

Waiting for Jesus' Return

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[0 : 00] Good morning. Please keep your Bibles open to Luke 17 as we continue our series through the Gospel of Luke. Imagine you got a call.

Someone very important is coming to your house this week. You don't know when exactly, but it will be this week. What would you do?

You could choose to relax. It won't be tonight. Spend your time watching TV, taking naps, not bother cleaning up.

Or you could get busy straight away, making sure that you have food, tea, coffee, cleaning the toilet. And if they don't come on the day, you would make sure that everything stays clean.

Kids, eat outside. I'm sure most of you would do the latter and only relax after the person has left.

[1 : 06] Well, the Bible tells us many times that Jesus is coming. So what should we do now as we wait? Our passage today shows us what we must do while we wait.

Our passage today is quite long. The whole of chapter 17. And we're going to start by summarizing the last bit first, which is the part that we just read in verse 20 to 37.

It's going to be on the screen. So in verse 20, the Pharisees asked Jesus when the kingdom of God would come. They were assuming that the kingdom of God would be like a political military kingdom that would liberate the Jews from the Roman occupation.

But Jesus said, the coming of the kingdom of God could not be observed. That is, could not be predicted because it's a spiritual kingdom.

And it's, surprise, surprise, already in their midst. Because Jesus, the king, was already there doing the work of the kingdom, like healing the sick and raising the dead.

[2 : 18] So the kingdom of God was already there. He's already here now. But in verse 22, Jesus turned to the disciples and said that the kingdom of God was already there, but also at the same time, not yet.

It's still coming. Because Jesus would leave them and he would come back. Although the disciples would not be able to see him when he returns, because his return is going to be after their time.

Regardless, in verse 23 to 25, when Jesus returns, it will be like lightning flashing across the sky. Everyone will be able to see him.

It will be obvious. There's no need to follow people who claim they know about the secrets of the coming of the kingdom. It will be obvious.

In verse 26 to 36, although it will be obvious, the second coming will come so suddenly that people will just do normal things, like sleeping and grinding grain.

[3 : 32] In verse 37, the disciples are still confused, so they ask, where? Where is this going to happen? And Jesus says, where there's a dead body, there the vultures will gather.

In other words, it will be obvious. Like vultures know where there's a dead body, everyone will know when Jesus comes. So, that's a very quick overview of verse 20 to 37.

Jesus has come, has started the kingdom of God, and he will return to establish the kingdom of God in its fullness.

No one knows when or where, but when it does happen, it's going to be so obvious that everyone will know. But what do we do now as we wait?

My grandma passed away two weeks after Hannah and I got married. My parents told me that when she was still alive and when my parents visited her every two weeks or so, she would always, without fail, ask the same questions.

[4 : 47] When is Ricky getting married? When is his wedding? Why is it not coming soon? She was dying and she knew it.

And so, when my wedding was announced, she was a woman with a mission. She was busy. She called up people to organize who's going to pick her up.

She bought a new dress. She organized for her makeup to be done by a professional. And on the day, she came very early before everyone else came, prepared, beautiful, limping, because she wasn't able to walk or hear anything properly.

But she prepared herself. Are we like that? Are we people with a mission while we wait for the wedding of the Lamb, the day when Jesus returns and brings us home?

So, what must we do? What must we do while we wait? We go back to verse 1. In verse 1 to 3, Jesus warns us, first of all, to not be a stumbling block.

[6 : 06] Jesus said to his disciples, things that cause people to stumble are bound to come, but woe to anyone through whom they come. It would be better for them to be thrown into the sea with a millstone tied around their neck than to cause one of these little ones, that is, the disciples or the weak Christians, to stumble.

So, watch yourselves. In all of the Gospels, every time Jesus talks about the stumbling block, it's always in relation to the second coming.

anything can happen while we wait for the second coming, including Christians causing each other to sin to such an extent that they leave Jesus altogether.

That's what it means to stumble. And so, we must endeavor to help each other to stay faithful to Jesus. Through our words, conduct, teaching, advice, we ought to be careful not to cause people to leave Jesus while they are waiting for him.

Jesus says it's better for us to be thrown into the sea with a millstone around our neck. Sin is such an important issue.

[7 : 27] But not less important than that is the need for forgiveness in verse 3. If your brother or sister again refers to another Christian, sins against you, rebuke them and if they repent, forgive them.

This is another part of our mission as we are waiting for the second coming. We rebuke each other as we sin. not out of moral superiority or to judge them, but to invite repentance.

And if they repent, we must, that's what it says there, we must forgive them. In a sense, every time we rebuke people, we rebuke with open arms, ready for them to repent, ready to forgive.

In verse 4, even if they sin against you seven times in a day and seven times come back to you saying, I repent, I'm sorry, you must forgive them.

Seven is a perfect number. Forgiving them seven times means unlimited forgiveness. And so, basically, Jesus is saying, doesn't matter how many times they sin against you, as long as there's repentance and they say sorry, regardless how many times in a day, we must forgive them.

