

The King and His Kingdom

Luke 17:20-37

Have you ever been talking to a young child and got one of those complicated question or perhaps an awkward question? Where you just give an over simplified answer instead of the nitty gritty details of the answer. You know one of those questions I am talking about: *why is the sky blue or where do babies come from?* You scratch your head and think up something quick. I mean you want to explain everything correctly but at that time you know their little minds just can't handle the truth.

This is kind of what is going on when the Pharisees asked Jesus when the Kingdom of God would come. The Pharisees did not understand the question they were asking. So, Jesus answered their question but it was not the answer they anticipated. Then He turned to His disciples and answered the question again but this time He unpacked the answer in greater detail.

This morning we want to consider Jesus answers to the question: *When will the Kingdom of God come?* It is a question that is on the minds of many people today. As a matter of fact, many Christians build their whole theology around *when Jesus will return*.

Yet, we must keep the context in mind as we consider Jesus answers to the question on the signs of the end times. Jesus had been talking about *what faith does*. **Remember, faith:** Faith forgives, faith fights against unbelief, faith fights against pride, and faith makes you well. So . . . when Jesus comes to the end times, He continues to emphasize *what faith does*.

Here is the point of vv. 20-37: *Faith in Jesus ushers in the Kingdom of God and sustains us until the Kingdom of God comes in gospel-fullness.* Now let's consider, what Jesus teaches us about faith and the Kingdom of God.

I. Faith in the King means the Kingdom of God is already here (vv. 20-21)

So . . . when Jesus had been talking about faith, the Pharisees saddle up beside Him and slip in their little question, *"when will the Kingdom of God come?"* Here is what you need to know about this question.

First, this was not a trick question where they were trying to trap Jesus. It was a legitimate question born out of legitimate concern.

Why would they be concerned? Well . . . the Romans were in control of the nation of Israel. They oppressed the people. The Edomite, King Herod was ruling Israel. Life was hard and people were hurting. Their way of life was decaying right before their eyes. It seemed like the nation would not last much longer because their heritage, way of life, worship, and theology would be gone. Things were very bad and it seemed like the end would come soon or at least they hoped it would.

Does this sound familiar? Every generation says this is the worst of times. Every generation says life is so bad and so hard that this has got to be the end. I remember in the 60's, 70's, and 80's it was the fear of Russia, Communism, nuclear war, and the sexual revolution.

Now it is some 40 to 60 years later and the people and places have changed but the problems are still the same: North Korea, Communism, nuclear war, and the sexual revolution.

We think, *"Things are so bad that this has got to be the end. Just look at our culture. It is a wreck. The world is in a mess."* Friends, the world has always been broken and because it is broken we are right to ask: *"When will the kingdom of God come?"* We are right to long for it and anticipate it and to prepare for it just like the Pharisees wanted to do.

Secondly, the Pharisees asked Jesus this question because they loved end-time prophecies and trying to figure out signs of the times. They loved to speculate when the kingdom would come. They wanted Jesus to affirm their apocalyptic pursuits.

So . . . before we are too hard on the Pharisees we need to be reminded that people still do this today. They build out their charts, try to figure out time lines, estimate dates, and in some cases actually set dates. There is a congregation of people at the corner of 13th and Grand and every year they hold a prophecy conference. Their whole theology is built around eschatology, (study of the end times) and setting dates. However, as soon as you set a date you can bet that Jesus will not come on that day because Jesus tells us elsewhere that no man knows the day and time but only the Father in Heaven knows. There will not be anyone in heaven saying, *"I told you so. I told you the right date."*

Listen . . . there is nothing wrong with studying the end times as long as the gospel is at the center of your study of the end times. I say this because this is what Jesus said in **v. 21**.

First, He said at the end of v. 20 that the Kingdom of God would come in ways *"that were not observable."* **What did he mean by "not observable"?** He meant that it was not going to be the sign and wonders they had thought it was. The Pharisees loved the apocalyptic writings of their day. They wanted Jesus to affirm their apocalyptic expectations of the Kingdom of God. However, Jesus did not answer their question the way they anticipated.

