

THE STORY OF JESUS' MINISTRY

The arrival of God's kingdom, *Luke 17:20-21*

Next month, at Easter, many people will observe Jesus' death and resurrection. That holiday pairs with Christmas, a date when many celebrate Jesus' birth. Our calendar revolves around the beginning and end of Jesus' life but includes no special times to recognize his ministry. That gap reveals the tendency to interpret his life in terms of his birth, death, and resurrection. However, we should notice that the gospels dedicate considerably more time to Jesus' ministry than his birth and death. In fact, two of the four gospels do not even record Jesus' birth. While volume alone does not determine significance, it does contribute to how we assess importance. Given the weight the gospels give to the long middle section of Jesus' ministry, we will take the next three weeks to explore the message of the kingdom driving Jesus' ministry. This lesson begins that series by noting that Jesus' ministry announced the arrival of God's kingdom in the world. However, the kingdom he proclaimed did not look like any of the world's kingdoms, nor did it match the expectations of the Jewish people. So, what does the arrival of God's kingdom mean?

The gospel in the gospels

- Luke notes that Jesus began his ministry by traveling throughout Galilee, teaching in its synagogues (*Luke 4:14-15*).
- Luke also offers his readers insight into what Jesus taught by recording Jesus' teaching in the synagogue in his hometown of Nazareth (*Luke 17:16-21*). Reading from "the scroll of the prophet Isaiah,"¹ Jesus announced that he fulfilled the "good news" about which Isaiah prophesied (*Luke 4:17-21*).
 - Isaiah's "good news" announced God's promise to rescue His people from the hand of their enemies and restore His blessings to them (*Isaiah 61:1-2*).
 - Isaiah connected the "good news" to the establishment of an everlasting kingdom ruled by a new David (*2 Samuel 7:4-16; Isaiah 9:1-7; 11:1-10; Ezekiel 37:15-27*).
 - The anticipation of a future kingdom moves throughout the prophets, whose messages offer accumulating insights. Daniel, for example, received visions revealing the kingdom would be founded on God's judgment of the world's empires (*Daniel 7:13-14*).
- Even though many Jewish people were actively looking for the arrival of God's promised kingdom, Jesus' announcement about the fulfillment of Isaiah's "good news" surprised them.
 - Jesus' message about the kingdom's appearance surprised them because it did not look like the kingdom they anticipated (*John 18:33-36*) – *he resisted the tense kingdom politics of his day to focus on transforming people's hearts (Matthew 22:15-22)*.

¹ All quotes from the Bible come from *The Holy Bible, English Standard Version* (ESV Permanent Text Edition, Crossway, 2016) unless otherwise noted.



- Jesus' message about the kingdom's appearance surprised them because they misunderstood the identity of the enemy enslaving them (*Luke 1:67-74; 4:16-21; Matthew 1:18-23; John 8:31-47*) – *instead of announcing the fall of Rome, he declared the fall of Jerusalem (Matthew 24:1-35).*
- Jesus' message about the kingdom's appearance surprised them because they misunderstood the scope of God's promise (*Matthew 8:11-12; cf. Acts 1:6-8; Genesis 12:1-3; Daniel 7:13-14*) – *he taught the kingdom would be taken from them and given to foreigners (Matthew 8:11-12).*
- The misunderstandings common to Jesus' audiences caused them to miss the kingdom's arrival – **"the kingdom of God" arrived in Jesus (Luke 17:20-21).**
 - Jesus' ability to "cast out demons" confirmed his claim that "the kingdom of God has come upon you" (*Matthew 12:22-29*).
 - Jesus' evidence of the kingdom's arrival and his authority over it signaled its importance:
 - "Something better than the temple is here" (*Matthew 12:6*).
 - "Something better than Jonah is here" (*Matthew 12:41*).
 - "Something better than Solomon is here" (*Matthew 12:42*).
 - Despite the evidence he offered, the crowds' misunderstandings caused many of them to reject Jesus and the kingdom he announced (*Luke 4:16-30; Matthew 12:22-32*).

Applications

- The "kingdom" is not simply code for 'heaven.' Instead, it refers to a reality present in the world – *"the kingdom of God" came to earth (Luke 17:20-21).*
- By coming to earth, the kingdom seeks to reshape this reality (*cf. Matthew 4:17, 23*).
- The kingdom works slowly, transforming hearts rather than overthrowing empires (*cf. Luke 19:11-27; Acts 1:6-8*).
- The kingdom's arrival has immediate, everyday implications for how we think and live – it expects gradual, over-time transformation in us. For example, Jesus' kingdom expects people to learn to love their enemies rather than to seek their defeat (*Matthew 5:43-48*).
- We participate in the kingdom's mission through our transformed thinking and behavior; we need to learn how to pattern our lives after our "heavenly Father" rather than the "Gentiles" (*Matthew 5:43-48*).
- If we focus on what we receive rather than the mission God has given to us through Jesus' kingdom, we will misunderstand the kingdom and potentially lose our place in it.

May God help us understand, and submit to, Jesus' kingdom.

