

## Scripture for Reflection

Mark 1:15: "‘The time has come,’ he said. ‘The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!’" (NIV)

Matthew 6:33: "But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well." (NIV) Matthew 6:10, Jesus teaches His disciples to pray, "Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." (NIV)

Luke 17:20-21: "Once, on being asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, Jesus replied, 'The coming of the kingdom of God is not something that can be observed, nor will people say, 'Here it is,' or 'There it is,' because the kingdom of God is in your midst.'" (NIV)

## Full Sermon: The Kingdom of God

### A Brief, Important Exchange

Pharisee: "Teacher, when will the Kingdom of God come?"

Jesus: "The coming of the Kingdom of God is not something that can be observed, nor will people say, 'Here it is,' or 'There it is,' because the Kingdom of God is in your midst."

In this brief but important exchange, Jesus confronts the questions many of us ask about the "Kingdom of God." The Pharisees, like us, were looking for something concrete which would answer questions like "What is the Kingdom of God?", "Is it here or yet to come?", "Where is it...here, out there, in both places?" In those days most expected a grand, real, earthly political kingdom or a dramatic event that would unmistakably declare the arrival of God's rule. But Jesus' answer shifts their entire perspective: the Kingdom of God is not about external signs or a physical location—it is already present, hidden in plain sight, dwelling within and among us...and still it is yet to come. For us that may be hard to get our minds around, so let us break this apart and dig a little deeper into what scripture tells us.

### The Gospel Message About God's Kingdom in Three Scripture Selections

The Gospel includes a deep understanding of the Kingdom of God as central to its message. Jesus' teachings in the Gospels continually reference the Kingdom, emphasizing both its present reality and its future fulfillment.

**Present Reality: In Mark 1:15**, Jesus begins His ministry by proclaiming, "The time has come. The Kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!" Here, Jesus declares that the Kingdom has already arrived through His presence and ministry, calling people to repentance and faith.

**Future Fulfillment: In Matthew 6:10**, Jesus teaches His disciples to pray, “Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven,” indicating that while the Kingdom is present, it will be fully realized when God’s will is completely established on earth.

**Internal and Transformative: In Luke 17:20-21**, Jesus tells the Pharisees, “The Kingdom of God is not something that can be observed... because the Kingdom of God is in your midst,” showing that the Kingdom is not just a future event but something internal and active within believers.

## An Interesting Note About Translations

In Luke 17:20-21, Jesus tells the Pharisees, “The Kingdom of God is in your midst.” \*[NIV] Other translations vary slightly, for example, “The Kingdom of God is among you.” \*[NRSVUE] One striking translation I remember is, “The Kingdom of God is within you.” \*[NKJV]

\*[NIV – New International Version; NRSVUE – New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition; NKJV – New King James Version]

I think I grew up with the “The Kingdom of God is within you” translation, probably the King James version. Without going too deeply into academic details about the Greek version of this verse, there is one word which can be translated different ways...and it gives us insight into how we understand “The Kingdom of God.”

The variation in translations of Luke 17:21, whether “in your midst,” “among you,” or “within you” reflects the complexity of the Greek word “ἐντὸς” (entos). Each translation captures different aspects of the Kingdom of God: the present Jesus, the external communal presence of Jesus and believers, and the Biblical idea that God’s reign is yet to be fully realized.

These three meanings are reflected in the three Biblical references cited above. Thus, the Gospel integrates both the present experience of God’s reign and the hope for its complete fulfillment.

## The Kingdom of God is in Your Midst: How Then Shall We Act?

For us in the present time we are reminded that the Kingdom isn’t something far off or reserved for some future time. It is here, now, calling us to live differently, to reorient our priorities, and to embrace our role as co-laborers with God in bringing about His will on earth. And as we do this, we find that the Kingdom of God is not only something we await but something we can experience in the very fabric of our daily lives.

## Primary Allegiance to God, Shaping Priorities and Values

Imagine a successful business executive faced with a moral dilemma: she could easily cut corners to maximize profits or manipulate competitors, as many in her industry do. Instead, her commitment to God’s Kingdom shapes her decision. She prioritizes integrity over profit, valuing honesty and fair treatment of her employees and customers. This decision might cost her financially in the short term, but her loyalty to God and His principles drives her to live with honesty and compassion. By doing so, she demonstrates that her primary allegiance is not to worldly success or recognition but to the values of God’s Kingdom—truth, integrity, and justice.

