

The Kingdom of God

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Preacher: Andy Meadows

[0 : 00] Today's passage is from Luke chapter 17, verse 11 to 21, and that's found on page 1056 in the Church Bibles.

On the way to Jerusalem, he was passing along between Samaria and Galilee, and as he enters 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. Being asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, he, Jesus, answered them, The kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be observed, nor will they say, Look, here it is, or there.

[1 : 34] For behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you. Good morning. My name is Andy. I'm the acting lead pastor here this morning. You can follow along with the talk on the back of the server sheet or on the screen behind me.

Let me pray as we start. Heavenly Father, we thank you that you are a speaking God, that you are, we can know you and know your truth.

Please help us this morning to listen to you as you speak to us. Amen. Now, in solidarity with members of the youth group who have exams at the moment, I've set us our own exam question. It's a multiple choice question, which is my favourite. So you're sitting there in the exam hall. You open up the paper. Question one. Has God's kingdom come?

Here are your answers. A, yes. B, no. C, other. Has God's kingdom come? I guess it's a question that comes in different guises today.

[2 : 47] It comes in the guise of our non-Christian friend or family member asking us whether God has made any difference to the problems of the world. Was Christmas actually its success?

We're back in January. What's changed? The world before 33 AD and the world after 33 AD is basically the same. Full of war and sickness.

And what do you say? Yes, God has done something. No, God hasn't done something yet. Or other. And it could come as well if you were to go to a Jewish synagogue and chat to the rabbis steeped in Old Testament promises about God's kingdom.

I think of Daniel chapter 7 and the prophecy of the Son of Man when he comes bringing judgment, giving glory and power and a kingdom that won't pass away.

Jesus has come. Jesus has come. His rule is opposed by billions around the world today. Has God's kingdom come? Yes.

[3 : 53] No. Other. Well, this is not just a 21st century issue. It was also a first century issue. And it's the question at the heart of verse 20 of our passage this morning.

Being asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, Jesus answered them. Ever since Luke chapter 9, Jesus has been heading to Jerusalem.

And Luke, as a gospel writer, has been marking out these sections with geography markers. And so chapter 17, verse 11, we get another marker, a new section on the way to Jerusalem.

We are one step closer. And this question about the kingdom of God is this dominant theme right from chapter 17, verse 11, right up to chapter 19, verse 28.

And we last looked at Luke at Grace Church back in 2021. So we need to get a bit more, get a bit of our bearings. Luke is a medical doctor, but he's also a historian and a theologian.

[5 : 02] He's got three jobs. He opens his account in Luke chapter 1, verses 1 to 4, with his credentials as a historian. He's been interviewing eyewitnesses.

He's carefully followed everything. He's putting together an orderly account. But he's also a theologian. He has a pastoral intent.

We don't really know who this guy, Theophilus, is. But chapter 1, verse 4, Luke wants him to be certain. He wants him to be convinced, to be confident in the things that he has been taught. And for the next few months, as we look at this question about the kingdom of God, it's fair to say that Luke wants us to have this same certainty concerning the kingdom of God.

Has it come? If not, when? How will we know? And what does it look like? Who will enter it? How will they enter it? How do I live in the light of it? All these issues Jesus is going to touch on in the next 10 weeks, leading us up to Easter.

[6 : 12] Has God's kingdom come? You want to know the answer, don't you? The exam question. Well, the answer that Jesus gives over the course of this section is C, other. Jesus has a lot to say about the kingdom.

And he neither says, yes, the kingdom has come. Nor does he just say, no, the kingdom of God hasn't come. He says, yes and no. But not in a politician kind of way, trying to wiggle out to things. But in a clear and precise way. Let's look at the first part of Jesus' answer, verse 20 again. Being asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, he answered them, the kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be observed.

Nor will they say, look, here it is, or there. For behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you.

The kingdom of God is in the midst of you. There's a bit of debate around that translation.

The footnote gives other options. But essentially, what Jesus is here is saying to these Pharisees, the kingdom of here, because God's king is here.

[7 : 24] I am here. And you've missed it. You have it within your grasp. Quite literally for them. And this episode with the ten lepers that starts this section really is the evidence.

Luke uses this episode at the start of this section to both introduce the themes that will keep coming up. But he's also giving us some revision. Sorry to mention that word.

