

Luke 17 - Preparing for the King

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[0:00] And we're doing chapter 17, verse 20. Once having been asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, Jesus replied, the kingdom of God does not come with your careful observation, 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, 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.

Just as was in the days of Noah, so also will it be in the days of the Son of Man. People were eating, drinking, marrying, and being given up, giving in marriage up, to the days of Noah and to the ark.

Then the flood came and destroyed them all. It was the same in the days of Lot. People were 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.

[1:16] It will be just like this on the day that the Son of Man is revealed. On that day, no one who is on the roof of his house with his goods inside should go down and get them.

Likewise, no one in the field should go back for anything. Remember Lot's wife. Whoever tries to keep his life will lose it. Whoever loses his life will preserve it.

I tell you, on that night two people will be in one bed. One will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding grain together. One will be taken, the other left.

Where, Lord? they asked. He replied, Where there is a dead body, there the vultures will gather.

Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up. He said, In a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared about men. And there was a widow in that town who kept coming to him with the plea, Grant me justice against my adversary.

[2:22] For some time he refused, but finally he said to himself, Even though I don't fear God or care about men, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she won't eventually wear me out with her coming.

And the Lord said, Listen to what the unjust judge says. And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night?

Will he keep putting them off? I tell you, he will see that they get justice and quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?

To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everybody else, Jesus told this parable. Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector.

The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself. God, I thank you that I am not like other men. Robbers, evildoers, adulterers, or even like this tax collector.

[3:29] I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get. But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, God, have mercy on me, a sinner.

I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.

Thanks very much, Louise. Again, if somebody could help me out here, there's some notes and some pens.

Thank you very much, Ralph. If you'd like a pen to take notes, and a sheet of paper to follow along with the notes that are on the screen, then we'll do that now.

Just to remind us all that we've been going through a series of parables from Luke's Gospel. We've got one more next week, and then we move into July and August, when there will be other people who will be coming to speak.

[4 : 40] This morning, the focus will really be looking at the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector. But we read what we did read, just by way of context and background, which I think will give us better understanding of the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector.

Thanks, Ralph.

So, let's pray, and we'll ask for God's help as we look at his word together.

Father, would you please help us, help us to understand the word that you have had written and preserved and kept for us.

We pray that it would teach us and instruct us, and it would change us to be the kind of people that you call us to be in this time and in this age.

[6 : 19] And that if there is anything that we see in our lives that need to be changed, would you give us the grace to do so.

And we pray all of this because we want to become more like Jesus, so that we bring glory and honour to Jesus.

So, do your work amongst us by your Holy Spirit's power, we pray. Amen. Well, Jewish rabbis or Jewish teachers had a story that they used to tell to illustrate God's grace towards us.

The story went like this. It was of a loving and kind king who ruled over a very large city of which he had a great army.

And the king was wondering to himself whereabouts he should station his troops. And after much thought and counsel with others, he decided that he would station his troops at a location that was some distance away from the city.

[7 : 32] His reason? Well, the king thought that if the people in the city began to rebel against him, it would take a long time for his troops to get to the city.

In the interim, the rebels would have opportunity to come to their senses, back down, and turn again to the king.

So their application was very simple. God, in his grace, keeps his judgment at a distance, giving us time to repent before he comes.

Now that's been the big theme of the parables that we've been looking at together. Jesus is going to come again, and we must be prepared for his coming.

Now before we get to this parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector, there's something that Jesus is teaching us that will help us to understand it a little bit better.

[8 : 40] The first thing he tells us is that the king has come. So have a look at chapter 17, verse 20. Chapter 17, verse 20.

Once, having been asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, so there's a dialogue going on, and they're asking, when's the kingdom going to come? The people were expecting and longing for God's kingdom to arrive.

It would be a kingdom where God would execute justice, and he would establish peace and put everything right. And so they longed for the coming of God's king who would establish God's eternal kingdom.

So naturally there's this question, when is the kingdom coming? And when the kingdom comes, when is the king going to come? Well, look at how Jesus answers.

In verse 20, Jesus replied, the kingdom of God does not come with your careful observation. Nor will people say, here it is, or there it is.

[9 : 46] You see, the kingdom isn't going to come with this grand announcement. It's not going to be on the six o'clock news, or you're not going to get a message on Facebook about it.

