

# LUKE—WEEK 21

## THE KINGDOM IS HERE



F. Michael Slay

*A DEEP Study*

**The Fellowship of Ailbe**

*The Cover Picture is Lazarus and the Rich Man, an anonymous 31x22 cm Illumination (ca. 1035–1040) on display at Germanisches National Museum, Neuremberg*

The *kingdom of God* has arrived and is *in the midst* of them. The era of the law and the prophets is over. Everyone wants in, but they can't see it because they're looking for the wrong thing.

Jesus preaches the kingdom, while performing the signs that prove it's here.

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Thank you.

Luke 16:14–17:25 — *The Kingdom is Here*  
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1 Luke 16:14–18 (ESV)

*The Pharisees, who were lovers of money, heard all these things, and they ridiculed him. And he said to them, “You are those who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts. For what is exalted among men is an abomination in the sight of God.*

*“The Law and the Prophets were until John; since then the good news of the kingdom of God is preached, and everyone forces his way into it<sup>\*</sup>. But it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one dot of the Law to become void.*

*“Everyone who divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery, and he who marries a woman divorced from her husband commits adultery.”*

<sup>\*</sup>Or *everyone is forcefully urged into it*. The NKJV has *everyone is pressing into it*.

In the middle paragraph (verses 16 & 17), Jesus makes an important declaration of the arrival of the kingdom of God.

John heralds the end of the age of the Law and the Prophets. *Since then the good news of the kingdom of God is preached, and everyone forces his way into it*. There is endless debate about the last part, and the exact meaning is unknown.

But look at the context. The Pharisees were ridiculing Jesus, and He replies with, “*You are those who justify yourselves before men.*” They justify themselves by the strict observance of the law. Jesus is saying that their whole system of justifying themselves is passé. What they really need is to be in the kingdom of God. Next, He may be saying that the Pharisees are trying to force their way into it. Or He might mean they are being forcefully advised to get in. It really doesn’t make much difference though.

In verse 17, Jesus makes sure to prevent one possible misunderstanding. The Law isn’t being made void. This can be confusing as Christians are not compelled to observe every *dot of the Law*.

But Jesus didn’t void the law; He fulfilled it.

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Nowadays, people aren’t even trying to get into the kingdom of God (forcefully or otherwise). The enemy has made great strides in discrediting Christianity, and many people are simply disinterested.

This is a case of bad soil, and the right response is to work on preparing the soil. This aspect of evangelism doesn’t get enough attention. You can’t evangelize someone who isn’t ready, and lots of folks aren’t ready. So, what’s a Christian to do?

The best answer is the simplest, just be a Christian. We always seem to be in a rush. God’s timing is slower than ours. A thing rushed is a thing botched. Just live as a citizen of the kingdom.

The kingdom of God is plenty attractive all by itself.

2 Luke 16:19–31 (ESV)

*“There was a rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. And at his gate was laid a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, who desired to be fed with what fell from the rich man's table. Moreover, even the dogs came and licked his sores. The poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried, and in Hades, being in torment, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus at his side. And he called out, ‘Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am in anguish in this flame.’ But Abraham said, ‘Child, remember that you in your lifetime received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner bad things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in anguish. And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, in order that those who would pass from here to you may not be able, and none may cross from there to us.’ And he said, ‘Then I beg you, father, to send him to my father's house—for I have five brothers—so that he may warn them, lest they also come into this place of torment.’ But Abraham said, ‘They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.’ And he said, ‘No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.’ He said to him, ‘If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead.’”*

“Marley was dead.” Thus begins one of the greatest literary works in the English language. Charles Dickens goes on to tell a wondrous tale of repentance and redemption. Ebenezer Scrooge discovers the error of his miserly ways and finds new life.

Unfortunately, the theology in *A Christmas Carol* is flawed. Christ is notably absent from the story, and Scrooge's redemption is entirely works-based. Moreover, as this passage shows, warnings from those in the afterlife don't happen because they wouldn't work.