He's giving us some revision. You see, the cleansing of the lepers is representative of a whole raft of healings that have been accompanying Jesus' ministry wherever he went, putting right elements in people's lives that are broken.

And so this incident is like the opening minute of a Netflix series or a TV drama as the producers of Vigil or Fool Me Once or whatever it is you've been watching bring us up to speed.

At pressing home, Jesus' point that God's kingdom is indeed in their midst, within their grasp. God's kingdom has broken in. So we've got one big point really this morning with three sub-points.

[8 : 36] The kingdom of God is within your grasp. That is what Jesus says to us this morning. The kingdom of God is within your grasp. So in this episode, Luke weaves in these big themes of these gospel accounts so far.

Firstly, the essence of God's kingdom. What is it that King Jesus has come to do? Bring salvation. Finally then, let's dig into this story.

Verse 11. On the way to Jerusalem, he was passing along between Samaria and Galilee. And as he entered the village, he was met by ten lepers.

Leprosy was feared deeply, still is. Physically as destructive as cancer is today and highly contagious. It makes a person an outcast.

It carried all the social stigma of syphilis in the 19th century and AIDS in the 20th century. And my brother is a pharmacist and he did his research project on leprosy.

[9 : 45] And why people don't complete the course of antibiotics. And what he found was apparent that such is the stigma, there's still the fear of being recognised as you go to the health clinic for treatment.

And the book of Leviticus in the Old Testament declares that someone with leprosy would be cut off. They're an outcast. They would exist on the fringes of the town.

If they wanted to go into the town to get anything, they had to shout out unclean, unclean as they walked. A lot of us made jokes about that in the COVID days, didn't we?

That anyone who heard them coming would have to get out of the way. A lot of us made jokes about that in the day.

Of what Jesus can do, his power. But it's interesting how they don't ask to be healed. That's interesting, isn't it? They ask for mercy.

[11:09] They are desperate people. At the end of their tether. And as they cry out for mercy and compassion, they cry out to the right person.

Now look at verse 14. When he saw them, he said to them, go and show yourselves to the priests. And as they went, they were cleansed.

And the Old Testament law gave instructions for priests who had acted a bit like medical officers. In both diagnosing and declaring people clean of leprosy and other skin diseases.

And the ten seemed to have confidence in Jesus' power. Because when he sends them off for the inspection, they went.

And as they were went, they were cleansed. It's an amazing picture, isn't it? We can imagine the scene. We can imagine him hurrying off and just looking at each other along the way.

[12:11] Spotting in other people how the blemishes have gone. The bandages can be taken off. They are clean. Imagine how happy they are. Excited they are. They've finally got their life back.

Imagine them at home at the dinner table, back with their loved ones, with the certificate of being cleansed. My life can get back on track.

Well, here then is Jesus giving us a glimpse of what his kingdom will be like in its fullness. That salvation and cleansing from everything that spoils this current age.

My in-laws recently moved to a new housing estate outside Oxford. And when they first went to visit, it's basically just a wasteland. They're just ploughed fields with plots marked out on a board.

But there is one house built, the show home. And you go into the show home, I'm sure we know this idea, you go in and you think this is what it's going to be like. This is what the house is going to be like in the future.

[13:18] It's a picture. It's a picture of what is to come. Well, verses 11 to 19 act as the show home of God's kingdom.

A complete overthrow of everything that spoils our current age. Yes, this is temporary healings here. All these 10 died still. They're not alive, knocking around still.

But by his healings, Jesus shows us the kingdom he will usher in, in its fullness in the future. And yet there's something more going on than that.

There's something more going on than just healing. Because something intriguing happens to one of them. Have a look at verse 15. Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back. Praise God with a loud voice. And he fell on his face at Jesus' feet, giving him thanks. Now one of these lepers stopped in his tracks when he realized he was no longer a leper.

[14:23] Now the priest's inspection could wait. And he turns back. And sure of his healing, he enjoys his first act of freedom.

And what is it? Well, not standing in a distance anymore, but falling on his face at Jesus' feet. At giving him thanks.

And so Jesus says to him, verse 19, rise and go your way. Your faith has made you well. It's a phrase Jesus has used before to the sinful woman back in chapter 7.

And then too, to the woman healed from bleeding in chapter 8. It's what he'll go on to say to the blind beggar after restoring his sight in chapter 18. And it's a phrase that could be translated, your faith has saved you.

