17:21

THE KINGDOM OF GOD

It is Within You

by Brandy Kirstein

Southern Adventist University is located on the outskirts of Chattanooga, TN. Chattanooga is an earth-friendly, trendy, gorgeous city with a rich, historic background. Most of its inhabitants enjoy a wide variety of outdoor sports and delicious local restaurants, all the while never knowing what lies beneath their feet. You see, there are two Chattanooga's: the one we see and the one we don't. What we don't see lies beneath the streets - a maze of history's commerce buried a century ago, but seen only in traces found in basements and passages that once were the city's ground floor. We don't see the town that Chattanooga buried in order to save the one we have today. After a series of devastating floods in the late 1800s and early 20th century, the town that began as a river trading post at Ross's Landing reinvented itself. In time, they raised a 40-block area of the city by about a story. Second floors became first floors. First floors became basements. Towering window arches became foundation decor or vents. Structurally, this leaves the city in a bit of danger as beams are rusted and the former buildings are falling apart under the new ones that have taken their place. Yet this massive feat, the raising of a town, has gone largely ignored in city history. There is almost no documentation of its reality and the majority of the Chattanooga population doesn't even know it existed. Meanwhile, every day they live in false security, walking on foundations under their feet, never knowing what lies beneath.



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Visibility vs. Invisibility

What if one day, the room they were sitting in just collapsed 40 feet into the ground? What would that do to their perception of reality? Would that change the way they walked? Would they suddenly feel insecure about walking around in Chattanooga? Or anywhere for that matter? We place a lot of faith in the things that we can see, in the structures that are built around us. Meanwhile, there is a whole other world happening that we are unaware of. Did you know that our eyes only see something at 1/24 of a second? Television is seen at 15 frames per second; we see what appears as a flicker, meaning there are 15 instants that the eye is not seeing or able to process. Galaxies are moving incredibly fast, but appear to be motionless because of the vantage point in which we sit. Yet an insect flying an inch past our faces will be able to move faster than the human eye can keep track of, thus revealing that an object is considered invisible if it moves faster at a certain distance than the eye and brain can process. But, is it really invisible? Is the insect in front of our face invisible to the hawk (whose vision is 3-4 times better than ours)? So, invisibility is based on our perception. In which case, invisibility is not even real! If something exists then something can see it, but it may not always be us. And yet, we are obsessed with what we can see, what we can touch, what we can hear, what our own senses tell us as though they have universal authority when, really, the ground is about to fall in underneath us.

Please turn in your Bibles to Luke 17:20-21. I'm reading from the New King James Version (this is important). "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; nor will they say, 'See here!' or 'See there!' For indeed, the kingdom of God is within you."

A Kingdom Without or Within

So, here we have the Pharisees coming to Jesus and basically sarcastically challenging Him. John the Baptist, three years before, came out of the wilderness loudly proclaiming that "the kingdom of heaven is at hand." And, since then,

Jesus had been talking about the kingdom of God constantly - "the kingdom of heaven is like a pearl...like a mustard seed...like a treasure...is at hand..." So, the Pharisees are like, "Okay, Jesus, so where is this kingdom you've been talking about for so long? And when will it arrive? Because so far, we don't SEE it!" They are totally trying to undermine Jesus' ministry and claims of authority from God. They are fully insinuating that Jesus' mission failed.

There were many Jews at the time who were "waiting for the kingdom of God." But, when the King did come, He didn't look like a king. And when He said the kingdom had arrived, it didn't look like a kingdom. Which is why it was so ludicrous to the Pharisees that people believed Him! It was so irritating when He was such an obvious fraud (in their minds). But! They were looking on the outside. On Earth, Jesus was not a king and didn't have a kingdom. Today He would have been classed with the insane for the things He was saying (cf. Mark 3:21). Which is why they mocked Him on the cross by placing above His head "This is Jesus - King of the Jews." It was meant to be sarcastic. They were trying to show how ludicrous it was that people believed Him in an attempt to take away any hope anyone still had at thinking He would rise up as a king. But, He did rise—not as a King of this earth, but a new kind of King to come, for those who belong to a new kind of kingdom, an invisible kingdom, because it isn't yet time for it to be revealed. Back to Luke 17:21.

