

The King is Coming; Keep Praying

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[0 : 00] Over the years I've taken and now I have set many examinations and most of them I have forgotten them almost immediately after having taken them. But I remember 35 years ago a scene, this was just before the summer holidays, Professor Holt walks into class, we had a chalkboard, he takes a piece of chalk in his hand, we're sitting there with our exam papers and he writes a simple sentence on the board, he said the American Civil War was a watershed moment. And we had three hours to discuss that particular sentence, that particular proposition. I use that as an illustration because the Bible presents us with three watershed moments in the New Testament. Now a watershed is a change of direction. So if you're interested, I agreed with the proposition that the American Civil War 1861 to 1865 profoundly changed the course of American history. So that pre-war and post-war were fundamentally different. When we come to the Bible we have three of these events. Event number one, not surprising, is Jesus.

The incarnation of Jesus is a watershed moment in human history. The arrival of Jesus changes the course of human history. Watershed moment two, the Holy Spirit. Pentecost, the Spirit is poured out, human history is forever changed. Today throughout the world, again it's hard to estimate but I'm told two billion or in excess of two billion people are worshiping the Lord Jesus Christ. That is quite an advance from 120 in Acts chapter 1.

The Holy Spirit is poured out and the gospel now goes forth with power to all the nations and the gospel is accompanied by the power of God. So Jesus coming, the Spirit being poured out, and as we come now to chapter 17 of Luke's gospel, we have the third and final watershed moment of the New Testament.

You see, the return of Jesus draws human history to a close as we know it. Now you know the phrase that sometimes we use, it's not the end of the world. For example, it's a summer's day, you buy an ice cream cone, and before you know it, the ice cream falls onto the ground. You're disappointed. You know, you had this high expectation of this lovely ice cream cone, there it is on the ground, and what someone might helpfully say, it's not the end of the world. It's just an ice cream cone. Luke chapter 17 is the end of the world. There is a day coming, we see this described in verse 24, for the Son of Man in His day.

There's a day coming and this day will change the course of human history forever. It will close the current chapter and commence a new chapter in such a way that the before and the after are profoundly different. So think of these three moments as you read the Bible. Two of these moments occur before the New Testament was written, the coming of Jesus. And when we talk about the Jesus event, we mean His life, we mean His death, and we mean His resurrection. And we speak of the Holy Spirit being poured out. We don't just mean Acts chapter 2, but we mean the subsequent history of the human race from Acts chapter 22 to the present.

[4 : 04] And the only reason why I can stand here with confidence is that the Holy Spirit Himself promises to take the Word of God and apply the Word to the hearts and lives of people. Otherwise, such an exercise like this would be completely and utterly pointless. So the coming of Jesus, the outpouring of the Spirit, and now the return of Jesus, which is at some point in the future. There are some books that you read that change your perspective forever. I remember reading a very short book on preaching. You might suggest that I read a few more, but I read a short book on preaching. And it was the proposition that was this was by a man called Stuart Oliott from Wales. And he said there are three elements to the teaching of Jesus. And when he identified them, you see them all the time. State, Jesus makes statements. Two, illustrate, Jesus illustrates His statements. And three, application or apply. So state, illustrate, and apply. And what we have here at the end of 17 and into 18 is Jesus doing exactly that. Jesus is telling us something profound about the future. His future and our future. And you see that's where human history coalesces. The future of Jesus and

the future of human race will intersect.

And that those two future events will be powerful and profound. State, illustrate, and apply. Verse 24, for the Son of Man in His day will be like the lightning which flashes and lights up the sky from one end to the other. But first he must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation. Jesus is telling us something significant and substantial. He's telling us something about the distant future and he's telling us something about the near future. He's telling us about the near future that suffering is coming, His suffering. But he's telling us something about the future to come, which is still in our future, that there is a day coming when the Son will return.

So I've got two points, two very simple points that really come from this passage. And the first is, the King is coming. Whether you like it or not. Whether you believe it or not. Whether you welcome it or not.