Your faith has saved you. You see, this encounter recaps the salvation King Jesus brings. Salvation from sin. You see, while the nine were certainly healed of their leprosy, for this man there was something more.

[15:34] A healing of his soul as well as his body. Leprosy. Leprosy in the Bible seemed to have a spiritual dimension to it. Those suffering from it and other skin diseases were forbidden from going into the temple where the presence of God was manifested on earth.

So essentially they were cut off from having a relationship with God. But this is also a picture of what it's like to be under the effects of sin in the world.

A lot of parallels. Leprosy cut you off from society. More significant, it cut you off from God. It had a corrosive effect on life. But that really could be describing sin.

Humanity's rebellion. That cuts us off from God. And from each other. So in other words, the skin disease was a picture of the sin disease.

And yet God's King came to bring salvation. A rescue from sin. That is a big theme in Luke. It started right back with Christmas. Remember?

[16:45] Remember we sat here last month with the angels' announcement to Mary and the shepherds. The saviour's been born. Simeon in the temple holding up baby Jesus.

My eyes have seen your salvation. And now as this leper comes to Jesus, that is what he experiences. Salvation. Salvation. And that is what is on offer to all of us this morning. Because sin leaves us unclean. Unfit to be with a perfect God. We can't wipe away the stain and the guilt of sin.

We are a bit like Lady Macbeth. After her part in murder of King Duncan. Another bit of revision for ye. She sleepwalks around the castle.

Desperately trying to rub the king's imaginary blood from her hands. The real blood has been washed away. But she's tormented. And no amount of soap and water and singing happy birthday can cleanse her.

[17:43] But what this leper knows is that you head towards Jesus and you get saved. The kingdom is within your grasp.

Salvation is available. And we're also told how it is that someone comes to enter God's kingdom. So secondly then, entry.

Faith in the king. You see, how is it this guy is saved? Because of his faith in Jesus. Verse 19. Your faith has made you well.

I don't know what you think of when you hear the word faith. Faith is not a blind. Nor is it vague. Nor is it just an intellectual ascent to a collection of truths.

True faith is a response to a person. A complete trust and dependence in Jesus. You see, ten were healed. But nine of them get it wrong.

[18:50] Because they failed to respond to the king. You see, this was a distant healing. They stood at a distance. And the distance consisted of more than literal space by the end for those nine.

Now, tragically, those nine still had a distance in their relationship to Jesus, as verse 17 shows. With Jesus, those quickfire three questions.

Were not ten cleansed? Where are the nine? Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner? All ten experienced the most remarkable miracle.

All ten were cleansed. Only one was saved. Only one saw. Only one was told, your faith has saved you. In other words, it's only as a person comes to faith in the Lord Jesus as God's king, that they are guaranteed a place in God's kingdom.

And as we go through this section, we'll see person after person entering the kingdom, not because of anything they've done, but because of having faith in King Jesus.

[19:59] This is stressed even more as the other nine, where do they go? They go off to the temple. Presumably, they carried on and got there. This one comes to Jesus.

The kingdom of God is in the midst of you. Where? The temple? No longer. At Jesus' feet? Yes. That should give us, of course, a huge joy.

There's no need for any pilgrimage to find salvation. No need to look inside yourself or go on a trek somewhere. We just have to come to the feet of the Lord Jesus.

The kingdom of God is within your grasp. Salvation through faith in the King. And this miracle also shows to whom the kingdom is available to.

Lastly, the extent available to all. You see, the identity of this one person who returns is stressed on several occasions. So verse 11, on the way to Jerusalem, he, Jesus, was passing along between Samaria and Galilee.

[21:11] Verse 16, Luke tells us this healed leper was a Samaritan. And then Jesus described him, verse 18, as a foreigner. This man was not only physically and spiritually excluded.

He was also a Samaritan. Part of a racially mixed, spiritually compromised, ethnically impure group. And the Jews had no time for them.

Such were the horrors of leprosy that it seems that in this instant, Jews and Samaritans had been brought together. Yet it was the Samaritan who was the first and only one to return to Jesus, to thank him.

And salvation is extended to him. And all this, all the way through Luke, salvation has been extended to the most unlikely people. The shepherds in chapter 2.

The man with the demons in chapter 4. The paralytic, chapter 5. The leper and the Levi, the tax collector, chapter 6. The sinful woman, chapter 7. And now here. Unlikely on two counts.

