

Christ Will Return
Luke 17:20-37

As I have shared on other occasions, my journey as a Christian began somewhat later in life than it did for many other Christians. I was twenty-nine years old when I gave my heart to the Lord.

And not having regularly attended any particular church I often wondered exactly which of the denominational names I would eventually call myself.

My Mom was Pentecostal. And when I was very young I would attend a Pentecostal church with her. And though later, as a new Christian I had some of those leanings I knew that I was probably not Pentecostal.

In those beginning years of my walk with Christ, at the encouragement of my boss at work, I started attending a Presbyterian Church. The preaching and the teaching there was very solid and always true to the scriptures. And so I became a Presbyterian.

But as I would visit other churches, especially Baptist and Methodist churches, I would hear some differences in the doctrines that were being taught. And some of those doctrines, though different, seemed also to fit well within the meanings of the scriptures.

But as time passed and as I studied more and more about the doctrines taught within the various church denominations, I found that I didn't exactly fit into any one of them. And so I wondered, am I a Presbyterian? Perhaps I'm a Baptist, even a Methodist?

Now, as the years have passed in my journey as a Christian I have been a member of a Baptist Church and I have also pastored two Presbyterian Churches. And yes, some people, would wonder how I could have such differing affiliations and still be faithful to the scriptures.

But perhaps, if truth be known, for most serious students of these scriptures, not many of us will fit perfectly within the doctrinal teachings of any one particular church. That as any group of Christians gather to study the words of this bible, though each of them be solid, born-again believers, their thoughts about one

particular matter of scripture or another can vary. Not so much as to make either person wrong or sinful, but still different in their thoughts and beliefs.

For me, as to what I might want to call myself, I think that I like the description that John MacArthur uses best. Though he is obviously very "Reformed" in his doctrinal teaching, he has said that he is a "Leaky Dispensationalist", a mixture between "Reformed" with just a "pinch" of "Dispensationalism" added in.

And so, maybe the same is true for myself. As with John MacArthur I have strongly held beliefs in the Total Sovereignty of God. And I also believe that there will be an actual one-thousand year Millennial Kingdom, just as it is described in the scriptures. But to have both of those strongly held beliefs at the same time does not always fit well with my Baptist and Presbyterian friends. But be that as it may, that seems to be where the Lord has my heart right at this moment.

Now then, with all of this being said, what do all these meanderings of my mind have to do with the scripture passage that we'll study today given to us here in Luke chapter 17? Simply put, there are mysteries within the words of these scriptures, mysteries that we Christians might not always agree upon, mysteries that form the doctrinal basis for the differing denominations. But those mysteries really should not be a means of dividing us. They should instead unite us in our love for the Lord and for His word.

May I read these somewhat mysterious words of our Lord and then, I'll explain why my meandering mind visited the thoughts that I have just shared with us. These words beginning in verse 20,

²⁰ Once, 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, ²¹ nor will people say, 'Here it is,' or 'There it is,' because the kingdom of God is within you."

²² 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. ²³ Men will tell you, 'There he is!' or 'Here he is!' Do not go running off after them. ²⁴ 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. ²⁵ But first he must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation.

²⁶ "Just as it was in the days of Noah, so also will it be in the days of the Son of Man. ²⁷ 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.

²⁸ "It was the same in the days of Lot. People were eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building. ²⁹ But the day Lot left Sodom, fire and sulfur rained down from heaven and destroyed them all.

³⁰ "It will be just like this on the day the Son of Man is revealed. ³¹ On 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. ³² Remember Lot's wife! ³³ Whoever tries to keep his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life will preserve it. ³⁴ I tell you, on that night two people will be in one bed; one will be taken and the other left. ³⁵ Two 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)

These words from our Lord give us a strong message about His return to us. And yes, while they are one message, the words seem to have two very differing points of focus, and they especially have differing timetables regarding those moments when the Lord Jesus will return. And for serious students of the bible who might be studying about the "end of days", as those events are described for us here, there can easily be two differing viewpoints developed from these words. And those differing viewpoints form much of the doctrinal differences that separate out the various denominations.

When we were last together, we studied in verses 21 and 22 about the manner in which the "Coming of the Kingdom of God" has already taken place among us. That when He came to us the first time, in His birth, His death and His resurrection, the Lord Jesus and His Holy Spirit began an invasion into the hearts and minds of everyone who would receive Him as Savior and Lord. But within that Coming of His Kingdom most of the people of the world would not be able to see it. His Kingdom came to us "without observation."

And that has taken place and it is still taking place all over the world. As people like you and me surrender our hearts to our Lord for salvation, His Kingdom comes to live and abide within our hearts. Again, a quiet invasion, one without much "observation", but an invasion, nonetheless.

But then, here the Lord Jesus goes on to speak about another “invasion” by His Kingdom later on, one this time with clear and plain “observation”, an invasion that everyone on the earth will observe and experience.

Listen again to these words. First, the coming of the Kingdom “without observation”.

