



## **Luke 17: 20-23**

New International Version of the Holy Bible

**Once, having been asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, Jesus replied, “The kingdom of God does not come visibly, nor will people say, ‘Here it is,’ or ‘There it is,’ because the Kingdom of God is within you.” Then he said to his disciples, “The time is coming when you will long to see one of the days of the Son of Man, but you will not see it. Men will tell you, ‘There he is!’ or ‘Here he is!’ Do not go running off after them.”**

## **THE HOLY CHRISTIAN CHURCH**

*“I believe in the Holy Christian Church, the communion of saints.”* All of you confess this in the Apostles’ Creed whenever you read it. If someone outside the church were to ask you: *“What do you mean by the Holy Christian Church?”* - what would you answer?

There is much confusion about the Holy Christian Church or Christ’s Kingdom as it is sometimes called. If you read any of the literature of the Jehovah’s Witnesses then you know that they are totally confused on what Christ’s kingdom or the Holy Christian Church really is. A professor from Texas University writes in the Austin American: *“To many liberal thinking Jewish people of today the millennium will be ushered in by the cooperative work of good men of all nations, races, religions, rather than by a single Messianic personality.”* Note that he expects a *“millennium”* - some age in the future when all the people here on earth will live in perfect peace and harmony. However, this writer believes that the Messiah will have nothing to do with establishing that kingdom of the millennium. Even some of our mainline Christian churches believe in a millennium (*some*

*kingdom in this world where Christ will rule as king and all people will live in peace under him).*

The Pharisees in the days of Christ were just as confused as some are today. Christ claimed to be their king, but as far as they were concerned nothing was happening. They were getting impatient. Where was Christ's army and when would he drive the Romans out of the land? Our text says they demanded to know when his kingdom was going to come.

In the midst of all this confusion we better go back to the Holy Scriptures (*the Bible*) and hear what Christ himself had to say about his Kingdom or the Holy Christian Church.

## **I. The Holy Christian Church Is Invisible**

The question of the Pharisee was pointed and frank and Christ's reply was equally frank. He had told them before and patiently he tells them again: **"The kingdom of God does not come visibly . . ."** **Luke 17:20**

Earthly kingdoms are visible for they have capitals, palaces, mansions and enforce these kingdoms with armies, machine guns and bombs. But Christ says that God's Kingdom can't be observed because it's invisible.

I can prove to you that I'm a citizen of the United States by showing you the proper papers. I can prove to you that I am a member of the Lutheran Church by showing you my baptismal and confirmation certificates. But I cannot prove to you that I am a member of Christ's kingdom or of God's Holy Christian Church. Why not? Christ himself answers that when he adds: **"Men will tell you, 'There he is!' or 'Here he is!' Do not go running off after them."** **Luke 17:21**

**"The kingdom is within you."** It's not made up of externals like being confirmed, joining the church, going to church, reading your Bible or having family devotions. While all of these are important in the life of a

Christian, they in themselves do not prove that you are a Christian or a member of Christ's kingdom. The kingdom is instead within you. Your membership depends on the condition of your heart – on whether or not you believe in Christ who was crucified for the sins of the world and that you have accepted him as your own personal Savior. While faith in Christ shows in a Christian's life, faith itself is invisible. No one except God can look into your heart and see whether or not you believe in Jesus Christ. That's why Christ says you can't observe or see his kingdom and that's why we speak of the "*Invisible Church*".

What then is the Holy Christian Church? It's made up of all those who believe in Jesus Christ. There are no hypocrites in this church. The members in this congregation who trust in Christ as their Savior from sin and damnation as well as all believers in the United States, Canada, Japan, Russia, Africa, the Ukraine and Korea (*all those who believe in Christ*) are the Holy Christian Church. No one can count them but they are there. Christ knows them and rejoices to rule over them as Savior and king.

