

## \*Luke 17:20-37

### Following Jesus and Faithfully Being Prepared

I know there are some people here who have been keen to talk about end time matters. Well, we've reached that point in Luke's gospel. Of all that Jesus has said his teaching doesn't get much more complicated or cryptic than this. And as grim *as parts* of this passage are, *and they are*, at the same time I want to inspire you with hope that if you're a Christian, there is a great and *glorious* future in store for us as we faithfully follow Jesus now and faithfully prepare for his coming again.

Life as we know it will come to an abrupt end when Christ returns and it will be both a catastrophic and devastating, yet worshipful event on a scale our minds cannot even comprehend. Let's be reminded though, being with Christ in eternity is our great goal. Who we are and what we do with this life is all geared toward that, and how we live our lives, now, in faithfulness to Jesus Christ is crucial to what happens when he comes again.

(READ) <sup>20</sup> Once, on being asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, Jesus replied, "The coming of the kingdom of God is not something that can be observed, <sup>21</sup> nor will people say, 'Here it is,' or 'There it is,' because the kingdom of God is in your midst."<sup>22</sup> Then he said to his disciples, "The time is coming when you will long to see one of the days of the Son of Man, but you will not see it. <sup>23</sup> People will tell you, 'There he is!' or 'Here he is!' **Do not go running off after them.** <sup>24</sup> For the Son of Man in his day will be like the lightning, which flashes and lights up the sky from one end to the other. <sup>25</sup> But first he must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation. <sup>26</sup> "Just as it was in the days of Noah, so also will it be in the days of the Son of Man. <sup>27</sup> People 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.

<sup>28</sup> "It was the same in the days of Lot. People were eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building. <sup>29</sup> But the day Lot left Sodom, fire and sulfur rained down from heaven and destroyed them all. <sup>30</sup> "It will be just like this on the day the Son of Man is **revealed.** <sup>31</sup> On that day no one who is on the housetop, with possessions inside, should go down to get them. Likewise, no one in the field should go back for anything. <sup>32</sup> Remember Lot's wife! <sup>33</sup> Whoever tries to keep their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life will preserve it. <sup>34</sup> I tell you, on that night two people will be in one bed; one will be taken and the other left. <sup>35</sup> Two women will be grinding grain together; one will be taken and the other left." <sup>36</sup> <sup>37</sup> "Where, Lord?" they asked. He replied, "Where there is a dead body, there the vultures will gather."

Some/many of you may have stayed up late into the night to watch King Charles and Queen Camilla's coronation. Apparently 100's of millions of people turned up and tuned in. Dignitaries from all over the globe. Everyone dressed in their finest clothes. Gold plated carriages. There were performances, hymns, oaths, anointing's, and homage paid to the King and Queen. Few events compare in terms of the scale of the event: the people involved and the importance.

Gods kingdom is *incomparable* to any other kingdom that has a king and or a queen and monarchies.

Psalm 47:2 *For the LORD Most High is awesome, the great King over all the earth... (v.9) for the kings of the earth belong to God; he is greatly exalted.*

Rev. 19:16 *On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.<sup>1</sup>*

Because we're talking about Gods kingdom today, I thought it would be helpful to have a definition: *The K.O.G is Gods reign, in Gods people, in Gods world, for Gods glory*

I've given this definition for a number of reasons. The primary one being, that to be in Gods kingdom, saved in Gods kingdom, is so much more than we have "*asked Jesus into our hearts*"

Saved from death to life, darkness to light, hopelessness to hope. Taking our definition: God reigns over every aspect of our lives, for one reason, ***HIS GLORY!***

Not difficult to see this was Jesus' favourite subject. And it is because he talked about it often that we see the enquiry of the Pharisees in v.20, "*when are we going to see this kingdom you keep talking about Jesus?*"

### **Being in Gods Kingdom now means following Jesus**

<sup>20</sup> *...Jesus replied, "The coming of the kingdom of God is **not something that can be observed**, <sup>21</sup> nor will people say, 'Here it is,' or 'There it is,' because the kingdom of God **is in your midst.**"*

For Jesus' response to the Pharisees to make sense we first need to have an understanding of what Jewish expectations were. They have heard Jesus talk about the kingdom but Jesus' ministry did not match *their expectations* of the messiahs coming.

Their expectation was a messiah, who would drive out the Romans with military power – like a 1<sup>st</sup> century Arnold Schwarzenegger. Imagine tanks – chariots – rolling down the streets of Jerusalem, Jesus at the front with all his legions of generals and soldiers flanking him. ***Not***, a baby born quietly in a manger with an announcement to poor shepherds. Not a man who would hang out with sinners and tax collectors. Not a carpenter, with a raggedy bunch of fisherman tagging along.

