

One of the aspects that I enjoy most about being a pastor... is when I get to teach people how to study God's Word... and draw out it's principles on their own – through careful analysis. The word for this is “hermeneutics.” Hermeneutics is the art and science of Bible interpretation.

Today I am in a position where I simply **must** start the sermon by teaching a **crucial** hermeneutical principle. ... But first... please accept my apology for not treating this principle (that I am about to teach) with the importance that it has – until *now*. ... Today I am going to start by teaching you something that you NOT ONLY need in order to understand today's passage in Luke... but it will (more importantly) help you understand ANY passage of Scripture.

Bible students in college and seminary are taught what is called the “Hermeneutical Circle.” Simply put... the hermeneutical circle recognizes that the Bible has so many individual parts. We have individual sections and verse after verse of narratives... poetry... law... prophecy... gospels... and epistles. And in order to understand any passage of Scripture (any of these smaller parts)... we must know the big picture (the message of the whole thing... the whole Bible.) But we can't know the whole big picture – unless we know the individual parts. **THIS** is the hermeneutical circle. It is a dilemma for many.

(But here is the good news!) ... You and I come to the Bible – standing on the shoulders of scholars who have studied the individual parts for centuries... and (from them) we can have a very good idea of the big picture – the Big Idea of the Bible – from Genesis to Revelation (and every part and detail that is in between.)

We are going to need this big picture to comprehend our passage today in Luke... where Jesus discusses the Kingdom of God. What exactly is the Kingdom of God? ... (Well...) **It is** the big picture that I have been talking about. The Kingdom of God is what every part of Scripture is about. It is the glue that holds this entire book together. (Now... please hang with me... here. I promise that if you get this... it will help you every time you read God's Word.)

What exactly is meant by the phrase "The Kingdom of God"? It appears often in Scripture. In Luke's Gospel (alone) there are 27 occurrences of it. Matthew and Luke present Jesus' coming as "The Kingdom of God" finally coming. "It is here!" ...But it is not just a New Testament concept. It didn't begin when the Messiah came.

Knowing what the Kingdom of God means unlocks so much Bible understanding. ... So... I am going to ask every to repeat aloud a short phrase in three sections. Please say this short phrase after me (this is what the Kingdom of God means):

"God's people..." (Go ahead and say that out-loud - "God's people...")

"in God's place..."

"under God's rule..."

Now please say it all together: "God's people... in God's place... under God's rule." Everything that you will ever read in the Bible is related to this. It is the big picture for understanding *any* individual passage. "God's people... in God's place... under God's rule." **All** of the Bible is about the Kingdom of God – every part... every verse... "God's people... in God's

place... under God's rule." There is NOTHING in here that is not related to it.

We first see the Kingdom of God in Genesis - through Adam and Eve (God's people)... in the Garden of Eden (God's place)... living in willing obedience to God (under God's rule.) ... The Bible's last book (the Book of Revelation) closes with the full restoration of the Kingdom of God (God's people... in God's place... under God's rule.) ...And everything between Genesis and Revelation explains how God is perfectly restoring people who are willing subjects of the perfect rule of God.

(OK... hang with me for just a little longer... then we will get to today's passage. But we need to grasp what the Kingdom of God is... so we can comprehend the perspective of the Pharisees - what they asked Jesus... and what it is... about which Jesus felt the need to teach His disciples.)

After Genesis and the Garden of Eden... and after the flood... the kingdom of God memorably comes into clear focus again when God made His covenant with Abraham... In Genesis 12:1–3... God promised that Abraham's descendants (God's people) would possess the promised land (God's place) and live under his authority (God's rule).

Scripture then reveals the historical process by which Israel came to enter the Promised Land. But at every step we notice that the current Kingdom of God was *temporary*... and *flawed* in terms of God's people living under God's rule. At one point God needed to rescue His people from captivity in Egypt — by the blood of the Passover lamb.

God gave to Moses the Law. It was all about how to be God's people... in God's place (Palestine)... under God's rule.

The period of Israel's kings (which reached its peak under David and Solomon (as flawed... disappointing... and temporary as it also was) imperfectly manifested a few of the essential elements of God's kingdom.

