

46. The Coming of the Kingdom of God

Luke 17:20-37

Luke: A Walk Through the Life of Jesus

When is The Kingdom of God Coming?

In his narrative on the life of Jesus, Luke now brings us to a question that was on everybody's mind at the time, just as it is today: When is the Kingdom of God coming? Daniel the prophet had spoken of the timing of Messiah's coming (Daniel 9:25), which was literally fulfilled on Palm Sunday when Jesus came into the city still several days ahead from when this question was raised. The people of Israel would have been very aware that the time was close, especially those that studied the Scriptures, the teachers of the law and the Pharisees, but they missed the fact that there were to be two comings of the Messiah. One as a suffering Servant that would give His life as an offering for sin (Isaiah 53:10-12), but also One Who is to come at a later time as a conquering King.

Before Jesus started His ministry, the coming Kingdom of God was the topic of John the Baptist, "**Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!**" (Matthew 3:1), and then for approximately three years, Jesus also talked often about the Kingdom of God. The Gospel of Luke alone has twenty – seven occurrences of the word. As Jesus was getting closer to Jerusalem, many who believed that Jesus was the Messiah were expectant of a powerful fight with the Romans, the angels to appear, and the Kingdom of God would start with the defeat of their enemies. It was written in the book of the prophet Joel that there would be a powerful appearance of the Lord, the Messiah in Jerusalem: ¹⁵"The sun and moon will be darkened, and the stars no longer shine. ¹⁶The Lord will roar from Zion and thunder from Jerusalem; the earth and the heavens will tremble. But the Lord will be a refuge for his people, a stronghold for the people of Israel. ¹⁷"Then you will know that I, the Lord your God, dwell in Zion, my holy hill" (Joel 3:15-17). Because of this belief that this was the timing of the physical appearance of the Kingdom of God, Jesus had to correct their theology as to how the Kingdom of God was to come:

²⁰Once, 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,** ²¹nor will people say, 'Here it is,' or 'There it is,' because the Kingdom of God is within you" (Luke 17:20-21).

Is the Kingdom of God Within You or in Your Midst? Verses 20-21

It could be that the Pharisees were asking Christ in a derogatory way as to when the Kingdom of God would come, i.e. with a sneer on their lips. They were aware that Jesus had taught from the beginning that the Kingdom of God was near (Matthew 4:17). In their minds, if it was coming, where was it? Of course, they didn't believe that He was the Messiah. He did not fit their picture of the Messiah. Jesus replied by telling them, "**The Kingdom of God does not come with your careful observation.**" The Greek word that is translated "careful observation" is *parateresis*, which means to watch with hostility or to keep an eye on something closely. The Pharisees were looking for spectacular signs in the sky that would hail the coming of the Kingdom, but Jesus

refutes that thinking by saying that the Kingdom does not at this time come visibly; it contains elements that cannot be observed with the natural eye like a mustard seed that becomes a tree (Matthew 13:32) and leaven that permeates through the whole bread (Matthew 13:33). The second coming of Christ will not come until the Gospel has permeated throughout the whole world (Matthew 24:14)

There is a difference of opinion among scholars concerning Jesus' words that the Kingdom of God is within you. Some translations, namely the New American Standard Version (NASB), translates it as "The Kingdom of God is in your midst." In that view, Jesus was saying that the very embodiment of the kingdom was in their midst, Jesus Himself, the King of the kingdom. Where the presence of the King is, there is the kingdom.

In the other view concerning the phrase, Ralph Earle, in his book *Word Meanings in the New Testament*, writes:

The Greek preposition here is not *en*, "in"; it is *entos* (only here and Matthew 23:26) which means "within." Alfred Plummer discusses both translations. His conclusion is that if "within you" is adopted, the meaning will be, "Instead of being something externally visible, the kingdom is essentially spiritual; it is in your hearts, if you possess it at all." It would seem that this is what Jesus meant.¹