*“If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead.”*

But some of the assumptions of *A Christmas Carol* are accurate. There is an afterlife, and Scrooge was not on a good path.

Actually, Dickens toned it down a bit. The rich man in this parable has it much worse.

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Another thing Dickens got right is that redeemed people find true happiness. Scrooge had nothing but sorrow, and his pursuit of wealth was the cause. That's a perfect illustration of how sin doesn't work. Total joy comes to those who seek to serve the Lord.

*God is love.* – 1 John 4:8b (ESV)

Think about what “love” means here. It's agape (αγαπη) in the Greek, which means sacrificial love. In other words, God makes a priority of our well-being. You definitely want to be on this guy's side.

*Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever.* — Westminster Shorter Catechism #1

3 Luke 17:1–10 (ESV)

*And he said to his disciples, “Temptations to sin are sure to come, but woe to the one through whom they come! It would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck and he were cast into the sea than that he should cause one of these little ones to sin. Pay attention to yourselves! If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him, and if he sins against you seven times in the day, and turns to you seven times, saying, ‘I repent,’ you must forgive him.”*

*The apostles said to the Lord, “Increase our faith!” And the Lord said, “If you had faith like a grain of mustard seed, you could say to this mulberry tree, ‘Be uprooted and planted in the sea,’ and it would obey you.*

*“Will any one of you who has a servant plowing or keeping sheep say to him when he has come in from the field, ‘Come at once and recline at table’? Will he not rather say to him, ‘Prepare supper for me, and dress properly, and serve me while I eat and drink, and afterward you will eat and drink’? Does he thank the servant because he did what was commanded? So you also, when you have done all that you were commanded, say, ‘We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty.’”*

It hasn't been that long since Jesus taught the concept of forgiveness using the parable of the prodigal son. That parable illustrated the stupidity and sinfulness of unforgiveness, but it didn't say that forgiveness is easy.

When Jesus says here that you must forgive seven times, he's implying unlimited forgiveness (see Matt. 18:22). The disciples feel incapable of such things and so ask Jesus to increase their faith. Jesus replies that if they had faith as large as a mustard seed, they could do a lot more than just forgive.

Faith is more black-and-white than quantitative.

*Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. — Hebrews 11:1 (ESV)*

The last paragraph seems pointless, but in context it makes sense. Jesus is saying that to forgive your brother, all you have to do is follow orders.

It's a simple matter of obedience.

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Pride is the enemy in all this. It's why we don't obey. It's why we don't forgive. It's why our faith is weak. Everything good is interdicted.

Ask God to search your heart and root out pride. The quickest way to purge pride is to be totally embarrassed. I'm not saying to pray for that; a more merciful cure will do just fine.

But don't hold back. Pride infects us all, and any cure is worth the pain.

Find a good mirror. An honest friend is the best kind.

4 Luke 17:11–19 (ESV)

*On the way to Jerusalem he was passing along between Samaria and Galilee. And as he entered a village, he was met by ten lepers, who stood at a distance and lifted up their voices, saying, “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us.” When he saw them he said to them, “Go and show yourselves to the priests.” And as they went they were cleansed. Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice; and he fell on his face at Jesus’ feet, giving him thanks. Now he was a Samaritan. Then Jesus answered, “Were not ten cleansed? Where are the nine? Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?” And he said to him, “Rise and go your way; your faith has made you well.”*

It may seem odd that Jesus is disappointed in *the nine* who didn’t return, since He told them to, “*Go and show yourselves to the priests.*” They stay on task, while the Samaritan, in an emotional outburst, runs back to Jesus, praising God. It’s also odd that the Samaritan was hanging out with non-Samaritans in the first place.

The Samaritan being with the rest is actually normal in this case. Being a leper makes you such a pariah that also being a Samaritan doesn’t matter; they’re all quarantined together. It also makes sense that the Samaritan was less focused on getting to the priests. They may have refused to see him. And he may have been unfamiliar with the Levitical law concerning lepers.

