

Luke 17:20-37

The Kingdom of God

I. Timing v.20

Translation — “Now when He was grilled by the Pharisees about when the kingdom of God would come. He said to them, ‘The kingdom of God does not come by observation.’ ” v.20

II. Now vv.21-22

Translation — “They shall neither say, ‘Look! Here!’ nor ‘There!’. Because, Look! The kingdom of God is in your midst.” v.21

Translation — “And He said to the disciples, ‘There will be days when you will long to see one of the days of the Son of Man, but you will not see.’ ” v.22

III. Mislead v.23

Translation — “And they will say to you, ‘Look! There!! or ‘Look! Here!! Do not go away nor follow them.’ ” v.23

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IV. Truth vv.24-37

Translation — “Because precisely as the lightning shines from one part under heaven unto the other part, so shall the Son of Man be in His day.” v.24

Translation — “But first He must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation.” v.25

Translation — “And just as it was in the days of Noah, so shall it be also in the days of the Son of Man.” v.26

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Translation — *“They were always eating; always drinking; they were marrying and being given in marriage, until the day on which Noah entered into the ark; but the flood came and destroyed them all.”* v.27

A constant round of eating, drinking and marriage. The verbs, all in the imperfect tense, denote continuous action. There is no sin involved in any of these activities if they are accompanied by faith in God and faithful service to Him. Here we have an expression of extreme materialism by a civilization that had rejected God and Noah, their warning about coming judgment and their offer of a safe passage through the flood inside the ark. These things were greeted only with scorn and derision — another banquet, another drink, another round of sex. This continued — “until the day on which Noah entered the ark.” There was no cessation in their sinful activity (Gen.6:5); no sign that they paused to reflect whether or not Noah could be right.

Noah's activities. He knew that God's judgment would come in his lifetime. He was ordered to build an ark (Gen.6:7,8; Heb. 11:7; 1 Pet.3:18-22). During this period of 120 years, Noah knew only that he would live to see the flood; that he and those who entered with him into the ark would be saved; that all others would be lost. During this period he did not know the precise day when the flood would come. But during the last seven days of that 120 year period, Noah did know precisely when the flood would come (Gen.7:4). During that last week Noah was a date-setter: “Seven days from today; six days hence; five, four, three, two — tomorrow — today is the day. Come into the ark.” This was Noah's message. Where was Noah during those last seven days? He was outside the ark (Gen.7:11-13). Note Gen.7:13- the 17th day of the second month of Noah's 600th year. On that day the flood came (vs. 11). The rain continued for forty days and forty nights (vs. 12). That last day Noah entered the ark (vs. 13). On that day his contemporaries ate their last meal, had their last drink and went to their last wedding. To them the cataclysm was a great surprise, despite that they had been told about it for 120 years. To Noah it was no surprise at all. He had been told 120 years before that he would live to see it, and he had been told seven days before that it would happen on that day on which it did, in fact, take place.

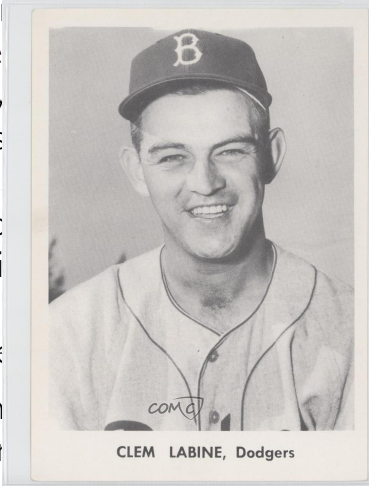
Keep in mind that the subject of Jesus' remarks is evidence that the Kingdom of God is at hand (Lk. 17:20-27). He had refused to give any information to the unsaved Pharisees, but He is informing His disciples (vv. 22-27). End time Christians can observe the sociological evidences that antediluvian permissive is rampant in the world. All of the signs are right. As this is written (July 8, 1980) we do not have God's revelation that Christ will come back to earth in our lifetime. Perhaps we are not the generation who will live to see the rapture. But that end-time generation, whoever they may be and whenever they may live, will know, as Noah did, when the Lord is coming.

