

# Is The Kingdom Of God Within You?

by Richard T. Ritenbaugh

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Kingdom. It is such an easy word to understand. Even without a dictionary to tell us its definition, we know that the natural usage of "kingdom" is a country or nation governed by a monarch. Thus, all kingdoms would have a few attributes in common. Obviously, a kingdom must have a *king*, who rules by *law* over a number of *subjects* who live within a certain *territory*.

When we imagine a kingdom, we often visualize something like Arthurian Britain —of knights and warhorses, a king making decrees from his throne, huge castles of stone, and crowns of gold and glittering jewels. Others might identify more with a modern constitutional monarchy as some of the northwest European states have. But would anyone ever imagine an invisible kingdom of some unknown ethereal quality that resides somewhere within a person's body?

Often, the ridiculous can expose how foolishly some interpret or spiritualize the Scriptures. Unfortunately, most of the modern "Christian" churches have spiritualized the vital knowledge of the Kingdom of God. They have various ways of expressing their idea, but many eventually fall back on Luke 17:21, where Jesus says, "For indeed, the kingdom of God is within you."

On its surface, this verse seems to support the notion that God's Kingdom dwells within a Christian. But is this really what Jesus said? Or do we have to dig a bit deeper to find the truth?

## Translation Error

Had we read this verse in the Greek language, we would have no difficulty with it. Since few of us have proficiency in Greek, we must rely on the faithfulness of unconverted translators to give us a true rendition of the original. At times, though, our trust is sorely abused, as in this verse.

"Within" is translated from *entos*, used only twice in the New Testament. Its primary meaning is "inside," as it is rendered in Matthew 23:26: "Blind Pharisee, first cleanse the *inside* of the cup and dish, that the outside of them may be clean also." However, when used in conjunction with a plural noun, *entos* means "among" or "in the midst of." In Luke 17:21, *entos* is used with "you," and from the context, we can see that Jesus was speaking to a crowd of Pharisees, who had come to question Him about the Kingdom of God (verse 20). "You," then, is plural. "The kingdom of God is among you" is best.

Most modern translations have recognized this grammatical error and translate *entos* as "among" or "in the midst of." Some texts, like the New King James and the New International versions, persist in using "within," though they note in the margin that "among" is an alternative.

Even without this technical knowledge of Greek, we could have easily understood that "within" is a poor and misleading translation. Christ was answering a question posed by the *Pharisees*, and He replied directly to them: "He answered *them* and said, . . . 'For indeed, the kingdom of God is within you.'" But how could the Kingdom of God be within His most bitter enemies? How many times did He reveal them to be hypocritical and misleading the people? Theologically, it is quite impossible to think that His Kingdom would be in the Pharisees.

It is only *after* He had made this remark that He turned to His disciples (verse 22) and explained what He meant. The subject of the entire section (verses 20-37) is stated most explicitly in verse 30: "Even so will it be in the day when the Son of Man is revealed." All along, He had been explaining His second coming! When He returns, He will set up His Kingdom on earth (Zechariah 14:9).

### ***L'Etat C'est Moi***

If the Kingdom is still future, how could He say that "the kingdom of God is among you"? To answer this, we must return to the four common traits of a kingdom. The primary trait is that a kingdom must be ruled by a king; otherwise, the country has some other form of government. A king of any nation is the chief representative of that nation. And the King of the Kingdom of God is none other than the living Jesus Christ!

Pilate specifically asked Jesus, "'Are You a king then?' Jesus answered, 'You say rightly that I am a king. For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth'" (John 18:37). So as the King of God's Kingdom, He could truly tell the Pharisees that the Kingdom of God was among them.

This idea is not without a secular counterpart. Louis XIV, king of France (AD 1638-1715), is said to have told the Parlement de Paris in 1655, "*L'Etat c'est moi*." This translates into English as, "I am the State." France was not a nation or a kingdom without the king, and as an absolute monarch, Louis XIV possessed the full power of the state in himself. In the same manner, Jesus could have said, "I am the Kingdom of God among you," and indeed, this is the basic meaning of "the kingdom of God is among you."