You see, God is not contingent. God does not require permission. God does not seek our approval. God does not seek our approval. Jesus came with or without human approval. In fact, He came without human recognition to be honest. Only a few people noticed Him when He came. The Holy Spirit was poured out again.

[7 : 05] This was not the result of a referendum. But this was part of God's redemptive plan. And God's redemptive plan always succeeds. Nothing can thwart Him. Nothing can oppose Him. Nothing can stop Him from doing what He is doing. So this is the end of the world as we know it. When Jesus comes and He is coming.

Human history comes to a close. And a new chapter commences. It's a watershed moment in human history. And it's in the future. So Jesus makes a statement that there's a day coming, the Son of Man, and that day will be His day. You see, as you read the narratives of Jesus, Matthew or Mark or Luke or John, there are some who get it and some who don't. Some who embrace and some who reject. Some who are transformed and transfixed and others who are embittered and emboldened and and annoyed. But there's a day coming when all will see, when all will know, when there will be no dubiety, no uncertainty, no lack of clarity.

Jesus arrived to begin with almost as we would say incognito. Didn't recognize Him. His birth was not written in the annals of human history because it was unimportant. But His return will be seen and experienced by all. So I said, Jesus makes statements. So He's making statements about His immediate future. He must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation. Time and again, He prepares His people. He prepares His disciples. They don't get it then, but they get it later. And maybe you're here today and maybe some of this material you don't get or you don't get fully. That's okay. Because God works in us and He enlightens our minds, He enlivens our hearts, so that things that are not clear now begin to become clearer. Jesus is teaching about His death and His resurrection during His life were unclear. But after His death and after His resurrection, strangely enough, they become clearer. And what we have is an example here that if Jesus is reliable about His description of the near future, then we have every encouragement to believe that He is accurate about His description of the more advanced future or the more distant future.

I said the second element of Jesus is preaching was illustration. Jesus gives us two very vivid illustrations. He gives us the illustration of Noah and He gives us the illustration of Lot.

[10 : 09] You know the story of Noah and he's not emphasizing the animals here, but the idea of a catastrophic worldwide flood. All of a sudden, all was not well. All of a sudden, there's only one place of safety and that is inside this boat. Just as it was in the days of Noah, so it will be in the days of the Son of Man. Life is going on as normal. Life is normal. There's eating and there's drinking. There's marriage and being given in marriage. But then the flood comes and everything changes in a moment. It was the same in the days of Lot, eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building. But the day Lot left Sodom, fire and sulfur rained down from heaven and destroyed them all. So what is Jesus telling us about His day? His day will be sudden. His day will be dramatic. His day will be surprising for many. Now Lot knew the day was coming or knew the moment was coming because he was rescued. He brought his wife. He brought his daughters. Noah knew the day was coming and he and his wife and his sons and their wives were all in the ark with the animals together. So some are prepared, but many are not. So Jesus is illustrating His day. Shocking, surprising, sudden, unexpected for many, but expected for some. It will be just like this. That's the illustration. That's Jesus, the teacher here.

I'm trying to explain, says Jesus, what the future is going to look like, but let me tell you what it's like. It's like the days of Noah and it's like the days of Lot. Days of Noah, catastrophic flood, days of

Lot, fire from heaven, but the picture is similar, isn't it? Everything is going on just as it was until it doesn't. Everything was normal as it always was until it wasn't and everything will be going on as normal until it isn't. Because when Jesus comes back, everything changes suddenly and there'll be many who do not know, many who are not prepared. You think of that illustration of the ark, those inside are fine, those outside are not fine. You think of Lot. Lot was rescued. His daughters were rescued.

His wife was rescued. But those who were left, they were not safe and they were not secure. And in fact, Jesus wants to tell us a little bit more about Lot, because we're told in verse 32, remember Lot's wife.