[22 : 21] Samaritan and unclean. But entry into the kingdom is extended to him. Entry into the kingdom, for us then, is available to all.

Unlikely people are included. Likely people miss out. And that's what we're going to see as we go through this section. The tax collector, her little children, blind beggar, all included.

The rich ruler, the religious Pharisee, missing out. So then pulling these things together, has the kingdom of God come?

Well, part one of Jesus' answer to the Pharisees is yes. The kingdom of God has come because I have come. God's king is here. It's within your grasp.

Salvation is on offer now. Forgiveness from sin through faith in the king. Falling at his feet in complete dependence and trust. And this kingdom is available to all.

[23 : 22] All the outsiders. Even the most unlikely. And yet next week we'll see part two of Jesus' answer. God's kingdom hasn't come yet.

Earlier we prayed, your kingdom come. God's kingdom come. But that's something. Well, let's not get ahead of ourselves. Two things then implying this today.

Firstly, certainty. That certainty. This is Luke's overarching intention for Theophilus. And it's intention for us too in this section. To be certain surrounding the kingdom of God.

Certain that God's king came to bring in a complete overthrow. That all that spoils our world. And that is in the future. Jesus didn't come the first time to sort everything out.

He gave glimpses of that. But he came the first time to announce his salvation. The day of mercy. That's what the leper says to him.

[24 : 23] Have mercy on me. Your faith has saved you. And so if you're here this morning looking in on the Christian faith. And in effect standing at a distance to Jesus.

Well then Jesus invites us all to come to him for mercy. The kingdom of God has come because salvation is now available. The king has died and rose again.

And rescue is on offer to anyone who turns to him. And that means we can be certain that through faith in Jesus. We have that secure citizenship now in God's kingdom.

So in fact every follower of Jesus has dual citizenship. We are citizens of various kingdoms on earth. But also of God's kingdom.

And it also gives us certainty surrounding what it is we're doing today. There's a lot of talk in Christian circles of building God's kingdom on earth.

[25 : 25] Growing the kingdom. Extending the kingdom. And the temptation is to attach various projects to that label. But the kingdom of God is not seen today in poverty relief or social justice.

As good and noble as those things are. The kingdom of God is seen today as person by person. By faith falls at the feet of Jesus.

And receives salvation. And so as we grasp the essence, the entry and the extent of God's kingdom. Well then we should be increasingly filled with great praise and thanks to God.

That's the second thing, praise. You see that's the response of the man that Jesus commends.

Verse 15 he praises God. Verse 16 he falls at Jesus feet giving thanks.

He was full of praise and thanks because he has received salvation. I don't know if you know that tomorrow is Blue Monday. Third Monday in January.

[26 : 32] Supposed to be the most depressing day of the year. First coined in 2005. We're all cold. We're not in Soweto. The credit card payments from Christmas are due.

Riddled with guilt that our New Year's resolutions have fallen by the wayside. But however each of us approach the concept of Blue Monday. Whether you do get the January blues.

Or whether you think it's just something completely made up. We can praise at God and give thanks to him for what he has done for us each and every day. Yet as perhaps as we go on in the Christian life.

Thankfulness towards Jesus becomes harder. We instill thankfulness in our children. We tell them to say their thank yous. To write the thank you cards in January after Christmas.

But if we're honest, we're weary. And thankfulness is hard as we go on. And we tend towards self-sufficiency in our lives.

[27 : 41] But this morning in this term, we are to share the response of this leper. Outsiders brought near.

Brought into the kingdom. A sinner receiving salvation. That talk of being saved can sound overly zealous, can't it?

If someone asked you, when were you saved? Sounds a bit over the top. A view of Christianity to our friends, perhaps. But this leper is not embarrassed at all.

And we needn't be either. The kingdom of God is within your grasp, Jesus says. We can enter it now. Through faith in the king who has secured salvation.

For us and all those who come to him in faith. The stain of sin and guilt removed. Let's pray together.

[28 : 41] The kingdom of God is in the midst of you. Heavenly Father, we thank you for the Lord Jesus.

That when he came, your kingdom broke in. That salvation is on offer. To all those who come to him. Please help us respond rightly like this leper.

With praise and thanksgiving. Please help us to praise you each and every day. For our certain place in that kingdom. Please help us to give thanks each and every day.

For what you have done for us in Jesus. Amen.