Secondly, He told them that, "The kingdom of God is in the midst of you." Some translations say: *it is within you or it is within your grasp*. The best translation is probably *within your grasp or in the midst of you*.

Think about the meaning of the phrase, "The Kingdom of God." One of the things that is true about *the Kingdom of God* is that it is a spiritual reality in the heart of a person. When a person is born again, the Spirit of God or *the Kingdom of God* takes up residence within that person. And so we might say . . . *the Kingdom of God* does not come in ways that are observable because we do not see how the Spirit of God gives new birth to people. We only see the evidence of new birth just like we do not see the wind but we see the affects/effects of the wind.

Yet, this is not exactly what Jesus meant when He said this to the Pharisees. The Pharisees were not born again so Jesus could not have meant *the Kingdom of God* was within them. They were not regenerate. They were lost but it is true that *the Kingdom of God* was *"in their midst" or "in their grasp."*

When Jesus said *the Kingdom of God* was in their midst He was referring to Himself. The King of *the Kingdom of God* was in their midst, He was in the presence, but they did not recognize the most important sign of all—Jesus.

They had observed power of *the Kingdom of God* in Jesus. They had heard Him preach the gospel, seen Him cast out demons, and heal the sick. He had done many miracles in their presence and yet they could not grasp that this was *the Kingdom of God*. These were indeed the signs they needed to recognize, not some apocalyptic sign.

Jesus told them in Luke 11:20 that *the Kingdom of God* had come upon them. All they needed to do was to look to Jesus. They only needed to put their faith in Jesus.

Application:**1. What kind of sign are you looking for or waiting on before you place your faith in Jesus Christ?**

Jesus is the King of the Kingdom of God and to have the King is to have the Kingdom of God so place your faith in Jesus so that the Kingdom of God will be ushered into your heart.

Jesus told Nicodemus that unless you are born again you cannot see the Kingdom of God. Faith in Jesus is the cry of new birth in Christ that reveals the coming of the Kingdom of God in your life. Call on Him today while there is time.

2. Don't waste your time on signs of the times. Here is what I mean. Don't make the mistake the Pharisees did of being distracted by apocalyptic signs of the times. I am not saying to be ignorant of our times but to not be distracted by charts, time lines, and newspaper reports that you think match apocalyptic biblical prophecy. Obsession with these things will *easily* pull you away from the gospel.

Any study of the end times that is not cross-centered is a distraction. **Any study** that does not have Jesus at the center is a distraction. **Any study of eschatology** that leaves out the most important sign—the person and work of Christ is a stumbling block set up by the enemy. As Bishop J. C. Ryle once said, *"The vast majority of men are utterly deceived in their expectations with respect to the kingdom of God. They are waiting for signs which will never appear. They are looking for indications which they will never discover."*¹

Friends, don't focus on signs of the times but focus on the Savior of the times—Jesus. Fix your eyes on Him and immerse yourself in His word. Learn the height, depth, breath, and length of the love of God that is in Christ Jesus through the gospel.

II. Faith in the King sustains us while we wait on Kingdom of God (vv. 22-24)

In **vv. 22-24**, Jesus turned to His disciples to make sure they understood what He was saying. Jesus answered His disciples differently than He did the Pharisees on the question of when *the Kingdom of God* would come. He told the Pharisees that the Kingdom of God was in their presence because He represented the Kingdom of God. In other words, the first thing they needed was put their faith in Jesus.

However, Jesus turned to His disciples and told them that they needed to be ready to live life without Him in their presence. They were going to need to wait and prepare for the coming Kingdom of God.

We might call Jesus teaching here; the "Already and the Not Yet" of the Kingdom. When you have Jesus, you have *the King and the Kingdom of God* in you. However, . . . the *Kingdom of God* has not yet come in its fullness.

Jesus was preparing His disciples for the time after His ascension into Heaven because He would not be physically present with them. He said to them in **v. 22**, *"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."*

What did He mean by this? He meant there were hard days ahead of His disciples and they would long for Jesus' return. All of Jesus' disciples go through many trials and tribulations until we enter the fullness of Kingdom of God. There will be days when we long for and pray for Jesus to come and take us home but we will have to wait.

