



THE GOSPEL OF
Luke

SESSION OBJECTIVE: LUKE 17:20-37

To understand more about the second coming of Christ.

The Kingdom Is Now

Luke 17:20-21 begins a new section wherein Jesus is “questioned by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come.” Jesus responds: “The kingdom of God is not coming in ways that can be observed” (Lk. 17:20). Jesus continues by reinforcing the idea that the kingdom is not something that can be pointed to or observed in a tangible sense, but rather, “the kingdom of God is in the midst of you” (Lk. 17:21). This means two things, contextually. For one, because the kingdom is in the midst of God’s people, it is silly to think that the kingdom of God is coming at all; it is already here! Beyond that, when the consummated kingdom of God comes along with the final judgment in Christ’s return, there will be no need to say ‘the kingdom is here’ because everyone will be fully aware of it when it happens (vs.22-37). It is also possible that by “in the midst of you,” Jesus doesn’t mean an internal reality but a nearby potential. In other words, those who seek to know where the kingdom is should be reminded of the glorious news that it is here, and it is not that far away. Either way, these two verses serve as an introductory to the larger theme of this passage, which is concerned with the second coming of Jesus.

The Coming of the Son of Man

The bulk of this study focuses on the return of Jesus and what we can expect it will be like. Jesus gives several illustrations and examples to describe what this day will be like. While not a comprehensive examination of the end of things, there are some helpful details of which Christians need to be aware. Below is a breakdown of some of the key concepts primarily found in verses 22 through 37.

A MOMENT OF CLARITY

Jesus begins in verses 22 and 23 by warning His disciples that there will be a time when people will falsely claim that Jesus has returned, and that we are to ignore them: “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. And they will say to you, ‘Look, there!’ or ‘Look, here!’ Do not go out or follow them.” This, however, has no doubt led many believers through the ages in a state of worry or concern. How are we to know for sure when Jesus has returned? Jesus tells us in verse 24: “For as the lightning flashes and lights up the sky from one side to the other, so will the Son of Man be in his day.” In the same way lightning is clearly visible and perceivable by all, so will the return of Jesus be. In the words, there will be no question when Jesus arrives. People will not need to tell one another; it will be plain to all.

THE DAYS OF NOAH

Jesus then uses the illustration of Noah in verses 26 and 27 to describe the suddenness of His coming. In Noah’s time, people were “eating and drinking and marrying and being given in marriage” up until “the day Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all” (Lk. 17:27). Passages like this have been used to argue a pre-tribulational rapture on the grounds that *everything seems fine* until it suddenly is not. However, this is not textually accurate. The context in this passage is that many will be falsely claiming His return already. The world is not necessarily fine when Jesus returns in this passage. A significant part of the tribulation for the world will seem less intense because of the false promises of the beast, the dragon, and the false prophet. Beyond that, the people of God will be protected from the wrath of God poured out in judgment due to the mark of the Lamb (Rev. 14:1). Beyond that, Revelation gives “a call for the endurance and faith of the saints” at least twice explicitly (Rev. 13:10; 14:12). The saints, or Christians, are to endure or stay the course, meaning continuing to obey God and worship Him day by day in spite of the increasing difficulty. This passage is consistent additionally with a post-tribulational second coming. It makes sense, then, that this day of judgment when Christ returns will come upon all people suddenly.

THE DAYS OF LOT

Next, Jesus turns to the example of “the days of Lot” (Lk. 17:28). Again, the example drives home the same point made in the example of the days of Noah. People will be going about their normal lives when they are suddenly overtaken by an instantaneous judgment.

FUTILITY

Jesus then says in verse 31: “On that day, let the one who is on the housetop, with his goods in the house, not come down to take them away, and likewise let the one who is in the field not turn back.” The point of this verse is that once the Son of Man appears, there will be no point in trying to continue on with normal living, nor would it be helpful to try and preserve one’s worldly goods. A person caught in a field doing work shouldn’t worry about trying to make it back home, for there will be no escaping the Son of Man. The one who has goods in his home should not try to take them and hide them or sell them. These normal behaviors will become futile in light of the pending judgment.