This view is that the King, when invited, comes and takes up residence upon the throne of our hearts, the temple of God according to Paul in 1 Corinthians 3:16. There is much truth in that view, for Jesus Himself was and is the seed of the Kingdom. Nicodemus was told by Jesus, "No one can see the Kingdom of God unless he is born again" (John 3:3). In case we didn't catch the importance of this, the Lord says it again more emphatically in verse 7, "You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again'" (John 3:7 Emphasis mine). There must be an inward manifestation of the kingdom in our hearts, the central part of our very being, i.e. our spirit; otherwise, we will never have a part in the outward, physical manifestation and the fulfillment of the Kingdom of God. When a person receives Christ as Savior, something happens in the core of his being, also described by the Apostle Peter as being "born again." He writes:

For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God (1 Peter 1:23).

Question 1) Why does Jesus and Peter both describe the Kingdom of God coming to the core of our being as being "born again?" What do you think Jesus meant by the Kingdom of God being within you? (v. 21)

We are alive to the physical world because we have been born into it. In the same way, we become alive spiritually by receiving the germinating seed of spiritual life from the Lord Jesus. He said: "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6). The Greek word that is translated with the English word *life* is *Zōē*. The Key Word Study Bible goes into the root of the word itself, saying:

¹ Ralph Earle, *Word Meanings in the New Testament*, Published by Hendrickson Publishers, Peabody, MA. 1974. Page 72.

Zōē is a somewhat metaphysical term which denotes the very life-force itself, the vital principle, which animates living beings. It is used most often in connection with eternal life. This life is the very life of God of which believers are made partakers.²

Until this experience of being born again happens within us, the inner state of our spirit is that of being dead in our transgressions and sins (Ephesians 2:1, 5). We cannot know God apart from receiving this life from Jesus. You cannot become a Christian by behaving Christianly; it doesn't work like that. You must be born again or born from above into the Kingdom of God. There is a new-life principle that is imparted to us when we repent (repentance means a change of mind and direction) and receive the Lord Jesus as Lord and Savior of our lives. This is why Paul the Apostle writes, "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come" (2 Corinthians 5:17).

When Jesus was talking to the Pharisees, he was not referring to them personally when he spoke about the Kingdom of God being within, for they had not received the king and were still dead in their trespasses and sins. This perception of the Kingdom of God challenged their views on the subject. Until then, they had been looking for something tangible. The very kingdom for which they supposedly were searching was right under their noses in the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ, and they were not aware of it. Sometimes, the answers to our questions are right there in front of us, but we do not have the spiritual sensitivity to see them.

The Visible Coming of the Kingdom of God

Over the last twenty-five years, I have taught several times on the topic of the second coming of Christ, and you can read those thoughts in the middle column of our website at the domain name of www.groupbiblestudy.com, under the heading of *Second Coming of Christ Studies*. Many teachers of the Word of God do not like to teach on this subject because it can be controversial. People can become defensive when they are taught something that does not go along with their view. Can we agree to study this topic with open hearts and keep a Christ-like attitude to those who believe differently as to the timing of His return? The study of the Return of Christ is a large topic, and we don't have time to go into every Scripture. We will try to concentrate on understanding these few verses in our passage today. Luke brings up the end-times again in chapter twenty-one, and we will focus more on the topic then.

Verse 22 tells us that, from this point in His talk, Jesus turns and begins to teach His disciples about His second coming. His plain talk is that, when the time of the end of the age comes, it will no longer just be spiritual. You won't have to look for this phenomenon because it will be powerfully visible to everyone on earth. The disciples would see a physical aspect to the kingdom because they were alive spiritually.

²²Then 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. ²³Men will tell you, 'There he is!' or 'Here he is!' Do not go running off after them. ²⁴For the Son of Man in his day will be like the

² Spiros Zodhiates, *Key Word Study Bible*, AMG Publishers, Page 1630.

lightning, which flashes and lights up the sky from one end to the other. ²⁵But first he must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation (Luke 17:22-25).

Question 2) What does Jesus mean by the phrase, "You will long to see one of the days of the Son of Man, but you will not see it?" (Verse 22). Why will men say, "There He is, or Here He is?"