It's going to come silently. In fact, look what Jesus says at the end of verse 21. He says, the kingdom of God is within you.

Or better translated, the kingdom of God is among you. So Jesus is saying to these people who are looking for the kingdom, who are longing for the king to come, Jesus is saying, the king and the kingdom has already come.

It's me. It's here. You've heard me teach. You've seen all my miracles. But yet you can't see that the king has already come among you.

Now that has a knock-on effect for us. Because the king has come, we are living in what is called a time of grace. This is a great big theme of Luke through his gospel.

[10:59] We read, don't we, of many times where we see Jesus coming and he's eating and drinking with sinners and tax collectors. He comes calling people like us into his kingdom.

Repent and believe. Receive the free gift of forgiveness. Come into my kingdom. I don't come for those who are healthy.

I come for the sick. Not for the righteous, but the unrighteous. This is a time of grace. Welcome, you sinners.

So because Jesus has now come, we live in a time of grace. But he also teaches us something else. He says the king has come, but the king will come.

Have a look at verse 22 of chapter 17. 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.

[12:02] Remember, Son of Man is a title. A title of a great king who was to come with absolute power and supreme authority. So he's saying, you'll long to see the day when the king comes, but you will not see it.

Men will tell you, there he is, or here he is. Do not go running after them. Don't be fooled by people who say, I know when Jesus is coming.

I'm able to discern when he's coming. 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.

You see, when Jesus returns, it will be different to his first coming when it was silent, but when the king returns, everybody will know without exception.

It will not be silent. Nobody will need to be telling us. It will be visible just like a flash of lightning across the dark sky. Everybody will see the coming of the king.

[13:13] Now when the king comes, it will not be a time of grace, but a time of judgment.

And he gives us two pictures to show us what it will be like. Two characters in the Old Testament. The first one is Noah. Look at verse 26. Just as it was in the days of Noah, so also will it be in the days of the Son of Man.

People were eating, drinking, marrying, and being given in marriage up to the day Noah entered the ark. Everybody remember the story going about their day-to-day lives?

Living and enjoying life, getting married, settling down, having kids. It was a time of grace. God was giving people time to turn to him, to change of their ways.

But, end of verse 27, then the flood came and destroyed them all.

[14:17] Judgment came just as God promised. It was the same, have a look at verse 28, with Lot. It was the same in the days of Lot.

People were eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building. People were going off to work, choosing their careers, off to college, saving their monies, buying homes, upgrading, doing all kinds of things.

It was a time of grace. God was giving the city time to turn to him, to put things right. But then, verse 29, the day Lot left Sodom, fire and sulfur rained down from heaven and destroyed them all.

Judgment came just as God promised. Now you see, what has happened in the past is just giving us a glimpse of what is to come.

Verse 30, it will be just like this on the day the Son of Man is revealed. we'll be going off to school or to college.

[15:36] You know, we could be at work. We could be sitting down with our mates having lunch.

We could be off on our holidays. We could be in the middle of a soccer match. Whatever we're doing or wherever we are, that day will come and it will be a day of judgment.

But as Jesus goes on to teach, he wants us to know that he is a just judge.

You see, the only reason judgment has not yet come is because we're living in this time or this age of grace. The King has come urging, calling people, all nations, all people, come to me.

Come and know my grace. Come and receive forgiveness. You see, God is a just and fair judge.

Have a look at chapter 18, verse 7. This is the parable of the widow and the unjust judge.

And what we're to see here is not a comparison saying God is like the unjust judge, but a complete contrast. God is not like this unjust judge. Verse 7.

[16:46] And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? I tell you, he will see that they get justice and quickly.

You see, God is a God of justice. He sees all that is going on in this world and he will not let the injustices keep going on.

God sees the 50,000 children, boys and girls who are trafficked from South and Central America into the US every year for the sex trade.

He sees the hundreds of thousands men and women who use and abuse them. God is not immune to the violence of ISIS as they go on beheading and raping innocent people.

God hasn't turned a blind eye to the 220,000 people in Syria who have been murdered and the other 11 million who have been displaced in the last five years alone.

[18:00] God sees every one of those boats that travel across the Mediterranean looking for somewhere to rest. Refugees.

God weeps and mourns over the 46,000 reports of domestic abuse in Ireland every single year and the countless hundreds who have to be rehomed.