[9 : 02] We encounter here only two parts of our mission while we're waiting. We haven't mentioned anything about evangelism or praying. And these are already so heavy, aren't they?

To be careful not to cause people to stumble. so hard. To always, always forgive fellow Christians, no matter how many times they have sinned against us in a day, even harder.

How are we going to do this? The disciples knew how difficult these two commands were, and so, in verse 5, the apostle said to the Lord, increase our faith.

we don't know how to do this, Lord. Increase our faith. Now, there's nothing wrong with the disciples' request here.

They're asking for help. The disciples did not try to increase their faith using their own effort. They asked Jesus. And they didn't ask for their own benefit, but for the sake of obedience, to do difficult commands.

[10 : 15] there's nothing wrong with their request, but they're missing the point in verse 6. Jesus replied, If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, be uprooted and planted in the sea, and it will obey you.

This is a mustard seed. You can't see it, can you? It's tiny. tiny. It's so small that it's really hard to see. This is all we need.

If we have faith as small as this, we can do an impossible thing, like telling a tree to move somewhere else. Now, that's not literal. Don't try this at home.

It just means that we can do the impossible. And in this context, what's impossible are the commands that the disciples just heard.

Our mission while we're waiting, not being a stumbling block and having unlimited forgiveness towards each other. That's the impossible thing to do.

[11 : 31] That's what faith enables us to do. If we have faith as small as this, and we do if we believe in Jesus, we do.

We can do those things. Because it's not the size of our faith that enables us to do the heavy commandments of God. It's the person in whom we have faith, Jesus.

He enables us. The disciples knew this, and that's why they asked him to help them. we just need to trust him.

And how did Jesus enable the disciples to do these things? By doing it to them first. He died on the cross, didn't he?

And paid for all their sins, so that every time the disciples repented, Jesus could forgive them. that's what happened to Peter, who denied Jesus three times, and repented, and in the Gospel of John, Jesus reinstated him three times.

[12 : 46] And that's what happens to us. How many times do we sin against God every single day, every single week, and we repent and say sorry to him, only to do it again, and again, and again.

We repent again, and we repent again. And every single time God forgives us, because like the hymn says, my sin not in part, but the whole is nailed to the cross, and I bear it no more.

So he forgives us every single time. And through showing us the Gospel of what Jesus has done for us, he enables us to do the same to other people, to each other.

We forgive each other because we have been forgiven. Like what we pray in the Lord's Prayer, forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.

Louis Zamperini was an American World War II veteran. while on a mission in 1943, Louis' plane crashed into the ocean, and then he was captured by the Japanese.

[14 : 13] And he endured two and a half years of imprisonment, constant beatings, humiliation, and torture. They made a movie about him. It's pretty horrendous. after the war, he returned to the U.S., suffering from severe PTSD, and became an alcoholic.

He spent most of his time planning about returning to Japan and murder the soldiers who had repeatedly assaulted and tormented him while in prison.

One day in 1949, Louis went to hear Billy Graham speak about human sin and the forgiveness that Jesus offered.

He repented of his sins and received Jesus as his Savior. Almost immediately, he was delivered from alcoholism, and he felt a surge of God's love that enabled him to forgive those who had imprisoned and tortured him.

And so just a year later, he went back to Japan, went to the prison where former Japanese soldiers were imprisoned and spoke about Jesus to the people who had tormented him.

[15 : 35] And then afterwards, he hugged each one of them with a loving smile. The Japanese soldiers were shocked. Now, God's grace doesn't always work in a sudden kind of way like he worked in Louis Zamparini.

Sometimes it takes a long painful time. But if we have faith as small as a mustard seed, and we know what Jesus has done for us, and we have tasted God's goodness and forgiveness, if we know how big our sin is, and how much he forgives us, it is possible to do these things.

It's not easy, but it's possible. So, if we have faith, we try to do it, even though the commandments are hard, because faith always produces obedience.

And that's why Jesus continues by speaking about the duty of a servant in verse 7-10. Suppose one of you has a servant plowing or looking after the sheep.

Will he say to the servant when he comes in from the field, come along now and sit down to eat?

Won't he rather say, prepare my supper, get yourself ready and wait on me while I eat and drink?

[17 : 07] After that you may eat and drink. Will he thank the servants because he did what he was told to do? So, you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, we are unworthy servants.

We have only done our duty. Faith results in obedience. We do what is demanded of us as we wait for the second coming.

We keep each other in the faith instead of being stumbling blocks, and we forgive each other infinitely. and we do those things not expecting anything in return from God, but simply because we are unworthy servants doing our duty.

We are the unworthy people who have been forgiven by God in Jesus. Now, this doesn't mean that we are not allowed to ask anything from God.

Jesus himself says that we ought to ask and knock. And God is generous and he gives abundantly. And even though in this parable the focus is on our duty as servants, there are other parables like in Luke 12 where Jesus the master serves the servants.