How does Jesus respond? He says, "The kingdom of God does not come with observation..." The kingdom of God is NOT something you SEE. Which is why no one will be able to say, "See here!" or "See there!" Because the KINGDOM of GOD is WITHIN YOU! What?! This is very confusing. Not just for the Jews, but for modern Christian scholars. Let's start with our modern day scholars.

Depending on which Bible you have, it will be translated differently. Some will say "within you" and some will say "among you" and some will say "in the midst of you." Any other variations out there? The actual word used in the Greek is the adverb "entos," which literally translates "within or inside." The only other place this word appears in the New Testament is in Matthew 23:26 where it is translated "inside," speaking of the inside of a cup, so language alone makes the translation

of “within” seem more accurate. The reason some Bibles and scholars have problems with this word is because they did not believe Jesus could have told the Pharisees that the kingdom of God was within THEM because it obviously was not, so the translators altered the wording according to their interpretation. But, if you look at the context of the verse, Jesus is contrasting the external with the internal. He says the kingdom of God is not something you can see; therefore meaning it is something you don’t see. So, it can’t be something “among them” or in the “midst of them” or else they could see it. The SDA Commentary translates it this way: “The kingdom of God is not something you may expect to see by close observation with your natural eyesight. You will discover it, if at all, within your own hearts.” Ellen White helps us clarify this passage by proposing, “The kingdom of God begins in the heart. Look not here or there for manifestations of earthly power to mark its coming.”

The Mystery of the Kingdom of God

Jesus, by saying this, was directly addressing the incorrect thinking of the Pharisees - the Messiah was supposed to come and raise up the Jewish nation above all the other nations in the political world. The Jews had turned all of the spiritual promises of God into promises of earthly power and riches. So, Jesus corrects them and says, “I’m not talking about a kingdom made of bricks and mortar; I’m talking about a kingdom of flesh and blood; I’m not talking about who rules the land; I’m talking about who rules your heart; I’m not talking about temporary things; I’m talking about eternal things. The kingdom of God has nothing to do with vain ambition, birth rights, theocratic position, rich or poor, handsome or ugly, driver’s license or bus ticket, honor roll or detention, Bieber hair or facial hair, freshman or senior. It has to do with your heart.”

Is anyone else relieved by this? God does not decide who is His based on what others see you as, because our vision is limited by their vantage point. He chooses you based on who you are and what potential lies inside of you. Just like when he told Samuel to go and anoint little teenage nothing David; He said, “Man looks on the outward appearance, but God looks at the heart.” Wow.

You see, the Pharisees were basing their perception of the kingdom of God on what they could see. The human heart and mind is invisible to them and us; but God, like the hawk, has better vision than we do. He knows what truly lies underneath our feet and whether we are walking securely or about to fall. And Jesus is telling them to have faith, which is belief in the things we do not see because God sees ALL.

Reality is, even if the Pharisees understood exactly what Jesus was talking about, they weren't interested in this kind of kingdom. They wanted position and power in the human realm. They wanted an earthly kingdom. They wanted a visible kingdom. In contrast, Jesus takes the kingdom of God from a visible tangible world to an unseen, internal world that may or may not be something witnessable by others except God. There may not be earthly benefits to this kind of kingdom. The outward kingdom has the benefits of prestige, power, popularity; the inner only that of humility and love – not very appealing for those focused on life here. Which brings up a question - what kind of kingdom are you looking for? Because whichever you are looking for is what you will find. And will find you. And will enlist you as a servant to it. Because these two kingdoms are not allies. You are either a citizen of one or the other. The earthly kingdom often has instant gratification and appeals more to your senses, making you feel what you want to feel, but is deceitfully made of structures that are not secure or real (like Chattanooga). The earthly kingdom seeks after its own resulting in poor relationships, injured people, disappointment, death, destruction, slavery, imprisonment, and hatred. The kingdom of God is based on promises that are sure, though they may have delayed gratification. The kingdom of God is ruled by the Holy Spirit, giving you the ability to see and understand the invisible realm of the universe wherein abides life, creation, freedom, and love. Spiritual things are spiritually discerned, which is why the kingdom of earth will send the thief to prison, but the kingdom of God will give him your shirt and shoes also. The kingdom of earth will fight back, the kingdom of God will turn the other cheek. The kingdom of earth is constantly striving to prove themselves and the kingdom of God strives to lift up others higher than themselves. The kingdom of the earth will use you and discard you when they don't need you anymore. The kingdom of God will love you unconditionally and cherish you and help you grow into the fullness of all that you can become.

