

57: The End (Luke 17:20-37)

One of the topics that sparks much interest among theologians is **eschatology** - *the study of last things* - **THE END**. What will happen at the end of time? How will people be judged by God and where will they go? And believe it or not, there are some major disagreements about **THE END** by Godly & knowledgeable people.

The theologians of Jesus' day discussed these things too and not all of them agreed either. They had elaborate theories of how **THE END** would play out. So the Pharisees asked Jesus for His view on 'when the kingdom of God would come' and the signs that it was near.

Luke 17:20-21 (NIV)

²⁰ 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, ²¹ nor will people say, 'Here it is,' or 'There it is,' because **the kingdom of God is in your midst.**"

As Dr. Luke has noted multiple times in his writing, Jesus claimed that the Kingdom of God had already come to earth.

- Referring to the transfiguration Jesus told the apostles that some would not die before seeing '**the Kingdom of God**' - and then they saw Him glowing & glorified (Luke 9:27).
- Jesus sent His apostles out to proclaim '**The kingdom of God has come near**' (10:9).
- Jesus claimed that His ability to cast out demons demonstrated '**the kingdom of God has come upon you**' (11:20).

Warren Wiersbe writes, "*The Pharisees' question was legitimate, but it was also tragic.*"¹ Jesus had been **preaching & proving** that He was the KING of the Kingdom for quite some time. The signs they should have seen had been exploding in their face, yet instead of recognizing Him as KING of the KINGdom, they said He was a false teacher empowered by Satan.

The Jews of Jesus' day were looking for a deliverer like Moses - one who would destroy their enemies and take over as king of the earth. For Jesus to say, '**the kingdom of God is in your midst**' without overthrowing the Roman occupying force was inconceivable. But like we have all done, they had a presumptions about how it should happen. Remember, this was ALSO true of Jesus' apostles. They believed the Messiah would never die and that they would reign with him with no fear for their lives. Yet, that is NOT what Jesus says next.

Luke 17:22 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."

What a great promise, huh?! The disciples would long to see Jesus in power because they were going to face some tough times. All of the apostles as well as many other disciples of Jesus were persecuted and sometimes killed for their faith in Him. Some difficult days ahead and Jesus would NOT return to take them out of it, although He promised to be with them **THROUGH** it.

❓ If the apostles of Jesus were going to face persecution and ultimately die without being rescued, WHY would we think we should not?

And in their desire to see Jesus return, **Kent Hughes** writes, "*They were NOT to be seduced by "prophecy experts" crying that they had seen Messiah.*"²

Luke 17:23-25 ²³ People 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.

You see, people aren't going to have to put a puzzle together about WHO the **Son of Man** is. His 'day' - like **lightning** - will be sudden, powerful, & obvious. Yet before He comes as conquering King, before He takes over the earth, He will '**suffer**' and **be 'rejected'** by the **generation** He had ministered to, rejected by His own people, handed over the Romans to be crucified. Of course, that would NOT be the end as Jesus would raise from the dead and shortly thereafter ascend to heaven, with the promise of His physical return by the angels in Acts 1.

So, WHEN will Jesus return and take over and what will be the signs?

This is where the passage is difficult to decipher, because there is a **NEAR FUTURE** fulfillment and a **FAR FUTURE** fulfillment as well.

All 3 of the synoptic gospels have this material in common - you can find it in Matthew 24 & Mark 13, yet Luke's Gospel divides it into two separate passages - here & in Luke 21.

¹ Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 245.

² R. Kent Hughes, *Luke: That You May Know the Truth, Preaching the Word* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1998), 179.

These are the passages that most 21st century believers point to as FAR FUTURE events - what has yet to occur. Yet very few consider how Jesus' words were fulfilled in the NEAR FUTURE to Jesus' original audience.

Jesus uses this language to refer to:

- a. NEAR FUTURE event - His **judgment on Jerusalem** that would come in A.D. 70 &
- b. FAR FUTURE event that has yet to occur - His **2nd Coming**.

We will cover much more of this as we go through Luke's Gospel, but I will now do my best to explain how both could be true - judgment on Jerusalem in A.D. 70 & Jesus' 2nd coming.

In answer to 'when the kingdom of God would come,' Jesus points to 2 well-known Biblical examples of God's judgment being poured out on mankind.

Luke 17:26-27 (NIV)

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.

