

The Kingdom of God: An Advent Meditation – Study Guide

I. Overview of the Sermon's Main Themes

This sermon, delivered on the first Sunday of Advent, delves into the nature of the Kingdom of God as described in Luke 17:20-30. It challenges common misconceptions about the Kingdom, particularly those held by the Pharisees, and offers both a serious warning and profound comfort to believers. The central message revolves around the idea that the Kingdom of God is not an observable, earthly entity, but an internal, spiritual reality, currently invisible, but destined for glorious revelation. The sermon emphasizes the absolute monarchy of Christ within the Church and contrasts the fleeting pleasures of the world with the eternal hope of believers.

II. Key Concepts and Biblical References

Luke 17:20-30: The foundational scripture for the sermon.

"The kingdom of God cometh not with observation, neither shall they say, lo here or lo there. For behold, the kingdom of God is within you." (v. 20-21): This is the core verse discussed, highlighting the invisible and internal nature of God's Kingdom.

"The days will come when ye shall desire to see one of the days of the Son of Man, and ye shall not see it." (v. 22): This speaks to the longing of disciples for Christ's visible return and the present reality of His unseen reign.

"For as the lightning that lighteth out of the one part under heaven shineth unto the other part under heaven. So shall also the Son of man be in his day." (v. 24): Describes the sudden and undeniable nature of Christ's second coming.

"But first he must suffer many things and be rejected of this generation." (v. 25): Acknowledges Christ's suffering before His glory, mirroring the tribulation believers will face.

Days of Noah and Lot (v. 26-30): Used as analogies to illustrate the world's preoccupation with earthly pleasures and its unpreparedness for divine judgment.

Acts 5:14 ("believers were the more added thereto multitudes both of men and of women believers"): Supports the idea that the true church consists of believers.

Ephesians 2 (foundation of apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ as chief cornerstone): Reinforces the spiritual foundation of the Church.

Great Commission (preach the gospel, he that believeth and is baptized shall be saved): Emphasizes faith as central to salvation and entry into the Kingdom.

Hebrews 10:25 (forsake not the assembling of yourselves together): Encourages local church membership and fellowship.

Revelation (sufferings of this present time not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed): Offers comfort regarding future glory.

III. Detailed Breakdown of Sermon Content

A. The Nature of the Christian Church and the Kingdom of God

Monarchy, not Democracy: The sermon asserts that the Christian Church is an absolute monarchy ruled by God through Jesus Christ, not a democracy where people govern themselves. This is presented as a positive reality because the King (Jesus) is gracious, merciful, and loving, unlike earthly kings.

Kingdom Within You: The Kingdom of God is not an observable, earthly organization, but an internal spiritual reality. It consists of all true believers in Jesus Christ, whose faith resides in the "inmost heart."

Invisible Nature: The Christian Church (the communion of saints) is invisible to human eyes because membership is by faith, which only God can see.

Contrast with Worldly Kingdoms: Establishment of Rule: Worldly kings use force; Christ establishes His kingdom through righteousness, truth, and saving grace.

Maintenance: Worldly kingdoms use carnal weapons (swords, guns); God's Kingdom is maintained by the preaching, teaching, and consistent application of God's Word (the "sword of the Spirit"), including both the Law (crushes the sinful heart) and the Gospel (brings comfort and salvation).

Support: Worldly governments use legalistic taxation; God's Kingdom is supported by the freewill offerings and sacrifices of loving, holy people.

B. Warning and Comfort for Believers

Warning to Outwardly Connected Members (Pharisees): The Pharisees had a false conception of the Kingdom of God, viewing it as an earthly political entity that would liberate them from Roman rule and give them dominion over other nations.

They trusted in their own outward works and external church connection rather than in Jesus.

Jesus' words, "The kingdom of God cometh not with observation," were a direct warning against this external focus.

Simply being a member of a local congregation or attending church is not enough; true membership in Christ's invisible kingdom requires sincere faith in the heart.

Those who habitually absent themselves from God's Word without good reason are not truly godly.

Comfort and Encouragement for True Believers (Disciples): Jesus' words in Luke 17:22-30, though seemingly uncomfoting, are full of glorious comfort for disciples.