The failure of Solomon's kingdom... the split between Judah and Israel (as two separate nations) and the subsequent Babylonian Exile made it clear that God's people needed a greater clarity about the Kingdom of God. This is when the prophecies of prophets like (Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel) wrote and preached about a *future* great day when the perfect... everlasting kingdom of God would come.

Under trying times... when the Jews were in captivity... their prophets prophesied about this eternal kingdom with uniform passion. In fact... the Old Testament ends on a note of promise and expectation of the coming of the kingdom. This was followed by over 400 years of prophetic silence between the Old and New Testaments. ... During that time a number of solutions were dreamed of. ... Perhaps the best known was that of the Pharisees (who sought a literal return of a descendant from King David... who would overthrow Rome and establish Israel as the world's greatest power on earth.)

After the passing of those four hundred dark years... the night skies over Palestine gave way to a great company of angels - glorifying God for the incarnation of Jesus — Messiah! ... And thirty years later Jesus began to say, "*The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel*" (Mark 1:15). ... The gospel is the bringing near of the kingdom. Jesus did not mean that the ultimate fulfillment had taken place... but that the kingdom was near - in Him!

So here is (in a nutshell) what we need for our understanding of today's passage. ... We can say that the kingdom (both) **came** in Jesus Christ... and **will come** in its fullness when Jesus comes back... with all that is described by the Old Testament prophets and the Book of Revelation. ... In Jesus Christ - we find the kingdom of God. He stood before the Pharisees who questioned Him. He stood in their midst. (And) all that we know... or need to know about God's kingdom - is found in Christ.

But the Pharisees and religious leaders of Jesus day would not recognize the Kingdom of God in their very midst – because they were expecting wondrous signs in the sky... and huge military victories through campaigns that overthrew the Romans in specific geographic areas.

Our passage today in Luke is in two segments. In the first two verses... (Luke 17:20-21)... Jesus speaks with **Pharisees** and He reveals that the Kingdom **has come**. Then the rest of our passage today Jesus will be talking with His **disciples**... and He tells **them**... that there is **more** to come. The fullness of God's Kingdom (God's people... in God's place... under God's rule) **will come**. Please remember this: The kingdom of God is **NOW**... and **NOT YET**. (You and I can be God's people... in God's place... under God's rule – TODAY... but the complete fulfillment will come when Jesus comes back to earth and establishes His full reign.)

Let's turn now to our passage of study from Luke's Gospel...

Luke 17:20-21

The religious establishment was looking for a visible... material... temporal... and worldly kingdom. ... (They had no idea what the Kingdom of God actually was.) ... Everyone... including the Pharisees... wanted to

know when the kingdom of God would finally overthrow the dominion of the evil Roman Empire. ...They wanted a militant messiah... one who would smash the power of Rome and start a new global empire... with Jerusalem as its capital and *them* as its officers. ... With snobbish arrogance... they wanted to know when He was going to start moving in that direction. ... The Lord ignored their demand for a date and described instead the spiritual kingdom that He had come to build.

Verse 20 in the ESV says it much nicer than the original language of the New Testament put it. In the ESV... we read "*Being asked by the Pharisees...*" but the Greek says they were demanding. The word used here is ***eperotao {ep-er-o-tah'-o}*** means "*to accost one with an enquiry, to interrogate or demand.*" This verb was used of demanding an answer when examining a prisoner. It was also used to speak of persistent interrogation. The fact that they demanding to know the answer shows contempt... disrespect... and disdain for Jesus.

Jesus didn't answer the Pharisees' question—at least not directly. Jesus gave a brief answer to them in these two verses... compared to what He taught His disciples in the next 15 verses... (verses 23-37.) He didn't reveal any more details about the kingdom because the Pharisees were not sincere. ... (People who reject the King don't really need to know more about His government.)