People were living in the moment, not even aware that THE END was coming. Then, suddenly, ***the flood came and destroyed them all.*** Look at how Matthew describes what Jesus says:

Matthew 24:38-39a (NIV) For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; and they knew nothing about what would happen until the **flood** came and **took them all away**.

Notice something that makes a HUGE difference in the context.

- *What took them away?* **The FLOOD.** The flood was how God brought **swift judgment** on sinners.
- *What happened to Noah & the others in the ark?* **When judgment came, were they taken off the planet?** NO, but they were protected from God's judgment. Remember that context as we continue with the next part of Matthew 24.

Matthew 24:39b-41 (NIV) That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. Two men will be in the field; **one will be taken** and the other left. Two women will be grinding with a hand mill; **one will be taken** and the other left.

Growing up, I was taught and later spent many years teaching that those who were **taken** were caught up in a secret rapture to heaven, while those who were **left** would experience a 7 year tribulation on earth. Notice that Jesus DOES NOT speak of a 7-year tribulation nor His people being taken to heaven, yet this IS what I had read INTO the text for quite some time.

But in light of the illustration Jesus used about Noah & the flood, is that what Jesus meant? Who were those who are TAKEN who who were those who were LEFT?

It hurt my feelings and my pride when I realized that I had it BACKWARDS!

- The ones who are **taken** are taken in judgment, like those TAKEN by the flood!
- The ones who are **left** are those NOT taken in judgment, but were protected from God's judgment & continued living on the earth. So...

BIG TRUTH: THE END brings Swift Destruction & Sweet Protection

Swift Destruction on those who REBEL & Sweet Protection for those who are RIGHTEOUS. When Jesus returns...will you be living in righteousness or rebellion? What if He were to return TOMORROW?

Jesus uses another similar illustration as we look back to Luke's Gospel...

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

Again, people went about their daily business & THE END came quickly bringing...Swift Destruction on Sodom & Sweet Protection for Lot and his family.

It will be just like this on the day the Son of Man is revealed.

Near & Far Future Events? Judgement on Jerusalem & 2nd Coming?

Luke 17:31 (NIV) 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.

• **Matthew 24:17** uses this same language as Jesus warns the disciples not to go back to Jerusalem and the state of Judea. As Noah & Lot were whisked away from the swift destruction God brought, so the disciples were encouraged to get out of Jerusalem which Jesus promised would be destroyed in the 1st century. We will see this clearly as we move further into Luke's Gospel.

• **Regarding Jesus' 2nd Coming**, these realities will be true as well - **Swift Destruction & Sweet Protection**. Many Christians love to read 1 Thes. 4 and talk about the Rapture of the Church to Heaven (which the text doesn't say happens) without moving into 1 Thes. 5 where Paul writes about the Return of Christ to Earth:

1 Thessalonians 5:1-3 (NIV) Now, brothers and sisters, 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.

Is it possible that we have diluted the focus of Scripture?

• Do you long for His Secret Coming to Rapture the Church OR His Second Coming to Earth? Many believers have formed holy huddles waiting for Jesus to take them off the planet instead of being obedient disciples to develop disciples until He returns.

Finally, Jesus calls upon 1 more vivid OT example when He says...

Luke 17:32-33 (NIV) Remember Lot's wife! ³³ Whoever tries to keep their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life will preserve it.

Don't look back. Don't hold on to your sinful past. Turn to Jesus while you still have time, because what you do with Him will separate family, friends, & co-workers.

Luke 17:34-37 ³⁴ I tell you, on that night two people will be in one bed [family]; one will be taken and the other left. ³⁵ Two women will be grinding grain together [friends, co-workers]; one will be taken and the other left." [³⁶ not in earliest manuscripts] ³⁷ "Where, Lord?" they asked. He replied, "Where there is a dead body, there the vultures will gather."

Those who say, "Jesus never judges" NEED to let this phrase sink down deep into their minds, because this is OT imagery is of birds of prey (vultures & eagles) are attracted to battles and slaughter (cf. Job 39:26-30; Ezek. 39:17; Hab. 1:8).

BIG TRUTH: THE END brings Swift Destruction & Sweet Protection

"If Jesus were to return TOMORROW, what should I be doing TODAY?"

- Bow your knee. Ditch your sin. Sell Out & Seek Him.
- Restore a relationship.
- Care enough to Share with another.