

Luke 16:14-17; Jer. 17:9-10; The Revealing Reality of Jesus' Kingdom I. It's Accurate Nature II. It's Forceful Nature III. It's Enduring Nature

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, what is the Kingdom of God like? Well, when we look at the kingdoms of men, we find that there are all sorts of deceptions to be found. Some people who are rich live like they are poor- while some poor live like they are rich. The fact is, we can deceive others in this world. I have at times been surprised by people- when they do things that I never expected. Sometimes I am surprised by the good- some kind action or word from an unexpected source. Other times I am surprised by people's rebellion. Their lies, trickery and deceit seem to have no restraint. It is easy to be deceived. All you need to do is go on FB and look at the projected life of people. With their staged events, pictures and profiles meant to give you a general impression- which is often not true and even unrealistic! It is a sobering fact that although we might be deceived- and we might deceive others- the fact remains that God cannot be deceived. You cannot pull the wool over God's eyes- you cannot trick Him into believing something that is not true about yourself. So today we consider this theme: Jesus Christ exposes the reality of His kingdom in the midst of common deception.

### **I. It's Accurate Nature**

We start with the accurate nature of His kingdom. As v. 15 puts it, God sees what lives in your heart- He knows the condition of your soul. It is interesting that when a politician or public figure is caught in their web of lies- or some past transgression comes to light- what do they always say? "I regret my previous error in judgement. This action is not who I am- these words do not display who I am in my heart." So they say- but I ask you- how do you know what lives in their heart? Are you to trust them now- when they say they are being truthful- were their previous words or actions out of character? Well- in our context we remember that Jesus has just exposed the heart of the Pharisees. They were lovers of money- serving the idol of Mammon- and Jesus had just revealed the reality of their wickedness. They were grumbling and murmuring- soon plotting to kill Jesus because He spoke the truth. That is what lived in their hearts. The fact is, by nature were all deceitful. As we read in Jer. 17- the heart is deceitful above all things- desperately sick. But the Lord searches the heart and tests the mind. He will give to each as deserved. We are all by nature deceivers. Children, maybe you know

someone in your class who appears to be totally different kind of person- depending on their context. If you were to talk to this person alone, they would be kind enough to you. But if they are with a certain friend, their mean nature is drawn out. We can all pretend to be kind to others- while secretly hating them in our heart. But God cannot be mocked- He cannot be deceived or tricked. He weighs the heart- He knows what lives there. He judges a person's soul- knowing the true nature of a man. For the Pharisees- this was not good news. It is a fearful reality- because the Pharisees sought to elevate and exalt things that God did not. As the end of v. 15 puts it- man often praising things that not worthy of honor in God's sight. Things like power, riches and prestige. Think of Megan Rapinoe- the woman's soccer player. Praised by media and exalted by man- but her character is very anti- Christian. She is extremely proud and rude- yet our world praises her. All men seek to justify themselves by exalting their own abilities. Like the Pharisees with their long and load prayers. But God does not judge us based on our own standards! No- God knows what lives within. He knows the true nature of your heart. What is praiseworthy by God? Humility, generosity, contentment and holiness. A humble and contrite heart- these will not be despised by God! The LORD knows those who are His. He knows those who are united to Christ by faith- who are humbled by their sin and turn from it in repentance. So what lives in your heart? Do you truly delight in the LORD and His word- or do you crave the praise of men? So if God knows what lives in your heart- what your greatest desire is- what should be our primary pursuit? God sees you as you are- which is frightening for lovers of money- but encouraging for those who truly do love God even though they fall and fail! It is God who justifies as Rom. 8 says- who if He justifies you- who will condemn!

