

Will The Kingdom Come?

Luke 17:20-37

Pastor John Miller

We're all familiar with The Lord's Prayer. Jesus said, "In this manner, therefore, pray, "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name." Let His name, His nature, His character be considered holy. Then the first petition is, "Your kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven" (Matthew 6:9-10).

Has the kingdom come? Will the kingdom come? Is the kingdom here now, or will the kingdom come in the future? Was the kingdom here on earth when Jesus came to preach the Gospel and to heal? Or will the kingdom come at the Second Advent when Christ returns?

I believe all are true. The King came, brought the kingdom, but there will be a Second Advent when He will bring a literal, physical kingdom to earth. It will be here for 1,000 years; that's why we call it the "millennium." Then it will go from the 1,000 years to the new heaven and the new earth, the eternal state.

So when we celebrate Christmas, it's not just the cradle or the Cross; it's the crown. We look forward to the day when Jesus Christ will come again and reign as "King of kings and Lord of lords" (1 Timothy 6:15).

The question was asked, in verse 20, "when the kingdom of God would come." "Now when He was asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come...." That's what started this whole section of our text. They wanted to know when it would come. They were looking for an earthly kingdom at that time. They weren't looking for a Messiah who would suffer and die. They weren't looking for what we know to be the Second Coming. They were looking for a kingdom right then and there and weren't looking for Him to die on the Cross.

So Jesus answered that the kingdom of God had both come and will come. As Christians, we should be looking for Christ to come as "King of kings" and set up His kingdom on earth. Titus 2:13 says, "looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ."

I want to make a distinction here. These verses are not talking about the rapture of the church. There are two, different events coming. The first will be that "The Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up..." the Greek word is "harpodzo," which means to "snatch up"; that's the rapture, being "caught up" in the air, not on the earth "...together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words"

(1 Thessalonians 4:16-18).

Our passage today is about the Second Coming or the Second Advent of Jesus. It's not the rapture of the church. The rapture is first taught and explained in John 14, where Jesus said, "Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house..." which is heaven "...are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you." I like this King James translation here. The Greek Word sometimes translates it "abiding places." One translation says "apartments." That's not my favorite translation. I'm looking for a "mansion."

Then He said in John 14, "I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also" (John 14:1-3).

But please realize our passage is not on the rapture; it's on the Second Coming. And there is at least seven years between the rapture and the Second Coming. I am a proponent of the doctrine of a pretribulation rapture; that the church will be raptured before the Second Coming. The church will be "caught up...to meet the Lord in the air" before the seven years of tribulation happens on earth, before God's wrath is poured out (Revelation 14:10).

Our passage in Luke parallels the Olivet Discourse found in Matthew 24-25. Jesus gave a whole discourse on the same subject, on what will precede His Second Coming. It is also recorded in Mark 13 and Luke 21. Our text is premised upon the Pharisee's question of when the kingdom would come. I don't know their motive, but they demanded to know when the kingdom of God would come. They weren't looking for a crucified King but a reigning Savior. So they missed His first coming. But we are looking for His return.

The first part of Luke 17 tells us that Jesus' disciples were to have forgiveness, faithfulness and thankfulness. Then He adds one more, in verses 20-37: preparedness.

There are only two main sections in verses 20-37. The first section is verses 20-21, where we see that the kingdom of God is here. The kingdom of God has come. At the end of verse 20 and into verse 21, Jesus explained the kingdom. "Now when He was asked..." the King James translation says, "was demanded"; most likely the motive and attitude of the Pharisees was hostile "...by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, He answered them and said, 'the kingdom of God does not come with observation.'" In other words, you can't find it by looking for it.

You're not to look for signs. I believe Biblically, as Christians, we are not to focus on signs; we're to be looking for the Savior. The focus is not to be the world around us; our focus is to be the Savior who is coming for us. That's not to say that we begin to see indications that the Lord's Second Coming is near based on the conditions we live in. But that is not to be our focus. When someone gets focused on and all absorbed with Bible prophecy, I basically say, "Beware of the Bible teacher who only talks about Bible prophecy." Yes, we should be talking about and preaching on the Second Coming of Jesus Christ, but that should not be our focus and all we talk about. We should be looking for Jesus Christ to come again, but not so enamored by outward observation or looking for signs.