God knows about the 260 million of unpaid tax in our country every year which means the most vulnerable suffer more and more because budgets have to be cut.

We only see facts and figures but God hears the cry of every act of violence and crime. These are not statistics these are people who suffer at the hands of others and God cares because God is a God of justice.

And God will bring his judgment to this world because it continues to rebel and behave the way that it does. But let's just bring all of that a little bit closer.

[19:16] We think about what's going on in the world. We think about what's going on in the country. But what does God see inside here? God sees every unkind act I have committed.

He hears every hurtful word and he knows every single selfish motive. He's seen when we've lost our temper.

He's seen when we've said something unkind. You see every single one of us well we've all contributed to this broken and disordered world and God looks at the world and he looks at all that he's made and God is grieved that we have hurt each other the way that we have done.

We deserve God's judgment but this is a time of grace. God is giving us time to change how we live, how we treat each other.

He is giving us time to turn to his son Jesus Christ. He is treating us with grace today because judgment will come.

[20:34] And so he is saying we need to be prepared. We need to be ready to meet the king. Now all of that is background, all of that helps us to understand why then Jesus goes on to tell this story of the Pharisee and the tax collector.

Let's read it in verse nine. You see to some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everybody else, Jesus told this parable.

Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee, the other a tax collector. You see Jesus through this story is warning us of the dangers of ignoring his grace and the blessing of seeking his grace.

What happens if we ignore his grace and what we receive if we seek his grace? First, ignoring his grace, verse 11, the Pharisee stood up and prayed about or to himself.

I mean, this is how arrogant he is. The Pharisee as he arrives in the temple gives the impression that he's talking to God, that he's praying to his Father in heaven, but in reality he's actually talking to himself.

[22:00] He's not asking God for anything. He's reminding himself of how self-righteous he is.

He's saying to himself, look at what I am not like. Verse 11, God, I thank you that I am not like other men, those robbers, evildoers, adulterers, or even, look at them, that tax collector.

Lord, I thank you that I'm not like my college friend. They just don't have time for you. God, I thank you that I'm not like the guy in work.

His life is in such a mess. Father, I thank you that I have not fallen like the one sitting behind me.

I mean, I don't want to judge them, but you know what they're like. You see, not only do we take pride in what we don't do, we take pride in what we do do.

[23:12] Look at what I am like, verse 12. I fast twice a week and I give a tenth of all I get. You know, I was the last one here last Sunday.

Everybody else had cleared off and I was still cleaning up. The church gave 600 euro to that mission. That means I must have given, let me think, what did I give?

I must have given a third. Yeah, I did. I gave a lot, didn't I? Why am I the only one who seems to be praying in the home group? I must be so much more spiritual than those other silent ones.

You see, we don't like the attitude of the Pharisee, do we? But the problem is we all compare and contrast. I'm not like them.

I'm so much better than what they're like. Why can't they be like me and do things the way I do it and have the same commitment and attitude that I have?

[24 : 22] It's all self-justification. It's arrogance. It's all about boosting our own egos. And the underlying fact is this.

When we talk or when we think like that, all we're saying is, I don't need God. I don't need grace. Other people do, but not me.

I will face God's judgment on my own terms. But there's another way to come.

Rather than ignore his grace, we come seeking his grace. Verse 13. But the tax collector, he stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast.

You know, the tax collectors, well, they were considered the lowest of the low in society. There were categories. You had sinners, and then you had tax collectors at the bottom of the pile.

[25 : 29] No hopers. But rather than ignore grace, he comes seeking grace. Look at verse 13 again.

Look at his humble approach. He stood at a distance. He wouldn't even look up to heaven, but beat his breast.

There's no bragging rights here. There's no talk of look at what I'm like or look at what I've done.

There's no comparing or contrasting with other people.

He sees himself as he truly is. He stands back at a distance. He understands he's separated from God.

He won't look up towards heaven. He knows he deserves God's just judgment. He beats his breast.

He is truly repentant for all that he has done.

[26 : 38] The tax collector sees himself as God sees him, and he humbly accepts that I am a sinner.

But he's not just humble, is he? He knows what he desperately needs. And that's why he comes praying, because he comes seeking.