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In 1 Thess. 5:1-6 Paul distinguishes between the saved and the unsaved and how the coming of the Lord relates to each. He tells us that those who will say, "Peace and safety will come. The unsaved will not expect it. They will be in darkness, that that day will come like a thief" to the unsaved, not to the church can occur at any time. They will be surprised when He comes. He does not speak about the rapture with his eyes.

In speaking about His coming, Jesus said, "But of that day and hour no one knows, not the Father only." (Mt.24:36). He did not say that no man would ever know.



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mploying the present tense, Jesus said, "But of that day and hour no one knows, not the Father only." (Mt.24:36). He did not say that no man would ever know.

Note finally God's activities. The flood came and destroyed them all, except Noah and his family (1 Pet.3:18-20).

To those materialists who could not recognize the Kingdom of God, incarnate in Jesus Christ, as He stood before them (Lk. 17:21) no other sign will be given. They are to be left to their eating, drinking and sex. But to the disciples who will be longing for just "one day of the Son of Man" because they are so disgusted with the world and its folly (Lk.17:22) He has given clues as to when we can expect deliverance. The final generation of end-time Christians, who have not been deceived by pre-tribulation rapture, the popular delusion that swept through Fundamentalist ranks since the days of the Plymouth Brethren, will, like Noah, not be children of darkness. Luke does not tell us in this passage what event God will use to indicate that His prophetic clock is running again and that the last countdown has begun. Matthew 24:15, which is parallel to Luke 21:20-24 provides us with the answer. Those who teach that Christians should not be looking for events, but for the rapture, are likely not to be able to recognize the events that telegraph the end of the end-time, when they come. If the Rider on the White Horse (Rev.6:1-2) came today, he would be ignored by those who are convinced that nothing prophetic can happen on earth until after the Church is translated out of the world. Perhaps their prejudice, now so concretely set, will be dispelled in that day. If they are truly regenerate, indeed they will come to understand. 1 Thess. 5:4 applies to all of the saints, even to those who are unduly influenced by the Schofield footnotes.

We get another illustration in

Translation — "So also was it in the days of Lot. They were always eating and drinking: they were buying and selling: they were planting: they were building." v.28

The people of Sodom, like the antediluvians, were always busy eating, drinking, buying, selling, planting and building. There is no mention of sex here, but the

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commercial activities are listed. Sodom, an urban culture, had all of the vices of Noah's day, complicated by a more highly developed commercial and agricultural system. The verbs are all in the imperfect tense denoting the frenzy of continuous activity. Economic growth and commerce bring with them the social ills that are certain to develop among the unregenerate. Overpopulation, crowding, slums, vice, disease, pollution, crime and violence, with the added aberration — homosexuality (Gen. 19:4-11). Paul alludes to this along with a catalogue of other vices, the natural result of the materialism that rules out faith in a personal God (Rom. 1:21-32, with particular attention to verses 26,27). There was too much democracy in Sodom (2 Pet.2:7), at least for a godly man. Laissez faire permissiveness, such as the bill of rights grants to Americans in a democracy, becomes repulsive to the Christian who, like Lot, is vexed with what he sees, hears and could read if he chose to.

Yet, since this is man's day, not God's, and because democracy, with all of its faults, is better than the dictatorship of some wicked man, the Christian is under the obligation of patriotism to support the bill of rights, even though it permits pornography, free speech in however bad taste and the vapid and vacuous drivel that originates on Madison Avenue. Many Christians apparently fail to realize that not since Calvary has there ever been a "Christian country" founded on "Christian principles." The United States is not a Christian country. It is a free country, in the sense that it is committed to democratic principles.

No democratic country is viable without good morals and good morals are not forthcoming except through the Holy Spirit's activities in the Christian. Therefore, unless democracies are also Christian, and therefore moral, their permissiveness results in social, economic, political and national collapse. Sodom banished God and His authority and every man did what he pleased. This is democracy. So indeed did Noah's civilization. So indeed has America to a great extent. The flood destroyed the antediluvians. The firestorm destroyed Sodom. The Second Coming of Christ will end democracy and replace it with the divine authority of Plato's Philosopher-King, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Translation — *"But on the day on which Lot left Sodom, fire and brimstone rained from heaven and destroyed them all."* v.29

The Sodomites carried on a continuous program of bustling activity but God had other plans. His judgment waited only until Lot left town. Just as the flood came on the day that Noah entered the ark, so the fire fell from heaven on the day that Lot left. God always cares for His own before He visits judgment upon the lost. Whether it is a flood (2 Pet.2:5) or a firestorm (2 Pet.2:6), God's judgment comes at the earliest possible moment after His chosen ones are delivered (2 Pet.2:7).

