

The Coming of God's Kingdom

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[0 : 00] Well, let's turn with the Lord's help now to Luke chapter 17, as we look at these words that we've read. Luke 17, verses 20 to 37.

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was dealing with this issue of the kingdom of God. And that, of course, itself is a very large subject in the Gospels, particularly, though it's in other parts of the Bible as well.

The kingdom of God, while it is impossible to really summarize it adequately in a few words, it has to do with God's kingly authority, God's reign as king, God actually manifesting that reign that belongs to him as king.

And that means over the whole creation and not just over his own church or over his own people. Remember when the kingdom of God is brought before us in the Bible, especially in the teachings of Jesus, that we find ourselves, as Jesus did, in a fallen world, where the kingdom of God alone exists in terms of God's absolute sovereignty, which the Bible never, of course, questions, and which was never lost, although we fell in Adam and in the sin of Adam and Eve from the situation, from the state in which God created us, that did not itself in any way interfere with God's complete control and sovereignty over the whole creation.

[2 : 15] But what God set about doing with a fallen creation was restoring it to the way it ought to have been and the way it ought to be now.

The way he himself will actually bring it finally to be. And that means that the kingdom of God involves such things as the restoration of the whole creation to be the way it should be.

But it will include, especially within that, the salvation of his own people. But it also includes, thirdly, the judgment of all people, and particularly so in the teaching of Jesus, as in this passage, the judgment of the wicked, the judgment of those who have not bowed the knee to God as their king.

And we could say that the kingdom of God has three phases in terms of its manifestation or the way it's been revealed to us in the scriptures, or down through the centuries to different generations.

For the whole of the Old Testament, the kingdom of God was something that was anticipated. Something that was mentioned, but mentioned in terms of looking for it in the future.

[3 : 39] Because the kingdom of God, as Jesus himself makes clear here, began in terms of it being revealed to us, actually, in this world, in the person of Jesus himself.

When Jesus Christ was born, when the Son of God came to be one of ourselves, that was, in that way, that was the beginning of the kingdom of God being revealed or manifested in this world.

That's the second phase, beginning with Christ himself. And that goes all the way through to the end of the world, to the end of time.

And the third phase of the kingdom, the completion of the kingdom, if you like, the way that God will finally make all things to be as they should be, including the judgment of evil, of wickedness, of sin, that will be at Christ's coming again.

When the kingdom will be finally established and revealed as it is to all. And, well, when all things will then be in their final state.

[4 : 53] So, that really is, in very, very brief compass, one or two of the main features of the kingdom and its importance and its relation to our salvation, to the creation around us, to the person of Jesus in his first coming and his second coming as well.

And if you carry that with you into the passage, we'll look at this second phase, beginning with his own coming, and what he's saying here in answer to the Pharisees. Now, the Pharisees were, along with other people, looking for signs of the kingdom's coming.

They knew from the Old Testament that God had promised that his kingdom would be established in the world. But they looked for signs which would be really spectacular things that would demonstrate to them and to everybody else that they were superior as a people and that that would be the step or part of the establishing of God's kingdom in the earth.

That's why Jesus replied in the way he did, first of all, because what he's dealing with is that here and now and between now and the end of the world, between his own time and the end of the world, the kingdom of God is not to be observed with signs, is not to be coming with signs to be observed, nor will they say, look at us here or look at us there, for behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you.

Now, that's possible to translate that as the kingdom of God is among you or even some translations have the kingdom of God is in you.

[6 : 32] But the teaching of Jesus is that the kingdom of God was among them. It had already arrived because he was there. He is the king, although in some regards he is incognito.

It is, in fact, the king of creation who has arrived in this world. It is the one who created all things to whom all things and all beings are answerable.

It is the one who sustains all things. The fact that he was manifested as a child and developed into a human adult is in no way indicative of him ceasing to have been the king.

And our catechism, you remember, in the way in which the catechism so beautifully summarizes Bible teaching for us. One of the things it tells us is that Jesus has three offices to perform.

Prophet, priest, and king. Both in his estate of humiliation and exaltation. In other words, Jesus did not become the king when he left this world and ascended back to heaven to be in glory with the father.