Do you want to know when the end times began? They began immediately after Jesus ascended into heaven. Since that time trials and tribulations have come upon God's people all over the world.

¹ J. C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on the Gospels: Luke*, vol. 2, 238.

All of Jesus disciples were martyred except for John and He suffered when he was exiled on the Island of Patmos. The days came when they longed to see Jesus and longed for His return.

Many Christians today live through dark days of tribulation. Christians are being killed in places like the Middle East, North Korea, and China. Many are being jailed in places like Indonesia. Christians are in the cross-hairs of politicians here in the U.S. and western Europe. We no longer live in a post Christian culture. Secularism is the new religion and if you do not bow the knee to secularism and all of its policies then you will pay the price. **We must understand that when we suffer for the Kingdom we will long to see Jesus.** We will pray, *“Maranatha, come quickly Lord Jesus.”*

The temptation in days of tribulation is for us to take our eyes off of the True Savior and put them on a false savior. Some people, who call themselves Christian, in their suffering, fall prey to false messiahs. They fall prey to the *Jim Joneses* and *David Koreshes* of the world. These men called themselves latest versions of Jesus.

Also, there are other cults of the world that have their own its versions of Jesus. The **Mormons** have latter-day Jesus, the **Muslims** have a version of Jesus, and even the **Hindus** are able to work Jesus into their system. All of these groups say what **v. 23** says, *“Look, there is the Messiah!” or ‘Look, here is Jesus!’”*

When times get hard, false messiahs and fake Jesuses come out of the woodwork. But don't believe them. Do not follow them.

Then in v. 24, Jesus gives His disciples the one sign concerning His return that we need to know. Are you ready it—here it is—everyone will know it. It will be obvious to all.

The Day of the Son of Man's return will not be concealed. You won't have to look for Jesus in some obscure part of the world. No . . . it will be like lightening that lights up the sky on a stormy night from one side of the horizon to the other. Everyone will see the Son of Man returning. There will be no guessing, no wondering, and no uncertainty.

Everyone will know it is King Jesus because every eye will see King Jesus and then every knee will bow before the terrible, wonderful, majesty of the glory of King.

The Apostle John had a vision of Jesus return when he was exiled on Patmos. He wrote in **Revelation 1:7-8**, *“Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him. Even so. Amen.”* **Then Jesus said in v. 8**, *“I am the Alpha and the Omega . . . who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.”* **Then in vv. 12-16, John wrote**, *“Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me, and on turning I saw seven golden lampstands, ¹³ and in the midst of the lampstands one like a son of man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash around his chest. ¹⁴ The hairs of his head were white, like white wool, like snow. His eyes were like a flame of fire, ¹⁵ his feet were like burnished bronze, refined in a furnace, and his voice was like the roar of many waters. ¹⁶ In his right hand he held seven stars, from his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining in full strength.”*

Friends there will be no doubt who Jesus returns. Everyone will know it.

Application:

So, what should we do while we wait for Jesus return? Nourish your faith in Jesus by holding fast to the gospel. **Nourish your faith** by immersing yourself in the word of God. **Nourish your faith** by being an active member of a local church that faithfully proclaims the word of God. **Nourish your faith** by being

sanctified in the truth of God's word. **Nourish your faith** by discipling everyone you can while you have time.

Nourish your faith by sharing your faith in Jesus with others as often as you can.

III. The Gospel is the sign of the Kingdom of God (v. 25)

So . . . where have we been in this text? We have one question by the Pharisees and Jesus gave two answers. Jesus is like a parent who is telling the children what they need to know.

It is like a group of teenagers who say, "Tell me how to be a doctor." Jesus says to one group, first you need to finish high school. Then he turns to another group and says, *"Now that you are about to finish college you need to take the MCAT."*

The Pharisees wanted to know the **signs** of the coming Kingdom but what they needed to do first was place their faith in Jesus. **The disciples** had faith in Jesus but they needed to know that it was not about **signs** but about holding fast to Jesus by faith until He returns.