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The story of Lot and Sodom has introduced the urban society with its economic growth, a factor missing in the Noah story. There is also the element of homosexuality. A third element is Lot's characteristic fulfillment of Jesus' remark in verse 22 about the saints, heartsick and disgusted with the world about them, longing for "one day" on which the Kingdom of God could rule the world. Righteous Lot felt this longing (2 Pet.2:7) just as the saints long for Christ's return at the end of this age. The destruction of Sodom and the antediluvians, after Noah and his family and Lot had been taken out, was total.

Translation — *"This is how it is going to be on the day on which the Son of Man is revealed."* v.30

The Noah story and the Lot story are said to be typical of events which will transpire immediately preceding and simultaneous with the second coming of Christ, when He comes to establish the Kingdom of God upon earth.

In each case there was a materialistic, utterly corrupt society, which had rejected the revelation of God's Word. In each case society had descended to such depths of internal self-contradiction that there was no remedy but judgment. So shall it be again. In each case, however, God had His small elect group, totally out of step with their sinful peers, who were themselves totally out of step with God. Noah and Lot longed for a restoration of the Kingdom of God. In each case they had it revealed to them that judgment was imminent, and in each case they were removed from the scene of the judgment of God on the same day that judgment fell upon the ungodly. So shall it be again. (1 Thes. 5:1-5). If the church is raptured five minutes after you read this, millions of God's saints would be as surprised as the unsaved antediluvians were about the rainstorm and the Sodomites were about the firestorm. There is an alternative conclusion to which we can come, but it is doubtful that many will wish to accept it: perhaps the vast majority of church members in the 21st century church are Unregenerate. There is scant doubt that many people are involved in *churchianity* who know nothing of Christianity, but even the most devout Christian believer does not spend every waking moment looking into the sky and listening for the shout. But if our Lord tells the end-time church, as He told Noah and Lot, precisely when He is coming, then every saint will be watching, while every sinner, those within and those without the institutional church, will be scoffing. One cannot imagine Noah or any of his family spending the appointed day in any other way than in entering into the ark and listening for the thunder in the sky. Nor was Lot without concern for the events on the fateful day! Nor will the end-time saints be.

Verse 31 is parallel to Mt.24: 17,18, which are a part of Matthew's context which begins in Mt.24:15. It is clear from Mt.24:15-31 that the events of verse 15 come in the middle of Daniel's 70th week, and that the events described in Mt.24:15-31

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stretch across the last half of the week — a period of three and one-half years, forty-two months or twelve hundred, sixty days. Mt.24:29,30 is clearly a description of the Second Coming and verse 31 is a picture of the rapture of the church. Luke 17:31-37 fit into the Matthew parallel at verse 17. Note the parallel between Luke 17:37 and Matthew 24:28. Thus we must interpret the words (Lk. 17:31) as meaning the day when the Abomination of Desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stands in the holy place in Jerusalem. This is a mid-week event. (Lk. 17:31) This does not mean the day of the second coming, but rather a day three and one-half years before. Jesus, in Luke is not attempting to give a detailed, chronologically structured schedule of events. Study the Matthew passage carefully. It is clear that in Luke 17:31, Jesus is returning chronologically from the end of the tribulation week where we stood in verse 30, to the middle of it in verse 31, immediately after AntiChrist reveals himself in his true murderous colors as described in Mt.24:15,16.

Translation — *“On that day whoever may be upon the roof of his house, but his goods are in the house, must not go down to carry them out, and the one who is in the field likewise must not turn back.”* v.31

This is therefore parallel to Mt.24:17,18 and Mk. 13:15,16, comment upon which passages should be reviewed. Mark 13:16 explains that Luke’s phrase. The farmer in the field had worn an extra jacket for protection from the early morning chill. As the sun arose, he became too warm and shed his coat and left it hanging on a post at one end of the furrow. Now Jesus warns him to forget his coat and to flee posthaste from the persecuting police of the Man of Sin, who will have revealed himself in his true anti-christian character and will be bent upon making war with the saints (Rev.6:8-11; 13:7).

