

17:20 Now having been questioned by the Pharisees as to when the kingdom of God was coming, He answered them and said, "The kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be observed;

17:21 nor will they say, 'Look, here it is!' or, 'There it is!' For behold, the kingdom of God is in your midst."

When the Pharisees asked about when the kingdom of God was coming they probably had in mind the apocalyptic imagery of the Old Testament. The Old Testament predicted that the Day of Salvation would be preceded by great tribulation. Heavenly signs would signal the kingdom's arrival; as Jesus Himself said, "the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken" (Matt. 24:29). Then Messiah would come as a warrior to conquer the nations in a great battle and the unbelieving would be judged. The whole topography of the planet would be changed; a river would flow from Jerusalem and make the desert blossom like a rose. Messiah would then rule as King and all the earth would bow before Him. Israel would have peace, prosperity, and fame among the nations of the world.

But Jesus said that the kingdom of God was not coming with signs to be observed; it was already present.

The expression, "the kingdom of God is in your midst," has been understood by some to mean, "the kingdom of God is inside us" ("within you;" NIV, KJV). However, this is unlikely for at least three reasons: (1) it is inconceivable that Jesus would tell the unbelieving and hostile Pharisees that the kingdom of God was in them. (2) The Bible never presents the kingdom of God as an inner, private, or psychological reality. People are said to enter the kingdom, the kingdom is never said to enter them. (3) Thirdly, "your" in the phrase "in your midst" is plural; the plural more likely means "among" or "in the midst of" the group, not within all the individuals (Edwards, 489).

If the kingdom's coming was not observable, how did it come?

The answer to this question can probably be most easily explained through Jesus' teaching on the "mysteries of the kingdom" in Matthew 13. That is where He gave a number of parables that explained the nature of the kingdom in this age:

1) The Parable of the Wheat and Tares (Matt. 13:24-30)

Jesus said that the kingdom can be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field, but while his men were sleeping his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went away. When the wheat sprouted and bore grain the tares became evident also. At the end of the harvest the wheat and the tares were separated; in verse 41 this separation is explained as judgment: "they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all evil doers, and throw them into the furnace of fire" (Matt.13:41).

This is what the kingdom looks like in our age: it exists in the world with the righteous (v. 43) and the unrighteous living side by side until the consummation. This was not expected.

2) The Parable of the Mustard Seed (Matt. 13:31-32; 36-40; Lk. 13:18-19)

The kingdom is also like a mustard seed – a tiny seed that grows into a tree.

The Pharisees expected the kingdom to arrive in its fully developed form, as a great tree. Jesus said that the kingdom would have a small beginning and then grow into something huge.

3) The Parable of the Leaven (Matt. 13:33; Lk. 13:20-21)

The kingdom of God is like leaven. It is hidden in the dough, but will eventually permeate every part of it. Through the influence of the gospel, the kingdom of God will gradually spread until it permeates the entire world.

4) The Parable of the Drag Net (Matt. 13:47-50)

The kingdom of God is likened to a fishing net thrown into the sea. The net caught every kind of fish; when it was full, men drew it ashore and the fish were separated – the good from the bad.

The kingdom is such that it has influence even over both believers and unbelievers; although both will be “in the net” for a time, at the end of the age the unbelieving will be removed and judged.

As Piper warns, we need to “beware of assuming that all who are swept into the power of God's kingdom are the children of the kingdom. The power of the kingdom gathers many (Matthew 7:22) into its net that will be cast out in the end. . .”

In sum, Jesus taught that the kingdom comes into the world gradually (like a mustard seed), and grows until it permeates everything (like leaven). But He also taught that both believers and unbelievers come under its influence and will need to be separated (like wheat from tares and good fish from bad fish) before the kingdom is established in its perfected glory.

If the coming of the kingdom was not observable, how were the Pharisees to discern that it was in their midst? Or, to state it differently, why were the Pharisees unaware of the kingdom's presence among them?

First, they were unaware of the kingdom because they refused to accept Jesus as the God-ordained messianic King. The kingdom was present because the King was present. If they had discerned who Jesus was, they would have known that the kingdom was there as well. As McClain says, “[the kingdom]. . . in the person of its divinely appointed king, physically present in incarnate form on earth where He must eventually reign, the kingdom was in that sense already in the midst of man regardless of their attitude, whether for or against Him” (McClain, *The Greatness of the Kingdom*, 272).

Secondly, they refused to accept the miracles of Christ as demonstrations of kingdom power. In the previous context, Jesus had healed ten lepers (17:10-19); miracles of healing provided evidence that the effects of the fall were being rolled back. Likewise, casting out demons showed that the kingdom of God was advancing; the kingdom of darkness was being conquered. This was Jesus' thinking when the Pharisees accused Jesus of casting out demons by the power of Satan; Jesus replied to their accusation

by saying, "if I cast out demons by the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you" (Luke 11:20cf. Matt. 12:28).

