

Luke 17:20-37

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[0 : 00] All right, would you turn with me to the Gospel of Luke, chapter 17. We are going to look at the last half of Luke 17 tonight, verses 20 through 37.

That's page 876 in the Pew Bible, if you want to follow along there. Luke 17, 20 through 37, page 876.

All right, let me read this for us. Verse 18, being asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, Jesus answered them, the kingdom of God is not coming in ways that can be observed, nor will they say, look, here it is, or there, for behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you.

And he said to his disciples, the days are coming when you will desire to see one of the days of the Son of Man, and you will not see it. And they will say to you, look there, or look here.

Do not go out or follow them. For as the lightning flashes and lights up the sky from one side to the other, so will the Son of Man be in his day. But first he must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation.

[1 : 25] Just as it was in the days of Noah, so it will be in the days of the Son of Man. They were eating and drinking and marrying and being given in marriage until the day when Noah entered the ark and the flood came and destroyed them all.

Likewise, just as it was in the days of Lot, they were eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building. But on the day when Lot went out from Sodom, fire and sulfur rained down from heaven and destroyed them all.

So it will be on the day when the Son of Man is revealed. On that day, let the one who is on the housetop with his goods in his house not come down to take them away. And 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. I tell you, in that night there will be two in one bed.

One will be taken and the other left. There will be two women grinding together. One will be taken and the other left. And they said to him, where, Lord? And he said to them, where the corpse is, there the vultures will gather.

[2 : 35] Let's pray together. Let's pray together. God, we are grateful that you are speaking, God. Lord, you spoke our very universe into existence.

God, you continue day after day, night after night to pour forth speech from the things that you have made. You spoke to the people long ago through your prophets.

Lord, most of all, you have spoken to us through your Son, Jesus Christ. And through his apostles. And Lord, we thank you that you continue to speak to us through your written word.

And by your spirit, you take these words and impress upon us what you want us to hear. For our life. For our spiritual good. So, God, we pray that you would give us ears to hear what your word says and what your spirit is saying to us tonight.

For Jesus' sake. Amen. Amen. Well, friends, I think it's as easy as reading a newspaper or taking a walk around your neighborhood or maybe even just looking into your own heart.

[3 : 43] It's about as easy as those things to realize that the world is not the way it's supposed to be. Don't you agree? There's suffering and injustice. There's crime and hatred.

There's bitterness and grief. And none of this, we know, biblically speaking, is how the world was meant to be. God created this world good in the beginning.

And he created us, humans, to live under his good authority as our king. He made us in his image even. To be stewards of creation and to cultivate the joy and the energy of creation and to redirect it back to the praise of God, its creator.

But that's not what we really see in the world right now, is it? Instead, we humans have gone our own way and rejected God's kingship over us.

Tried to become our own kings and our own rulers. And in the process, we've spoiled the world. We've marred our relationships. And worst of all, we've fractured our relationship with God.

[4 : 45] So the story of the Bible then, really, is the story of God becoming the one and only king of his creation once again.

The Bible is the story of how God rescues us and rescues his world from its rebellion. The story of the Bible, in other words, is the story of the kingdom of God.

It's the story of the reign, the rule of God coming to make things right. The Bible even teaches us that one day God will come and he will reign and even sin and death will be destroyed.

Creation, which is so fractured and broken, will actually be healed. And God's people will finally be liberated, set free, to serve God wholeheartedly again.

That's the biblical hope. That's what all of our hearts really long for, deep down. That's the story of the Bible. So when the Pharisees, here in our text in Luke, come to Jesus and say, Jesus, when will the kingdom of God come?

[6 : 12] This is what they're asking about. They're asking, when is God finally going to break into his broken creation just like the prophets promised?

When's he going to come and when is he going to deal with our enemies who are oppressing us and trampling on us? When is he going to come and when is he going to vindicate us and release us and set us free?

When is God going to come with his righteous creation restoring reign? When is he going to come and make things right again? Jesus, when is that going to come?

And to that question, Jesus gives a two-fold answer. First, he answers the Pharisees in verses 20 and 21 of our text. And then he answers a little more to his disciples in verses 22 and the rest of the chapter.