*Trinity Western University* (TWU), a private Christian university in Canada, has consistently prioritized its religious convictions even when faced with legal challenges. In 2018, TWU fought for the right to open a law school that would require students to follow a community covenant, which included a commitment to Christian values, such as marriage between a man and a woman. This stance led to legal battles with provincial law societies that argued the covenant was discriminatory. Despite the potential for reputational and financial damage, TWU maintained its commitment to its faith-based values. While the Canadian Supreme Court eventually ruled against TWU, the university's unwavering commitment demonstrated a primary allegiance to God, shaping its priorities and values, even in the face of societal pressures.

### Living in Anticipation of the Fulfillment of God's Kingdom, Bringing Hope and Purpose

Consider a community in an economically depressed rural area where resources are scarce, and the future often seems bleak. A small group of believers comes together, motivated by their hope in the fulfillment of God's Kingdom. They start a community garden, inviting neighbors to plant, grow, and share food. Over time, this garden becomes more than just a place to grow vegetables—it becomes a symbol of hope and renewal. Though the world around them may seem broken, their anticipation of God's Kingdom fuels their efforts to make a difference, no matter how small. In this, they find purpose, knowing that their work is part of a larger divine plan of restoration.

*Nelson Mandela's* lifelong fight against apartheid in South Africa is an example of someone who lived in anticipation of justice, a value deeply rooted in the Kingdom of God. After spending 27 years in prison for his opposition to the apartheid regime, Mandela emerged without bitterness, seeking reconciliation rather than revenge. His hope for a future where racial equality could flourish was not just a political stance but reflected his broader belief in the eventual fulfillment of justice and peace—a vision aligned with the coming of God's Kingdom. Mandela's life work brought hope and purpose not just to himself but to millions of South Africans, inspiring them to believe that change and restoration were possible.

### Actively Participating in God's Kingdom Work of Justice, Mercy, and Love

A local church becomes aware of families in their town who are struggling to access affordable healthcare. Instead of remaining silent, the church members decide to act. They organize free health clinics, partnering with local doctors and nurses who volunteer their time. These efforts go beyond just meeting physical needs; the church members build relationships, offering emotional support and a listening ear. They are actively promoting justice by standing in the gap for the marginalized and offering mercy and love in practical, tangible ways. This community becomes a living example of what it looks like to be the hands and feet of God's Kingdom, showing that justice, mercy, and love are not abstract ideals but concrete actions.

*Bryan Stevenson*, a lawyer and the founder of the Equal Justice Initiative (EJI), has dedicated his career to defending those who are marginalized and wrongly convicted, particularly on death row. His work reflects active participation in God's Kingdom, where justice and mercy are core values. Stevenson's mission stems from his Christian belief that every person has inherent dignity and worth. He has fought tirelessly for racial justice, the reform of the criminal justice system, and

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against the death penalty, embodying the Kingdom principles of mercy, justice, and love through his legal advocacy and public service. His efforts have brought both legal and emotional support to people who had been otherwise forgotten or condemned.

## Conclusion

We know that leading a Christian life is not easy. Living as citizens of God's Kingdom often runs counter to the values of the world around us. While the world may prioritize power, success, and self-interest, the Kingdom of God calls us to humility, sacrifice, and love. But it is in this counter-cultural way of life that we find true purpose. As we seek first the Kingdom of God, we discover that our lives take on a new direction, one that leads not only to personal fulfillment but also to the flourishing of those around us.

This teaching reminds us of a fundamental truth: our primary allegiance is to God and His Kingdom, and this shapes the way we live and think. The Kingdom of God isn't tied to earthly powers or our human expectations of success or dominance. Instead, it calls us to a deeper alignment with God's values—values that transcend our immediate desires for control, security, or recognition. Jesus challenges us to seek God's reign in the here and now, in the daily choices we make, the priorities we set, and the values we embody.