Bock adds some additional evidences of the kingdom's presence:

- In His ministry, Jesus offered forgiveness and the Spirit, which is central to kingdom promise (3:15–18; 24:44-49).
- The kingdom invitation continued to be offered and was not withdrawn with Israel's rejection (14:15–24).
- Jesus promised to bestow the Spirit as a token of the kingdom's presence (Acts 2:30-39; 13:32–39). (Bock, 1118–1119).

Therefore, in Luke 17:20-21, Jesus was telling the Pharisees that the kingdom wasn't coming in the manner that they were thinking. They were looking for a consummated kingdom but the kingdom does not begin in its final form. The kingdom comes in stages. It has a present existence and a future, final state.

17:22 And He said to the disciples, "The days will come when you will long to see one of the days of the Son of Man, and you will not see it."

Bock does a great job summarizing the flow of the context in the following section (17:22-37). He says,

The kingdom may be in the midst, but its presence does not mean that the day of the Son of Man's glorious coming has occurred. So Jesus now turns to the theme of his return, which will bring about the kingdom's consummation. The Son of Man's arrival will be sudden and visible, so do not be deceived by those who point to its presence in a certain locale. It will come after the Son of Man suffers, in the midst of a godless period similar to the days of Noah and Lot. It will be a day of judgment, where vultures gather over the dead. In sum, the kingdom may be revealed in Jesus now, but it will show itself in judgment and power one day.

The unit's major concern is to warn the disciples of the nature of the time and to encourage them to endure the interval. They are not to fall away before the end, the negative example of which is Lot's wife. Loyalty to Jesus means loyalty to the end, despite the severe trials that God's people may face in the meantime. This unit leads nicely into the parable of the nagging widow and the judge (18:1-8), where part of the point is that God's people are to pray for a swift vindication (Bock, 1420).

In verse 22, Jesus' audience changes from the Pharisees to the disciples. In the previous verses, 20 and 21, Jesus was responding to the Pharisees' question about when the kingdom of God was coming; His answer was that the kingdom was already present. However, that does not mean that the kingdom is present in its consummated form. Although many will desire to see the consummated kingdom, they would not see it.

Jesus probably refers to Himself as the “Son of Man” since the title is connected with Him as Judge; John 5:26-27 says, “For just as the Father has life in Himself, even so He gave to the Son also to have life in Himself; and He gave Him authority to execute judgment, because He is the Son of Man.”

“The days will come” (ἐλεύσονται ἡμέραι) is an expression in the Bible that frequently alludes to judgement (Isa. 39:6; Jer. 7:32; 16:14; Ezek.7:10-12; Amos 4:2; Zech. 14:1). The reason that Jesus is telling the disciples about His return is to assure them that although they will face persecution, He will eventually return as Judge to bring about justice.

The wording, “the days (plural) of the Son of Man” (here and verse 26), is unique to Luke. Usually the time of wrath is referred to in the singular “day” (see 17:24, 30). In the context, the plural of day might be a way of paralleling the plural, “in the *days* of Noah” (v. 26) and “in the *days* of Lot” (v. 28). However, it appears that whether “day” or “days” is used, the event is the same (the second coming of Christ).

In short, verse 22 is saying that the disciples will long for Messiah’s glorious reign but He will not come until the time is ripe (17:26-20).

17:23 "They will say to you, 'Look there! Look here!' Do not go away, and do not run after them.

17:24 "For just like the lightning, when it flashes out of one part of the sky, shines to the other part of the sky, so will the Son of Man be in His day.

Matthew 24 has a conceptual parallel. It says,

23 "Then if anyone says to you, 'Behold, here is the Christ,' or 'There He is,' do not believe him.

24 "For false Christs and false prophets will arise and will show great signs and wonders, so as to mislead, if possible, even the elect.

25 "Behold, I have told you in advance.

26 "So if they say to you, 'Behold, He is in the wilderness,' do not go out, or, 'Behold, He is in the inner rooms,' do not believe them.

27 "For just as the lightning comes from the east and flashes even to the west, so will the coming of the Son of Man be.

Some will say that the Messiah has returned and will want others to follow them. Although such rumors may be attractive, the disciples were not to entertain the idea for the return of Christ will be unquestionable; it will be like lightning when it flashes out of one part of the sky and shines to the other part of the sky; it will be obvious to everyone. Revelation 1:7 says, “He is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see Him.”

17:25 "But first He must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation.