Look at the end of verse 13. God, have mercy on me, a sinner. sinner. He brings nothing to God, only his sin.

He blames no one, only himself. He comes to the one who is gracious, full of grace, one who acts in grace, and comes seeking his mercy.

He throws himself completely at God. have mercy on me, a sinner. And how did God respond to these two people?

[27 : 44] Look at verse 14. I tell you that this man, the tax collector, rather than the other, the Pharisee, went home justified before God.

Do you see the difference here? The Pharisee, he wore a mask. He hides his sin. He covers over his sin.

He takes pride in all that he's done. On the other hand, the tax collector, well, he's just taken off his mask. He owns his sin for himself.

He confesses his sin. He relies on God's grace. And the tax collector shows us how we are to be prepared to meet the coming king.

This is the person who will be welcomed into the king's kingdom. Verse 14, or the end of verse 14, for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.

[28 : 51] You see, the point is so simple. We either humble ourselves today before God and experience his wonderful grace today, or he will humble us when he returns in judgment.

So humble ourselves today and experience his grace or he will humble us when we experience his judgment.

Now because this is a time of grace in which we live in, we should be people of grace.

And just by way of application for us in this, just very simply, three things. The way in which God's grace should affect us.

If we've come to experience this grace, if we come like the tax collector, here's three ways it should affect us. First, we live in God's grace every day.

[29 : 57] The only way to come before God is like the tax collector. There's no room for arrogant pride. There's no place for boasting. We bring only who we are as we are.

We don't blame other people. We don't point the finger at other people and say it's their fault. No, we come as we are, owning our own sin and resting in the rich grace of God.

And look again at verse 14. What happens when we do that? I tell you that this person, rather than the other, will go home justified before God.

When we receive his grace, we enter into a renewed and restored relationship with God. That means we no longer have to stand at a distance. We are now welcomed and accepted by God. We no longer have to hide from God and cower. We can now enjoy God, love him and be with him. Grace means we are now treated and treasured as his own son, welcomed into his eternal kingdom.

[31 : 03] So live in God's grace today. Enjoy it. Know it. But not only do we live in it, but it also means that we treat each other with grace.

You see, there is no place for the Pharisee. Look at verse 9. Chapter 18, verse 9.

To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everybody else. You see, we are no better or no worse than each other.

God's grace. Sometimes we have come to experience God's grace and yes, we have seen God change us and transform us and the temptation is to suddenly think, well, I am better than those other people.

Well, we are no better or no worse. We are all responsible for this broken world in which we live. So what we need is not to condemn each other and point fingers at each other, but to bring grace to each other, to remind each other that when we fall and when we fail, that we live in a time of grace, that now is the time to come and repent and ask God to pour out his mercy upon us and to help us to change and help us to live as his people.

[32 : 32] We don't drag each other down and condemn, we build each other up with the grace of God. So live in his grace, treat each other with grace, and then offer grace to the world.

I think that's the big message of this, isn't it? We live in a day of grace. God has delayed his judgment. He longs that none would perish, but that all would come and turn to him just like the tax collector.

And so we need to be people who practice grace and who offer grace to our friends and our family, to the world who has not yet come to know the good news of Christ.

It's not our job to withhold grace from people. It's not our role to say to somebody, you don't deserve grace.

That's what Pharisees do. No, we're the tax collector who has received God's grace in abundance. And now turn and point other people towards Jesus so that they can also know and experience the amazing grace of God.

[33 : 58] The king has come. Grace is here. The king will come. Judgment awaits.

May we live in God's grace today. Let's pray. Father, would you please, by your Holy Spirit, take this word that we have thought through and listened to and as we leave this building that you would continue to work it deep into our hearts and in our lives.

and if there is any pharisaic aspect in our hearts that you would expose it and you would show it and you would turn us quickly into the tax collector who just comes as we are, owning it, admitting it, ready to deal with it.

Father, you are good and gracious. We know that you will not turn us away, but you will forgive. You will change and you will restore. And so we long for more and more of your grace in our lives every day.

asking that you would help us to go into the community, into our workplaces with our colleagues that we think about, with friends and with family.

[35 : 52] Help us to point other people to the King of Grace. Father, please, by your Spirit, use us to bring people to yourself.

For we know you are a just God, and one day you will come. Please make us prepared and ready. We ask this for your glory.

Amen.