But Jesus answered these hostile questioners according to their wrongful expectations. He tells them that the Kingdom does not come from observation. A.T. Robertson (who is known as the foremost Koine Greek scholar) says that the word for "observation" means "astronomical

observations.” In other words... Jesus is telling them that “*while you are looking up at the sky and trying to read it – the Kingdom of God is right here in your midst...*” “*You will not find it by looking up at the sky... and (verse 21)... “You will not find it by looking in specific geographical locations...*” It will **not** come in the same way that Alexander the Great... or Napoleon conquered lands with prancing horses... marching armies... and pompous outward show. People will not be greeting its arrival by shouting “*Here it is!*” or “*There it is!*” “*Hip-Hip Hoo-rey!*” “*Strike up the band!*”

Of course... Jesus birth was marked by a star that led the wisemen from the East... and Jesus had been performing many miraculous signs. But (here) Jesus is answering the Pharisee’s wrong expectations about a glorious and sudden overthrow of Rome. “*The Kingdom of God is in the midst of you.*”

Jesus’ point was that He was standing right in their midst. His kingdom had already begun in the hearts of His followers that had put their faith in Him. He was talking about a spiritual kingdom in men’s hearts. His spiritual kingdom (however) would eventually lead to a (physical) theocratic kingdom on earth - one day... in the future. (And about the future aspect of the Kingdom of God... He spoke further - to His disciples.)

Having given the Pharisees more than enough to think about regarding the **now** (aspect) of the kingdom... Jesus went on to offer teaching... (possibly in private) to His disciples... about the **not yet** (aspect) of the kingdom. (Don’t forget) The Kingdom of God is: NOW and NOT YET.

The NOT YET is more of what the Pharisees were expecting. It is still NOT YET to you and I. We are waiting for it – and it will come after the tribulation. The NOW aspect of the Kingdom of God for you and I is wrapped up in the church. Christ’s rule in and through the church is the Kingdom of God (NOW) for us.

What we are about to read is Jesus’ address to the Jewish national concerns about the Kingdom of God. Jesus discussed the coming of the NOT YET Kingdom of God from the Jewish nation’s standpoint. The things we are about to read are concerned primarily with the Jewish people – with whom God is not finished. The church will *already* have been raptured and God will still be dealing with His people (the Jews) in these verses that we are about to read. That is important. Please don’t try to read the rapture (or the church) into any of the verses that we are about to read in our remaining time today.

Luke 17:22-25

The “*days of the son of man*” are the NOT YET kingdom that will come when Jesus returns. This will come with sudden astronomical signs in the sky. (Everyone will know... it will not be a hidden spiritual kingdom... nor will it be kept secret from anyone alive at that time on earth.) It won’t start small and in secret in some geographic location where you will need to go check it out (over there.)

This happens after the rapture of the church... (you and I will be with Jesus) and it is after the 7-year Tribulation that the Book of Revelation speaks of.

Jesus tells His disciples that they will yearn for this NOT YET kingdom (the ultimate fulfillment of the Kingdom of God)... but the disciples who Jesus was talking to - will not see it during their earthly lifetime. ... In fact... they are about to experience excessive hardship. Jesus is going to be rejected and killed by THIS GENERATION.

Then Jesus went on to predict (after His rejection) a period of time in which evil becomes complacent and apparently victorious. (This is where we are today.) Jesus illustrates this time from two Old Testament occurrences.

Jesus' words describe many people's priority today — “eating... drinking... marrying and being given in marriage ... buying and selling... planting and building.” ... (LISTEN!) Better homes and cars... gardening... menus and feasts... friends... marriage... children are all good things. But many people give such high priority and constant consideration to these things... that you might wonder whether they have a soul! ... They give no thought to God (and His ways) as their priority. They are shallow... complacent... comfortable — and lost.

Luke 17:26-30

Again... there is not anything wrong with buying and selling... planting and building... eating... and drinking... and giving oneself to marriage. What was definitely wrong, though... was the fact that their minds and hearts were entirely absorbed in these matters. They took no time to satisfy their souls' needs. They were utterly self-centered.

All the way up to the time when the NOT YET kingdom of God comes in its ultimate fulfillment – there will be complacency toward evil... and it will seem victorious. People will continue to live in blissful ignorance... rejecting

the testimonies of godly men and women until their world undergoes a cataclysmic change. Then it will be too late.