[7 : 50] And Jesus did not begin his kingship when he was born into this world, though he was acknowledged even from the beginning there as the king in terms of the gifts that were brought by the wise men.

He always was the king. It was as king he was born. It was coming to establish his kingdom that he came.

The kingdom of God is in the midst of you. But he goes on to say that this phase of the kingdom, this aspect of the kingdom being set up in this world and not yet fully completed or even fully revealed is because there is a time of testing and a time where there is an interval, if you like, between this and the finishing of the kingdom and the coming of Christ again.

The days are coming he said when you will desire to see one of the days of the Son of Man and you will not see it. And he seems to mean by that there are things in this passage which are rather difficult to understand exactly what the Lord meant by them but it seems that he meant that people would actually, his own people especially, that they would desire to see one of the days of the Son of Man but would not be able to see it because it was not yet appropriate that it would be revealed in all its glory until Christ returned.

And it would be a time of testing in the interval because he said people will say to you look here or look there do not go out or follow them.

[9 : 41] for some reason or other people have always been fascinated by what theologians actually refer to as eschatology.

Eschatology is a word for the last things and it involves the Bible's teaching on the coming of Christ and some of the things that are associated with the coming of Christ.

and so fascinating are some people by it that they get into all kinds of contortions theologically and even come sometimes to make predictions as to when exactly the world will end.

People who call themselves Christians and who in many other respects may well be Christians. Christians but in this respect they are mistaken and have to be mistaken because the Bible itself makes it clear to us and even the teaching of Jesus in the gospel makes clear that only God knows the precise date and time at which this world will end.

It may end before this year is out. It may be another thousand years or more. there is no way of predicting it in the way that some people do.

[11 : 03] And you remember yourselves some of the prophecies in recent years Harold Camping for example an experienced man who had been involved in Bible teaching for many years but in October 2011 he predicted when the world would actually end on a precise date which of course didn't take place so then he had to make adjustments just like many before him had to make adjustments that oh yes but this calculation was out now that makes Christianity to appear silly.

And it gives people who are against the gospel all kinds of reasons and excuses why they should not believe the gospel and why things like the second coming of Christ are not really believable at all.

let's stick to the facts that the Bible gives us and this is one of the facts that it gives us the world is going to end the Lord is going to return but only God knows the precise moment in time when that will happen.

The fact that people get embroiled in all these kind of speculations should never actually in any way make us doubt the validity of the Bible's own point and the point is the kingdom has begun the kingdom is in the midst of us with the coming of Christ the kingdom has now reached out to incorporate us as Gentiles into the gospel and under the gospel and into the church of God the kingdom will be finalized and completed and consummated at the coming of Christ at the end of the world that is certain that's a Bible fact that's a revealed fact by God and if you believe the Bible as the word of God you have to believe that as a fact there is an interim of testing an interim of waiting an interim when you and I will be drawn towards considerations other than what the

Bible teaches and when you will be faced with the temptation not to believe the Bible itself at all but that it's better just not really getting involved with these things in any sense well we're encouraged to believe what God has revealed and as we believe what God has revealed we believe the kingdom of God is in the midst of us but then he says that as the lightning flashes up and lights up the sky from one side to the other so will the son of man be in his day but first there is this period he must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation just as it was in the days of Noah so it will be in the days of the son of man in other words he's saying to us that when the kingdom of God is finally consummated and when the son of man returns when the day of the son of man takes place we will not actually have any doubts about it we will not have it on the news as a kind of speculative theory we will not actually in any way have to ask one another or ask somebody else when is this going to be it will be known to have taken place because it's like the lightning flashes and lights up the sky when you get a bolt of lightning you know exactly what's happened you don't have to ask anybody what was that it was a bolt of lightning it made itself clear the flash the following thunder everything about that bolt of lightning makes it clear what's happened you don't need to go and ask anybody what it's about when Jesus returns it will be just as clear it will be demonstrable to everyone what is happening nobody will need to ask their neighbor or anyone else what is all this about you and I will know for sure that the day of the son of man has arrived but first he must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation so that's the first phase of the second phase of the kingdom having been revealed and established in the world with the coming of