[18 : 25] We, the servants, are allowed to ask and God is generous. But the point of this parable is that we ought not be ungrateful, entitled servants.

Like if we expect good things from God merely because we have been obedient. No, that's not God, that's Santa. Like if we say, God, why are you not giving me what I pray for?

I've been going to church every Sunday, leading a Bible study, praying every day, fasting every week. No, that's entitlement.

The best that we have done is what we should have done as servants anyway. God doesn't owe us anything, but we are allowed to ask because God is gracious.

But whether or not he gives us what we ask for doesn't depend on our obedience, only depends on his graciousness.

[19 : 31] And that's what we see illustrated by the story of the lepers in verse 11 to 19. Now on his way to Jerusalem, Jesus traveled along the border between Samaria and Galilee.

As he was going into a village, ten men who had leprosy met him. They stood at a distance and called out in a loud voice, Jesus, Master, have pity on us.

When he saw them, he said, Go, show yourselves to the priests. And as they went, they were cleansed. One of them, when he saw he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice.

He threw himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him. And he was a Samaritan. Jesus asked, Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine?

Has no one returned to give praise to God except this foreigner? Then he said to him, Rise and go, your faith has made you well.

[20 : 35] This is a real-life illustration of what Jesus has been talking about. In verse 13, the lepers called Jesus Master, thus placing themselves as the servants from the previous parable.

people, they asked the Master to heal them, showing that it's okay to ask the Master. And Jesus graciously agreed.

But in verse 14, Jesus commands them to do something seemingly impossible, to show themselves to the priests. They can't do that. They can't show themselves to the priests because they're not healed yet.

Like the commands to not be a stumbling block, and to forgive infinitely, this command doesn't make sense. But the lepers have faith.

They trust and they do it. Faith results in obedience. They go even though they're not healed yet and on the way, as they went, they were cleansed, they were healed.

[21 : 46] now all ten of the lepers called Jesus Master, but only one is a true servant. The other nine don't return, thus showing that they are ungrateful, entitled servants who only want to be served, but not to serve the Master.

One, however, comes back, praises God with a loud voice, showing his great joy and thanksgiving and throws himself at Jesus' feet.

This is the real servant. And in verse 19, Jesus commends his faith. Jesus says that literally your faith has saved you.

Although ten of them are healed, only one is saved. Because only one has the kind of faith that produces obedience and thanksgiving.

showing him to be the real servant, a real disciple of Jesus. His faith is saving faith, because it produces the fruit of obedience and thanksgiving.

[23 : 05] So, Jesus is coming. We don't know when, but he's coming. And in the next chapter, in verse 8, Jesus asks, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?

Faith is all we need. We are saved by faith alone, and we will be saved by faith alone when Jesus returns. But faith never stands alone.

True saving faith always produces the fruit of obedience and thanksgiving. and so we have things to do while we wait.

We do what Christ has commanded us to do. We're not just sitting around doing nothing and say, oh, I'm saved by faith alone. I don't need to do anything. No.

Christ has commanded us to do things, loving one another, keeping each other faithful to Jesus, forgiving one another infinitely, praying persistently, going out and making disciples of all nations. [24 : 21] These are impossible commands. And we might say to Jesus, Lord, these commandments are too hard. They don't make sense.

We can't do these things. but, like the leper, we only need faith. If we have faith, we just need to start going and start doing.

Take the first step. Take a second step. Take a third step. And before you know it, the impossible happens. We are enabled to do the difficult commands.

So, how do we begin? What is the first step in doing these commandments? Well, in a sense, you are already doing it right now.

It is the old triple habit of Christian discipleship. Church, Bible, and prayer. Through church, we are training ourselves to love and be loved, to forgive and be forgiven, to be taught the right doctrines, so we don't lead ourselves astray and be stumbling blocks.

[25 : 36] Through reading the Bible, we are training ourselves to know the right doctrine. And through consistent Bible reading, the Holy Spirit reminds us of the gospel frequently.

And like we have said, the gospel keeps our faith alive. And the gospel enables us to do the things that are commanded of us, because we get reminded that Jesus has done them first.

And the last thing we are to do while we wait in this passage is to pray persistently, as we've heard on kick-off Sunday. Because through prayer, we let ourselves leap with praise and thanksgiving every time we get reminded of the gospel.

people. So, while waiting for Jesus to return, we need to keep our faith. But faith results in obedience and thanksgiving.

And the way we nurture these things is through the habits of church, Bible, prayer. So let's pray now. Father, we thank you for reminding us that Jesus is coming, coming back.

[26 : 53] So help us with the Holy Spirit, Lord, to live on this earth doing the commandments that Jesus has given us, to do the mission, to be faithful to him and to help each other to be faithful to him, and to forgive and love each other.

these are difficult commands, Lord, so help us through your Spirit and remind us of the gospel of Jesus always. Through Christ our Lord, we pray.

Amen.