SOME RIGHTEOUS, SOME NOT

Verses 32 through 35 hone in on the reality that some will be saved and some will not. Again, these verses are sometimes used to support a rapture that happens before tribulation (which is problematic for many reasons, one being it would mean Jesus will also return a *third time*, a position untenable to the New Testament). Jesus imagines two people sleeping in the same bed, and one taken and one not, and again, two people at a grinding stone where one is taken, and the other is not. It is likely, however, that Jesus is simply using this as a Hebraism to communicate that some will remain on the earth to be destroyed, and some will be taken up into the sky with Jesus as the final judgment occurs. New Testament scholar Robert Stein writes, concerning the

word taken: The term ‘taken’ does not mean to disappear but to escape judgment.”¹ It isn’t a disappearing, but an escape from the final judgment. Note as well the removal of verse 36 in many of the newer translations. This is a verse not found in any of the best Greek manuscripts and thus should not be seen as part of the original Lukan account. Verse 37 is one of the stranger and more elusive proverbs of Jesus and scholars are divided on what He meant. Some think that in the same way a dead body attracts vultures, so will unsaved people attract judgment. Others have suggested other ideas. None of those ideas really give a satisfactory answer to why Jesus’ disciples ask the question: “Where?” My favorite opinion comes from another New Testament scholar, David Garland: “They want to know *where* the elect will be taken when they are saved from destruction. The answer is obscure, and the disciples will not be able to understand it until after the resurrection when they can recognize Jesus as the risen Lord, remember his words, and interpret the events in light of God’s purposes in Scripture. Only after the passion and resurrection can they recognize the “body” as the one given for them by Jesus (22:19), who was raised from the dead and transported to glory.”² In other words, the answer to this question becomes clear once Jesus defeats death. The saints go to be with the risen Savior for all of eternity.

What About Now?

One of the takeaways is that the kingdom is in the midst of God’s people. That means that in church gatherings, small group gatherings, and Christian-specific gatherings, the kingdom is there. When we invite people to church, they should be exposed to something otherworldly and different to anything else they experience. Another takeaway is the reality that Jesus will return one day, and it will be unexpected for all people.

Study Questions

Day One

1. Read Luke 17:20-21. Who asked Jesus about the kingdom? What did Jesus say in response?

2. Read Luke 17:22-25. In your own words, summarize Jesus’ words. What does the suffering and rejection of the Son of Man refer to?

Day Two

1. Read Luke 17:26-27. How does Jesus use “the day of Noah” to illustrate the second coming?

¹ Robert H. Stein, *Luke*, The New American Commentary, eds. E. Ray Clendenen and David S. Dockery, vol. 24 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 440.

² David E. Garland, *Luke*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 702.

- 2. Read Luke 17:28-30. How does Jesus use “the days of Lot” to illustrate the second coming? In what ways is this example the same as the “to days of Noah,” and are there any differences?

Day Three

- 1. Read Luke 17:31. What is the main idea of Jesus’ words in this verse?

- 2. Read Luke 17:32-33. What happened to Lots wife? Read Genesis 19:15-26. How does Lot’s wife serve as an example to Jesus’ teaching in this passage?

Day Four

- 1. Read Luke 17:34-35. In your own words, summarize Jesus’ teaching in this passage.

- 2. Read Luke 17:36-37. What do the disciples ask Jesus? How does Jesus respond? (Hint: See above notes)

Week 63 Discussion: The Gathering

In Luke 17:20-21, Jesus says “For behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you.” Either He means that the kingdom resides within the gathering of believers, or that it is near to those who seek to find it; probably both are intended. That means the Christian gathering is a sacred and important gathering that conveys the kingdom to those who participate. Talk as a group about the ways in which the Sunday gathering is special and unlike any other gathering in the world.

- 1. Icebreaker: How important is the Sunday gathering to you? In other words, what will you skip church for?
- 2. How did you first come to church? Who invited you or brought you? What church did you attend?
- 3. When was the last time you invited someone to church? Did they come with you?
- 4. How is the church gathering different than any other secular gathering in the world?
- 5. What is the most special part of the church gathering for you personally?
- 6. Who can you invite to church and Bible study next week? Pray for them by name specifically as a group.

Takeaways:

- 1. Jesus teaches the crowds that the kingdom of God is in the midst of His disciples.
- 2. Jesus teaches about His second coming, that it will be sudden and unexpected, and that He will save those who belong to Him from judgment.