But that's how he came, and that's who he is. The Pharisees wanted to be able to say "*there it is. It's happening over there*" They wanted the fanfare. They wanted to be the ones that noticed. They wanted that kudos for his arrival. Jesus says "*no, sorry guys, it won't be like what you expect*"

What did Jesus say (v.20)? It "*is not something that can be observed...because the kingdom of God **is in your midst.***" In other words, while you were waiting for the tanks to roll in, I

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<sup>1</sup> Ps. 103:19 *The LORD has established his throne in heaven, and his kingdom rules over all.*

arrived. I'm here. And because I – the king am here – the kingdom is *"in your midst"* The kingdom of God was present by the presence of Jesus. It's like Jesus was saying *"It is not your knowledge of it, your views about it, or looking for it, that brings you into his kingdom. It is placing your faith and trust in the King of that kingdom and your belief in the truth he has come and is coming, again, that brings you into the kingdom<sup>2</sup>"*

Jesus is dealing here with the unbelief of the Pharisees. They couldn't 'see' Jesus. They refused to believe him even though all the *signs were there*. And as we know, ultimately their inability to trust him as the Messiah led to his crucifixion. The application is very simple here, *being in Gods Kingdom now means following Jesus, now*. If Jesus is your Lord and king you're in his kingdom.

But O how we complicate things: how much attention do we give things we don't know, but we think we know, when Jesus says *"don't bother looking"*, as opposed to things *that really matter?*

No area of theology breeds more speculative attention than end times. In particular, matters regarding rapture, tribulation and millennium. What's happening in the world is a matter of significant fascination too. There can tend to be an enormous amount of time and focus put into Jesus' 2nd coming. So what Jesus has said here asks of us an important question: ***What is the appropriate amount of attention to give to end times matters?***

The *how* is important - we might share a slightly different view on the how.

*When* is important. But...Mark 13:32 *"...about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.*

Jesus has made no request for us to figure out when he will return. Neither *how* or *when* are critical to our salvation. Though we're certainly encouraged in scripture to keep watch.

Mark 13:32, 33 *"Be on guard! Be alert*

BTW, this doesn't mean having an unnecessary obsession about what's happening in the world. It means having a constant vigilance of your spiritual walk with Jesus. One commentator I read said the outline scripture gives on end times is designed not to have us prepare charts, but to *prepare our hearts*

*What is, most important* is our belief and trust that *he is* coming again; that we follow him now with that in mind for the future, and, that every day, marks our readiness for

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<sup>2</sup> As Luke has said in various ways, the time of fulfillment is present in Jesus (4:16 – 30; 7:22 – 28; 9:1 – 6; 10:18; 11:20; 16:16).

his return<sup>3</sup> What really matters is being in God's Kingdom now, following Jesus, now, for what is to come. He, is our point of focus not the how or when.

The problem with the Pharisees was their attention was misdirected. It was on what was going on around them, rather than their need to simply trust Jesus. Jesus didn't want his disciples making that same mistake, which brings us to v.22.

Not only does Jesus want us faithfully following him now, he wants his disciples faithfully being prepared for his return...

### **Being in God's future kingdom means faithful preparation for Jesus' return**

<sup>22</sup> .."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.** <sup>23</sup> People will tell you, 'There he is!' or 'Here he is!' Do not go running off after them.

Jesus now referring to his 2<sup>nd</sup> coming is saying all manner of people will claim to be the Messiah, there will be fake news about me, conspiracy theories galore...run for the hills Jesus says, give that zero attention.

It's a popular subject...Google search, 19m results!...End of the world: 'Jesus Christ soon to return' as Bible expert...

Jesus said first, don't look for it, don't run after those who think they see it. You won't. You won't see the coming of Jesus approaching, but then it seems he says something indicating the opposite...

<sup>24</sup> For the Son of Man in his day **will be like the lightning**, which flashes and lights up the sky from one end to the other.

What's that about?

Imagine we're on a call to Zac and Bella in California and while on the call they see the sky ablaze with the same flashes of lightning we see here in NZ, that will be seen across the entire earth. There will be no 3-day warning on the news. No gradual build up, but an instantaneous event, where the earth will be left in no doubt as to what is happening. It will be the most *frightening* thing, but the most *exciting* thing!

I can picture the disciples on the edge of their seats *mouths hanging open*...then Jesus brings things back, down to earth, and speaks about the sorts of things that will happen, **first**

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<sup>3</sup> Belief that he has come, that he has died, that he rose from the dead, that he is coming again is a matter of salvation. It's a matter of salvation because Jesus coming again is the end, is the full stop in God's redemptive plan. And also is the beginning of the New Heavens and New Earth.

Jesus has come, and we're talking about Jesus coming again – truths central to the gospel. But I want us to see in v.25 another truth absolutely critical to the gospel

<sup>25</sup> ...**first** he must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation.

Jesus is referring to his suffering and death, as a result of those who rejected him. And that same rejection continues to this day. And in Vv.26-37 Jesus explains what that rejection will be like leading to his coming and what will happen on the day Jesus is "revealed"

I'll read the scripture then explain...

<sup>26</sup> "Just as it was in the days of Noah, so also will it be in the days of the Son of Man. <sup>27</sup> People 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. <sup>28</sup> "It was the same in the days of Lot. People were eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building. <sup>29</sup> But the day Lot left Sodom, fire and sulfur rained down from heaven and destroyed them all.<sup>30</sup> "It will be just like this (like the above) on the day the Son of Man is revealed.