And this two-fold answer that Jesus gives is completely essential for us as we follow Jesus today. We've got to keep both of these things in mind as we follow Christ.

[7 : 16] And remember, that's what these middle chapters of Luke are all about, following Jesus. How, as followers, as disciples of Jesus, should we understand, in this case, the coming of God's kingdom? And how does understanding it rightly, the way Jesus describes, how does that make a difference in our lives and in our life together?

So let's look at Jesus' two-fold answer and then we'll end talking about some applications, some implications of that. And the first point of Jesus' answer is this, in verses 20 and 21.

Jesus says to the Pharisees, in a nutshell, guys, the kingdom of God has already begun. The kingdom of God, Jesus says, is right here in the midst of you.

Now, apparently, some of Jesus' contemporaries, the Jews of Jesus' day, were expecting this kind of in-breaking reign of God to arrive with cataclysmic signs and just tumultuous world events.

The word that Jesus uses at the end of verse 20, things that can be observed, signs to be observed, means just that, big, world-shattering events. Something that you could point to and say, look, here it is, or look, there it is.

[8 : 33] Now, for some Jews in Jesus' day, no doubt, the great cataclysmic, world-changing sign that they were expecting was the overthrow of their foreign rulers. They wanted Rome to be toppled and to be an independent, liberated people.

Maybe for others, it was a more sort of spiritual thing that they were looking for. In the Old Testament, God showed up powerfully in the midst of his people, fire and cloud in the wilderness at the tabernacle.

When Solomon dedicated the first temple, God's glory came down and no one could stand up. It was so palpable. Maybe some people were looking for that kind of sign, a visible sign of God's presence in their midst.

Whatever it was, they thought that the coming of God's kingdom, his world-healing reign was going to be accompanied by these sort of blatant, cosmic signs.

Something you could see in a just unmistakable way. And, you know, there's a way in which we can sort of think similarly today. We can look at the world and wonder, what is God up to?

[9 : 39] Where is he? We see all the suffering in the world. We even see our own personal struggles to be holy, to live a godly life.

We see our constant failures to follow Jesus the way we should. Now we think, maybe God's just not here. Maybe his reign must not have come yet.

But Jesus tells them, and he tells us, that God's kingdom is not going to arrive with fireworks and fanfare and stars falling from the heaven.

It's not going to come with those kind of signs. He says, the kingdom of God is already in the midst of you. Right now, it's already begun.

And, of course, we know what Jesus means by that, don't we? There's a little bit of dramatic irony happening in the text here. If we've been following Luke's sort of historical account of Jesus' life and his gospel, we know that what Jesus means by this is that in his own person, in his own presence, in his own ministry, the kingdom of God has come.

[10 : 59] The world-healing reign has started in Jesus. The blind are receiving their sight in Jesus' ministry. The lepers are cleansed.

The lame are walking. The brokenhearted are receiving comfort and welcome. And best of all, sinners are receiving forgiveness. There's a way in which each of the mighty works that Jesus has been doing throughout his ministry has been a sign that God is putting the world right again.

The kingdom's already in the midst of you, Jesus says. It's like C.S. Lewis's *Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, that great children's book. Do you remember how under the witch's power, Narnia is always winter and never Christmas?

But at the start of that story, when the children make their way into this magical land, they hear news that Aslan is on the move. And as they begin their journey, slowly the winter begins to thaw and the streams start running again and the flowers start breaking through the snow.

It's like that, friends. Jesus, the King, has come. The kingdom is already underway. Hearts are being thawed.

[12 : 27] New creation life is starting to crop up around him. And that serves as a challenge to the Pharisees of Jesus' day and, I think, to us.

Are we willing to see Jesus for who he is? We might have our expectations of what God should do and ought to do and when he ought to do it and where he ought to do it, but are we willing to see that God's kingdom has, in fact, arrived in Jesus' first coming?

Will we acknowledge him as king or are we going to continually look for another? But after telling the Pharisees that the kingdom of God is already present, already on the move in his own person and ministry and in the hearts of those who are believing and following him, then Luke's story kind of continues in our passage.

