

How are we? Merry Christmas. Let me just throw this out there. This will be the last weekend we will be in the gospel of Luke until late February. And let me try to explain why that is. First of all, at this point who cares anymore? At this point, is anyone really going, "Stay on task, Chandler?" It's been well over a year and a half now, so at this point we're just going to press pause because there's a couple of things I think we need to address. What I want to do for the next few weeks is just unpack a couple of things going into the new year. I want to sit down and go, "This is very much a transitional year for us in regards the fact that next Christmas we'll be in a new building, at least for the Highland Village campus. So I just wanted to do two weeks on how we needed to prepare for that. And then, starting the weekend of January 10, we're going to do a six week series on what the church is and what the church isn't. We're just going to get into what the Bible really says the church is vs. what it's not. So we're going to do that for about six weeks. And during that time we're rolling out not only a new covenant to our members but we'll introducing new elders to you. The new elder candidates have been in a one year training deal, and we will begin to roll them out to you. We are in no hurry to do that. What I mean by that is we're not going to do it like this: "Here they are. Let's vote." That's not what we're doing. So we're going to roll them out very slowly, they will be very visible and you'll have a shot to do Q&A's with them. So the roll out process will also begin starting in mid February. With all of that said, we're going to do a small piece of Luke here. I don't believe it's going to take us all that long, but it has everything to do with this coming week. Then we'll dismiss, and the next time we get back into Luke will be late February with a completion date sometime April of 2016.

So let's get going. Luke 17, we're going to pick it up in verse 11, a very strange story about ten lepers. Let me show you what's so peculiar about this, and then we're going to read verses 20-21. We'll spend the bulk of our time explaining 21-21, and then we'll go back and explain this story and what's happening here and then sit under the warning that we may be one of the nine in this story. Luke 11, "On the way to Jerusalem he was passing along between Samaria and Galilee. And as he entered 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." So the story is, they don't want to get near Jesus, so they stay their distance and just yell at Him. They're saying, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us. Heal us." And Jesus says, "Go show yourselves to the priests." In some way here, He's saying, "I'm going to heal you." So as they walk towards the priests, all ten of them are healed. Let's keep going, "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." That's pretty key to what's happening here. The Samaritans at this point were half-breed Jews who were very much racially profiled and outcast from Jewish society. So it's a pretty significant deal here that the Jews don't return but the Samaritan does. In fact, Jesus always tells these great stories where the Samaritan is the hero. It's probably one of the things that got Him killed. "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."

We'll come back to all that later. For now let's continue to verse 20, "Being asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, he answered them,..." We need to stop here, because there's no shadiness going on in this question. Normally when the Pharisees ask Him a question, they're trying to set Him up. If you've been with us through the gospel of Luke, their questions are pointed questions meant to trap Him. There is nothing in the Greek at all, there is no way to look and dig apart the way this was originally written that leads to this question being a trap. They're literally asking,

“When is the kingdom of God coming?” So here’s the question we’ve got to ask ourselves: What exactly is the kingdom of God? What are they asking about? What is this thing they are asking about? If you’ve got

any background here at the Village at all, one of the things I always point out to you when we get into the Old Testament is that the Old Testament constantly points to outside of itself. It points to something outside of itself as its fulfillment. And the kingdom of God is not a New Testament idea, but an Old Testament idea. It is the idea to which the Old Testament points outside of itself. Let’s do this. We cover this one a lot here too. In Genesis 1, the triune God overflows out of Himself onto the blank canvas of nothing and creates the universe. He creates it all. There’s not a point in it where anything dark or anything shady gets in there. It’s perfect *shalom*, it’s peace, it’s innocence, it’s beauty, it’s depth, it’s meaning. And God is with them and near them. It is the Garden. God makes man, God makes woman, puts the two together naked in the garden and says, “Eat and drink. Avoid this one. Be fruitful and multiply.” And you’ve got this picture of *shalom* where man and woman walk intimately with God. They walk in the purpose for which they were created. And when that happens, everything in creation is consumed and used and experienced and never terminates on itself, but rather it boils up in worship. So food creates worship, drink creates worship, sex creates worship, relationship creates worship, children create worship. This is how God created it. This is our first picture of the kingdom of God. Now, sin enters into the world and fractures the *shalom*, fractures the kingdom of God. What ends up happening now is instead of pursuing God, instead of worshiping God, we worship created things so that our affections terminate on just those things and don’t bubble up in worship for God, leaving everything hollow. Which means you can enjoy sex, but if it’s not bubbling up to worship of a creator God, it never satisfies. You can enjoy food, but you’ll either consume it without gratitude and rob yourself of worship or you’ll make it your god and become a glutton. Everything gets broken, from alcohol to relationships, everything gets broken. So the kingdom of God was fractured.