It could mean that He was specifically talking about the soon-coming mourning of the disciples due to loss of the visible presence of the Lord walking with them and telling them again that He would not be with them much longer. They took for granted that He was always going to be there, but the days were coming when they would long for His physical presence in the period of persecution they would endure after the resurrection, but His physical presence would no longer be with them. They would have to walk by faith, just as we have to walk in our day. The disciples would endure a time when Stephen and James were murdered and Peter would be imprisoned as referenced in the Book of Acts (Acts 7:54-59; Acts 12:2-3).

Jesus could also have been talking about the time prior to His second coming, a time of trial for all believers due to the level of evil and difficulty that will be manifest. The time of distress will herald His snatching up of the Church: "There will be a time of distress such as has not happened from the beginning of nations until then. But at that time your people—everyone whose name is found written in the book—will be delivered" (Daniel 12:1). In that time of darkness, the Church will depend on the Spirit of God. We are not to be deceived into following a man (the Antichrist) claiming to be God on earth. Jesus' physical presence men will not find.

The Lord spoke elsewhere about the time of difficulty for His Church: "Nations will be in anguish and perplexity at the roaring and tossing of the sea. Men will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world" (Luke 21:25-26). Matthew recalls Jesus as saying that, at the time of the end, there will be many that will come in His name, "claiming 'I am the Christ,' and will deceive many" (Matthew 24:4). Jesus tells us not to listen to those who say: "'There he is! or Here he is!' Do not go running off after them" (Luke 17:23). We are not to be deceived by men, for our Lord will come like lightening that lights up the sky from one end to the other. Personally, when the Bible says that "every eye shall see Him" (Revelation 1:7), I do not believe that we are talking about worldwide television coverage. This will be an event that in some way will enable all eyes to see Him, all at the same time.

The Lord then gives us two examples of what the time preceding His second coming will be like:

The Example of Noah's Time (vv. 26-27)

²⁶Just as it was in the days of Noah, so also will it be in the days of the Son of Man.

²⁷People were eating, drinking, marrying and being given in marriage up to the day Noah entered the ark. Then the flood came and destroyed them all (Luke 17:26-27).

Both Noah and Lot were two righteous men (Hebrews 11:7; 2 Peter 2:7) who lived for God when all around them people lived only for themselves. What was happening in the days of Noah that is also happening in the days in which we live? First, there was genetic manipulation by

interbreeding of evil angels called in Scripture *the sons of God*, i.e. another name for angelic beings (Genesis 6:1-4). Led by Satan, their goal was to corrupt the image of God in the race of man and specially to hinder the birth of the Messiah Who was prophesied would crush the serpent's (Satan) head (Genesis 3:15). The corruption and depth of evil on earth at that time was so bad that **"The Lord saw how great the wickedness of the human race had become on the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time"** (Genesis 6:5). If you'd like to read more on this incursion into the earthly realm by Satan, I'd encourage you to read the study in the middle column at www.groupbiblestudy.com, scroll down until you see the series, *If God Is for Us*, scroll down to the fourth study, *Restoration vs. Corruption*.

In Noah's day, every inclination of the thoughts of man was toward evil (Genesis 6:5), and they thought that it was okay. They carried on their lives with no concern for righteousness or eternal things. Their care was only for that which was mundane and of this earth. They ignored the preaching of Noah (2 Peter 2:5). Jesus said that, **"People were eating, drinking, marrying, and being given in marriage up to the day Noah entered the ark (v. 27)**. What the Lord is saying is that the days before His coming will be days of terrible evil that will be manifest, but the unregenerate will carry on living their lives as if it was normal. Eating, drinking, and planning their marriages depicts most people living only for the moment, blissfully unconcerned about such corruption and evil behavior, and carrying on with normal life when moral corruption abounds. When Noah preached that the Lord was going to judge them, the people ignored his proclamation of the time of judgment: **"For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to pits of darkness, reserved for judgment; and did not spare the ancient world, but preserved Noah, a preacher of righteousness, with seven others, when He brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly"** (2 Peter 2:4-5). It is the same today; most people are carrying on unconcerned about what God has said.