Translation — *“Always remember Lot’s wife.”* v.32

So as not to fall into her error. She was a child of God, as is clear from the fact that God could not punish the city until she left with her husband. But, though she was a child of God, she had allowed the wicked city to attract her. She had orders to flee with her husband with specific instructions not to look back at the city which would be in the process of being destroyed. She disobeyed. She looked back and was overwhelmed in the judgment of the city. She became a pillar of salt (Gen. 19:26).

We all have our personal eschatology. If you are practicing some secret sin, having an affair, or cheating on your taxes, it may all be revealed and you will reap the consequences of your actions. Eschatology, the last days, does not just refer to the ultimate time when God brings down the curtain on the world. We must live in the light of our individual and corporate eschatology all the time. Jesus speaks about Noah and Lot’s wife. Noah, with his family, built an ark to escape the coming disaster.

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Why were his neighbors so hard to convince? They were not evil necessarily. They were just too busy eating and drinking, marrying and burying, conducting business. They were too busy to think about the catastrophe. They were caught up in the details of the present.

The sin of Lot's wife was that she couldn't give up the past. Instead of looking ahead to what God had for her and her family, she looked backward and turned into a pillar of salt. I heard about two children who studied this story in Sunday school and were discussing it. "Do you believe that story about Lot's wife turning into a pillar of salt?" asked one. "Sure, I believe it," said the other. "My mother went out driving the other day and she looked back and turned into a telephone pole." Tragedy overtook Lot's wife because she was not future-looking. She was tied to the past.

We can think of many examples of personal and social eschatology. Hiroshima is one. Suddenly life ended for tens of thousands of people. The Jewish people in Germany during the time of the Nazis could not believe that a mass destruction was coming a sudden eschatology. The town of Coventry, England, experienced eschatology when, in a matter of moments, bombers leveled the town and destroyed its people, its factories, and its great cathedral. The *Titanic* was considered the world's safest liner iceberg-proof and sink-proof. Yet passengers having martinis on the deck were caught up in an unexpected moment of eschatology.

On a day when your physician says those dreaded words, "I think you have cancer," you are plunged into an eschatological moment. If we live only for the now, we are not prepared. Some years ago I on a plane about to land in Newark, New Jersey, when the pilot announced that our landing gear would not go down. All sorts of emergency measures were taken. We flew out over the Atlantic and dumped our gasoline. The runway was sprayed with foam, and fire trucks were lined up on the field to meet us. As you may have guessed, we did make it, without any mishap. They did get the landing gear down. But that was an eschatological moment for me. I thought, "Am I ready? I've lived a great life, but am I prepared for this moment?" That moment may come to all of us many times along the way.

That's one of the major thrusts of evangelism. We have the urgency to make sure that our neighbors and friends are ready. We could liken it to yelling "Fire!" in a burning building. On such an occasion, we wouldn't say, "May I suggest that at your convenience you amble over to the telephone and put a call in to the fire department?" We Christians have a sense of urgency about the Kingdom of God so that those ultimate last days, personal or social, will not find us unprepared. Soren Kierkegaard, the great Danish theologian, said, "You can't sew unless you put a knot in your thread." Life is like that. The knot in our thread is the knowledge that someday

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it will be over for all of us and we must be ready for that day. That's what gives us perspective for the living of all of our life.

Having said all that, we can't deny that many Christians are absorbed by prophecy. They consider the Bible the basis for all this prophecy. But Biblically, prophecy is not future-telling. It is forth-telling about the mighty acts of God. A prophet, in the Biblical sense, is what we call a witness. You bear witness to your neighbors, friends and colleagues about the Lord, about what He has done in your life, about what He is doing in your church or in the world. We speak forth about the mighty acts of God.

