

Is It In You?

A sermon based on Luke 17:20-25

Have you ever seen a football player, sweating big drops of purple sweat, haul in a spectacular catch for a touchdown? Have you seen the basketball player who's sweat is bright orange, swish the buzzer beating shot to win the game? If so, you've seen the Gatorade commercials that seem to promise that you too can play this great if you'll only drink their product. And the commercials end with that prodding question: "Is it in you?"

This morning we ask that question, not of some sports drink that promises improved athleticism, but of something far more important...

The Pharisees rightly understood Jesus' claim to establish the kingdom of God. So they demanded to know *when?* When would Jesus show himself to be the physical king they had longed for for thousands of years? When would he dominate the Romans and free the Jews from the yoke of service to them? When would he bring peace to the Holy Land? When would he make his so-called Messiah-ship known?

But they misunderstood what the kingdom of God was all about. The rule of God is not over a plot of land. It has no borders. And it doesn't increase by force. It's a kingdom, a ruling, that takes place inside of people. And in a certain sense Jesus asked the Pharisees (and today he asks us), "Is it in you?" Let's answer that question this morning.

I. It's Within.

Borders of a nation or a kingdom are pretty easy to see, aren't they? If any of you have driven Outside, that fact is clear. As easy as it was years ago to travel the Alcan and cross borders with little to no hindrances, not anymore. Today, you can't enter Canada without a passport, and sometimes, that's not good enough (I actually had to show a copy of my call form to show I was just passing through so I could be a pastor in Fairbanks). Oh, it's easy to tell where countries' borders are.

But when we pray the 2nd petition of the Lord's Prayer, "***Your kingdom come...***" it can be a little confusing, can't it? Kingdoms don't usually go anywhere! Canada won't come to the United States. China won't come to Mexico. People go to a kingdom, but not vice versa. But the kingdom of God is different. It comes to us. And it comes to others.

So what is this kingdom? Well, let's turn to God's word for a better understanding. In John 18(:36) Jesus said it was not of this world. God's kingdom doesn't have a flag or national currency. It's not made up of countries or borders, or even of churches and synods. But it does have a ruler. So where is this kingdom? Jesus makes it clear: "***the kingdom of God is within you.***" Or as Paul wrote in Colossians 3(:15), "***Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts...***"

Simply put, the kingdom of God is Jesus ruling the hearts and lives of people. The Pharisees didn't get that. They only dealt with externals. They were only looking for something physical. That's why Jesus warned them, "***Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You clean the outside***

of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. Blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and dish, and then the outside also will be clean.” (Matthew 23:25-26)

So, as I look out into the pews this morning I see clean cups. You all look bathed and dressed up. You're all in church and look like Christians, members of the kingdom of God, citizens of heaven. But looks can be deceiving. The outside doesn't matter. Only what's in you matters. So, how about it? The kingdom of God... is it in you?

Who rules your heart? “Well, Jesus, of course!” Right? But would your bank statements agree? Do your purchases and transfers reflect the fact that Jesus and his kingdom are most important in your life? Or do they show that your greater concerns are still about earthly kingdoms?

Or how about that even more precious commodity that's in even shorter supply than money? How about your time? Does your schedule reflect that you serve God first by your regular worship, your time spent in the word, your hours of service to him and others? Or does your calendar book reveal that Jesus isn't really in charge, but that other things rule in your life?

You see, as pious and tidy as we want to look on the outside, truth be told, we're dirty cups, tarnished by sin. We don't let Jesus rule in our hearts as we should. We take the throne. We want to do things our way...we do things our way, not his. Jesus said he had to ***“be rejected by [his] generation,”*** but too often he's rejected by us too. And for rebelling against the laws of his kingdom, we deserve to ***“long to see one of the days of the Son of Man, but... not see it.”*** We deserve to lose citizenship in his kingdom and to be deported to hell.

II. It's Within You.

And yet, in spite of what we deserve, we get to be a part of his kingdom anyway.

You know, every kingdom is established by a war as one ruler proves his dominance over another. Think of the wars our nation has seen. The Revolutionary War created a new Kingdom. The Civil War prevented a new Kingdom from being established. And every war has been a struggle to gain or maintain a kingdom – that is, the rule of one people or group over another. And it often comes at the expense of many lives.

Jesus fought a war to establish his kingdom too. He spoke of that struggle when he said, ***“First he [the Son of Man] must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation.”*** He fought at the expense of not many lives, but just one—his own—but that life was the life of the Son of God. He went to the cross to take on himself all of the guilt of every rebellion against his rule that you and I have ever committed. He paid the penalty our sins earned. He was deported to hell in our place. And by that war, he defeated sin and Satan and death and hell and he established his Kingdom. He did it for you.

Most (if not all) of us here became U.S. citizens by birth. But by birth we were also sinners—citizens of hell. And when we could only choose to reject Jesus because we were spiritually dead and unable to choose to become citizens of heaven, Jesus chose us. He poured out his Holy Spirit into our hearts and began his rule there through the Word.

Now, can you imagine the joy that must have filled the disciple Matthew, the lying, cheating, traitorous tax collector, when he heard Jesus say, "Follow me"? As unworthy as he was, Jesus chose him to be a part of his kingdom. Well, you can imagine it! Because that same joy is yours! You too are unworthy to be a part of his kingdom, but Jesus chose you!

So, the kingdom of God... Is it in you? Well, do you believe that Jesus died to pay for your sins? Then, yes, absolutely! It's within *you*! Rejoice! You're a citizen! A member of that kingdom with all its blessings!

So if it's already come to us, why pray "***Your kingdom come***"? Because, even though Jesus is ruling there, there is still a struggle going on in our hearts every day. We long to have Jesus take more control of our hearts and lives and establish his rule more firmly. So we pray as the father of the demon possessed boy did and cry out to Jesus, "***I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!***" (Mark 9:24) We guard our faith and our doctrine closely and are eager to spend time in the Word. And as the kingdom of God does come to us and Jesus rules more and more, the kingdom will also come through us, as we share the good news with others in thanks to Jesus.

And so that prayer—"***Your kingdom come***"—is a dangerous prayer. For when you pray "***Your kingdom come***" you pray that the word will spread ***through you*** even if that means God creates situations that move you well beyond your comfort zone. When you pray "***Your kingdom come***" you pray that God move you to generously support the work of the Kingdom, putting it first in your budget, even if you have less left over for entertainment. When you pray "***Your kingdom come***" you pray that God guide your pastor to speak the truth of his Word in a clear and precise way even when he preaches the law to you. When you pray "***Your kingdom come***" you pray that God would crush any opposition to the growth of his kingdom... even if that opposition is you.

And as you pray that bold prayer, God will hear and answer. Is it in you—the kingdom of God? You bet! And just as his kingdom has already come to you, so it will continue to come, through you to others until it finally comes in its full glory on the last day. "***For the Son of Man in his day will be like the lightning, which flashes and lights up the sky from one end to the other.***" So keep praying that bold prayer: "***Your kingdom come!***" and know that it does. Amen.