[16 : 02] Jesus himself it continues through the preaching of the gospel right through to the end of time to the coming of the son of man and that's what the rest of the passage in most of it deals with some of the features of the second or the final phase of the kingdom of God how it's completed in the return of Christ and there are five particular elements five things that are spoken about there or revealed to us are features of this final phase of the completion of it at Christ's return first of all it will be clear to all as we've said from the lightning that flashes and lights up the sky so will the son of man be in his day what is brighter than a flash of lightning in the midst of the darkness well the coming of

Jesus will be that clear in the midst of all the darkness or the unexpectancy of this world the brilliant flash of light the last trumpet that will sound will make it clear that the king has arrived that he has come to judge the world the second thing Jesus makes clear is that his arrival and the completion of the kingdom will be unexpected by many just as it was in the days of Noah so it will be in the days of the son of man just as it was in the days of Lot so it will be when the son of man is revealed now Jesus you notice is drawing from two events in the past and isn't it significant that Jesus firmly believed in the historical accuracy of the Bible's account of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah and of the flood of Noah's day people will tell you today these are features of the Bible that you must nowadays just ignore they are okay for the days in which they were written they were alright for those days that's how people understood things but you don't take them literally you don't actually take them as if they happened exactly like that they are put in a picturesque kind of language to demonstrate for us some of the truths that God wants us to know that's the kind of teaching that's the kind of suggestion that's the kind of proposal that's commonly set out for us today in regard to people's view of the Bible people's view of the historical accuracy of the Bible with regard to what it claims to be historical events well if you go to Jesus Christ and you believe in Jesus Christ as the Bible reveals them and if we don't then we're not really in any sense to be saved at all we're in a hopeless situation if we believe in Jesus Christ as revealed in the Bible and in the ministry of Jesus as the likes of Luke recorded for us Jesus believed in the flood of Noah's day Jesus believed that Noah was a historical figure who lived at such a time as the flood that took place and destroyed many in the world Jesus believed in the figure of Lot in the person of Lot he believed in the historical accuracy of the Genesis record regarding the overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrah and if Jesus believed it that's good enough for me you don't have to go beyond that itself to answer the question is the Bible true did Jesus believe it to be true yes that's why he's taking these two examples from history to press home the point what it will be like when he returns and what does he say from these two events from history well what he emphasizes really because they both are brought together just setting out pretty much the same thing they were eating and drinking and marrying and being given in marriage in Noah's day in Lot's day they were eating and drinking buying and selling planting and building in other words Jesus is saying when the catastrophe of these two occasions happened the catastrophe of the flood for which people have been warned for many many years the catastrophe of the overthrow of Sodom which came about for their gross iniquity and immorality everything was as normal

people were going about for their ordinary business and you know when you read genesis and the likes of chapter 19 which deals with the overthrow of sodom and gomorrah and the cities of the plain it's very significant that it says quite clearly the sun was risen upon the earth on the day that lot entered into zoar the little town that god had told him to get to to escape the catastrophe the sun was risen on the earth it was a nice beautiful morning in other words and i'm sure many people then said to themselves this is going to be a beautiful day and before the day was out they were dead they were overtaken with the judgment of god god proved his word to be true that's what jesus believed that's what jesus used in pressing home his point with regard to his own coming you see the world is not going to be a vastly improved place by the time the lord returns we mustn't in our evangelism think that our objective really is to convert everybody and the world will be such a good place and then the lord will return the world is going to be like it is today at least people will be going about their ordinary business people will be getting along with family life eating, drinking, marrying, being given in marriage celebrations, family events they will be planting and building they will be erecting things like they've been in every generation they'll be planning for the future they'll be drawing up all of these plans just as people have been doing for countless years that's what he says it'll be like on the day when the son of man is revealed we're actually not going to get much warning if we don't heed the bible and we're not going to get anything elsewhere that will convince us as to the day of the son of man the return of christ we have enough in the bible to tell us how to order our lives and prepare for his coming we only believe these things friends when we believe the bible is the word of god if we lose that we've lost everything and that's what in this present age you and I are being counseled and pressurized into doing not believing the bible as god's infallible word see when you begin looking at a confession of faith it gives you a lot of doctrine the doctrines of the bible as they are gathered together into the confession of faith or the same you might say with the catechisms as well but they begin the Westminster confession of faith begins not with a chapter about god not with a chapter about jesus christ not with a chapter about salvation and what salvation is not with a chapter about human beings and what human beings are or what they're like not with a chapter about sin it begins with a chapter a magnificent chapter about the bible and that's not an accident