Suffering and Tribulation: Believers will suffer much tribulation and bear a cross, just as Christ suffered before His glory. The world will enjoy itself while believers endure hardship and hatred for Christ's name.

Analogy of Noah and Lot: Just as destruction came suddenly upon the ungodly in Noah's and Lot's days, so too will it come upon those unprepared for Christ's second coming.

Longing for the Son of Man's Day: Disciples may long for a visible manifestation of heavenly glory or Christ's physical presence, but His kingdom is not of this world and comes not with observation. They must "figure on being under the cross."

Sudden, Glorious Return: Christ's second advent will be sudden and undeniable, like lightning. He will then make right all wrongs, glorify believers, and take them to His heavenly kingdom, which is beyond earthly suffering.

Triumphant Hope: The comfort lies in lifting eyes above fleeting worldly disappointments to the inexpressible glory awaiting believers in heaven. The sufferings of the present time are incomparable to future glory.

C. Call to Self-Examination and Living in Faith

Examine Yourselves: In this Advent season, believers are urged to examine themselves to ensure that the Kingdom of God is truly "within" them, meaning they possess true, sincere faith in their hearts.

Proofs of Faith: True faith is evidenced by godly works of righteousness in daily life and the avoidance of sin.

Urgency: This self-examination should not be postponed, as "the time is short" and the Lord's return will be quick. Today is the "time of salvation" where grace is still available through the Gospel.

IV. Quiz: Short Answer Questions

Answer each question in 2-3 sentences.

According to the sermon, how does the speaker describe the nature of the Christian Church, contrasting it with a common misconception?

What is the primary meaning of Jesus' statement, "The kingdom of God cometh not with observation"?

How did the Pharisees' understanding of the Kingdom of God differ from Jesus' teaching, as explained in the sermon?

List two ways the sermon contrasts the establishment and maintenance of earthly kingdoms with the Kingdom of God.

What is the "sword of the Spirit" mentioned in the sermon, and how does it function in maintaining the Kingdom of God?

Besides being a member of a local congregation, what deeper spiritual condition does the sermon emphasize as essential for being part of Christ's true kingdom?

Why does the sermon suggest that Jesus' words about His disciples desiring to see "one of the days of the Son of Man" are, in fact, comforting?

What historical events does Jesus use as analogies to describe the suddenness of His second coming and the fate of the unbelieving world?

According to the sermon, what is the blessed lot of believing disciples in this world, and what is the ultimate promise regarding their suffering?

What specific action does the sermon urge Christians to take during the Advent season, and why is this action critical?

V. Quiz Answer Key

The sermon asserts that the Christian Church is an absolute monarchy, ruled by God through Jesus Christ, not a democracy where people govern themselves. This is presented as a beneficial arrangement because their King is loving, gracious, and merciful.

It means the Kingdom of God is not a visible, earthly organization or political entity that can be pointed to or identified with the eye. Instead, it is an internal and spiritual reality, residing within the hearts of true believers.

The Pharisees conceived of the Kingdom of God as an earthly, political kingdom where the Messiah would free them from Roman rule and give them dominion over other nations. Jesus, however, taught that His kingdom is not of this world and is an affair of the inmost heart.

Earthly kingdoms are established by force of arms, while Christ establishes His kingdom by righteousness, truth, and saving grace. Worldly kingdoms are maintained by carnal weapons like swords and guns, but God's Kingdom is maintained by the preaching and teaching of God's Word.

The "sword of the Spirit" is identified as God's precious Word, which includes both the Law and the Gospel. The Law crushes the sinful heart and reveals sin, while the Gospel brings comfort, healing, and salvation in Christ Jesus.

The sermon stresses that beyond outward membership in a local congregation, one must have true, sincere, and earnest faith within their heart. This internal faith makes one a true member of Christ's invisible kingdom, the communion of saints, known only by God.

These words are comforting because they clearly set forth the blessed destiny of Christ's truly believing disciples in contrast to the terrible fate of unbelievers. Despite present suffering, believers have the certain hope of future glory and vindication at Christ's sudden return.