²⁰ Once, 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, ²¹ nor will people say, ‘Here it is,’ or ‘There it is,’ because the kingdom of God is within you.” (Luke 17:20-21)

And then next, His Kingdom coming at a future time which will take place with “great observation”.

²² 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. ²³ Men will tell you, ‘There he is!’ or ‘Here he is!’ Do not go running off after them. ²⁴ 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. ²⁵ But first he must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation.

²⁶ “Just as it was in the days of Noah, so also will it be in the days of the Son of Man. ²⁷ 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.

²⁸ “It was the same in the days of Lot. People were eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building. ²⁹ But the day Lot left Sodom, fire and sulfur rained down from heaven and destroyed them all.

³⁰ “It will be just like this on the day the Son of Man is revealed. ³¹ On 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. ³² Remember Lot's wife! ³³ Whoever tries to keep his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life will preserve it. ³⁴ I tell you, on that night two people will be in one bed; one will be taken and the other left. ³⁵ Two women will be grinding grain together; one will be taken and the other left.” (Luke 17:22-35)

Within these words can be seen some of the differences within the various church doctrines that we spoke about a few moments ago.

And though, as we see with these Pharisees of Jesus' day, whose desire and cry was for God's Kingdom to come visibly, with great destructive power to defeat all their enemies and to restore the nation of Israel back to its days of glory and peace, Jesus has here declared that God's kingdom must first come in a very different manner. That it must first come "without observation", with a quieter, more unseen invasion, one conducted solely by the Spirit of Christ as He would invade the hearts and the souls of all those who would receive Him, one person at a time. And He has done exactly that. Those words in verse 20 again,

²⁰ . . . "The kingdom of God does not come with observation; ²¹ nor will they say, 'See here!' or 'See there!' For indeed, the kingdom of God is within you." (Luke 17:20-21)

And this truly is a far better way for God's Kingdom to come, first quietly and unseen, with an invasion of our souls, one person at a time. And as Christ's Spirit comes in and takes up residence within our souls, and as we surrender control of our lives over to Him, the "Kingdom of God" truly begins to spread and to reign upon the earth.

Beginning with you and with me, His Kingdom can grow into vast communities, taking up full and complete and permanent residence within all those who call upon His name, changing our lives, as He abides in us, and as we abide in Him.

And yes, there is far more to follow in the "Coming of the Kingdom of God", but this first step is absolutely necessary, else we will not be prepared to receive Him when He comes in His more visible and more "observable" final and majestic triumph over sin and satan and death.

With that being said, there is also an innate desire within each person, and especially within the hearts and souls of believing Christians, that Christ would come back, and very soon, and in the way that it is described for us in these words that we have just read, visibly and with power like lightning flashes, to redeem His people and to cleanse the earth from its bondage to sin and self and corruption.

And so, while the ordinary citizen of this world cries out for peace and provision and cries out against the outrage of oppressive governments and merciless armies, those of us who know and trust in Christ as Savior and Lord also cry out.

But thankfully, the cry of the believer is not for some governmental program, or for some other political intervention to come and save us. But rather we cry out for the Person of Christ to return and to reign among us as Lord and Master and King over all the earth.

But again, as these words warn us, we must not be Impatient for His return, so as to get confused about the time and the people who might take part in our final redemption. Impatience will not accomplish the will of God.

Listen again to the warnings! Verse 22,

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. ²³People 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 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)

There are men of our day, good and honest preachers, who dedicate the focus of their entire ministry to this very purpose, that of searching for and estimating the time in which the Son of Man will return in the clouds in all of His pomp and glory. Their preaching and their teaching is taken up with the counting of days and recognition of signs and wonders and happenings throughout the earth.

And I agree that such things are necessary and they are good. And those pursuits are most likely a calling from God. But those pursuits must be carried out very carefully, else, as these warnings from Jesus tell us, we can easily get confused. As good and as earnest as those pursuits may be, the evil one, satan, can confuse our efforts and we can find ourselves following after strange doctrines and designs.

Some of the more trustworthy end-time pursuits can be seen in the efforts by story writers like Tim LeHay and Jerry Jenkins with their "Left Behind" series of books and films. But while their efforts are firmly based within certain contexts of scripture, we must always remember that those books and their story lines are not on the same level as scripture.

The premise behind most all of the teachings within those books comes from a very limited amount of scriptural context, with the vast majority of the storylines being greatly embellished by the story writers.

And yes, I myself do like most all of the stories those writers have fabricated. And I do believe that there will someday be a great and terrible time of tribulation on the earth. These scriptures are clear that those days will surely come.

And I believe also that there will be many similarities in the sufferings that are portrayed within those books, that will take place with the saints that are called to go through that great tribulation.

But we must also understand that the time and the manner in which those days will come and the events that will take place within them will also probably be so unique and so terrible, that even the cleverest of story writers could not conceive such horrible atrocities.

That is the way of the wrath of God and the responses that satan and his vile armies of demons will probably have toward the wrath that God will bring upon them and upon the whole earth.

