

# Sermon: Already and Not Yet

Text: Luke 17:20-37

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**Introduction:** Two audiences are addressed here: the Pharisees (v. 20) and Jesus' disciples (v. 22). Both groups need to understand the requirements of the Kingdom. It is important that everyone realize how the Kingdom is to be expressed and what the King's expectations are. The people of Jesus' time had large hopes and loud dreams for what the Messiah would bring to their lives. Jesus had shown them in many ways that he was God, yet they still were largely unconvinced. John the Baptist had been unsure in his final days. Possibly colored by his life situation, even he questioned if Jesus was really the Christ.

**Matthew 11:2-3 (NIV)** <sup>2</sup>When John heard in prison what Christ was doing, he sent his disciples <sup>3</sup>to ask him, "Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?"

Today, if you ask about who Jesus is (was), you will get very different answers from people. Jesus wanted to make it clear in his first appearing:

## I. The Kingdom Exists Already (vv. 20-21).

The Inauguration has begun.

**Luke 17:20-21 (NIV)** <sup>20</sup>Once, having been asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, Jesus replied, "The kingdom of God does not come with your careful observation, <sup>21</sup>nor will people say, 'Here it is,' or 'There it is,' because the kingdom of God is within you."

### A. The Kingdom is not perceived physically (v. 20).

It is always easier to understand realities in concrete terms rather than abstract ones. Many people today still think of heaven and hell in literal terms. It may be reassuring somehow to think of streets of gold and gates of pearls with all the finest of precious stones in heaven's foundations. Yet, I still like to think of heaven as the presence of God and hell as his absence. Most of Jesus' audiences were looking for a ruler who would free them from Rome, a monarch that would provide real bread and water, sumptuous banquets of food, a person who could sustain peace, prosperity, and physical riches.

There are some today who make these kinds of promises from a church context. And this misses the point just as clearly as it did in the 1st century. Solomon understood in the OT that you could have all these things: wealth, wisdom, and your health, but those were all vain things without a relationship with God. Jesus says:

B. The Kingdom is in your midst (v. 21).

Here, I believe the **KJV** and the **NIV** both have it wrong. Rather than **the kingdom of God is within you**, it should probably read “in your midst,” “within their grasp” or “in your grasp.” Jesus is talking to the Pharisees who typically opposed him, so it would be wrong for him to say the kingdom of God was in *them*. And clearly Jesus does not talk about the kingdom entering a person, but that a person through faith enters the kingdom.

Jesus is saying that the kingdom is in your midst because the King is here *now!* This is a critical realization so that a person recognizes God when he is present. If one is looking for God in the wrong place, he/she may miss him altogether. He is not found where the world looks for security: happiness in people, things and activities.

C.S. Lewis adds this wise counsel: “All human beings pass away. Do not let your happiness depend on something you may lose. If love is to be a blessing, not a misery, it must be for the only beloved who will never pass away.”

The fact that the king was in their midst demanded a decision of loyalty, and a commitment to follow his decrees. “The reign of God meant different things to different people, but generally it conjured up images of peace, freedom, and prosperity...(but) the when, where, and how are tucked away in God’s wisdom.” - Craddock, *Luke*, p. 204

Jesus wanted to make it clear in light of his final coming:

## II. The Kingdom Is Not Yet! (vv. 22-37)

But, the Consummation is coming.

**Luke 17:22-23 (NIV)** <sup>22</sup>Then he said to his disciples, “The time is coming when you will long to see one of the days of the Son of Man, but you will not see it.

<sup>23</sup>Men will tell you, ‘There he is!’ or ‘Here he is!’ Do not go running off after them.

A. The Second (Final) Coming is misunderstood (vv. 22-23).

Jesus' day was filled with stories of false messiahs whose lives and followers' lives did not end well and were quickly forgotten. For as long as there have been people interested in the interpretation of scriptures, people have claimed "inside information" about Jesus' return. Yet, oddly enough Jesus claims ignorance about any matters of timing. He is heard saying:

**Matthew 24:36 (NIV)** <sup>36</sup>"No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.

"When I started out in the classroom. I would disguise my 'I don't know' and try to dazzle my students with a lot of verbal footwork, but I could tell by the way they looked at me that they realized I didn't know. As I got older, more chastened by my own ignorance, I said, 'I don't know' more frequently and with less pain. Now, some people, you don't ever expect them to say, 'I don't know.'

Nettie and I heard, some years ago, the chief of staff at Georgetown University Hospital in Washington, D.C., both publicly and in private at the table, say, 'I don't know.' A Nobel Prize-winning scientist at Princeton University that a number of us were gathered to hear speak about the frontiers of medicine and science opened the floor for questions. There were questions about cancer, AIDS, and Alzheimer's disease, and to every question, he said, 'I don't know.'

But even so, you never expect Jesus to say, 'I don't know.' It's disappointing. In fact, when the scribes sat and copied the scriptures--you know, hand by hand, word by word, faithfully copying it exactly as it was--and they got to **Matthew 24:36**, when they came to the expression, "Jesus said, I don't know," they couldn't write it, so they left it out. And we still have copies of those ancient manuscripts in which reverent, God-fearing scribes said, "I can't write those words! I can't stand for Jesus to say, 'I don't know.'" - *Craddock Stories*, pp. 62-63

Not knowing when does not discount the sureness of the second coming, though; it only leaves it in God's hands where Jesus was willing to leave it. We are told:

B. This Coming will be obvious and sudden (v. 24).

**Luke 17:24 (NIV)** <sup>24</sup>For the Son of Man in his day will be like the lightning, which flashes and lights up the sky from one end to the other.