Then . . . after Jesus explained all of this He said in v. 25 there is ONE sign that must happen before all signs and it is the most important sign. **Listen to v. 25 again,** *"But first he must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation."* The "But first" is the sign and the "he" is Jesus.

So . . . what was sign was Jesus talking about in v. 25? **Matthew 12:38-40**, records another conversation Jesus had with the Pharisees concerning signs, *"Then some of the scribes and Pharisees answered him, saying, "Teacher, we wish to see a sign from you." ³⁹ But he answered them, "An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. ⁴⁰ For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth."*

The greatest sign Jesus could give and did give WAS NOT some apocalyptic sign of distress in the cosmos. **THE GREATEST sign was the gospel.**

The greatest sign was that the Son of God came, lived a perfectly sinless life for sinners because they could not live it and then died on the cross to pay for their sins. He paid for the **penalty** of their sin, freed them from the **punishment** of the sin, and also delivered them from the **power** of their sin. Then Jesus was buried and rose from the dead on the third day. He is the True and Better Jonah who came forth from the belly of the earth.

When you read the rest of **Matthew 12** Jesus said the men of Nineveh will rise up and condemn the men of this generation because the men of Nineveh repented at the preaching of Jonah. The men of Nineveh would condemn the Pharisees because they and their generation rejected Jesus as the Son of God—the Messiah.

Application (2 things):

1. First, good solid Christian eschatology has the gospel at the center of it. If your study of the end-times does not lead you to the cross then you don't have Christ-centered eschatology. **If your eschatology** is filled with charts dates and times you don't have Christ-centered eschatology. **If your eschatology** does not preach the work of Jesus on the cross, you don't have Christ-centered eschatology.

Charles Spurgeon once told the story of a young man who was preaching in front of his old pastor/mentor. The young man worked hard and preached for 45 minutes. After the service was over he asked his old mentor, *"What did you think of my sermon?"* The old preacher said, *"Ah, it was a very poor sermon indeed."* The young man was crushed. So, he proceeded to see why the old pastor thought that. He asked him, *"What about my exegesis of the text?"* The old pastor said it was fine exegetical work. *"Well what*

about my illustrations?” The old pastor said they were fine illustrations. The young man asked, *“Well what about my delivery?”* The old pastor said it was a fine delivery. The young man was confused at this time and asked then why was my sermon so poor? He said, *“Young man, because you did not preach Christ from the text.”* The young man said, *“Well . . . Christ was not in the text.”* The old pastor asked him, *“Do you not know that from every hamlet and village in England that all the roads lead to London?”* The young man, looking confused, said, *“Yes, of course.”* *“Son, just like every road in England leads you to London so in every text of the Scriptures there is a road to Jesus.”*

If your eschatology leads you down roads that are filled with charts, dates, and always looking for end time signs that are disconnected from the cross then you are not on the gospel road. I am not saying there are no signs but I am saying the **most important sign** has already been given **and** that was the perfect, sinless life of Christ to earn our righteousness, His death on the cross to pay for our unrighteousness, and His resurrection from the dead. **Verse 25** is about the most important end times sign there is and that was what the Pharisees were missing.

2. The second application is: Have you believed the most important sign—the gospel?

IV. We must have faith in Jesus while we wait for the Kingdom of God (vv. 26-30)

Now Jesus shifts to what it will be like in the culture when He steps out of Heaven and returns. Notice that **v. 30** says, *“so will it be on the day when the Son of Man is revealed.”*

What will it be like when God judges the world for all of its wickedness? The word “it” in **v. 30** is referring to what was going on in the daily lives of the people on earth—the culture.

So, let’s backup and look at vv. 26-29, *“Just as it was in the days of Noah, so will it be in the days of the Son of Man. ²⁷ 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. ²⁸ Likewise, just as it was in the days of Lot—they were eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building, ²⁹ but on the day when Lot went out from Sodom, fire and sulfur rained from heaven and destroyed them all.”*

When you hear these descriptions of culture, we learn that the culture in Noah’s day and in Lot’s day was wicked. Wickedness reigned just like it does today. Culture has always been wicked.

