

Luke 17:20-37: Biblical Reading and Reflections

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[0 : 0 0] Luke chapter 17 verses 20 to 37. Being asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, he answered them, The kingdom of God is not coming in ways that can be observed, nor will they say, Look, here it is, or there. For behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you.

And he said to the disciples, 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, 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. But first he must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation. Just as it was in the days of Noah, so will it be in the days of the Son of Man.

They were eating and drinking and marrying, and being given in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all. Likewise, just as it was in the days of Lot, they were eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building. But on the day when Lot went out from Sodom, fire and sulphur rained from heaven and destroyed them all. So will it be on the day when the Son of Man is revealed. 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. Remember Lot's wife. Whoever seeks to preserve his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life will keep it. I tell you, in that night there will be two in one bed. One will be taken, and the other left. There will be two women grinding together. One will be taken, and the other left. And they said to him, Where, Lord? He said to them, Where the corpse is, there the vultures will gather.

Luke chapter 17 ends with a discussion of the coming of the kingdom, and the two big questions, when and where. Jesus is asked by the Pharisees about when the kingdom of God is coming. They presume that it is arriving at some point in the future. Yet the kingdom is already dawning and present in Jesus. The Pharisees are also expecting to be able readily to notice when the kingdom arrives.

However, the coming of the kingdom is in many respects secret and imperceptible, like leaven working in loaves. The kingdom doesn't come as something whose arrival we can closely monitor and pinpoint.

[2 : 1 5] The kingdom is already in their midst. It's hidden like the leaven. The Pharisees can't see what is taking place in Jesus' ministry. It's right under their nose, but they cannot perceive it.

Jesus then turns to address his disciples after this, as they also have difficulties recognizing the coming of the kingdom and the manner it occurs. When the Son of Man is revealed, it will be sudden, dramatic, unmistakable, and public. The time will come when they will long for a manifestation of the Son of Man, but not see it. And people will point them in various directions, but they should not be misled. When the Son of Man is truly revealed, they will know it. References to the Son of Man's day should also remind us of Daniel chapter 7 verses 13 to 14, when the Son of Man comes on the clouds of heaven to the Ancient of Days and is given the kingdom. Jesus' coming in judgment will be sudden and catastrophic, and the rejection by and suffering at the hands of the current generation must happen first, and then catastrophic judgment described in verse 25. Jesus compares the judgment to come upon Jerusalem to the judgment that befell the pre-flood world and Sodom. In each of these cases, things were continuing as usual until unexpected, catastrophic, and final judgment hit, and everything changed. The day of the Son of Man, the days of Noah, and the days of Lot are held alongside each other and paralleled. Jesus, the Son of Man, is the one who leads a new group of people escaping final judgment, who are saved with him. The story of Lot is one in which there is final judgment upon the cities of the plain. The angels come to inspect the city of Sodom, and they deliver Lot and his family from it, and its downfall. The story of the flood is the story of an end of an old world too.

The world before the flood is drowned, and Noah and his family are delivered through it. The days of Noah and the days of Lot refer to the days of peace and seeming normality before judgment hits. The days of the Son of Man are the days of his personal presence and his ministry with his disciples, the days they're currently enjoying. As the judgment looms, the day of the Son of Man, I can imagine the disciples looking back upon the days by Galilee and wishing that they could return to that time. The Son of Man will be revealed, and all else will be laid bare. Final judgment on Jerusalem is coming, and all riches must be left behind. Without looking back, the disciples must flee.

They must recognize that anything that ties them down is a liability. Anything that attaches them to that present order is a threat in that day when they need to escape. They must not run back into the burning building. This, it seems to me, is one of the reasons why the early church in Jerusalem sold its property, its land, and shared the money among them for their needs. Not only was the value of real estate in Jerusalem going to crater as the city was destroyed, it was also a danger to own property that would overly attach you to a place that was doomed. And finally, liquidating their property and using that money to minister to those in need and to build up the body of Christ was laying up treasures in heaven.

Condemned property was thus translated into something that would yield eternal dividends. One would be taken, another would be left. Taken here does not refer to the rapture of the left behind series or anything like that. Rather, it refers to being taken by the sword. Where will they be taken? [5 : 41] The body, the carcass of Israel, is where the eagles, the unclean foreign force of the Romans, will be gathered together. Jerusalem and her people, overthrown Babylon, will become Rome's carrion.

See this described in Revelation chapter 19 verses 17 to 18. Then I saw an angel standing in the sun, and with a loud voice he called to all the birds that fly directly overhead, Come, gather for the great supper of God, to eat the flesh of kings, the flesh of captains, the flesh of mighty men, the flesh of horses, and their riders, and the flesh of all men, both free and slave, both small and great. A question to consider. What is the lesson of Lot's wife? Why is her example underlined here?