

Remember Lot's Wife! (Luke 17:20-37)



We find in Luke a unique and surprising teaching of Jesus on the end time and His second coming. Jesus is addressing two different audiences here. First, He answers the Pharisees' question about when the kingdom of God will come. Then He teaches His disciples on the signs of the last days before His return, how He will return, and what will take place when He returns. And He warns them of the danger of presuming they will enter God's kingdom because of their theological knowledge or their religious zeal.

A. The Spiritual Kingdom

1. This passage opens with the Pharisees challenging Jesus, *'When is the kingdom of God coming?'* (v20)
 - a. The end-time teaching was a hot topic in Jesus' day as it is today. The popular belief in those days revolved around the idea of the sudden invasion of God's kingdom on the earthly kingdoms to establish Israel as a politically superior nation over all other nations, including the oppressive Roman Empire.

The Pharisee's assumptions were: (1) The kingdom of God is essentially the nation of Israel as a political entity, so they looked for spectacular and sensational signs of its coming. *'Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?'* (Acts 1:6) (2) Accessing this secret knowledge would grant them a cutting-edge advantage and a promotion to the front seat!
 - b. Jesus announced the imminent arrival of the kingdom of God from the beginning of His ministry. It has been now 3 ½ years since He demanded repentance and faith from Israel on this basis. But strangely Jesus was not gathering an army, or training anyone to fight, or making political moves to take over the corrupt leadership of Israel. For the past 3 ½ years Jesus has been healing the sick, casting out demons, preaching the kingdom of God, but he just was not making any political moves. So, the Pharisees were asking Him now, *'So when is the kingdom of God coming?'* (v20) Can you hear the mocking tone? *We can't see it. You are preaching the pie in the sky.*
2. Jesus corrects the Pharisees' faulty view of the kingdom of God.
 - a. The kingdom of God does not come in the 'observable' way they expected, 'Look here! Look there!' In fact, the Pharisees have already missed the kingdom of God because they did not recognise the King who was right there in their midst. Why did they miss it altogether? Because the kingdom of God is essentially spiritual now. That is why Jesus said, *'But if I cast out demons by the finger of God, surely the kingdom of God has come upon you.'* (Luke 11:20)
 - b. Jesus already taught His disciples that the kingdom of God grows in our world like a mustard seed (13:18-19), and like leaven (13:20-21). The growth of God's kingdom is unstoppable, yet it is hardly noticeable and not spectacular. On any given Sunday in any church, a few sinners may repent and decide to follow Christ. The world takes no notice of it and no one seems to care. But in every heart that bows to Jesus and vows to follow Him, the kingdom of God is expanding inwardly! Although it may not be spectacular today, one day it will be openly revealed for all to see.
 - c. ἐντός (*entos*) can mean (1) 'inside' or 'within'; (2) 'in the midst' or 'among'. (2) 'The kingdom of God is *in the midst* of you,' is more likely because Jesus was speaking to the Pharisees, and the Holy Spirit has not been outpoured yet. Those who are in Christ, can say 'the kingdom of God is within us.' E.g. *'Christ in you, the hope of glory.'* (Col 1:27) The nature of God's kingdom right now has everything to do with our relationship with Jesus and His presence within us.

B. The day of the Son of Man

Jesus is now speaking to His disciples who already know about the internal kingdom of God. The Pharisees were not completely wrong. There is a day when God's kingdom will break into our world in power. Notice the two different phrases: *'the days of the Son of Man'* (v22, 26,) AND *'the day of the Son of Man'* (v24, 30). The 'days' refers to the days of Jesus' earthly ministry leading all the way up to the day of His return. The 'day' refers to the day of Jesus' actual return. Jesus warns His disciples, if they are not careful, they too will miss the kingdom of God like the Pharisees. Jesus' warning was two-fold.

1. Warning 1: 'Zeal without Knowledge' (v22-24)

- a. *'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.'* (v22) There will be 'revival-like' movements on earth that will mislead people. There will be movements to find the secret 'earthly Messiah' like the Pharisees - 'Look here! Look there! He will bring the kingdom of God to Israel!' Jesus warned, *'Do not go after them or follow them.'* (v23) Why? It will be the wrong Messiah who will lead them astray. Jesus warned about false prophets and false messiahs who will come. They will ultimately set the stage for 'the False Prophet' and 'the Antichrist' (Matt 24:24-26). We need to be on our guard against movements that promote false unity, false worship, and false anointing.
- b. *'For as the lightning 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.'* (v24) There is no secret messiah whom we can trust. The only Messiah we can trust is the one who comes down from heaven. And just like the lightning strikes, it will happen in a split second without a prior parade or prior warning. So, we don't need to speculate about the exact timing as the Pharisees did. Jesus said, *'No one knows the day or the hour.'* (Matt 24:36)

There are two facets of Christ's return. He will come back like the thief in the night to the world. But the children of light ought not to be caught out unprepared. (C.f. 1 Thess. 5:1-4)

- c. *'But first He must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation.'* (v25) The cross must precede the coming of the kingdom in power. This is obvious to us now, but it was completely a foreign idea to the disciples back then, that (1) there are TWO comings of the Messiah. His first coming was in suffering and rejection. His second coming will be in power and judgment. (2) The cross was not an accident, but a part of the divine plan. Cross always precedes the crown! As it was for Jesus, so it is with us. (C.f. v33)