## **II. The Holy Christian Church is a Magnificent Church**

The Holy Christian Church is a magnificent church for, as we confess in the Creed, it is holy. Why is the church holy? Is it because we try to be holy? Obviously that can't be the answer. There is a great distance between trying to be holy and actually being holy. What then? Are we using exaggeration, like they do in so many commercials in the newspaper and on television, when we say the church is holy? Are we just using words which have no meaning? No, these words have meaning. The church is holy. St. Paul writes: **"Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless."** Ephesians 5:25-27

Thus according to Holy Scripture the church has been cleansed. It's without spot or wrinkle. The important point is: if you believe in Christ then this passage is talking about you for you are the church and you are holy. Christ cleansed you when you were brought to faith in him through baptism and his Word. In spite of your sins of the past week, the evil you did and the good you failed to do; in spite of your worries, and your acts which hurt others or the evil thoughts of your heart, you are still holy. You are just as holy as Christ is. The Bible teaches that God forgives sin to all who believe in Christ and this means that God forgives daily and completely, every time the believer sins. Even though you look dirty, in Christ you are clean. Even though you are sinful, in Christ you are forgiven. Even though you are a sinner, in Christ you are a saint.

How wonderful to be a member of this church. You're a saint. You are in fellowship with the saints at Ephesus, Corinth and Rome that were once addressed by St. Paul. You are in union with all the saints in heaven and just as holy as they are. Lift up your heads, put out your chests, sit up straight, you are saints! When you leave church, walk like saints, talk like saints, play and work like saints. According to St. Peter you are God's chosen people, a royal priesthood, and a holy nation. Let it show by singing his praises and serving him with gladness in the daytime and then sleep in peace at night. It makes no difference whether it's dark or light; for you are always holy in Christ Jesus.

### **III. The Church is Christian**

According to our Confessions the church is not just invisible and holy – it is also Christian. We believe in a Holy CHRISTIAN Church.

A man once asked his friend a certain question *“Are you a Christian?”* Taken by surprise the friend stuttered: *“Well, I suppose I am, I go to church quite regularly and try to do the best I can.”* *“That’s not what I asked,”* said the man. The point is that a person can go to church and try and live the

best he can and still not be a Christian. Unless you believe that Jesus died for your sins, you are not a Christian. Without faith in Christ there is no salvation and no Christian Church.

The believers in Antioch were the first to be called Christians because they believed in Christ. When the Pharisees and leaders of the Jewish church tried to stop Peter from preaching Christ who was risen from the dead as the Savior of all he replied: **“Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.” Acts 4:12** When St. Paul was writing to the Christians of Corinth on topic of building the church he reminded them: **“For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ.” I Corinthians 3:11** Jesus Christ is the foundation, the cornerstone, the head of the Church.

There are two lessons to be learned: The first lesson is that Christ is the foundation, cornerstone, and head of the church, no one can ever destroy it. The second lesson is Since Christ is that the church is built only wherever Christ is preached as Savior

**Lesson one:** Christ is the foundation of the church. Christ himself said: **“ . . . and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.” Matthew 16:18** The church and Christ are so intimately connected that no one can destroy one without destroying the other. The devil has tried and so have his cohorts. Kings, philosophers, whole nations have tried to destroy the church. Ahab, Nero, Domitian, Karl Marx, Darwin, Freud, Mrs. Murray, Rome, and Japan are only a few among the thousands who have fought the church. Besides these, there have always been the enemies within the church. There were the Scribes and the Pharisees in the days of Christ. Today the liberals deny the inspiration of Scripture and the legalists insist that we are saved by the law. Such inside enemies are busy trying to destroy the church from within. But no one will ever destroy the Holy Christian Church, it will stand forever.

If it's security you want, a place of permanent safety, then get into and stay in the church. St. Paul exhorts: **“Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you – unless, of course, you fail the test?” 2 Corinthians 13:5** There is no better time than now. Are you in the faith? Do you recognize your sinfulness and trust in Christ as your Savior? Christ, who loved you unto death and who loves you still says: *“Come, I’ll give you forgiveness, son-ship, all you need.”*

**Softly and tenderly Jesus is calling,  
Calling for you and for me . . .  
Come home, Calling O Sinner, come home**

**Lesson two:** Since Christ is the foundation of the church, the church is built only wherever Christ is preached as Savior. Today we hear a great deal about church growth. To be sure Christ and every sincere Christian works and prays for growth of the church. But let's remember that the church – that is, the Holy Christian Church – grows only where the parents, members, Sunday school teachers, and pastors speak of sin and grace. Church socials, ball teams, suppers and bazaars may have a place but no heart is ever changed or comforted until the Gospel is used. When St. Paul was about to die by execution he wrote a young pastor by the name of Timothy: **“In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge: Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage – with great patience and careful instruction.” II Timothy 4:1-2**

This is still basic advice to all who would build the church; in season and out of season, preach the Word.