Remember Lot's wife. Don't turn back. Don't return. When the day comes, it will be just like this on the day the son of man is revealed. On that day, no one who is on the housetop with possessions inside should go down to get them. Likewise, no one in the field should go back for anything. Remember Lot's wife.

Now, my mother was not known for civil disobedience. But there was a time where there was a evacuation order for our part of New Jersey. And the evacuation order stated clearly, leave your homes and do not take anything. Not even pets. My mother, age 75, I'm not leaving my cats. And she didn't. She took the cats with her. Now, thankfully, she and the cats survived to tell the tale. But it's illustrative, isn't it?

[14:18] I can get, I better get the, I better get my wedding album. You know, I better get my passport. You know, wait, wait a second. Let me, no. Jesus said, no, no, there's no time. There's no time to go back. When he comes, that's it. There is no chance to return. There is no time to get anything. It's too late. It's time to go.

And when he comes back, it's time to go. So it's sudden. It's surprising. And there is no delay possible.

Lot's wife. You read the story of Lot in Genesis. Quite remarkable. Lot and his uncle Abraham. Lot settled in Sodom. And it seemed like Sodom had a very strong influence on Lot, on Lot's wife, on Lot's family. God rescued Lot. Lot was a righteous man living in an unrighteous place. Kind of like us today.

If you're a Christian, you're a righteous person, you're living in an unrighteous place. But this warning about Lot's wife is don't have a divided heart. One way or another, you need to choose. You need to choose where you're going. You need to choose whose side you're on. You can't have two, one foot in two camps. You see, when the moment came, Lot left. Now, the Bible tells us that he lingered, you know, he kind of liked where he was, and he lingered, but he left. Whereas Lot's wife turned back.

[16:01] That was a mistake. She made a mistake and that was her last mistake. Because when she turned back, she was turned to a pillar of salt. Now, what does this tell us? It tells us that Lot was compromised, but he still left. But it tells us that Lot's wife, that her heart was still there. And ultimately, your heart can only be one place or another. Is your heart here in the world? In that case, you will go for your stuff. You will turn back. You will delay. Or is your heart there with Jesus, with his coming, in his kingdom? You can't have one foot in two camps, and you have only one heart.

So where is your heart? Where is your desire? Where is your focus? If it's here in the world, or if it's there in the coming kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ. So Jesus says the day is coming.

It's his day. It's not our day. It's his day. There's a day coming when he will vindicate. There's a day coming when he will be seen for who he is. Whoever tries to keep their life will lose it. Now, you see, the great thing about Jesus, he doesn't keep us in the dark, does he? When he makes these statements, when he makes these illustrations, the good preacher hammers the point home. Verse 33, whoever tries to keep his life will lose it. And whoever loses their life will preserve it. So what is it? Do you want your life here? Is this where you're meant to be? Or are you willing to lose your life here to secure life that never ends there? It's a choice. And the Bible constantly presents us with choices. But the choices of the Bible are always accompanied with consequences. If you try to keep your life, you will lose it, says Jesus. But if you're willing to lose your life, you will preserve it.

That's again quite an, it's a strange principle, isn't it? I want my life. Well, you're not going to succeed. I'm willing to lose my life. Oh, you've chosen well. You see, Jesus has this ability of presenting these stark contrasts that seem not to make sense. If you're willing to lose your life, you can have it forever. But if you hold on to this life with both hands, you can't keep it. And you can't have eternal life either. I tell you on that night, two people will be in one bed. One will be taken, the

other left. Two women will be grinding corn together. One will be taken, and the other left. Let me just say, it's possible to interpret this passage in a lot of different ways. And I'm not going to interpret this passage in a lot of different ways. But there are different views from different Christians about the coming of our Lord Jesus. I would suggest that many of the differences deal with order of events, sequence rather than substance.