But . . . notice how Jesus described what was going on in those wicked cultures. **People** will be going to work, **people** will be getting married, **people** will be loving their sin, **AND they** will be ignoring the warnings that were being given to them by the preachers and preaching of God’s word.

In the days of Noah, Noah gave warnings that judgment was coming. He built an ark so that those who believed his preaching could be saved. Instead, everyone laughed him and his family to scorn but then judgment came and it was too late because they did not listen to the gospel Noah preached. **In the days of Lot,** it was like any other day. Wickedness may have reigned as people were buying, selling, planting, building and just going about their daily lives. It was a day like any other day **and** if the LORD had not rescued Lot he would have perished along with the people of Sodom.

Application:

1. Faith in Jesus will save you from the coming judgment. You must be ready for you and I do not know when that day will come. Consider this, **it was a day** like any other day when terrorist attacked the world trade center and thousands of people died. **It was a day** like any other day when the tsunami hit southeast Asia in the Indian Ocean and over one hundred thousand people died. That morning in New York

and in southeast Asia it was a beautiful day. The sun was shining and everyone was going about their business and then it happened.

My point is that it will a day like any other day. Those people had no idea that they would stand before Almighty God that day. **When Jesus returns, it will be a day like any other day.** People will be going about their business. The sun will be shining and the normal things of life will be going on and then the glory of the Son of God will light up the sky. Will you be ready for that day?

So, what should you do? You should heed the call of the preaching of the gospel and get in the ark of Jesus and be saved. Jesus is the ark of God that saves and those who are saved gather in local churches to worship their Savior every Sunday. Faith in Jesus puts you in His Ark.

2. Secondly, church, we must be like Noah and faithfully preach the gospel of Jesus Christ. We must compel people to get in the ark of Jesus. We must call them to **repent** of their sins and trust Christ only. This is the only way for them to be saved.

You need to know this, when you faithfully preach the gospel and call people to repent of their sin you will most likely be treated just like Noah. However, if we know God's judgment is coming, we can do no less than preach the gospel.

V. Faith in Jesus prepares us to meet the King in the Kingdom of God (vv. 31-37)

Verse 31 begins with "On that day." On what day? It is the day Jesus is revealed from Heaven and on **that Day, all will be revealed.** You will either be saved by your repentance and faith in Jesus or you will suffer the judgment of God because of your love of yourself and because you trusted in your own self-righteousness.

Verse 31 goes on to say "don't come down and don't turn back." It is not that you should not do this but it is because it is an impossibility. You can't make changes or run or get something you forgot because it is too late. All will be revealed on *The Day of the Son of Man*.

What we learn is that heart of Lot's wife was revealed on the Day of Judgment of Sodom. She disobeyed God because she did not trust God, she did not love God. She looked back at Sodom because she loved her old life. Judgment revealed that she had no faith in God. No love for God. No desire to do the will of God.

That was Jesus point in v. 33. You see . . . Lot's wife had not died to her old life. She loved her old life. She wanted to preserve it. She wanted to keep living it and never lose it and because she clung to her old life she lost it. It was not a life preserver but a mill stone that sunk her in an ocean of judgment.

In vv. 34-36, Jesus explains how some will be saved and others will not. If you notice, some translations jump from **v. 35 to v. 37**. That is because **v. 36** is not in the earliest manuscripts and so most translations have omitted **v. 36**. But, **v. 36** simply continues the illustration that *"one will be taken and one left."* It is teaching us that some will be saved and some will not. Those with faith in Jesus will be saved and those who do not have faith in Jesus will not.

Verse 37 concludes with a gruesome picture of judgment. Those who do not have faith in Jesus will perish. Vultures are birds that eat dead things. There is no life in that place. There is no hope of salvation. The Kingdom has come and those in **v. 37** have missed it and they suffering for it.

Now you need to know that this text does not mean you simply die and it is over. This death is an eternal death. It will be a place of eternal perishing where there is a kind of perishing where your body always experiences the agony and horrors of perishing.

Conclusion

The question, as we conclude is: are you trusting Jesus? You don't have to be preoccupied, distracted, or worry about the signs of the end times when you trust Jesus.