In the same way that God ushered His chosen into the ark and shut the door, that same day judgment fell (Genesis 7:13-14). There will be no second chance once the church is lifted, snatched up or raptured. The door is shut. The time to make peace with God is now.

The Example from Lot's Time

²⁸It was the same in the days of Lot. People were eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building. ²⁹But the day Lot left Sodom, fire and sulfur rained down from heaven and destroyed them all. ³⁰It will be just like this on the day the Son of Man is revealed (Luke 17:28-30).

Question 3) What is the lesson we should take to our hearts from Jesus' words above?

In the time of Lot, God sent two angels to Sodom to deliver Lot and his family before the Lord destroyed the city. Again, the situation was one of indifference. When Lot went to his sons-in-law and told them that the Lord was about to bring judgment on the city and that they should get out of Sodom with him right now, his sons-in-law thought that he was joking (Genesis 19:14). All the men of the community tried to batter down Lot's door with a mind to rape the two angels that were under his hospitality: **"They called to Lot, 'Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us so that we can have sex with them'"** (Genesis 19:5). That is the

same situation today and getting worse, i.e. men loving darkness rather than light (John 3:19). The cities of Sodom and Gomorrah were indulging in sin in such a way that God heard the outcry against it. God's viewpoint of their sin was as follows:

Then the LORD said, "The outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is so great and their sin so grievous that I will go down and see if what they have done is as bad as the outcry that has reached me. If not, I will know (Genesis 18:20-21).

Now the men of Sodom were wicked and were sinning greatly against the LORD (Genesis 13:13).

We should not think that God's judgment on Sodom was only for their unnatural sexual acts because the Bible also references their arrogance, indifference, and lack of care for others: "Now this was the sin of your sister Sodom: She and her daughters were arrogant, overfed, and unconcerned; they did not help the poor and needy" (Ezekiel 16:49). Let's go back to our passage that we are studying in Luke 17. In talking about the time before He comes again, Jesus said:

³¹On that day no one who is on the roof of his house, with his goods inside, should go down to get them. Likewise, no one in the field should go back for anything. ³²Remember Lot's wife! ³³Whoever tries to keep his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life will preserve it. ³⁴I tell you, on that night two people will be in one bed; one will be taken and the other left. ³⁵Two women will be grinding grain together; one will be taken and the other left. ³⁷"Where, Lord?" they asked. He replied, "Where there is a dead body, there the vultures will gather" (Luke 17:20-37 Emphasis mine).

Jesus is describing the time when He will come to separate the believers from the unbelievers, i.e. the time of rapture and the time of judgment.

Question 4) At the end of Luke 17:32, why does Jesus tell us to remember Lot's wife? What was it about Lot's wife that we should learn?

Jesus gives us a warning of just three words. "Remember Lot's wife." This warning also applies to us today. Before the end of the age comes, those who belong to Christ will not be living in darkness, and that day will not overtake them like a thief. Whatever those days will be like, those who belong to Christ are to be focused not on the things of this world but on the coming of the next world, i.e. the Kingdom of God. As the two angels led Lot and his wife and two daughters from Sodom, Lot's wife looked back with longing in her heart for what she was leaving behind. She was no longer in Sodom, but the problem was that Sodom was still in her! She died on the spot, longing for what she had left behind.

Still another said, "I will follow you, Lord; but first let me go back and say good bye to my family." Jesus replied, "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the Kingdom of God" (Luke 9:61-62).

The enemy is seeking to bring about a situation where people are so dependent on his evil world system that, when spiritual darkness pervades the earth (Isaiah 60:2), he hopes that many will take the Mark of the Beast and swear allegiance and ownership to him. Our electronic gadgets,

gold and silver, as well as other things, will beckon longingly toward going home to get them. He says that, if you are on the roof of your house when the time comes, don't go down into your house to get your goods. If you are in the field, you should not go back to the city. It is possible that Jesus is warning of a certain time that is yet future when those who are waiting for the coming of the Lord, i.e. those enduring the persecution and who have refused the Mark of the Beast, should be out of the cities. The Book of Revelation warns us that, at some point, the cities will be destroyed: **"The great city split into three parts, and the cities of the nations collapsed"** (Revelation 16:19).

