

THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS WITHIN YOU

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Preterists often use Luke 17:21 to defend the spiritual nature of the kingdom:

Luke 17:20-21 And when he was demanded of the Pharisees, when the kingdom of God should come, he answered them and said, The kingdom of God cometh not with observation: {21} Neither shall they say, Lo here! or, lo there! for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you.

I agree with the phrase "within you" in favor of "in your midst" as some translations read.

One person wrote me concerning this issue:

"Ward, would a better translation of this passage be 'The Kingdom of God is among you' or 'The Kingdom of God is in your midst', otherwise I believe, the reader is left with the impression that the Pharisees already had the Kingdom of God in them. I don't think this was possible or maybe they just didn't recognize the Kingdom of God truly in them. I think, the better understanding of this passage is that Jesus is and represents the Kingdom of God and the Pharisees didn't recognize or understand this."

Well, it is very possible as God frequently said that He would set His kingdom "in the midst of the heathen...etc." However, I have some arguments against the "in your midst" translation:

First, consider these passages:

"John 14:23 Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him."

We typically interpret this as God dwelling in us.

Also,

Ephesians 3:17 That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love,

That seems to be a theme in NT soteriology:

2 Corinthians 6:16 And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

Again, "in them" seems to be the regular NT motif regarding God dwelling with His people. After all, we are the Temple and God dwells in the Temple or the Church. Also, He is the Husband of the bride. The Husband dwells in the bride in the most intimate sense of the word.

And two more:

Rom 8:10 And if Christ be in you, the body is dead because of sin; but the Spirit is life because of righteousness.

Galatians 4:19 My little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you,

So then, that is my first argument, i.e. the frequency with which that theme is carried out in the NT

writings after Christ's ascension.

My second argument:

The objector wrote:

"Ward, would a better translation of this passage be "The Kingdom of God is among you" or "The Kingdom of God is in your midst", otherwise I believe, the reader is left with the impression that the Pharisees already had the Kingdom of God in them. I don't think this was possible or maybe they just didn't recognize the Kingdom of God truly in them."

Certainly I do not believe the kingdom of God was in the Pharisees. I have two examples to explain why Jesus used this term.

First, an analogy would be like this:

Suppose I ride the highest rollercoaster in the world. How would I describe it? It would be something like this:

"When you ascend to the top of the rollercoaster, suddenly you realize that you are climbing hundreds of feet above the city-all you can see is an ocean of buildings, streets, houses, trees...then you no longer hear the clicking of the chain dragging you to the top...your breath stops...and then it happens...the rollercoaster begins to shoot down the track at speeds in excess of 70mph. Your stomach climbs into your throat, you gasp for air...etc."

You get the idea. Christ was doing exactly what many of us do when trying to convey a thought in language the people can understand. Did he ever speak this way elsewhere?

John 6:32 Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Moses gave you not that bread from heaven; but my Father giveth you the true bread from heaven.

But consider the audience:

John 6:26 Jesus answered them and said, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Ye seek me, not because ye saw the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves, and were filled.

This same audience left Jesus Christ:

John 6:65-66 And he said, Therefore said I unto you, that no man can come unto me, except it were given unto him of my Father. {66} From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him.

In other words, my point is that just because Christ uses language with second person plural pronouns does not necessitate that the audience to which He was speaking were the actual recipients of any given blessing. Rather, many times he was merely describing the nature of some aspect of the kingdom.

Also (and this could be the strongest argument)...

The Pharisees had a natural or physical interpretation of the kingdom. Christ was constantly showing them that the nature of the kingdom was spiritual. The Pharisees asked: "When will the kingdom of God come." What was Christ's response? The same as usual: He first corrected their interpretation of the nature of the kingdom. "The kingdom of God does not come with observation, neither will they say *see* here or *see* there, for behold the kingdom of God is within you."

Everyone knew that the kingdom had not come, for both John the Baptist and Christ had both said that the kingdom was "at hand," not present. Therefore, since the Pharisees were asking when, if Christ said it was in your midst, they would not be corrected at all in their interpretation of the nature of the kingdom. Why? They understood it was yet future, and "in your midst" does not correct a nature problem at all, but "within you" definitely corrects a nature problem. In other words:

"When the kingdom of God comes, it will not come as you expect it, for the kingdom of God is a kingdom that is within you, not a physical kingdom."

Finally, the translations read:

21 nor will they say, "Look, here it is!" or, "There it is!" For behold, the kingdom of God is [15] in your midst.» 15= [15] Or within you NASB

21 nor will people say, 'Here it is,' or 'There it is,' because the kingdom of God is within [2] you." 2=2.21 Or among NIV

Young's literal: 21 nor shall they say, Lo, here; or lo, there; for lo, the reign of God is within you.'

Weymouth: 21 People will not be able to say, "Look, here it is!" or "There it is! That is because the kingdom of God is inside you.'

And of course the KJV: 21 Neither shall they say, Lo here! or, lo there! for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you.

I think there is far more evidence contextually, hermeneutically, and theologically to support that the phrase "within you" is really speaking of Christ (the kingdom) dwelling in a person rather than in the midst of the person. This does not negate the fact that the kingdom is in our midst, nor does it negate the fact that the kingdom being in the midst of God's people is a truth taught in Scripture. It is. But the evidence leans toward the passage in Luke meaning "within you."

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