that's deliberate because these great men who framed our confession realized and knew full well unless you draw your information from the bible and regard the bible itself as god's infallible truth there's little point to believing anything else people could have the most accurate view of the person of Jesus Christ tonight and they could have the most accurate and orthodox view of the gospel of the cross of Christ what it was for what it achieved what it's about why he was crucified people could have the most orthodox view of the resurrection that it was indeed real but if they're not drawing that from a proper view of the bible there is nothing to guarantee that they will have these views of Christ of his resurrection of God of anything of salvation tomorrow the only thing that guarantees that your view as an orthodox biblical view of Christ of salvation tonight the only thing that guarantees you will have it tomorrow is if you believe this bible to be what it claims for itself as the word of God the infallible accurate authoritative unchangeable word of God and that's why we depend on this as we look forward to the coming of Jesus Christ that's why we look to a passage like this and tonight are convinced as we should be surely that this is true that this is accurate that this is indeed what is going to happen that this is how things will be in the world when the Lord returns it will be clear to all but it will be unexpected for many but you and I should not find it unexpected when you believe the bible as God's infallible truth thirdly it's going to be final look at verses 31 to 33 on that day let the one who is on the housetop with his goods in the house not come down to take them away likewise let the one who is in the field not turn back remember Lot's wife whoever seeks to preserve his life will lose it but whoever loses his life will keep it it will be final because there is no going back history will not be reestablished to repeat itself opportunities to come to a proper relationship with God will not be renewed what it says there about whoever is on the housetop with his goods in the house when the Son of Man is revealed when Christ comes back there is no point to going back into the house to get your possessions they are no use anymore the world has come to an end the things of this life are no longer appropriate for the things of the next the conditions of this world will be at an end whoever is in the field let him not turn back and then he says whoever seeks to preserve his life will lose it but whoever loses his life will keep it well he is making an example of Lot's wife many a great sermon has been preached on that one text verse 32 remember

Lot's wife why should we remember Lot's wife because when she was just so near to safety the catastrophe of the judgment of God on Sodom overtook her why did it overtake her when she was just so near to safety because she looked back because she wanted to take what she left behind to take some of it with her and we can't do that the things of this life are no use for the next the opportunities of this life will be gone when the next one begins the activities of this life ordinarily apart from those that are spiritual in the worship of God and so on but the ordinary course of this life will be over there will be no need for any of the things that we know in the ordinary daily business of life the world is ended and it's not ended like some of the films suggest with a nuclear catastrophe it's not ended with rampant disease throughout the world killing most people and leaving just a remnant it's ended because the judge has arrived because the king has come to exercise his authority and to put everything in its rightful place it will be finer fourthly it will be divisive on that day in that night there will be two in one bed one will be taken the other left there will be two women grinding together one will be taken and the other left it seems that he means taken means taken into the

[31 : 13] Lord's kingdom and its completion into the safety the refuge into the final state of salvation with Christ that's what the Bible elsewhere teaches isn't it 1 Thessalonians chapter 4 the Lord's people will rise up even those whose bodies are in the ground and rise up together to meet the Lord in the air they shall be together to meet the Lord in the air to be with him forever the others will be left left to their lostness left to be forever abandoned to a lost eternity and you see these people were doing the same things Jew will be in one bed two women were grinding together they were engaged in the same activities identical activities of course that's just a sample of all humanity many people will be involved in doing exactly the same things and yet out of that some will be taken others will be left what that means is that some are already in the kingdom and others are not how do we enter the kingdom well that was made plain by Christ to