Luke 17:31-33

When all of this takes place... the church has already been raptured. We are gone. We are with Jesus. But God will still be dealing with the Jewish people. Revelation tells us that God will send 144,000 evangelists who will bring many Jews to believe in Jesus the Messiah. Two (in particular) will have special power and will (eventually) be killed in Jerusalem. But not before bringing a vast number of Jews to Christ.

Midway through the tribulation the AntiChrist will stand in the (rebuilt) Temple in Jerusalem... declare himself to be god... and demand that everyone worship him. In Matthew 24:17-18 Jesus said – when you see this happening (which is called the Abomination of Desolation) – flee to the hills immediately... because from then on... Tribulation will become MOST severe for the Jewish people. That is what our passage is (also) saying. Flee – run! Don't be concerned with your possessions. Remember Lot's wife – who looked back and wanted those possessions.

Jesus in our passage today is telling His disciples that the NOT YET Kingdom (the ultimate fulfillment of the Kingdom of God) is coming. But first... Jesus will be rejected... then complacency about evil will set in... then tremendous judgment will occur. But you must not place material things above spiritual matters.

Luke 17:34-36

Jesus is NOT discussing the rapture of the church in these verses. These verses are about what will happen AFTER the church has been raptured.

The ones who are taken away (here) are taken to judgment. Some will be left. The ones who are left behind (here) will be those who survive the Tribulation... and get to experience the NOT YET Kingdom. [P A U S E]

His disciples locked into and responded to the news about the horrific judgment. They asked Jesus “where?” *“Where will those who are facing judgment be taken?”*

Luke 17:37

Jesus is saying: “Do not worry about where the judgment will occur... because once it comes... (1) it will be too late... and (2) all will see it.”

So the point Jesus makes is the finality of judgment when it becomes visible. ... All will see the judgment’s horrific finality... as everyone can see a circling group of vultures. The similar image in reference to the coming’s being like lightning. Both of these images depict the certainty and visibility of the events. When the Son of Man returns and the judgment comes... it will be obvious. ... [P A U S E] ...

As I bring this to a close today... I must acknowledge that I have been detailing an interpretation of this passage – to which not every Bible scholar is in total agreement. But I have done my best to stay as true to the Bible’s complete message as I can.

Bible prophecy will never seem to fully satisfy everyone’s curiosity. But I believe that we have been given enough (actually - more than enough) for us to absorb and deepen our faith in the Bible’s truth... and be prepared for the future. Prophecy was not given so that we will know all the details related to the future; it was given so that we will know how to obey when the time is right.

As believers... we live in the tension of the Kingdom NOW... and the Kingdom NOT YET. It is because of the Kingdom NOW that we have great assurance that the Kingdom NOT YET is indeed coming. Until that time we must be God's people... in God's place... under God's rule.

Knowing what we know about the Kingdom NOT YET is like a road map... the prophecy tells you where you are... where you are going... and how to get there alive.

You have the map; now drive carefully!

Reuters mentioned on December 22, 2003 that thousands of Dutch residents spent time digging through their garbage after they learned that they might have thrown away a beautiful diamond. ... A local jeweler sent 4,000 clients a mailing marking the tenth anniversary of his store. ... Two hundred of the envelopes contained a small diamond... while the others contained cubic zirconium (a cheap substitute used in costume jewelry.) Many people who received the letter ignored it... thinking it was junk mail and threw it away without looking inside.

When only a few people responded to the mailing... the jeweler called several clients and learned most had discarded the mailing without looking at the contents. Though sending precious stones to clients is not unusual in the Netherlands... the jeweler told a local newspaper, "*I was very naïve. People nowadays do not trust mailing like these anymore.*"

Perhaps the mailing seemed too good to be true to those who read the letter... so they threw the contents away after glancing at the letter. But others didn't even bother to open the package. That's a shame. But a

greater tragedy is the number of people who never bother to consider Bible prophecy about the Kingdom NOT YET.

You're among the blessed ones. You are like the disciples to whom Christ gave the whole story – not like the Pharisees (who got the short answer.)

The only question remaining is what will you do with the real diamond that God has given to you. God doesn't offer cubic zirconium to anyone... yet everyday people ignore His opportunity to respond to His Kingdom. They turn down His offer and throw away their opportunity at eternity. ... What will you do today?