He's sort of back on the road with his disciples. And as he continues on the road with them, he teaches them more of what they need to know about all of this. And in verses 22 through 37, Jesus tells us, secondly, not just that the kingdom has already begun in his ministry, but that the kingdom of God is not yet complete.

That there's still more to come. There's still a great day, Jesus says, a day when the Son of Man will be revealed, as he puts it in verse 30. Now, if you've been reading the Gospels, you'll know that one of the ways that Jesus often refers to himself is, through this title, the Son of Man.

[14 : 20] And where do we see that? Well, you see it in a couple places in the Old Testament. Psalm 8. What is man that you are mindful of him or the Son of Man that you care for him? But then more importantly in Daniel 7.

Daniel 7 is an Old Testament prophetic text where Daniel sees all the sort of kingdoms of the world represented by these grotesque animals.

And then he sees one like a Son of Man. Someone who's truly human amidst all of these creatures. One like a Son of Man who comes and to whom God gives a reign of righteousness and goodness and peace that will never end.

So you see, when Jesus is taking this title and applying it to himself, he's making a very stark claim. That he is the one who's coming to begin God's kingdom. To finally put things right.

And Jesus says here in our text that there's coming a day when the Son of Man will be revealed. Don't you see, it would have been easy for the disciples.

[15 : 28] And again, I think it's always a danger for us already today too. We hear that the kingdom of God's already come in Jesus. That God's on the move already. And then we can start to think, well, does that mean that this is all there is?

Is what we're experiencing now in the here and now, is that all we should expect? And Jesus says, no, there's more to come.

You see, friends, Jesus came the first time in his first coming. He came in humility as a servant. Ultimately to suffer for our sins.

But again and again and again in the gospels, Jesus teaches that he's going to come a second time. In glory to reign and to judge.

Look at some of the things that Jesus tells us here about his coming again. First, it's going to be unmistakable. Verse 24, like lightning flashing from one end of the sky to the other.

[16 : 33] You're not going to miss it. No one's going to wake up one day and think, oh, Jesus came back? I didn't hear that. I didn't check my news app on my phone. Now, friends, like lightning ripping across the sky, you're not going to miss it.

So don't be led astray then, he says, by anyone claiming to have some secret insight into Jesus' return. This isn't something that you can calculate. And certainly don't be led astray by false prophets or false Christs even saying, look, here I am.

Or look, there he is. Don't follow them, Jesus says. When I come, it's going to be unmistakable. You're not going to doubt it. But then he says, it's not just going to be unmistakable. It's also going to be unpredictably sudden.

It's just sudden. Jesus says it will be like the days of Noah and the days of Lot. And in the days of Noah and the days of Lot, which are Old Testament characters in the book of Genesis, people were doing what people do.

They were going about their everyday lives. They were eating and drinking. They were marrying and being given in marriage. They were buying and selling. They were planting and building. And then suddenly, without notice, the end comes.

[17 : 49] The king arrives. Life is going on as normal. And then all is different. So it's unmistakable.

It's unpredictably sudden. But it's also going to be total. When Noah entered the ark, the floods fell on everyone, Jesus says.

When Lot left the city, the fire fell on them all, we read. No one will be excluded on that great day when Jesus returns.

Every human being, friends, will stand before the world's rightful king and give an account. Which, of course, makes sense, doesn't it?

If God has created each and every one of us in his own providential sovereign plan, then doesn't it make sense that he would also call each one of us to account before him, the very giver of our life?

[18 : 57] And this unmistakable, sudden, total inbreaking of God's righteous rule will also be individual. Look again at verses 34 and 35.

From the same bed, from the same workplace, one taken, one left. You see, friends, it won't matter on that day how close you are to the church, how close you are to godly friends.

It won't matter if your parents are believers or if your spouse is a believer or if your best friend is a believer. It won't matter if you work for a Christian organization. None of that will do you any good if you yourself are not in a saving relationship with the king.

The God who created you and the God who sustains your every breath will one day bring history to its completion and you yourself will stand before God and you will give an account.

God will dignify you in that way. But God will also hold you accountable in that way. And then when hearing about this great total judgment, the disciples ask, Where, Lord?