*“This shall be the law of the leprous person for the day of his cleansing. He shall be brought to the priest, and the priest shall go out of the camp, and the priest shall look. Then, if the case of leprous disease is healed in the leprous person,”* — Leviticus 14:2–3

But why does Jesus criticize *the nine* who didn’t return? It’s because they’re being legalistic and selfish. They’re focused on their own healing, and on the legal procedures needed to get back into normal society.

That’s understandable. Leprosy is a social catastrophe and is emotionally crushing. Still, the miracle is more important than their individual cures. Miraculous deliverance from this scourge should have been cause for celebration. Instead, *the nine* only thought of themselves.

The idea of praising *how* God delivered them didn’t even cross their minds.

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Leprosy still exists and infects hundreds of thousands of people worldwide. It is a bacterial disease cured by antibiotics. It is contagious, though not highly, and that has led to the abolishment of leper colonies.

Modern medicine is an amazing gift. Just think, only a few decades ago there were no joint replacements or organ transplants. Who can even imagine what medicine was like 2000 years ago when this passage was written? So, are we appreciative, like the Samaritan leper, or do we just take it for granted and go on about our business, like the other nine?

There’s no right way to thank God for the many blessings we have.

We couldn’t even name them all if we wanted to; there are just too many.

5 Luke 17:20–25 (ESV)

*Being asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, he answered them, “The kingdom of God is not coming in ways that can be observed, nor will they say, ‘Look, here it is!’ or ‘There!’ for behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you.”*

*And he said to the disciples, “The days are coming when you will desire to see one of the days of the Son of Man, and you will not see it. And they will say to you, ‘Look, there!’ or ‘Look, here!’ Do not go out or follow them. For as the lightning flashes and lights up the sky from one side to the other, so will the Son of Man be in his day. But first he must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation.”*

Jesus’ relationship with the Pharisees is not all that simple. They were often hostile to Him but not always. They had heard Jesus talk about the kingdom of God, and so they ask him about it. It’s an honest question, which indicates that they’ll respect His answer. It’s not a trick question, nor an attempt to trap him.

Thus, neither is His response hostile. The NIV has this as, “*The kingdom of God does not come with careful observation ...*” The Greek word here is para-tay-RAY-see-ose (παρατηρήσεως), which means more than just seeing. It carries the sense of watching or looking out for something.

They can’t see the kingdom of God even though it’s there *in the midst* of them right now. It’s almost as if Jesus is telling them that they can’t see it because they’re trying too hard. It’s like a lesson in the Zen of the kingdom of God. They just need to relax and stop trying to force their perceptions to conform to some preconceived agenda. Then they’d see the kingdom, and the king who’s been talking to them.

Then Jesus turns to the disciples and speaks about the future. The future will be the opposite; Jesus’ arrival will be as obvious as when *the lightning flashes and lights up the sky from one side to the other*.

*“But first he must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation.”*

The cross is looming larger and larger as they get closer to Jerusalem.

The disciples don’t know what’s coming even though Jesus keeps telling them.

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The Pharisees couldn’t see the kingdom of God, even though the king was standing *in the midst* of them, because Jesus wasn’t the kind of king they were looking for. Now people can’t see the kingdom of God because they aren’t looking for a king at all. They see the church as some kind of commune.

The kingship of Jesus is central to what the kingdom of God is, and what the kingdom is all about. We preach this all the time but do we live it? When we evangelize, do we tell people that the point of joining the kingdom is serving the king?

Of course not. We tell people that becoming a Christian is the best thing for them.

It is the best thing for them, but that’s not the point. The kingdom of God is **of God**.

*Questions for reflection or discussion*

1. What are the most attractive things about Christianity?
2. What is your image of hell?
3. What things help get rid of pride?
4. What modern things are you most thankful for? Which ones should we be most thankful for?
5. If it's all about Jesus, then how should we pray?