**Illus.** Maybe you have seen the Peanuts cartoon where Snoopy is on top of the doghouse working on his novel? He has written, "Suddenly, a shot rang out." And Lucy says, "That is a cliché. I think you should change it." So Snoopy scratches his head for a moment and then writes, "Gradually, a shot rang out." Well, it is just as ridiculous to say, "Gradually, a bolt of lightning lit up the sky." - illustration from Dr. Donald T. Williams

The second coming will be much like a violent storm for some. It will be upon them before they can take cover. Even though the weatherman had predicted the weather, there are always the ones who think that the storm will affect others, while sparing them. Lightning will not only be sudden, but obvious. No one will say: what was that? The Son of Man will be easily identified even by the slowest among us spiritually. And this will be a global, cosmic storm. It will not be just the recognition of the storm, but its devastating results that will make it such a unique day in history.

### C. People's attitude towards God is timeless (vv. 25-33).

**Luke 17:25-33 (NIV)** <sup>25</sup>But first he must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation. <sup>26</sup>“Just as it was in the days of Noah, so also will it be in the days of the Son of Man. <sup>27</sup>People were eating, drinking, marrying and being given in marriage up to the day Noah entered the ark. Then the flood came and destroyed them all. <sup>28</sup>“It was the same in the days of Lot. People were eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building. <sup>29</sup>But the day Lot left Sodom, fire and sulfur rained down from heaven and destroyed them all. <sup>30</sup>“It will be just like this on the day the Son of Man is revealed. <sup>31</sup>On that day no one who is on the roof of his house, with his goods inside, should go down to get them. Likewise, no one in the field should go back for anything. <sup>32</sup>Remember Lot’s wife! <sup>33</sup>Whoever tries to keep his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life will preserve it.

#### 1. People reject God’s authority (v. 25).

Why did Jesus suffer so much from his generation? They did not want to give up their control over the people. They did not want to submit to God’s will. They saw Jesus as a threat to their position rather than as the Messiah of God.

The religious leaders of Jesus time did not deny that Jesus performed miraculous signs. They did question his authority and what that would mean for their importance. Right after Lazarus is clearly raised from the dead after four days, we hear: **John 11:45-48 (NIV)** <sup>45</sup>Therefore many of the Jews who had come to visit Mary, and had seen what Jesus did, put their faith in him. <sup>46</sup>But some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done. <sup>47</sup>Then the chief priests and the Pharisees called a meeting of the Sanhedrin. “What are we accomplishing?” they asked. “Here is this man performing many miraculous signs. <sup>48</sup>If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and then the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation.”

A lot of people want Jesus today for what he will do for them, but when he makes ethical/moral demands or requires their time, money, and life, some look for another savior. Nothing has changed.

2. People reject God's priorities (vv. 26-33).

Luke gives us two examples of godly men living in a godless culture. He does not make his point on the backs of the gross immorality that existed then. He talks about the common occurrences of life.

in Noah's time - <sup>27</sup>People were eating, drinking, marrying and being given in marriage in Lot's time - <sup>28</sup>People were eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building.

None of these things are inherently wrong, but when that is all there is to life something is missing. I personally think that busyness can be a sin rather than something for which to be congratulated. When activities keep us from God, the fellowship of believers and listening to his representatives we are self-condemned. We need to be careful to choose what is best, not just what is good. God must be our priority in this life.

The Pharisees were moral/ethical people generally - good people, but they would not listen to God either. Their attention was on themselves. Lot's wife was a believer in Yahweh, but when the choice between obedience and the cares of this world was posed, she chose wrongly and paid with her life.

We hear what is sometimes called free-floating sayings in verse 33. <sup>33</sup>Whoever tries to keep his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life will preserve it.

This is found in John's gospel in the context of service of God rather than thinking only about oneself. **John 12:26 (NIV)** <sup>26</sup>Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me.

D. God's judgment will separate good and evil (vv. 34-37).

You will notice v. 36 is missing in NIV translation, but not in KJV

**Luke 17:34-37 (NIV)** <sup>34</sup>I tell you, on that night two people will be in one bed; one will be taken and the other left. <sup>35</sup>Two women will be grinding grain together; one will be taken and the other left." <sup>37</sup>"Where, Lord?" they asked. He replied, "Where there is a dead body, there the vultures will gather."

**The wise will go with God. These are the ones who are taken. The ones who are left are the foolish ones. They will be left alone (abandoned to hell). Someday, all of humanity will be divided into two groups: saved and lost, those going to heaven and hell. There will be no second chances, no excuses, no gray area. It will be black or white, either, or. This coming universal judgment will be as obvious for everyone as vultures circling overhead waiting to gorge themselves on the dead. The end will be devastating for those who did not care about God in this life. He will allow that to be their eternal choice.**

**Conclusion:** *The Day of the Lord* is coming. As I speak today, it is not yet here, the Kingdom is not fully realized. The time is coming, though, when Jesus will return. When he does come back in all his glory, it will be a time of reward and punishment, gathering and separation. We don't like to talk about it much; some say it is too negative of a subject. But, let's be clear, those who die unrepentant or fail to repent before Jesus returns will be sadly consigned to a place of punishment. We must tell everyone we can of the coming judgment. In the days left, let's do everything we can to impress on others the importance of being faithful and ready at Jesus' appearing.

**It is easy to pray and long for the day where there will be no more suffering, pain, tears or death and join with the early church in saying "Maranatha" (Our Lord, come! - [I Cor. 16:22](#)).**

**"The best way to prepare for the coming of Christ is never to forget the presence of Christ." - William Barclay**

**What we have now as a kingdom experience can be great, but later it will be perfect.**