Verse 21, “Nor will they say, ‘See here!’ or ‘See there!’” This is a fancy way of saying, “He’s in Barstow.” (I can’t get away from Barstow.)

Years ago there was an advertisement in a London newspaper that said, “The Messiah has come.” It said that He was living in an apartment in London, England. People freaked out. “The Messiah came! Let’s go check it out!” That’s stupid. No.

If they say He’s over here, don’t freak out. If they say He’s over there, don’t freak out. When He comes, you’re going to know it. They’ll be no question about that. It’s going to be very clear that this is the Messiah who has come.

Jesus continued, “For indeed, the kingdom of God is within you.” This is an unfortunate translation in the King James Bible. It should be, like some modern translations have, “The kingdom of God is among you.” Nowhere in the Bible does it teach that the kingdom of God is within us. We, as Christians, live in the kingdom; the kingdom does not live in us.

This is a verse that a lot of New Age mystics like, because they believe there is a spark of divinity in every one of us. When I was in high school, all my friends got into transcendental meditation or TM. They chanted a mantra, sat in a lotus position and contemplated their navel. They told me, as a Christian, “John, you really need to do transcendental meditation; it’ll help you be a better Christian.” And they quoted this verse. I was a baby believer; I didn’t know any better. This is one of Oprah’s favorite verses.

Jesus certainly wasn’t speaking about the Pharisees; He called them “white-washed sepulchers...full of dead men’s bones” (Matthew 23:27). You know God wasn’t in them.

So what was He talking about? He was talking about Himself, that the King was among them. That’s a better translation. That’s what the text seems to infer. It’s this simple: wherever you have the King, you have the kingdom. If Jesus is there, the kingdom of God is among you. So Jesus came healing, preaching the deliverance and preaching the kingdom of God. John the Baptist, the forerunner, preached repentance, “For the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matthew 3:2). That’s what Jesus is saying in our text.

It is universal, meaning God sets up kings and rules throughout the whole earth; it is spiritual, meaning when we are born again, we are actually transferred into the kingdom, living in the kingdom—this world is not our home, because our home is in heaven; and it is physical, meaning there is a literal, physical kingdom that will come about in the future when Christ the King comes back as the Son of David.

It will be the fulfillment of the Davidic Covenant, that in David’s lineage, there would be a King to sit on his throne to reign forever, and “of His kingdom there would be no end” (Luke 1:33). This is why Jesus was called the Son of David. But this will happen in the future, and Jesus will talk about it in verses 22-37. So it is the question of the kingdom, the kingdom explained and Jesus is the King.

are you living in the kingdom now as a child of God?

Verses 22-37 deals with the kingdom of the future. It deals with the Second Coming of Christ and His millennial, kingdom reign on earth. Jesus gives His disciples and us six facts about His kingdom.

Number one is that believers long for His return. During the church age, which we are in right now, one of our heart's desires is for the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. And verse 22 is the real thrust of the passage, and He is now speaking to His disciples. It says, "Then He said to the disciples, 'The days will come when you will desire to see one of the days of the Son of Man, and you will not see it.'" Why not? Because He would be rejected and crucified, and now during this period of time when the church is being built up or formed by Christ, the church will be raptured up to heaven to be with Christ, then God will once again begin to work with the nation of Israel during the last seven-year period.

In the book of Daniel, it's known as "the seventieth week of Daniel." It is that one, seven-year period, which is still future to us but is Jewish in flavor. That's why it's interesting that Israel is back in the land, Israel is once again a nation. God will eventually restore them spiritually when Christ comes back. Their eyes will be opened.

But we long for that day and look for it now, yet it has not yet appeared. That's why the hearts of the believers cry, "Even so, come Lord Jesus" (Revelation 22:20). We long for His return.

Number two is that Christ's coming will be visible and glorious, verses 23-24. "And they will say to you, 'Look here!' or 'Look there!'" Again He says that it won't come by observation. Some people say Jesus came years ago, but that He came secretly and set up His spiritual kingdom. No! He didn't come secretly; He's not hiding. That's why I say He's not living in Barstow under wraps. He's not hiding. "Do not go after them or follow them." In the Olivet Discourse, it says that there will be false christs and false prophets who will deceive many (Matthew 24:4-5). Don't follow them and be deceived.