How do the people of this invisible kingdom become like that? This is the mystery of the kingdom of God. How does something so big fit inside someone so small? Like water in a cup, often the content molds to fit the container, but this is not so with God. When the Holy Spirit fills our hearts, He then shapes us into His likeness. So, physics is reversed and the container must mold to fit the content. How others view you may or may not be changed. Your circumstances may remain the same, but your vantage point, the place from which you perceive the world, is changed. In *Testimonies Volume 7*, Ellen White says, “The kingdom of God comes not with outward show. It comes through the gentleness of the inspiration of His Word, through the inward working of His Spirit, the fellowship of the soul with Him who is its life. The greatest manifestation of its power is seen in human nature brought to the perfection of the character of Christ.”

The Kingdom is Now

Lastly, this verse is so important because it is one of the few verses that places the kingdom in the present. It is no longer something we are waiting for, but something we can take part of NOW. When we decide to join this kingdom, we NOW experience peace instead of turmoil, joy instead of despair, love instead of loneliness. And we have a legion of angels ready to battle the demons on our behalf as we pick up the real armor of God, because in the REAL world we do not battle against flesh and blood; earthly weapons won't work in the invisible kingdom. We must have the sword of the Spirit, the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, the belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, and our feet covered in the gospel of peace. Then, we can stand firm in what we are battling. Then, we have an entire kingdom backing us up in prayer, with angels, and with God Himself. Who can stand against us? We are an invincible, invisible kingdom!

There are many people who choose God because of the fears of the afterlife. They want to go to heaven. But how will heaven be a better fit for you then, if it is not a place you would want to live now? The glory of heaven is being with Jesus. You can have that now. The kingdom of God can begin in you now—healing you, changing you, governing you, protecting you, serving and loving through you,

and preparing an eternity to spend with you. Heaven is the continuance of what is happening now; it doesn't start at the Second Coming—that will be the external manifestation of the present invisible kingdom. And it will be a party you won't want to miss! But, until then...

A true story: Jessica Eaves from Guthrie, Oklahoma recently had her wallet stolen by a man while she was grocery shopping. Most people in that situation would immediately get the authorities involved, but she found a way to resolve her problem herself. "I saw this gentleman down the aisle from me," Jessica shares. "He walked behind me, and when I got a couple of aisles over, I realized my wallet was gone. I spotted him in a crowded aisle and approached him," she continues. "I'm a pretty out-there personality, but I was quiet and calm. I said to him, 'I think you have something of mine. I'm gonna give you a choice. You can either give me my wallet and I'll forgive you right now, and I'll even take you to the front and pay for your groceries.'"

The alternative? Jessica reporting him to the police.

"He reached into his hoodie pocket and gave me my wallet," she recalls, adding that the man was extremely grateful for her help and forgiveness. "He started crying when we walked up to the front," she says. "He said he was sorry about 20 times by the time we went from the pickle aisle to the front. He told me he was desperate."

She spent \$27 on his groceries, which included milk, bread, bologna, crackers, soup and cheese. "The last thing he said was, 'I'll never forget tonight. I'm broke, I have kids, I'm embarrassed and I'm sorry.'"

"Some people are critical because I didn't turn him in, but sometimes all you need is a second chance," she adds.

This is an example of the kingdom now—not just what she did for him, but the change that took place in his heart as a result of her grace. He instantly turned from a thief to a friend. What would the world look like now if the invisible kingdom became visible through the outpouring the Holy Spirit in our lives? Don't

you want to be part of that kind of kingdom? What you see and experience in the world can never compare to what God can do from His all-knowing vantage point. Nothing is invisible to Him. Nothing is truly invisible to begin with. All is based on our perception. Do you trust God's or your own? Do you live in the external world or the internal world? Join the ranks today, for the kingdom of God is here and now and accessible. But I leave you with this question, is it within you? And if it is, what will you do with it? ●