Now, God shows up a few generations later to a man by the name of Abraham. And He comes to Abraham and says, “From your line I’m going to create a people, and through this people I am going to bless the entire world.” The kingdom of God will once again be ushered in through the line of Abraham. And the Abrahamic Covenant was born, and it pointed to a future day that was coming. So you’ve got the kingdom of God in the Garden, the kingdom of God promised again in the Abrahamic Covenant. And then you’ve got Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, and for several generations we have nothing, then Egypt gradually forgets about Joseph and then Charlton Heston as a baby is put into a basket and floats down the river right to Pharaoh’s palace and there Moses becomes one of the Egyptian rulers. And then he sees one of his countrymen being beaten, so he kills the Egyptian with his bare hands. And then he runs into the wilderness for forty years where he becomes a shepherd and then God shows up and goes, “Hey, we’re going. It’s time. The kingdom of God time, land flowing with milk and honey time.”

And Moses is like, “I can’t do it. I stutter. Send my brother.” He has all these excuses, and God finally says, “No, I’m sending you.” So he then heads up to Egypt, walks up to Pharaoh and says, “God sent me. Let my people go.” But Pharaoh says no, and the Scriptures say that God began to harden Pharaoh’s heart. If you’ll remember the story, Moses throws down his staff and it turns into a snake. And Pharaoh rolls his eyes, and his two magicians throw down their staffs and their staffs turn into snakes. Then they begin to argue about who’s more powerful, and then Moses’ staff begins to eat the other two staffs. But I guess Pharaoh didn’t see that one or he was a slow learner because he didn’t do anything about that. So the plagues began. You’ve got plague after plague after plague, and Pharaoh still will not relent. So finally Moses comes in and says, “The firstborn son of everyone is going to die.” And tell me there’s not some foreshadowing here. So the Jews take a lamb and kill it and they take the blood of the lamb, wipe it on the door frames of their homes and as the angel of death shows up and begins to kill the firstborn son of all the Egyptian men and women, he passes over their homes and leaves their firstborn sons. To which Pharaoh relents. So then, Moses leads God’s people out of slavery, right to the cusp of a land flowing with milk and honey, God’s place for God’s rule for God’s people. There was some disobedience that happens, and so God says, “Alright, I’ll kill off all you fools and I’ll let your

kids go in." So Moses, who had the most glamorous ministry in the history of mankind, gets to spend the last days of his life waiting for all the grumblers to die out. Once they finally die out, it's time to go in, but God pulls Moses up on the mountain and kills him.

Joshua brings the people into the Promised Land flowing with milk and honey, kingdom of God imagery. The problem was sin still remained and it wasn't ten chapters from when they crossed the Red Sea until they built a golden cow to worship. There's problems here. There's problems in the land flowing with milk and honey. So finally Israel establishes themselves as a nation with God as their king. And they go, "No, we want a man as a king. We don't just want God, we want a man like other nations." And God goes, "Trust Me, that's going to go bad for you. I'm trying to go kingdom of God here." But they go, "No, we want a man. Look at this guy. This guy is great. Let's make this guy our king." And so you've got this really imperfect picture of the kingdom of God with a human king who can never seem to get it right, none of them. And all of this is kingdom of God imagery for the Jew.

And then from here you get David and you get Solomon, and it doesn't go much farther than Solomon. The kingdom is broken up, the Babylonians take the Jews into exile and from this moment on, you get all the Old Testament apocalyptic prophets. And what do they say? They begin to point to this great and glorious day of the coming of the kingdom of God. So they got it full on in the garden, and now they keep getting it in these promises, they keep getting these shadows of it. The rule and the reign of the power of God in the present, it's what everything is built on for them. It's this big hope, and all the Old Testament prophets continue to go, "There is this great day coming...there is this great day coming... there is this great day coming..." In fact, Malachi 4, the last chapter in the Old Testament is a chapter on the coming of the kingdom of God, the great and glorious day of God. So this is what they're asking about. When they say, "When is the kingdom of God coming?," they're talking about the restoration of the fractured soul. They're asking about being relieved and removed from slavery, both external and internal. They're talking about a good, just, holy, right king who would lead them, protect them, and guide them. They're talking about the presence of God in their midst. That's what they're asking about.