Jesus uses the days of Noah and Lot as analogies. In both cases, people were preoccupied with worldly pleasures until sudden and complete destruction came upon them, illustrating that the Son of Man's revelation will likewise come unexpectedly upon an unprepared world. The blessed lot of believing disciples in this world is to suffer much tribulation and trial, bearing a cross with Jesus, just as He suffered before His glory. However, the ultimate promise is that their suffering will not be for long, as Christ will gloriously return to make all wrongs right and take them to His heavenly kingdom.

The sermon urges Christians to "examine yourselves whether ye be in the faith" and "prove your own selves." This self-examination is critical because if the Kingdom of God is not truly within one's heart, they are not a part of God's kingdom at all, and time for salvation is short.

VI. Essay Format Questions

Discuss the sermon's argument for the Christian Church being an "absolute monarchy." Explain why the speaker believes this form of governance is "not a bad thing" and how it contrasts with typical earthly monarchies.

Analyze the central theme of "The kingdom of God cometh not with observation" by differentiating the Pharisees' understanding from Jesus' teaching. How does this distinction impact the definition of true membership in God's Kingdom?

Compare and contrast the characteristics of "kingdoms of this world" with the "Kingdom of God" as presented in the sermon. Focus on how each is established, maintained, and supported.

Explain the dual nature of the sermon's message: a "serious and earnest warning" and "wonderful comfort and encouragement." Provide specific examples from the text for both aspects and discuss for whom each message is primarily intended.

The sermon extensively uses the analogies of Noah and Lot. Discuss how these Old Testament narratives are employed to convey messages about both the ungodly world and the suffering/hope of believers in relation to the coming of the Son of Man.

VII. Glossary of Key Terms

Advent: The season preceding Christmas, observed in Christian churches as a time of expectant waiting and preparation for both the celebration of Christ's birth and His second coming.

Absolute Monarchy: A form of government where the monarch (king/queen) holds supreme autocratic authority, not restricted by written laws, legislature, or customs. In the sermon, it refers to God's unquestionable rule over the Christian Church.

Kingdom of God (or Kingdom of Heaven): A central theme in Jesus' teachings, referring to God's sovereign rule and reign, which is spiritual and internal rather than an earthly political entity. In the sermon, it is specifically described as "within you" and consisting of true believers.

Observation: In the context of "the kingdom of God cometh not with observation," it refers to something that can be outwardly seen, identified, or pointed to with the eye. The sermon emphasizes that God's Kingdom is not physically observable.

Pharisees: A prominent Jewish religious and political sect during the time of Jesus, known for their strict adherence to the Law. In the sermon, they represent those who focus on outward religious practices and have a mistaken, earthly understanding of the Messiah's kingdom.

Son of Man: A title Jesus often used to refer to Himself, highlighting both His humanity and His divine authority, particularly in relation to His future judgment and glorious return.

Days of Noah and Lot: Biblical accounts of divine judgment (the Flood and the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah) used by Jesus and the sermon as analogies. They illustrate the world's preoccupation with earthly life and its unpreparedness for sudden divine intervention and judgment.

Sword of the Spirit: A biblical metaphor (Ephesians 6:17) for the Word of God, described in the sermon as the means by which the Kingdom of God is maintained. It includes both the Law (which reveals sin) and the Gospel (which offers salvation).

Law (of God): The commandments and moral principles revealed by God, which serve to expose sin and demonstrate humanity's need for a Savior.

Gospel (of God's grace): The "good news" of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ, emphasizing God's mercy and forgiveness.

Communion of Saints: A theological concept referring to the spiritual fellowship and unity of all believers, living and dead, in Christ. The sermon identifies it with the invisible Holy Christian Church.

Self-Examination: The act of critically evaluating one's own faith, motives, and spiritual condition, as urged by the sermon during the Advent season.

Second Advent: Refers to the second coming of Jesus Christ to earth, which the sermon describes as sudden, glorious, and bringing both judgment for unbelievers and eternal salvation for believers.

Tribulation: Suffering, affliction, or distress. The sermon emphasizes that true believers will experience tribulation in this world, much like Christ suffered, before entering into glory.