[20 : 22] Which I feel like is one of those sort of disciple-esque kind of questions. They seem to always be asking the wrong questions at the wrong time. Here Jesus is talking about a worldwide history-consummating act of redemption and judgment.

And the disciples say, Where is that going to happen? And Jesus answers with a common expression of the day, sort of a common saying. He says, Where the corpse is, there the vultures will gather.

Which is a sort of sober way of saying, You won't miss it. It's going to be unmistakable.

Impossible to miss. It's going to be total. So taking a step back then, what do we see here about God's kingdom?

What is Jesus teaching us? He's teaching us that it's already present in his own ministry, that Jesus' first coming has launched God's kingdom into the world, and yet one day Jesus says he'll return, and he will return as the just judge of everyone, and God's kingdom then will be fulfilled.

[21 : 34] And of course, the second half of that picture is a very sober one, isn't it? When the king comes, when God's kingdom is completed, when evil and suffering and injustice and sin and death and decay and all the things that stand against us, when all of that is put to an end once and for all, it's going to be a result of Jesus' coming in glory to judge.

Now on the one hand, as we think about that, we have to admit that that is good news, isn't it, for the world. Don't we want God to say no to evil and oppression, say no to suffering and death?

Jesus is coming as judge as good news for the world because all that is wrong and all that is broken is going to be stopped and condemned in a final way. But friends, if it's good news for the world, it also pushes a deeper question, doesn't it?

Is Jesus' return going to be good news for me? If the Lord Jesus Christ will come to judge, where will I stand before him?

Will I have spent my whole life just pursuing creature comforts, eating and drinking and buying and selling and building and planting, which are not bad things in themselves.

[23 : 12] These are things that can be done to God's glory. But will I have merely distracted myself with them day after day and engrossed myself in them and given no thought and no meaningful response to the God who made them and to the God who is coming to judge what we've done with them?

Of course, it's easy as Christians to think about people out there, right? People out there are the ones who are getting engrossed with all that stuff. But what about those of us who profess to be Christians?

Are we like Lot's wife? Lot's wife outwardly identified with God's people at the time.

She was a part of the people of God. And yet inwardly, her heart was wrapped up in loving the things of this world more than she loved God.

Friends, will you and I on that great day to come look back longingly in our hearts to the goods in our house, to the produce in our fields?

[24 : 35] We might profess, we might claim to be followers of Jesus, but really, what are our hearts actually wrapped around? What thing have we taken our calendar and just wrapped it around and spent all of our time doing?

What thing have we taken our money and invested it in and wrapped it into? What have we taken our energies and our passions and have we poured it into? What's that thing? And of course, our jobs, our families, our pursuits, all of these can be done to God's glory, but have we simply done them for our own glory and our own comfort and our own pleasure?

Remember Lot's wife, Jesus says. This obscure Old Testament character teaching us an incredibly important spiritual lesson.

She looked back longingly at the city God told them to leave and the moment she did, she turned into a pillar of salt, becoming externally what spiritually she was.

She turned into a prayer of the Christian. Friends, I think if we're honest and we look in our hearts, we see that if we aren't exactly like Lot's wife, we're at least Lot's wife-ish, aren't we?

[26 : 05] what's our hope then how can we stand before Jesus on the great day when we know that our hearts are prone to wander Lord I feel it as we sing look again at verse 25 in the context Jesus is saying he will return as judge he will return and make everything right but first verse 25 he must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation Christ the coming judge friends was himself judged in his first coming Jesus the Lord of all came and took the place of the guilty and he let the sentence that we deserved on that last day he let that sentence of condemnation come forward into history and fall on himself on the cross for us though he was innocent he himself was taken away for judgment so that we could be left in God's favor and in God's righteousness so you see in order to stand before the risen Lord Jesus when he returns friends in order to stand before him then we need to embrace what he's done for us now we need to take him as our king and confess that the death that he died was the death that we deserve to die and what the Lord tells us that when we put our trust in him alone for salvation that he will never turn us away no matter how wayward your heart has been no matter how many years you've squandered simply on everyday pursuits chasing self chasing money