Nicodemus except you be born again you cannot enter the kingdom of God you enter the kingdom by rebirth by a new life by a new beginning here we are coming to the end of another year in our experience another calendar year another year of our lives is gone where are we in relation to the kingdom of God it has arrived in the person of Christ but are we in it have we entered into it through rebirth as we anticipate celebrating a new year can we look at our lives and say yes my life has had a new chapter beginning in it because I've come to know the Lord because I've come to commit my life to him because he has become my king personally one will be taken the other left there will be divisions that day within families already there there'll be divisions between different types of people it's the gospel that establishes these divisions it will be divisive of course it's there already just now but on that day of

Christ return a great chasm remember last in the previous chapter we saw the rich man in Hades and his lost eternity being told that there is a great gulf a great chasm fixed you can't go from one side from the saved to the lost to the saved this great chasm has been fixed it's already fixed but every single person who ever lived will see it and will know it's fixed on the day of the Lord's return because you and I will see and you and I will take part on one side or the other in that great division which side will we be on I I could preach the gospel all my life and without Christ I would be on the wrong side of the division I would be left unsaved

I would spend eternity under the judgment of God in hell without Christ for myself it doesn't matter what I've done other than that in this life it doesn't matter what kind of activity I've been involved with what kind of career I've followed what sort of thing I've actually heard what sort of privileges I've had in all of these things we have many things to be thankful for this is the crucial thing do I tonight have eternal security for myself am I actually within the kingdom of God have I come to be born again have I made a new start is Christ my king it will be divisive it will divide humanity clearly and demonstrably into the lost and the saved for all to see finally fifthly rather it will be inescapable verse 37 it's not easy to interpret they said to him where Lord we're not sure what they meant by that did they mean where will this take place or did they mean where will those who are left be and it's difficult to know precisely how we should interpret the Lord's answer where the corpse or where the carcass is there the vultures sometimes translated eagles will gather but the picture seems to be as you can see yourself sometimes in nature films and so on wherever you find in the desert especially in desert areas that an animal has died very very soon you'll see the vultures circling and coming to dispose of the carrion their carrion eaters the eagles are not that's why it's better translating it as vultures but what he's saying is wherever the corpse is there the eagles there the vultures will be gathered when you see vultures circling you don't have to ask what's that what is that about you know that somewhere or other there's carrion there's a dead corpse there's a carcass for them to feed upon and maybe that's all the Lord means by this that just like he said about the lightning people will not need to ask questions about what's going on when the judgment of God comes or else it could be that he means more by it by using this imagery which is very grim and very dark and very graphic and has to do with death and the circling of of these carrion eaters which involves the death of some animal that they're going to eat it could well be that the Lord includes in that the idea that death attracts judgment and so it does the Lord's judgment always falls upon what is dead spiritually the amazing thing is that the judgment of God fell upon Jesus Christ his own son not because he had sinned but because he took the sin of his people maybe you think tonight this is a very dark note on which to end this final sermon of this year well it is that in a sense although it is the

word of Christ and it's just in the sequence the way we've come to this point in Luke's gospel but let me say this it is also a very bright note in the sense that God in his kindness has erected for us tonight a huge huge signpost and on it is written this is what you need to know for your future that is God's kindness there will be many people in the world and there are many people in the world tonight who will die having never heard of a judgment who will leave this world absolutely oblivious to the fact that there is such a thing as the kingdom of God who will never have heard why the son of God came into this world what the son of man's return is really about but you know and I know because God in his kindness has sent us the gospel and if we die unsaved having had the gospel what is

[40 : 45] God then going to do with us what do we then expect from God our judgment will be all the more solemn if we are judged for not being saved when we had every opportunity to be so friends don't end this year or begin another one without being ready for the day of the son of man let's pray gracious lord we give thanks for the completeness of your revelation to us in your word and we give thanks too for its many details we give thanks for all that is clear in it about the things of our salvation the things of this world in its history and in its destiny we give thanks that you have established your kingdom and that your kingdom is not of this world the lord is established in it we praise you oh lord for all whom you have brought into your kingdom and for the way that you have given us to pray that your kingdom come and that your will be done on earth as it is in heaven so bless to us once again the gospel message we pray help us lord we pray to reckon seriously and earnestly and believably with the dark and solemn things as much as those things that give us so much joy and gladness and we pray lord that in all of these things we may be concerned to glorify your name to serve you acceptably to be prepared for your coming hear us now we pray for your name's sake amen