The point is in verse 24, "For as the lightning that flashes out of one part under heaven shines to the other part under heaven, so also the Son of Man will be in His day." Have you seen the lightning on a dark night? The whole sky lights up. It's pretty hard to hide lightning. It shines from the east to the west. When Jesus Christ comes back, it won't be in secret; it'll be like the lightning on a dark night. It will be a visible and a glorious coming. It won't be hidden.

Revelation 1:7 says, "Behold, He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him." In Acts 1:7 when Jesus ascended back into heaven, called His Ascension, His disciples had asked Him if the kingdom would come then. He said, "It is not for you to know times or seasons," but they would go forth to preach the Gospel. Then He lifted off the ground and went back up into heaven. "A cloud received Him out of their sight" (Acts 1:9). That was no doubt the shekinah cloud of glory.

He came from heaven. He was conceived in the womb of a virgin. Then He died on a cross,

was buried and physically, bodily rose from the dead and went to heaven. Then the angels showed up and asked the disciples, at the Ascension, why they were staring into the sky. “This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven” (Acts 1:11). They saw Him physically, and He ascended into heaven. The same manner in which He went, He will return at the Second Coming. Revelation 1 has a beautiful description of the Second Coming. And Revelation 19 tells us it will take place in power, majesty and glory.

Number three is that Christ's coming will follow His rejection and His Crucifixion, verse 25. “But first...” meaning before the Second Coming or His Second Advent “...He must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation.” This is what stumbled the Jews—and stumbles them to this day. The Jewish people say that He can't be the Messiah. How could He be the Messiah; He was crucified on a Cross? The Bible says, “Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree” (Galatians 3:13). So they stumble over the Cross of Jesus Christ. To them it's foolishness. No. Jesus said that He must suffer and He must die (Mark 8:31).

So there will be a time period before Christ returns. In Romans 9-11, God chose Israel, God rejected Israel and God will restore Israel. Because of the Cross, there will be a time period, known as “the church age” when Israel would reject their Messiah. It's important to understand that.

Number four is that Christ's coming will be like the days of Noah, verse 26-27. “And as it was in the days of Noah, so it will be also in the days of the Son of Man. They ate, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all.” It's so important to properly interpret these verses.

At the end of time before the Lord returns, it will be “like the days of Noah.” This is where a lot of Bible teachers and pastors begin to go off the text and talk about the sin and violence in Noah's day. Then they say that this is what is going on in the world today, so Jesus is coming again. That is not the way the text should be interpreted.

What was going on in the days of Noah? Verse 27 tells us. They ate, drank, married until the flood came. They didn't know judgment was coming. Unexpected judgment will come. In Noah's day they were having parties, they were building homes and were planning for the future. They were having a good time. There was nothing sinful about eating, drinking and getting married. The problem was that judgment was coming, and they didn't know it until the flood came and destroyed them all.

Let me make a footnote here. Jesus actually believed in a literal story of Noah and the ark and that the flood destroyed the whole earth. It's not fiction or a fairy tale or myth. Jesus believed in Noah. Jesus believed in Lot, in David and in Adam and Eve. He talked about Adam and Eve being the foundation for marriage. God “made them male and female, and [He] said, ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh’....Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate” (Matthew

19:4-5). He believed in the stories of the Old Testament and in their historicity and clarity. So our text is an actual story of God's judgment.

Isn't it funny that we decorate our children's nurseries with Noah and the ark? "Good night, sweetheart. Pleasant dreams. God's going to kill everybody. I hope you sleep well." What's up with that?! This is a story about God's judgment! God did it once, and He'll do it again; not with a flood but with fire. And we'll see the story of Sodom and Gomorrah. God destroyed them.

So the basic teaching of this text is that the Second Coming will happen, but there will be judgment. There will be God's wrath, which is known as the tribulation period, when God's wrath will be poured out upon a Christ-rejecting world. So verses 25-26 basically is saying that there will be unexpected judgment.