Any other kind of prophecy is some sort of cosmic guessing game: "The world will end in the year 1999." Who cares? It will end some-day-tomorrow or in ten thousand years. Jesus tells us the time is not important. I am reminded of the story of two Indians who were watching a lighthouse being built on a coast near their village. It was finally finished and they couldn't wait to see how it worked. After observing a while, one turned to the other and said, "Look! Lights flash, horns honk, bells ring and still the fog comes in." So much of present-day prophecy is like that—a lot of commotion that in no way affects the timetables of eternity.

We get ready for the last days by living in the Kingdom now, and by loving the King and His world. We get ready for Him today, tomorrow and ten thousand years from now, by doing His will as best we understand it, by spending time with Him. We are living in the Kingdom when we trust the King. Ultimately, Christian faith is not having to worry about whether or not we have enough faith when the last days come. None of us has enough faith now, and we won't have enough when that time comes. Real faith means trusting God to supply what's missing.

No matter how stormy life gets for us, we need not panic because we have read the last chapter. God in Christ loves us, and we are now and will be forever in His Kingdom. Sir William Osler, the great pioneer Christian doctor, once said, "*If we throw all of our energy, intelligence, and enthusiasm into doing superb work today, there will be nothing to fear tomorrow.*"

Translation — "*Whoever shall try to negotiate for his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life will preserve it.*" v.33

We have a contingent or indefinite idea here in the context. Jesus is not speaking specifically of anyone, but of him, whoever he might be who would seek to negotiate with the forces of the Antichrist, in order to escape martyrdom. In such a construction the indefinite relative pronoun is used with the subjunctive and Mantey (Manual, 273) calls this a More Probable Condition. In the second clause we have the relative pronoun and the future indicative in a definite condition. Jesus is not

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speaking of actual cases but of probable ones, although He is more definite in the second clause than in the first.

If someone should try to negotiate with Antichrist and offer to compromise in order to escape death, he will find such an attempt doomed to failure. The Abomination of Desolation (Mt.24:15) will be utterly implacable in his war against the saints. No compromise will be made. On the other hand, whoever loses his life will preserve it eternally. There will be a great many end-time Christians who will pay the supreme price rather than deny the Lord. (Rev.6:9-11). With only three and one-half years, or less, remaining in the Times of the Gentiles (Rom. 11:25) before the Second Coming and the rapture of the saints, whether one lives to the end or suffers martyrdom at the hands of the Antichrist, will be of scant eternal consequence. All that the Beast can do is kill the body (Mt.10:28).

Jesus has just spoken of the preservation of the Christian life. It is fitting then that He should now mention the events connected with the first resurrection and the rapture in verses 34 and 35.

Translation — *“I am telling you that on that night there will be two men on the same pallet; the one will be taken away and the other will be left.”* v.34

A nighttime scene is described here, and we have a daytime scene in verse 35. Since the coming of the Lord is to be a universal event (vv. 24,37) it will be night on one side of the planet and day on the other side. Two men upon one pallet. It is interesting that Jesus should use the word best translated — “upon a pallet” rather than — “in a bed,” because this word is not a bed in the modern sense — something one can get into. It is rather a piece of bedding, suitable for spreading upon the floor — a pallet. The point is important when we consider:

The night in question is the night when the Son of Man returns to earth. The fact that two people shall be found on the last day upon a pallet, the one a Christian and the other unsaved, proves that Antichrist’s war upon the saints shall not have liquidated all of them. Nor must we believe that the issue of Christ versus Antichrist shall have divided saints from sinners socially in all cases. Here are two sleeping upon the same pallet. One shall be taken. Verse 35 gives a daytime picture of the same event.

Translation — *“There will be two women grinding together; the one will be taken, but the other will be left.”* v.35

“upon the same thing.” Engaged in the same task of grinding. A cooperative effort. This is a daytime scene, on the other side of the planet from the one described in verse 34.

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Translation — *“And they responded by saying to Him, ‘Where, Lord?’ Therefore He said to them, ‘Where the body is, there also the vultures will be gathered together.’ ”*
v.37

Our Lord says in verse 37 that the body will draw the eagles. Some scholars have concluded that the eagles are symbolic of the Roman soldiers. Others assume this is a mistranslation for “vultures.” At any rate, carrion birds, which eagles are not, come where the body is. This life will end and decomposition will take place. But we have read the last chapter. We can enter the Kingdom now and live in it forever more by saying “**yes**” to the King.