# DAY 7:

# CAUGHT IN BETWEEN

***[NOTE TO PRESENTER:*** *This message captures the tension between the kingdom of God as it is experienced on earth and the kingdom of God that will come in full when Jesus Christ returns to take His people home. While we can live in the kingdom now by accepting Jesus as Savior and Lord of our lives, we only need to look around to see that all is not perfect in our world. This is one of the tensions which we must live with before Jesus returns.]*

*There is a longing in the heart  There is a hunger in the soul*
*A thirst that can't be satisfied*

*And deep inside you know  You long for something that is much more*
*Than everything that's in your world*

*Life is a dream and heaven's reality  And I'm caught in between*
*I know it seems this world has everything  It's nothing more than a dream*

*'Cause life is a dream and heaven's reality and if we just hold on*
*Then we will wake up to the face of God*

Those are the lyrics to a once-famous gospel song from the 1990s. Chances are that you weren't born yet when that song came out. The lyrics, though, still ring with truth. The songwriter is trying to get the listeners to focus on a different reality than the one we see on earth. Most people tend to think that what's real is only what they can see, touch, taste, feel, or hear. But that's not entirely true. Heaven is more real than anything on earth, yet few people live like it.

The problem we have is a tough one. We are earthbound creatures. We can daydream about Hheaven all we want, but then we have to do homework, do our chores, hang with our friends, and Instagram each other. We do our living on planet Earth; the kingdom of Heaven seems very, very far away from earth.

The disciples were not immune to this problem. They too longed for the kingdom of God to come. In their minds, and the minds of most Jews of their day, the Messiah was going to deliver them from Roman oppression. As they watched Jesus perform miracles, bind demons, and preach the gospel, they projected all their hopes and wishes on Him.

Jesus never encouraged this line of thinking, but neither the disciples nor the throngs who followed Him listened closely to His message. Let's examine Jesus' exchange with Pilate as He faced certain death. It's found in John 18:33-36.

"Pilate then went back inside the palace, summoned Jesus and asked him, 'Are you the king of the Jews?'

"Is that your own idea,' Jesus asked, 'or did others talk to you about me?'

"Am I a Jew?' Pilate replied. 'Your own people and chief priests handed you over to me. What is it you have done?'

"Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jewish leaders. But now my kingdom is from another place" (NASB).

The charge leveled against Jesus was that He claimed to be Messiah, King of the Jews. What was the evidence against Him? He talked often about something called the kingdom of God. Read John 18 closely and you will see the charges that led to Jesus' death.

Jesus' response seems to fly in the face of all the parables about the kingdom that we find in Matthew 13. He talked about mustard seeds, yeast, hidden treasure, a dragnet. If He was speaking about the kingdom as a real, tangible, touchable thing that people could become a part of, how could He then say to Pilate, "My Kingdom is not of this world"?

## The Real Deal

Here are a few thoughts that can help us understand the present and future kingdom better. "The Kingdom is a present reality (Matt. 12:28), and yet it is a future blessing (1 Cor. 15:50). It is an inner spiritual redemptive blessing (Rom. 14:17) which can be experienced only by way of the new birth (John 3:3), and yet it will have to do with the government of the nations of the world (Rev. 11:15). The Kingdom is a realm into which men enter now (Matt. 21:31), and yet it is a realm into which they will enter tomorrow (Matt. 8:11)" (*Seventh-Day Adventist Bible Student's Sourcebook*, Commentary Reference Series, Vol. 9, p. 556-557).

Confused yet? It is hard not to be when the Bible seems to have some contradictory statements about the kingdom of God. Here's where the tension comes from:

1. Some Bible passages refer to the kingdom where God reigns—Hheaven.
2. Some Bible passages refer to God's kingdom as a realm in which we can enter right now to experience His blessings.*
3. Some Bible passages refer to the future kingdom, which will only come when Jesus returns a second time.