Now to be fair, I think we have to address why they thought it was going to be a military ruler. Because I think the Pharisees get a hard rap most of the time, but some of it can be explained. Like I explained tax collectors, right? I think most of us grew up thinking tax collectors took \$20 more than they should have. That wasn't the case. I think the Pharisees had a legitimate complaint. Now the same thing is true on this. They didn't pull this idea of a military leader out of nowhere. Let me give you just a little inter-testament history between the New Testament and the Old Testament. Before Rome ruled over Israel, another empire ruled over Israel. The Seleucid Empire reigned over this piece of land in about 167B.C. A man named Judas Maccabeus, a Jew whose nickname was "The Hammer," led a revolt against the Seleucid Empire. From this revolt, this tiny sliver of land gains their independence from the Seleucid Empire through the military brilliance of Judas Maccabeus. So they well up, they fight this massive empire, they do these really creative things and Israel was once again its own empire...for about 25 years. Then a little place called Rome shows up and once again oppresses them. And so this is fresh in their minds. Judas Maccabeus is fresh in their minds. So they think this kind of apocalyptic Old Testament prophecy, great and glorious day of the king, is going to be like that. They think there will be a guy like Judas Maccabeus who shows up, there will be a "Hammer part II" who's going to show up and destroy Rome. And this time it's not just going to be for 25-40 years; this time it's going to be forever. And that's how that was kind of built in to what they were expecting on the kingdom of God. They were just wrong. And it's not just their history that has them looking for this great and glorious day. The human soul, regardless of historical background, was hard wired for this. Think of how everyone seems to be on some level or another on some sort of savior search. Like some of us think it's some level of economic prosperity, some of us think it's relational, but all of us are asking the same thing the Pharisees were: "When is this going to get here? When will there be peace in my mind and in my heart? When will I find the fullness of all things? When will I find purpose? When will I find meaning?" That's what this question is. "When

is the kingdom of God coming? When is this mess going to make sense? When am I going to come across that thing, that idea, that place that brings all of life experience, both joy and sorrow, under a purpose and puts me in a direction? When is it coming?" That's the question.

Now look at how Jesus answers it. "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!'" They had in their mind that there were going to be some sort of moon turning to blood, stars fracturing in two and falling on the earth apocalyptic images that were going to occur when the kingdom of God was ushered in. Even if it was just military signs, they were looking for rebellion to fire up, they were looking for a marked defeat of some Roman outpost. That's what they're looking for, and Jesus is going, "You're looking at the wrong things. You're missing it here. The kingdom of God is not coming like this or like that." The irony is they're talking to the coming of the kingdom of God. The kingdom is not over there, over here. Look at how He answers. "...nor will they say, 'Look, here it is!' or 'There!' for behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you." If you have a version of the Bible that says, "inside of you," I give you permission to mark that word out. That word is nowhere in the Greek. Now, Jesus just said to them, "I'm here. The kingdom is here. I'm in the midst of you right now." So let's see exactly what He's saying. "The restoration of what was broken in Genesis 3, it's here. The fulfillment of the Abrahamic Covenant, that all the nations on the earth will be blessed, it's here, it's begun. Freedom from slavery, both external and internal, it's here. Your king, your guide, your provider, the lover of your soul is here. I'm here. It has begun." And then He goes on after this and talks about the consummation, what comes after this. "Okay, here's where it begins, and here's how it ends. But the kingdom of God has begun."