[19:12] It seems that Jesus is saying here, he might come at night when people are sleeping. He might come in the morning when they're grinding corn. He's not telling us the timetable. He's not saying this is a morning event or an evening event. What he's telling us is it's a sudden event where people will be doing normal things just like they do every day. But the normal things will cease on that day because that day will not be normal. It will be extraordinary. Verse 37, again, this passage does have its challenges.

Sometimes Jesus doesn't answer questions like we would like him to answer them. Sometimes he answers questions in a way that seems to be more confusing than helpful. Where Lord, they asked. Where there is a dead body, there the vultures will gather. Now if I was marking an exam paper, I might put in the margin non sequitur, you know, a little comment. This doesn't seem to follow. Well actually, if Jesus is telling us, it does follow. But how does it follow? What does he talk about when he talk about dead bodies and vultures?

I think what Jesus is saying here is that when this day comes, those who are rescued and safe will be rescued and safe. And all that's left will be utter carnage and destruction. Like the flood, those in the ark were safe. Those in the ark were not in the ark were not safe. Like that day in Sodom, Lot and the daughters, they were safe. Everyone else wasn't safe. On that day, when the righteous are redeemed, when the people of God are rescued, they will be safe. But everyone else, as it were, the people of God are safe. And the people of God are safe. And the people of God are safe. That's the consequence of not being ready. That's the picture that Jesus leaves. But the second point, and very briefly, is this. This is knowing that the king is coming, we are to keep praying. I said that the third element of the preaching style of Jesus is state, illustrate, and apply. Chapter 18 is the application.

Then, that's the linking word, and that's the word I had neglected to notice. And having been given this passage in both halves, that's the obvious word. Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up. The king is coming. There's trial and trouble and tribulation.

[22:16] There's heartache and hassle. The king is coming. People of God, what are you to do? Pray. People of God, what are you to keep doing? Pray. Keep praying. Don't give up. Why? The king's coming. There is a day coming when all will be made right, even though all is far from right now. Jesus uses this illustration. It's so vivid, isn't it? He told them in a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared what people thought. And there was a widow in that town who kept coming to him with the plea, grant me justice against my adversary. Not a fair fight, was it? Here's the judge. He has power. He has authority. He has status. Here's a widow. She's weak. She's vulnerable and she's isolated. It's not a fair fight, is it? She's weak. He's strong. He has status. She has none. He has resources. She has none. For some time he refused, but finally he said to himself, even though I don't fear God or care what people think, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice so that she won't eventually come and attack me. Looking closely at this passage, the idea here is the judge is worried about getting a black eye. The idea here is, you know, being struck in the eye and I've never been struck in the eye, but

I'm told that if you are struck in the eye hard enough, it creates, you know, bruising that gives you a black eye. Now the judge is not so much saying that this is a painful event, but the black eye would be a reputational event. This is reputational damage. The judge doesn't want to get a black eye, because if he gets a black eye, it'll be obvious that he's been hassled. And then when they say, who's been hassling you? Oh, it's this widow. She just doesn't stop. Let me give you an example. In prison, I've been working now, I just celebrated my 20th anniversary inside. It's a long time to be inside, but 20 years. And what I noticed over those years is that over the is that many guys have black eyes from time to time. And I say, what happened? Slipped in the shower. I mean, we've all done that.

You slip in the shower and your eye hits the, uh, the water faucet happens all the time. Or I, I slipped in the, in my room and my eye hit the corner of my bed. Again, it's quite a common, quite a common accident. We've all done that. But what are the guys saying? They've obviously been

punched in the face, but they don't want to admit that their reputation has been damaged, so they kind of tell you a somewhat obvious lie. They're trying to protect their reputation, because they don't want to say, oh, the reason why I've got a black guy is somebody stronger than me. Punch me in the eye.

The judge here is trying to keep his reputation because he's, he's saying somebody weaker than me has harassed and harried me so much that my reputation is, is damaged.