So, the kingdom of God can mean three different things depending on which verse one is looking at. There are kingdom blessings we can experience now, such as knowing Jesus Christ (John 17:3), close fellowship with Christ (John 15), and peace that passes all understanding (John 14:27). So while Jesus spoke His parables about the kingdom, He communicated that the kingdom of God would not be present in its fullness and perfection.

**Are We There Yet? No!**

Last year, several grizzly stories made the news, as all grizzly stories seem to do. An angry husband killed his wife and then posted pictures of his crime on Facebook. A few weeks earlier, one woman was arrested for sexually molesting babies entrusted to her at a daycare. A few months before that, YouTube videos of people in Syria dying from a poisoned gas attack saddened many around the world. I could go on and on, but you get the point. We live in a really, really sick world.

Friends, if this is what the kingdom of God looks like in its fullness and perfection, then count me out. I want no part of it. What about you?

Jesus' own words seem to make the case better than we ever could. How can some claim that the kingdom of God is here in its fullness when Matthew 13:36-43 makes clear that evil doers will not be removed until Jesus returns? Verse 43 says, "Then the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear." Notice, the righteous don't shine forth until God has removed all sin.

Of this blessed day, Ellen G. White wrote this: "Fellow pilgrim, we are still amid the shadows and turmoil of

earthly activities; but soon our Saviour is to appear to bring deliverance and rest. Let us by faith behold the blessed hereafter as pictured by the hand of God. He who died for the sins of the world is opening wide the gates of Paradise to all who believe on Him. Soon the battle will have been fought, the victory won. Soon we shall see Him in whom our hopes of eternal life are centered. And in His presence the trials and sufferings of this life will seem as nothingness. The former things 'shall not be remembered, nor come into mind" (*Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 731-732).

## Appeal

My friends, don't you long for the day when Jesus will open the gates of paradise to you and me? Won't it be wonderful to leave earth behind forever to spend eternity with God in the earth made new?

*[Tell the following story in your own words.]*

*On November 3, 2013, the Associated Press carried the story of Asher Vongtau, a 19-year-old student of New York University who somehow found himself stuck between a rock and a hard place. It was not clear at the time how long he had been there, but he certainly was desperate to get out.*

*So where exactly was Mr. Vongtau? He was wedged between a 17-story high-rise dormitory and a concrete parking garage. No one knows for sure—except Mr. Vongtau, of course—just how he got there. Thankfully, someone heard his cries for help and called authorities. Police came and, after about ninety minutes, they freed the trapped student by breaking through one of the concrete walls.*

We may not be caught between two concrete buildings, but perhaps there are moments you feel trapped between the harsh realities of living on earth and the unfulfilled joys of living with Jesus in the kingdom of Heaven. The prophet John got a vision of Hheaven and this is what He wrote:

"Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer *any* sea. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them, and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be *any* death; there will no longer be *any* mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away" (Revelation 21:1-4).

Are we there yet? Unfortunately, the answer is no. Now is time for us to cry out to God, to seek His face, to make all things right with Him so that we can be ready when He returns to take us to His kingdom. That kingdom will be perfect in every way.

So, are you going? Are you sure that you're ready to go? If you want to tell God today, "I want to let everyone know that you are my God," please raise your hand. Now, if you would like to be baptized into God's great kingdom, please raise your hand.

***[Note to Presenter:*** *Don't rush the appeal here. Take time to give everyone a chance to join Jesus in His glorious kingdom. Close with prayer, thanking God for being with us while we await His soon return.]*

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Think carefully about your life right now. What challenges are you currently facing? How do you cope with them?

2. What does John 16:33 tell us about God's ability to help us overcome the trials we face as we wait for Jesus?

3. Read 1 John 4:16. What does this verse tell us about how life will be for those who live for Jesus?

4. How would you respond to someone who said this: "How can you say that God is good when there is so much evil in the world? What kind of an all-powerful being would let evil flourish?"

5. What is the first thing that you want to do when you get to Heaven? What is the first question that you will ask Jesus?