And it has so many implications that you could talk for hours on this. It has spiritual implications. In fact, if it's not for the spiritual implications, there are no other implications. But spiritually the kingdom of God coming, Jesus Christ coming means that my soul is purchased, reconciled, made right. I am adopted as a son of God almighty. What was fractured in Genesis 3 between me and God, the enmity in my heart towards Him is removed and replaced with worship and affection. Sonship is given, the kingdom of God is here. But it also has social implications. Like I've been set free from the asinine pursuit of hierarchy and positioning, and I can lower myself and serve all. I've been freed in a materialistic sense, which means I'm not defined by my jeans, I'm not defined by my shoes, I'm not defined by my clothes and I'm not defined by where I live or what I drive. In fact, I've been set free to give whatever I have away for the good of the kingdom. I've been set free, spiritually coming to the kingdom, socially coming to the kingdom. Any power, any authority, anything I have is not given to me to lord it over anyone, but so that I might serve. That's the coming of the kingdom. Materialistically, I'm not, "Let's gather trinket after trinket after trinket to fill some void in my life." But instead it's open-handed generosity to the saints and the poor and oppressed. That's the coming of the kingdom. And He's going, "I'm right here. I'm standing in front of you. The kingdom of God is in the midst of you."

So back to our ten lepers. This is a crazy week, can we agree? It's crazy because even if you have to go to work, it's hard to get anything done. Because your crazy aunt is coming in, and she's probably going to steal stuff, so you've got to hide it. Or is that just my family? It's just a crazy week. It's a crazy week where for us the emphasis is not on family, it's not on friends. The emphasis is on the incarnation of the Son of God, the coming of the kingdom. That's our emphasis, that's our weight, that's what we are celebrating. So at some level, you have to start going, "Are we really celebrating that? Are we really thinking that way at all? Are we informing our children that's what we're celebrating?" There are a lot of things going on this time of year that are a very poor substitute for what's actually going on right now. And I'm wondering if we're not careful, if we might make it all the way to the priests instead of coming back to where we should be. I'm wondering if in the end there might be a lot of cool presents and maybe great family times and a great day or two off but a complete swing and miss when it comes to what we're really supposed to be celebrating here: the ushering in of the kingdom of God. This is why in the book of Hebrews 11, when you've got the role call of faith, the writer of Hebrews

says, "You get something that all of these men and women just longed for. Like Moses, he just hoped for it. Abraham just hoped for it. Isaiah just prophesied on it and hoped for it. But you get to know it. You get to walk in it. You get to worship it. You get to exalt it. It's not hope for you alone; it's here. That's what you get. That's your gift this Christmas. The kingdom is here." That's what we should be celebrating. That's what we should be teaching our children. That's what we should be enjoying. Because I think the other option is to get all the way to the priest and go, "Hey, look at us. We're clean....Hey, look at us. Here's your remote control truck...Hey, look at us. We've done well. Get your stocking jolly St. Nicky. Dig in...Hey, we've done well. Merry Christmas." Okay, you haven't done well; He's done well. We're so confused.

This past week I was out of town just working on some stuff. A great friend let me use his cabin, so I went out there and just worked. If you work 12-13 hours a day, it doesn't feel like it if you're wearing pajama pants in front of a fire. Late one night, I turned on the television out there and Oprah had this special on where there were hidden cameras filming to see if people make the right decision. I just giggled at it, because Oprah doesn't believe there's a right or wrong. And so now she's judging on whether or not people make a right or wrong decision when I thought that there just was what there was and we needed to be true to ourselves. Do you see what I mean by confusion? Who is she to decide what action is right and what action is wrong when I'm a bigot for explaining what the Bible says is right and wrong? This is a strange and funny world that we live in. And my fear is that way too many of us are going to get sucked into it. I'm not going crazy here. Please have presents, please have family over and eat a meal, but just be sure you're celebrating what we're supposed to be celebrating and we're not celebrating winter. We're celebrating that the kingdom is here and has been fulfilling the Abrahamic covenant in nation after nation after nation after nation. We will not have a third testament, for all that was written in the Old was fulfilled in God in the flesh, Jesus Christ. So this isn't some nostalgic handing out of gifts; it's a celebration that the kingdom is here.

Let's pray. "Father, I thank You for these men and women. And I do thank You that the kingdom is here. I do think You that we are not looking to some far off hope that has not been fulfilled but we're walking in a hope that is yes and coming. I pray that You would help us. I pray particularly for husbands and fathers that you might press us a little bit on how to lead our families in this season, how to exalt you and celebrate the incarnation and not something else. Help us. We love you. It's for Your beautiful name. Amen."