When Jesus comes again – forgive the understatement – it will be a catastrophic event on a global scale!

In referencing Noah's and Lot's time, Jesus means it will happen when people are least expecting it. For the majority, life will be going on as normal, completely oblivious to events...

Remember Noah spent years warning the people of the approaching catastrophe. And people mocked and ridiculed him as he built the Ark. People carried on as normal, "eating, drinking, marrying..." then the flood came and destroyed them all.

Likewise, in Lot's day: "People were eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building" They ate, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they built" People carried on as normal, then fire and sulphur destroyed them all.

Just in case we think this is overstating what will happen, look at v.30, "it will be just like this" The 2nd coming of the Lord will be like those ancient days of judgment.

Life will be going on as normal, but on "that day", without warning, whatever is happening life will come to an abrupt end. People will be caught unaware, everything will be wiped out.

2 Peter 3:11 *Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives <sup>12</sup> as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming...<sup>14</sup>...make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him.*

The idea that there is a second chance on the judgment day – when all that is described in Luke 17:26-37 occurs – is a myth as far as the Bible is concerned<sup>4</sup>

If when he comes, people have not put their faith in Jesus Christ...they will be judged accordingly. Here's once again the core truth: there is no more important day, than today for us to put our faith in Jesus Christ, to follow Jesus Christ and to be faithfully preparing for his return.

I hear people saying all the time Jesus is coming back soon. That he's coming back soon has been the case since his resurrection. No one knows whether Jesus will return tomorrow, 50 years, or 300 years...

No one knows whether we'll be still here, or the Lord will have taken us. Either way, "soon" is not our issue, **preparation is!**

Titus 2:11-13 ...say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope—the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ,

I said earlier life will come to an abrupt end. To underscore just how quick and devastating this will be, Jesus says...

<sup>31</sup> **On that day** no one who is on the housetop, with possessions inside, should go down to get them. Likewise, no one in the field should go back for anything. <sup>32</sup> Remember Lot's wife! <sup>33</sup> Whoever tries to keep their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life will preserve it.

No time! No time to fetch your photos, laptop, or your cat! Most importantly, no time to make a decision here for the Lord. Despite what you see in the movies, there'll be no "father, who art..." BOOM, just like that. Sitting at Archie's having coffee, nek minute, gone! Recall Jesus said to the disciples, remember Lot's wife. What did she do? Why did she? *Don't look back!*

Here's the crucial point of Vv. 31-33; even though this event will happen in a moment, our preparation for it, requires us to look at what we love, or who we love. Looking back is akin to pining for the temporary things the world offers.

Phil. 3:8 *I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ*  
It's a challenge, I know, but folks this life, is a mist, here and then gone, and carries little value compared to life to come. Being with Christ in eternity is our end game. That's our great hope!

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<sup>4</sup> Bock, Darrell L. "Original Meaning" In *NIV Application Commentary, New Testament: Luke*. 450-460.

Who we are and what we do with this life is all geared toward that. We must look only one way! Because when He returns some will escape and many won't. And it is that separating between those who are lost, from those who are found that Jesus describes in Vv. 34-36

*<sup>34</sup> I tell you, on that night two people will be in one bed; one will be taken and the other left. <sup>35</sup> Two women will be grinding grain together; one will be taken and the other left." [36]*

*<sup>37</sup> "Where, Lord?" they asked. He replied, "Where there is a dead body, there the vultures will gather."*

Noah, Lot, one from the rooftop, one person from the bed, one from grinding, all saved, to life. Those left behind, are prey for the vultures. In other words, facing God's judgment and eternal death.

The image is graphic isn't it. *This is serious*. God's judgment is real. Followers of Jesus are separated from those who are not.

Matt. 25:32, 33 *All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.*

Thrilling and full of great hope for believers. If you are a follower of Jesus, you will be taken, *you are saved*. Devastating for those who are not. And on that point can we see, how great the need is for mission? When he returns there is no time, no second chances. So many people are lost, and while still breathing have an opportunity to know Christ. Now is the time for faith in Christ for what is to come.

What about us, in this room? Are we eager for him to come, are we praying for this, are we prepared?

Dr. Joseph Stowell, former President of Moody Bible Institute, once visited a home for special needs children that was operated by a Christian friend. Noticing the children's handprints on the windows, Dr. Stowell remarked about them to his friend. "Oh, those," he replied. "The children here love Jesus and they're so eager for Him to return that they lean against the windows as they look up at the sky."<sup>5</sup>

1 Thess. 4 *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. <sup>17</sup> 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. <sup>18</sup> Therefore encourage one another with these words.*

Jesus is coming back! We do not know when. But the passage we've looked at today calls us to look at ourselves. It calls us to place our faith in Jesus Christ so we're part of his kingdom, and to not look back!

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<sup>5</sup> Lesson 80: The Present and Future Kingdom (Luke 17:20-37) | Bible.org

And, where the children's eagerness has their faces against the window our eagerness is in faithfully preparing for his return. Not concerning ourselves with how, or when, but that he is. There is a great and glorious future in store for us, where we will enjoy his glory for ever and ever.\*\*