Jesus makes a similar statement to the Pharisees in Matthew 12. The Pharisees had accused Him of casting out demons by Beelzebub, another name for Satan (verse 24). During His reply to this accusation, Jesus says, "But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, surely the kingdom of God has come upon you" (verse 28).

John writes,

And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name. (John 20:30-31)

This passage is a simple explanation of why Christ did so many miracles, including the casting out of demons. It was to testify to who He was! So, Jesus says, casting demons out of people by the Holy Spirit is proof that a representative of God's Kingdom worked among them.

Another sometimes misunderstood statement is Luke 10:9, where Jesus sends out the seventy disciples to preach: "And heal the sick who are there, and say to them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you.'" The problem here is that many people understand the preposition "near" to refer to place or proximity, but in this case it refers to time. To paraphrase Jesus' words, He said, "Tell them, 'The Kingdom of God is coming soon.'"

### **The Broader Teaching**

Our understanding of a troublesome verse is often well served by studying the surrounding scriptures. If we pull a verse from its context, we can ascribe meanings to it that have nothing to do with its intent as it was spoken. In the case of Luke 17:21, this is very true.

The original question posed by the Pharisees was, "When is the Kingdom of God coming?" (verse 20). The long section from the end of verse 20 to verse 37 is Jesus' answer, first to the Pharisees (verses 20-21) and then to His disciples (verses 22-37). His reply to the Pharisees is rather curt: "You won't be able to discern the coming of the Kingdom because you haven't recognized that I am its chief representative, though I have been among you."

In His longer explanation to His disciples, Jesus goes into quite a bit more detail about the timing and conditions of establishing His Kingdom. First, He says, do not be deceived when people tell you Christ has come (verses 22-23). We will know very well when He returns; it will be like a flash of lightning that everyone will see (verse 24). However, before this can happen, Jesus must be tortured and crucified as man's Redeemer (verse 25). From our vantage point, which the disciples did not have, we know that this condition has already been met at Golgotha or Calvary.

Then He gives details about the conditions in the world when He returns. It will be as it was in the days of Noah and Lot (verses 26-30). He highlights two major signs of the end here:

1. He will come suddenly when people do not expect Him to return. Most people will be going about their normal activities, unaware of the times.
2. When He returns, society will be degenerate and wicked just as it was before the Flood came and before God destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah (see Genesis 6:5-7; 18:20; 19:1-11).

Luke 17:31-33 shows that, for His disciples, His coming will result in a test of faith. They will have to be willing to leave everything behind—their homes, their possessions, even their loved ones—in order to obey the call of God. Lot's wife turned back in longing for what she had left behind, and God's judgment fell swiftly upon her. We may have to be willing even to give up our lives for salvation, because in trying to save our physical lives, we would have to renounce our beliefs.

Verses 34-36 illustrate three scenes of judgment. These show that Christ will judge us individually, and despite how close we may be to another—a spouse, a neighbor, a co-worker—our obedience and good works will not deliver anyone else (see Ezekiel 14:12-20). We will have to prove ourselves to the righteous Judge of all (Acts 17:31; Romans 14:10).

Finally, the disciples ask Jesus where these things will take place (Luke 17:37). His reply is better translated in the Revised English Bible: "Where the carcass is, there will the vultures gather." This seems somewhat enigmatic, but if we take what He says literally, He implies that He will return at a place of great carnage. This would parallel the scenarios prophesied in Zechariah 14:1-5 and Revelation 19:11-21 (see especially verses 17-18, 21b).

All through this section Jesus is describing real circumstances, real people and real places. He speaks of a literal Kingdom to be established at His return "with power and great glory" (Matthew 24:30).

Since the context of Luke 17:21 is Christ's second coming, and Jesus is speaking in great detail about the time, place and conditions of His return, we must see His Kingdom as a literal government—just as real as any government of man. We cannot divorce "the Kingdom of God is among you" from this larger topic. Doing so distorts the true meaning of a literal, soon-coming Kingdom ruled by Jesus Christ that will grow to fill the whole earth after His return.