Jesus says if you come to me I will not cast you out you can come right now you can come to me and you can know that I've taken your sentence of condemnation and borne it away that I've been carried away for you so that you can remain with me forever friends is that true of you tonight have you taken hold of the king have you taken hold of the judge who was judged for you well friends so here in Luke 17 we have Jesus teaching us two great truths about God's kingdom on the one hand God's kingdom has already come and on the other hand God's kingdom is not yet complete you see we live in between Christ's first coming and his second coming between God's kingdom already at work and God's kingdom not yet finished and real briefly as we wrap up how do we live what does it mean if we if we hold these two things to be true how does it change how we live now as his followers if we hold on to the already and not yet how does it change how we live now real quickly just a few things first it means that we will expect God to be at work it means that we are a radically hopeful and expectant people because already God's kingdom has come you see friends when you step into a relationship with Jesus Christ already you're united to the king of the world already you're given new spiritual life already God pours the spirit into you and dwells within you already all of your sins are forgiven and you're completely reconciled to God already we're being reconciled to one another and the family of the church already all this stuff is at work

God's kingdom his new creation is a foot in the world we're radically hopeful and expectant people to see God at work but if we hold these two things in tension it also means that we're not going to grow triumphalistic and what I mean by that is we're not going to get cocky and pretend that the battle isn't over because we know that not yet has Christ returned and not yet has our old sinful nature been removed once and for all and not yet has Christ put an end to death and injustice not yet has God's kingdom been completed so we don't act like it has and that means third that we're not going to grow cynical as we do life together on the way of Jesus you know the cynic is someone who at one point had high and lofty ideals and then they all came crashing to the ground when they realized that there's a real world out there the cynic is someone whose lofty dreams just sort of crashed on the rocks of reality and now they're just cynical about everything and the reality is is that if we as Christians don't hold together the already and the not yet of God's kingdom we are going to grow cynical too because we'll forget that God's kingdom is still yet to be completed our ideals and our expectations won't be tempered by a fact that there's more to come we'll forget that there's still going to be hardship and suffering and oppression and pain along the road of Jesus which after all wouldn't you think that be the case with the one who said first I must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation aren't we too called to take up our cross and follow him

Jesus even points to this in verse 22 and he says look there are going to be days when we long when we desire for his return there are going to be days in this life when we just want more than anything for Christ to come why is that?

well friends because the Christian life is going to be hard we're going to ache for his coming because because life is going to be difficult but the reality is is that longing and that hardship isn't going to make us cynical because we know that God's kingdom is not yet complete and there's more in store and Christ is going to return and make things right so we can stay hopeful and expectant and joyful even in the midst of these things last thing holding together these two realities of the kingdom already come and the kingdom not yet completed friends it's going to empower our mission if you jump ahead to Luke's second volume the book of Acts what do we see there?

[33 : 14] we see the disciples going out in the power of the spirit with the message of Jesus' death and resurrection with the good news that Jesus is king they just fan out throughout pretty much the whole known world because they know that his rule and his reign has begun that the ascended Lord Jesus sits at the Father's right hand and he reigns but they also know that Jesus will return in glory that there's an appointed day when God will judge the world through the risen Jesus as Paul says in the city of Athens in Acts 17 and so everyone everywhere must be called to repent and believe in Jesus as their king to believe in him now so that they can stand before him then so you see as we wait and as we long for Christ's coming we're not meant to just stand still it's meant to empower us for mission to go and to make disciples of all nations because we know that all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Jesus the king who has inaugurated

God's reign and who's going to be with us always even to the end of the age he says until he returns and makes all things new so friends let us be empowered in our mission knowing that the kingdom has come and the kingdom is yet to come let's pray Lord Jesus we ask that you would take these twin realities that you taught your disciples so long ago and you would embolden us Lord help us to remain soft before you and God most of all help us to be ready for that great and last day Lord help those who are doubting the reality of your coming righteous judgment to see the clarity of it and the necessity of it Lord help those who are fearful who are doubting about where they'll stand before you on the last day to know the assurance and the confidence that comes through resting in Christ as their crucified and risen king and Lord help all of us to live with great expectation and hope that you will work now in our midst and bring all things to their good conclusion in Jesus name we pray

Amen