The King of the Universe has called us to Himself as a bridegroom to his bride. What God has joined together, let no man separate. He is jealous with a godly jealousy that the things of this world should not steal our attention from close union with Him. When Jesus comes, there will be a separation of the ungodly from those who are walking with Christ. How sad it will be for those left. Jesus says that there will be cases where a non-Christian is in bed with a Christian spouse. The non-Christian will wake up in the morning to find the Christian spouse has disappeared with the blankets unmoved. Two will be working together in the fields, perhaps talking to one another; the Christian will vanish, and the non-Christian will be left wondering what happened (verses 34-35).

Those who are born-again and spiritually sensitive will be aware of what is happening, but there will be many in the world that will be at peace and unconcerned about the time in which they are living. To them, the Lord will come like a thief in the night. There will be families that will have a mixture of Christians and non-Christians. The ones living in the light will be snatched up, and the ones living in darkness will be left. The King will come and catch up or rapture His people to Himself. At this point, Paul says, destruction will come on those who are living safely, saying "peace and safety," but who are without Christ (1 Thessalonians 5:3). He will deliver His people before God's wrath is poured out.

...will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky with power and great glory. And He will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other (Matthew 24:30-31).

Paul the Apostle writes similarly in 1 Thessalonians, chapter 4:

According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. (1 Thessalonians 4:15-17).

The word *Rapture* is not a word that is in the Bible. It is a word we use to describe being *caught up* in verse 17. The Greek word is *Harpazō*, which means "to strip, spoil, snatch. To seize upon with force; to rob." It is an open act of confiscatory violence. The Key Word Study Bible gives us three definitions for it. "1) To plunder, loot, maraud, pillage, ransack. 2) To seize upon

forcibly, lay hold of violently, apprehend, capture, remove by swiftly and aggressively grasping. 3) To seize in rapture; to carry or transport away, implying no assault against the object or resistance by it.”³

Question 5) Armed with this definition of the word, what is the picture that is formed in your mind of the event of the ages?

It will be a time when the Lord comes in deliverance to rescue His people out of someone else’s hand. Paul carries on in his letter by saying:

Now, brothers, about times and dates we do not need to write to you, for you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. While people are saying, "Peace and safety," destruction will come on them suddenly, as labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape. But you, brothers, are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief. You are all sons of the light and sons of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness. So then, let us not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be alert and self-controlled (1 Thessalonians 5:1-6).

“Where, Lord?” the disciples ask (Luke 17:37). The question may be directed at Jesus’ statement telling them not to go down into their house if they are on the roof. They were perhaps wondering where judgment would fall, i.e. would it be in a certain place as it was in Sodom and Gomorrah? Jesus replied, “Where there is a dead body, there the vultures will gather” (Luke 17:37). This judgment will fall wherever evil and corruption exists—all over the world. Just as vultures will descend on a decomposing body, in the same way judgment will fall on that which has no life, i.e. a person who refuses to repent and receive God’s gift of life, one who is not spiritually alive. Jesus’ warning here is very serious. Near the end of His ministry on earth, He is teaching here those things, which He desires His closest friends and co-workers to understand. It is a solemn warning.

Today is the Day of Salvation. Do not put off till tomorrow what you can do today. If today, you find yourself not ready for His Second Coming, isn’t it about time you were ready? We are not talking about trying to become a better person; we are talking about receiving the free gift of God, i.e. the forgiveness of sin and the presence of Christ in your life that He has bought for you at the cross. God wants to reach you through the written word. Wherever you are, He hears you and sees you. He knows your need. Ask Him to come into your life. Tell Him that you want to become “born again” so that you can experience the new life that Jesus offers.

Prayer: Father, thank You for the free gift of eternal life that You want to give me. I want to turn from pleasing self to pleasing You. Would you come into my life and help me to live for You? I receive you now and long for the day of Your coming when I shall be with You forever. Amen.

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³ Key Word Study Bible, AMG Publishers, New Testament Lexical Aids, Harpazō, page 773.