Genesis 6 records the story of Noah building a boat and God saving Noah, his wife, his three sons and their wives. Can you imagine what it was like when they walked off that boat? They had a brand-new world all to themselves! Talk about a lot of places to go! It's amazing to me! "Then the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And the Lord was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart" (Genesis 6:5-6). God had wiped out all flesh upon the earth (Genesis 7:23).

God did it once; God will do it again. So the judgment will come before the Second Coming of Jesus Christ.

Number five, in verses 28-30, we see that the coming of Christ will be like the days of Lot and the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. "Likewise..." so it's basically the same as we learned in the lesson of Noah "...as it was also in the days of Lot: They ate, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they built; but on the day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven and destroyed them all." You can read about it in Genesis 18-19. "Even so will it be in the day when the Son of Man is revealed." "Son of Man" is a Messianic term; one Jesus most often used for Himself. It's taken from Daniel 7 and 9.

We've had the story of Noah and the flood, validated by Christ, and now we have the story of Lot and Sodom and Gomorrah. The Bible teachers go from this point—and I'm one of them—and say that there was homosexuality. This is why we have the word "sodomy." God did not destroy Sodom and Gomorrah because of a lack of hospitality; He destroyed them because of their immorality, which was homosexuality.

I'm convinced that the day we legalized same-sex marriage in America was the beginning of the end. We cannot survive without marriage as God designed it. It will be the decay, the destruction of our nation. Look at the Roman Empire.

The point is that they were just thinking that life would go on as it was. Everything was honkey dorey. Everything was fine. "We're going to party, we're going to buy a home, we're going to invest, we're going to make money, we're going to have a good time." Then the fire and

brimstone rained down and destroyed all who were in the city of Sodom.

Again, the Lot story is about unexpected judgment. Most people in the world today are not expecting God to come back and judge them. That's why Peter, in his epistle, said that scoffers would say, "Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation.' For this they willfully forget: that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of water and in the water, by which the world that then existed perished, being flooded with water. But the heavens and the earth which are now preserved by the same word, are reserved for fire until the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men" (2 Peter 3:4-6). God did it once and He will do it again.

Number six, verses 31-37, Christ's coming will bring unexpected judgment. Jesus is just hammering home this point. He's saying, "You want to know when it's going to happen? After a time of judgment, there is going to be separation." "In that day..." or the day the Lord returns "...he who is on the housetop..." their houses had flat roofs with a patio on the roof and an outer stairway to the roof "...and his goods..." his TV, stereo, clothes, watches, furniture "...are in the house, let him not come down to take them away. And likewise the one who is in the field, let him not turn back."

When the Lord comes and He spits the heavens, you can't say, "Wait a minute! Let me go to the bank and withdraw my money!" You won't be thinking about the material things. You'll think only about eternity.

Now look at verse 32: "Remember Lot's wife." As they were being pulled out of Sodom, Lot's wife looked back as the fire and brimstone rained down on the city and destroyed everything. "Oh, my shopping mall got smoked! My beauty salon is gone! The country club just got fried!" The Lord had told them not to look back, but Lot's wife looked back longingly and she became "a pillar of salt" (Genesis 19:17, 26). Her focus wasn't eternity; it wasn't on God. So God judged her.

I don't believe this story is myth. I believe it actually happened. That's why the Bible says to us, "Remember Lot's wife." Don't look back but look ahead.

Verse 33, "Whoever seeks to save his life..." which she was trying to do "...will lose it..." she was turned into "a pillar of salt" "...and whoever loses his life will preserve it." So you lose your life in this world but gain it in the world to come.

In verses 34-37, the italicized words are not in the original Greek. "I tell you, in that night there will be two men in one bed: the one will be taken and the other will be left. Two women will be grinding together: the one will be taken and the other left. Two men will be in the field: the one will be taken and the other left.' And they..." the disciples "...answered and said to Him, 'Where, Lord?'" This section opens with a question and ends with a question. Will it happen? When and where will it happen? "So He said to them, 'Wherever the body is...' where the dead corpses are "...there the eagles..." it should be "vultures" "...will be gathered together.'" So

God's people should not be attracted to material things; they should be looking for the eternal.