And we must also remember that Jesus Himself told us that neither He nor the people of this earth truly know His plan and the timing of His return. And why should the people of this earth know or even care? Most of them have no interest in Him and His ways. The people of this earth are too consumed with the matters of their own day, their own self-centered pursuits, and their own vile and pathetic sensual desires.

And yes, I must agree, the warnings given here by Jesus do look eerily similar to the people and lifestyles of this day. Listen to how Jesus words it! Verse 26,
²⁶ "Just as it was in the days of Noah, so also will it be in the days of the Son of Man. ²⁷ 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. ²⁸ "It was the same in the days of Lot. People were eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building. ²⁹ But the day Lot left Sodom, fire and brimstone rained down from heaven and destroyed them all. (Luke 17:26-29)

Folks, these same kinds of activities and behaviors can easily be seen within the activities and behaviors that we are involved in today and every day. The people of this earth are consumed with the matters of daily life, buying and selling and pursuing fortunes, building bigger houses to hold greater wealth.

And along the way, people get involved in some of the vilest of behaviors, pursuing after other men's wives and other women's husbands. And also, here of late, more and more people have revealed that they have become like the people of Sodom, with the worst of vile sins of homosexuality and sodomy. And in another place in these scriptures we are told clearly that Sodomites will not ever enter into the Kingdom of God.

And here, God very plainly expresses His plan to deal with that kind of vile behavior, telling us what their fate is to be . . . "fire and brimstone", with no show of mercy whatsoever. Verse 28

²⁸ "It was the same in the days of Lot. People were eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building. ²⁹ But the day Lot left Sodom, fire and brimstone rained down from heaven and destroyed them all. (Luke 17:28-29)

Oh dear Christian, we dare not allow our attachments to the things of this world to take hold of us. All the things of this life are temporal and will all be destroyed on those great and terrible days of the wrath of God. Listen! Verse 30,

³⁰ "It will be just like this on the day the Son of Man is revealed. ³¹ On 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. ³² Remember Lot's wife! (Luke 17:30-32)

Our love for the things of this world is often a consuming bondage, even with those of us who count ourselves as being devout Christians. That is why God gives us the warning in 1 John 2 that we must not "love this world or the things of this world", that it will surely pass away when the fire and brimstone begins to descend upon the earth.

Lot's wife seemed to have loved the world and the things of the world. She seemed not to be able to fully turn away from it, even in the face of certain death. And as we know, she suffered the ultimate penalty for her choice. And her pillar of salt stands as a firm warning to us that we must not do the same. We must flee the things and the lures of this world and never look back.

But note here also, that God will surely protect His own when it comes time for His great and terrible wrath to be rained down upon men. Verse 33,

³³ Whoever tries to keep his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life will preserve it. ³⁴ I tell you, on that night two people will be in one bed; one will be taken and the other left. ³⁵ Two women will be grinding grain together; one will be taken and the other left." (Luke 17:33-37)

Folks, God is very selective. Just as He was with the three Hebrew children as they were thrown into the fiery furnace. The guards who threw them in were immediately destroyed, but not so the three Hebrew children. Not one hair of their head was singed.

And so also it will be with those of us who have put our trust in Christ as our Lord and Savior. On that great and terrible day of God's wrath, those who believe will be separated out from the unbelievers and we will be saved from His wrath. "Two people will be in one bed, one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding grain together, one will be taken and the other left."

God will surely save His beloved children, but the unbelievers will suffer the full force of His wrath.

And herein, we again encounter some of the doctrinal differences that will take place in a conversation between to otherwise strongly believing Christians. And herein lies some of the reasons for my meandering thoughts at the beginning of this study.

Many of our devoutly believing brethren believe that these scriptures that we have studied today speak about the final end of days when our Lord will return and with this single event, the new and eternal heaven and earth will be established.

While other of our devoutly believing brethren believe that these words describe only the beginning of the end of days, that event in which our Lord will "Rapture us out", and will rescue us as He did by saving out Noah and his family, and as He did by saving out Lot and his family.

The Lord Jesus will, on that day, rescue us, you and me who have placed our trust in Him. As He tells us here, "Two people will be in one bed, one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding grain together, one will be taken and the other left," rescuing us out from that great and terrible "tribulation" that will descend on this earth, a tribulation that some believe will

last as long as seven years. After which, He will usher in the one-thousand year Millennial Kingdom.

For our study today, may I simply conclude these words by saying that while there is such a diverse understanding of what these words of scripture are telling each of us, the one thing that we do know for sure and for certain is that, yes, our Lord surely will return. And that He will return exactly as these words of scripture here are describing for us.

And there will be only one escape from the great and terrible wrath of fire and brimstone that will descend upon the earth. That escape is by our trusting the Lord Jesus to be our Savior and Lord!

And so, let me plead with you. If you have not taken that step of receiving Christ and the kingdom of God to come into your soul, please, please do that now, without delay.

May we pray!