[25 : 23] So we pray. We don't give up praying. Not because God is like this unjust judge. No, he's not. He's completely just. God is completely just. And what's more, God also cares about his reputation. The unjust judge cares about his reputation for all the wrong reasons. God cares about his reputation for all the right reasons. So God is never threatened. God is never in danger of his reputation being damaged.

But when the people of God are harassed and harried, when the people of God are the victims of injustice, God's reputation is at stake. And just like the unjust judge cares about his reputation, God who is perfectly just and perfectly good, he cares about his reputation. He cares about his people. And what does he do?

He says, God will bring about justice for his chosen ones who cry out to him day and night. Will he keep putting them off? No. He will see that they get justice and quickly. God cares. He's not unjust. He's just.

He's not indifferent. He cares. And he makes sure that in the midst of this troubling time, the people of God are experiencing injustice. They are experiencing harassment. And they cry out to their God. They might not get human justice. They might not get a human hearing. But they cry out to God and God hears. And God answers. And just as Jesus returns at the right time, God always answers at the right time, in the right way, with the right response. So the king is coming. Get ready. He's coming suddenly. He's coming unpredictably by many standards.

[27 : 21] But the people of God should be ready. And when he comes, don't take anything with you. You can't take anything with you. You don't need anything with you. And when he comes, and until he comes, keep praying. Keep praying. We know he's good. We know he's just. We know he's loving. We know he cares.

We know he's loving. We know he's loving. We know he's loving. We know he's loving. We know he's loving. We know he's loving. Does he care about you and me? Absolutely. And just as the unjust judge eventually says, okay, okay, okay.

God, who is perfectly righteous, will see that his chosen ones receive mercy. Now this phrase, chosen ones, I'm going to just, I want to close with this quote from Revelation.

Because it's remarkable when you see these phrases repeated. You see the words in Luke 18 and verse 7. When, will God not bring about justice for his chosen ones who cry out to him day and night.

That same phrase is repeated in Revelation chapter 14. Revelation 17 verse 14. I'm sorry. Revelation 17, 14. They will wage war against the lamb.

[28 : 41] That's the enemies. But the lamb will triumph over them because he is Lord of Lord and King of Kings. And with him will be his called, chosen, and faithful followers.

There is a battle. And that battle is raging. The forces of good and the forces of evil. God and the devil. God and his angels. The devil and his demons. And God will win that victory.

And God will vindicate his people. That is the all encompassing nature of this event. So there is a watershed moment coming folks. And that watershed moment brings this era of human history to an end.

Are you ready? Or are you not? Are you prepared? Are you praying? Because the king is coming and he will vindicate his chosen people.

Jesus closes the section on this note. He says, however, when the son of man comes will he find faith on the earth.

[29 : 42] Faith is not just saying yes to a series of statements. Do you believe in God? Yes. Do you believe in God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit? Yes. Do you believe that Jesus is the savior of the world?

Yes. Do you believe, you know, all of these questions are, these are important questions. And you say yes. But faith is much more than just a saying of yes. The shorter catechism tells us that faith in Jesus Christ is a saving grace.

Whereby we receive and rest upon him alone for salvation. As he is offered to us in the gospel. This is a solid piece of furniture here. But it's not firmly affixed to the ground.

And I feel that if I lean too much on this, I'm going to, not only will the lectern topple, but I'll topple with it. Faith is resting on Jesus, knowing that he will not let us topple.

He will not let us fall. It's not just saying yes to a series of propositions. But it's resting upon him as he is offered to us in the gospel.

[30 : 44] How can you be ready? When the king comes, you have faith in his son. How can you be ready for Jesus' return? Because you have had faith in Jesus. You trust in him. You're praying to God.

And you're ready for that final event that brings human history to a close. And commences a new chapter in human history. And a new chapter in our life history.

A chapter that never ends. No more suffering. No more sorrow. No more injustice. No more pain. No more disease. No more death.

Why? The king has come. He's taken his people with him. And we will be with him forever and ever. Amen. We're going to close by singing, We will feast in the house of Zion.

We'll sing these words together.