2. What will the DAYS of the Son of Man be like (v26-30)?

- a. There are two characteristics of the last days that will parallel (1) the days of Noah, and (2) the days of Lot. These two cultures flourished just prior to God's direct judgment that was total and complete. Their vices and wickedness were well-documented facts - Noah's days in Gen 6:1-8, and Lot's days in Gen 18:16-21. The two unique evils of those days were (1) unmitigated violence on the earth, and (2) rampant sexual degradation, especially militant homosexuality in Sodom. Why was this so? Because every intent [imagination] of man's heart was continually evil. (Gen 6:5)
- b. But surprisingly Jesus doesn't even mention the sinful vices of those cultures. Rather He points to the 'normal activities' of those days, 'eating, drinking, marrying, given in marriage,' (v27); 'eating, drinking, buying, selling, planting, building.' (v28) None of them are sinful activities in themselves. So, what was their problem? It was their preoccupation and engrossment in the affairs of this world. The most dangerous trap for His disciples in the end time is not necessarily the hard-core evil, but the distractions, diversions, and losing the focus on Christ's return - living our lives as if this world is all there is to live for.
- c. Sudden destruction fell upon both cultures. So also *'it will be in the day when the Son of Man will be revealed'* (v30). There are three Greek words that describe Christ's return.
 - i. *'parousia'* - a royal visit with an entourage, describing the glorious return of Christ in power. (1 Cor 15:23; 1 Thess 2:19, 3:13, 4:15, 5:23; 2 Thess 2:1,8; James 5:7,8; 2 Pet 1:16, 3:4,12; 1 John 2:28)
 - ii. *'epiphaneia'* - to appear publicly, to show forth. It points to the public appearing of royalty. (2 Thess 2:8; 1 Tim 6:14; 2 Tim 4:1,8; Titus 2:13)
 - iii. *'apocalypse'* - unveiling of the person as who he really is. It is the picture of the king coming with the crown in the full royal robe. E.g. A king secretly came into his city disguised as a poor man to find out what his people really thought of their king and how they treated each other. The second time the king came to the city, he came in his full royal regalia and his military as the rightful king, to sort out his loyal subjects from the rebels. Jesus' first coming was as the suffering Messiah to be rejected and killed. Only three disciples saw Jesus' glory in His transfiguration. When Jesus returns as king and judge, all will see His glory. (1 Cor 1:7; 2 Thess 1:7; 1 Pet 1:7,13; 4:13; Revelations)

3. Warning 2: 'Knowledge without Zeal' (v31-33)

- a. On the day of the Lord's return, 'our response' will be very important (v31). That day will reveal our real attitude toward the Lord and the kingdom of God. If we truly long for His coming as our heavenly bridegroom, we will not draw back and hesitate. When we see the Lord coming for us, we will get up right away and run to Him. We will not delay, trying to take valuable things from the house with us. (C.f. Matt 24:17-18 is a parallel text, but in a different context.)
- b. *'Remember Lot's wife.'* (v32) Lot's wife was someone who came closest to salvation without actually achieving it. She had the knowledge. She had the divine revelation of the coming judgment on her city. She had one foot in the world and the other foot in the kingdom. Her body left the city of Sodom, but her heart didn't. She had built so much of her life in the city, so her heart and zeal for the Lord had grown cold. She had so much of her life to lose by leaving Sodom - friends, house, wealth, etc. And she looked back to Sodom in regret and turned into a pillar of salt, thus perishing with the city at the very threshold of salvation (Gen 19:26).

To whom did Jesus give this warning? To His disciples. (v22) This should greatly concern the church. How well will we do if the Lord comes today?

- c. *'Whoever seeks to save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life will preserve it.'* (v33) This is the key verse. If your life is rooted in this world, you will not make it. But if you have already lost your life here, and started building your life in the kingdom, you will save your life! Just as the cross preceded the crown for Jesus, so also it will be for His disciples.

4. What will the DAY of the Son of Man be like? (v34-36)

'I tell you, in that night there will be two people 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.'

- a. We can deduce three facts concerning the day of Christ's return. (1) Daily life will go on until the very last day; (2) That day will separate all humanity into two categories, 'TAKEN' or 'LEFT' with nothing in between - complete salvation or total destruction; (3) No other relationship matters on the day, husband and wife, best friends, close business partners. Only one relationship will matter - our relationship with Jesus Christ.
- b. *'[Taken] where, Lord?'* (v37) The disciples understandably wondered, where can all of the disciples meet together quickly when Jesus returns like the lightning from heaven? Jesus answers them with a proverb: *'Wherever the body is, there the eagles will be gathered together.'* (v37) *'ἀετός' (aetos)* is either an eagle or a vulture. (C.f. Rev 4:7, 8:13, 12:14, 16:15-16 - Armageddon) We will not be meeting the Lord on the earth, there is no place large enough. We will meet the Lord in the air (1 Thess 4:15-18). Just like the eagles swoop to gather over a prey, so we will see the bride of Christ gathering out of all over the world, pulled like a magnet by Christ to meet Him in the air. So, it will be a very natural process.

C. Summary

1. The kingdom of God is essentially an inner spiritual reality until Christ returns and sets up His kingdom on earth. We need to recognise and grow the internal spiritual kingdom in our midst and within each of us by growing in our relationship with the Lord and growing in His presence.
2. We must be careful not to be like the Pharisees, who looked for the external, immediate, and spectacular. There will be many who will be misled by the false messiahs and miss out on the coming of the Lord.
3. The basic pattern of life will continue in some form to the last day until Jesus returns. We must resist being lukewarm, having knowledge without the zeal for the Lord. The danger for the end-time church is the preoccupation with the affairs of this world at the cost of developing the inner life of the kingdom of God.

Lot's wife came so close to salvation but missed it. Therefore, the only way for us to be ready for the Lord's coming is to live each day for the kingdom of God, so that we are ever ready to meet the Lord whenever He calls us. It will be too late to start preparing when He comes.