I want to make another point clear. Quite often these statements about two in a bed, one taken and another left; two shall be grinding, one taken and another left; two in the field, one taken and another left describes evening, morning and afternoon. I believe the ones who are taken are not taken in the rapture; this is not a teaching about the rapture. This is not Matthew 24. They weren't thinking about the rapture when they asked about this.

This is one of the biggest mistakes pretribulation-rapture folks, which I am, make. They read the rapture into this text. It sounds like a rapture reference, but it's not. I believe in the rapture, and I believe it will happen before the tribulation.

I believe that those who are taken here in these verses are taken in judgment. Those who are left are left to go into the kingdom, left to go into the millennium. These are the sheep on His right hand, to whom He said, "Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world" (Matthew 25:33-34). Otherwise you could argue for a posttribulation rapture. But I don't think that is what the text is teaching.

These people will be taken away in judgment. Noah was in the ark and the people left in the world were swept away in judgment. Lot and his family were pulled out of Sodom, and the cities of the plain of Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed by God. So those who are taken away in our text are the unsaved and go to judgment. Those who are left here are not going into the rapture but are left to enter the millennium and the kingdom age of the reign of Jesus Christ.

Then the disciples asked a question, in verse 37: "Where, Lord?" Then Jesus gives what is considered a cryptic answer: "Wherever the body is, there the eagles will be gathered together."

Remember the old cowboy movies? I guess they're still around. They would be riding out in the desert, and they'd see vultures circling overhead. That told them there was a dead carcass nearby. And we use the expression, "Where there's smoke, there's fire."

I believe that verse 37 is referring to the battle of Armageddon, or World War III. The bodies in the Valley of Megiddo are there. Revelation 19:18 describes how the birds will come to "eat the flesh of kings, the flesh of captains, the flesh of mighty men, the flesh of horses and of those who sit on them, and the flesh of the people, free and slave, both small and great."

So Jesus is somewhat veiled in His statement, but He is telling them that there will be dead bodies and Revelation 19:17-19 will come. The birds will feast on those dead bodies.

How will this unfold? I'm going to give you eight, rapid-fire points. Number one, the rapture is next on the calendar. The rapture could happen at any moment. I always thought it would be really cool if I was preaching on the rapture when the rapture happened. People would say, "Man, that's a powerful sermon!"

And who will be raptured? Those who have been born again. It's not for the "super saints"—

although I want all of you to be super saints. It's for the saints, period. If you are a Christian, you are a saint. You're a saint or you ain't; your born again or you're not born again. You either know Jesus Christ, or you don't know Jesus Christ. The church is the body, the bride of Christ. And the next event will be the rapture.

Number two will be the revelation of the Antichrist. The Antichrist will come and make a covenant with Israel for seven years. That will be the last seven years of history on the earth before Jesus Christ returns. Revelation 6 describes His coming on a white horse, and Revelation 13 describes Him in great detail.

Number three in how this will unfold in that there will be seven years of tribulation, Matthew 24:21-22.

Number four is that at the end of the tribulation, there will be the battle of Armageddon, the last war on earth, World War III.

Number five, at the height of that battle, will be the Second Coming of Jesus Christ, Revelation 19:11-16.

Number six is the coming of the kingdom age, one-thousand years, Revelation 20. It is also called the millennial reign of Christ. It is the fulfillment of God's covenant with David; that on his throne, Messiah would reign forever.

Number seven is that at the end of the millennium, there will be the great, white-throne judgment. This will occur when all the wicked dead from all of human history will be resurrected and stand before Christ, who will sit on the throne, the books will be opened and their names will not appear, so they will be thrown into the "lake of fire," which is "the second death" or Gehenna, where there will be fire burning forever (Revelation 20:12-15).

There has been a lot of buzz on the Internet lately about whether or not there will be a literal hell. The Bible says, "Yes." There is eternal salvation, and there will be eternal judgment.

And number eight is that there will be a new heaven and a new earth. Heaven and earth will become one.

I don't know about you, but that's what I'm looking for. I'm looking for a new heaven and a new earth.

So this doesn't just stop with Christ in a cradle at Christmas. He grew up, He died, He rose from the dead, He conquered sin and death, He paid for our sins, ascended back into heaven and said, "I will come again" (John 14:3). He's coming back as "King of kings and Lord of lords."