## **IV. The Church is Eternal**

In the Creed we confess that we believe in the Holy Christian Church or the communion of saints, the two are the same. However, the last statement implies that the church is eternal. A saint is a person who believes in Christ. Some saints are already in heaven and others, like you, are still here on earth. You have union with each other now for all members of Christ are bound by a common faith. But there comes a great day when all the believers on earth will be united physically with those who are already in heaven.

**“For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage each other with these words.” I Thessalonians 4:16-18**

In spite of what the Jehovah’s Witnesses, the Zionists, and the millennialist say about the kingdom of Christ here on earth which is supposed to last a thousand years, we instead look for a kingdom which is eternal. Christ himself, when Pilate asked whether he were a king, replied: **“My kingdom is not of this world.” John 18:36**

Forty days after Easter the Christian Church celebrates Christ’s ascension. After his glorious resurrection on Easter morning, Jesus appeared to various disciples in various places to convince them of his resurrection. On the fortieth day he led them out of Jerusalem, up to the Mount of Olives and gave them final instructions to go and make disciples by baptizing all nations and by teaching them to observe all which he had commanded them. **“. . . and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.” Matthew 28:20** Then as he blessed them, he was



gradually lifted up, higher and higher, until a cloud moved below him and obstructed their view. While they were still looking up, hoping to get one more glimpse of him whom they loved and trusted, an angel suddenly appeared to them saying: **“Men of Galilee,” they said, “why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.” Acts1:11**

Earlier Christ had assured his disciples: **“In my Father’s house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.” John 14:2-3**

Where is Christ? He ascended into heaven. That’s where he will take us upon his return in order to live in his glorious kingdom forever. Keep on singing and rejoicing as you look ahead. The Holy Christian Church is eternal.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion we need to say a word about the connection between the Holy Christian Church and our own congregation. While membership in the Holy Christian Church through faith is of utmost importance, your membership in a local congregation also has its value. If there were no congregations where would you have been baptized, instructed in God’s Word, and confirmed? If there were no congregations what would you do about the Lord’s Supper, where would you get married, and by whom would you be buried? For their own good Christians want to join a Christian congregation and not just any congregation which calls itself Christian. Our Savior asks us to: **“. . . and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.” Matt. 28:20** That’s why we look for a congregation which does this: neither adding nor subtracting from the

teachings of our Lord. It is true that whenever Jesus Christ is preached as Savior some will be saved no matter what denomination it is. But it is also true that wherever any doctrine of Christ is denied or changed some people are hurt and even eternally lost. According to Christ, it's the TRUTH that makes people free. So, if you have not already done so, join a church which teaches Christ's Word in all its truth and support it not just for your own sake but also for the salvation of your children and for the many other people who are still without Christ and without hope.

The connection between the local congregation and the Holy Christian Church is like the doctor's office and the doctor – one leads you to the other. That's why the local congregation deserves your dedicated support. So there are three P's with which you support your congregation. They stand for prayer, personal service, and your purse. Those who pray, keep on praying; those of you who serve, keep on serving; those of who give, keep on giving. It's through people like you that congregations are established, the Gospel is preached, and the Holy Christian Church is built for the joy of Christ and for all who will eventually live with him in his eternal kingdom.

**I love Your Kingdom Lord  
The house of your abode  
The Church our blest Redeemer saved  
With his own precious blood.**

**For her my tears shall fall,  
For her my prayers ascent  
For her my cares and toils be given  
Til toils and cares shall end.**

Lutheran Hymn 462, verses 1,4