## **II. It's Forceful Nature**

Jesus continues in v. 16 by revealing what should be our first desire- the goal of our lives. As God's people, our greatest love and Joy should be in Christ, His Word, God's glory- even seeking first the Kingdom of God! This call to a radical pursuit reads like this- the good news of the Kingdom of God is preached, and everyone forces his way into it. Or it could be translated- the Kingdom is forcibly urged upon everyone. The word in the Greek is "Biaintai" meaning to suffer violence or to enter by force. Now what does Jesus mean when He points to the forceful- even violent nature of God's kingdom? Well, we can understand this in a variety of ways. First of all,

the Kingdom of God is not easy to enter. As we have read in recent weeks- we are called to take up our cross, forsake the world and all else, to pursue Christ and His kingdom with all our heart. Self-denial is not for the faint of heart! You can't serve God and man- choose this day who will be your God! You cannot be a casual Christian. A nominal Christian is not a true Christian- remember that God sees your heart. If you are lackadaisical- or half-hearted in your pursuit of righteousness- God sees this! No- we will forsake all to pursue it! The good news of the gospel has been proclaimed- and its truth is our every joy and delight! The Christian life is not a stroll through the park! After Jesus preached the sick and the sinners would trample others just to get to Jesus. No sea or roof of the house could keep them away! They would follow Jesus anywhere! It is this forceful- a whole hearted commitment that will manifest itself in the lives of God's people! We battle against sin without and within. And our sworn enemies never stop attacking! There is another aspect of this Kingdom that is violent- and that is the violence of those who serve God will receive in this world. As Jesus was standing there, the Pharisees' opposition to Christ is mounting. Those who follow Christ know that they will not be friends with this world. People are going to hate you, persecute you- say mean things about you- because of this Jesus whom you serve. The coming of Jesus' kingdom was bringing conflict- violence as John the Baptist himself experienced! It is not easy to enter the kingdom of God- nor is it easy for those who have entered the kingdom of God. Jesus' kingdom was breaking into this world- forcing Satan's kingdom to retreat. But as the army of darkness retreats, it grows ever more furious! The old is passing away, the new has come! So seek first the kingdom of God- pursue it with all your heart- run after this goal- sell all to gain this prize!

### **III. It's Enduring Nature**

As we come to v. 17 we find the enduring nature of Christ's kingdom- or more specifically the enduring nature of His word. In v. 16 we read of the Law, prophets and the gospel or the good news. And again in v. 17 we find the Law again. How is the Law of the LORD to be viewed by those who have been ushered into the Kingdom? Does the Law pass away- does it still have any use? Well, it is easier in fact for the earth to pass away than for the Law to become void and null. We know that Jesus did not come to abolish or destroy the Law- as Mt. 5 says- but to fulfill it. But now that Jesus has fulfilled the Law, how does it remain? In what capacity does the

Law endure as a part of Christ's kingdom? Although the Law and the Prophets- our OT- preceded John the Baptist, that does not mean that the Law no longer applies. The Law is still valid if viewed and used properly. The first error we must avoid is that of Legalism- thinking that we can keep the Law perfectly and earn our way into God's kingdom. That was the main problem of the Pharisees- they had turned the Law into a list of rules that only they could keep. The Law for them was an opportunity to boast because of their outward actions- while the LORD looked at their hearts and was not impressed. So the Law cannot serve as the basis for our justification- rather we find the good news of the gospel to tell us that we are saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. But that does not mean that the Law is useless- or that it has no purpose. The second error to be avoided is called antinomianism- or the believe that Christians should be against the Law. Jesus does not through the Law out- in fact the Sermon on the Mount is really an extended sermon on how to apply the Law in the New Covenant. All Scripture, including the OT, is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness as II Tim. 3 says. So we can love God's Law- as Psalm 119 says- delighting in it day and night. We can use the Law to show us our sins- expose our need for a Savior. And we must use the Law to show us how to live- as a guide to a holy life of gratitude that is pleasing to God. Grateful Christians will love the Law of the LORD- because it reveals the heart of our God and it reveals the way He would have us live. Jesus is so clear here- that not one jot- not one dot of the "I" or cross of the "T" will pass away. OT Scripture is inspired by God- and it will stand the test of time. In fact, the Law is firmer- more steadfast and solid than the ground beneath your feet! Being justified- having a new heart by the Spirit and a new will and way- we will delight in and obey His law- being zealous for good works- eager to do what is right.

To conclude, as sinners we are by nature experts at deception. We can rationalize our sin and deceive those closest to us. But God cannot be mocked- He will not fall for our schemes. In our text, Jesus Christ exposes the reality of His kingdom in the midst of common deception. May it be true of us that we really do Love God and His word- delighting in His Law. Not giving simple lip service, but seeking to please Him from the heart! Knowing that God knows what lives within. He searches the heart and will give to each according to his ways.