Before the Son of Man returns He must suffer and be rejected by the disciples’ generation. Luke stresses the divine necessity of the cross by using the word “must” (δεῖ ; *dei*); Jesus would not just suffer; He MUST suffer.

17:26 "And just as it happened in the days of Noah, so it will be also in the days of the Son of Man:

17:27 they were eating, they were drinking, they were marrying, they were being given in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all.

17:28 "It was the same as happened in the days of Lot: they were eating, they were drinking, they were buying, they were selling, they were planting, they were building;

17:29 but on the day that Lot went out from Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven and destroyed them all.

17:30 "It will be just the same on the day that the Son of Man is revealed.

The circumstances that mark the time in which Jesus returns are likened to the circumstances in the days of Noah and of Lot. Of course, the flood and the events that surround Sodom and Gomorrah are good illustrations since both were also times of God's judgment.

The flood in the days of Noah was a cataclysmic event that took the world by surprise. At that time people were living life as usual, totally oblivious to the moral corruption around them and hardened to the warning of God. "They were eating, they were drinking, they were marrying, they were being given in marriage." No one showed any concern when Noah began building the ark, but then suddenly the floodwaters came and swept them away. They could have avoided disaster had they had more concern for the things of God.

A similar situation existed in the days of Lot. During that time people were eating, drinking, buying, selling, planting, and building – living life as if that was their only concern. As Edwards says, "They were attentive to daily business as though it would last forever, and neglectful of eternity as though it would never come" (492). Then, out of nowhere, "it rained fire and brimstone from heaven and destroyed them all."

The coming of the Son of Man will follow the same pattern as the days of Noah and of Lot. People will be living life as normal, doing what they have done every day, giving no thought to their moral corruption or of the judgment of God, when suddenly the Son of Man will appear. But then it will be too late.

17:31 "On that day, the one who is on the housetop and whose goods are in the house must not go down to take them out; and likewise the one who is in the field must not turn back.

17:32 "Remember Lot's wife.

Housetops in the land of Israel were used as patios with an outside staircase that led to the ground. People would sit on their rooftops to relax and enjoy the outdoors. When Christ returns people (believers) will have to escape quickly (Bock, 1434). If someone was on the housetop, they shouldn't waste time going inside to gather supplies; if one is in the field, they should not look back.

"Looking back" pictures loving the things of the world. The fate of Lot's wife when she looked back became a classic picture of longing for the world (Gen. 19:23-26). Noah and Lot took measures to avoid

judgment. Lot's wife came as close to being delivered as one can come, but in her heart she belonged to Sodom. She looked back and was judged.

The point of the illustrations in verses 31-32 is stated explicitly in the principle in verse 33.

17:33 "Whoever seeks to keep his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life will preserve it.

The one who tries to keep his life will lose everything. The one who gives up everything for Christ will gain eternal life. When the Son of Man comes, people's behavior will reveal their destiny. There will be some, who like Lot's wife, will look back instead of fleeing destruction, and like Lot's wife they will be judged.

17:34 "I tell you, on that night there will be two in one bed; one will be taken and the other will be left.

17:35 "There will be two women grinding at the same place; one will be taken and the other will be left.

17:36 "Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other will be left."

It is debated whether the one taken is taken for judgment or salvation. Some even view this passage as the rapture and assume that the one taken is "taken up to be with the Lord" (1 Thess. 4:15-17). Others simply say that the ones taken are the ones saved.

However, Matthew 24:37-41 (a parallel passage) seems to favor the first view – those taken are taken in judgment. It says:

"For the coming of the Son of Man will be just like the days of Noah. For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and they did not understand until the flood came and took them all away; so will the coming of the Son of Man be. Then there will be two men in the field; one will be taken and one will be left. Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken and one will be left."

The ones who were taken in the days of Noah were the unbelieving who did not enter the ark. The passage says, "the flood came and *took them all away.*" "So will the coming of the Son of Man be." In other words, when Christ returns, the unbelieving will be taken just as the unbelieving were taken in the flood. Two men will be in the field and one *will be taken*; two women will be grinding at the mill and one *will be taken*. Although the verb for "take" in verse 37 is different than the verb in verses 40 and 41, they appear to be used synonymously.

This emphasis on judgment continues in the next verse.

17:37 And answering they said to Him, "Where, Lord?" And He said to them, "Where the body is, there also the vultures will be gathered."

It is difficult to determine what the disciples' question really is and what Jesus' answer means. It appears that the disciples were thinking locally instead of globally and were asking where the events in verses 26-36 will take place? If that's what they were asking, Jesus' answer is grim: it won't be hard to figure out; the vultures will make it obvious where judgment has come.

1 Thessalonians 5

1 Now as to the times and the epochs, brethren, you have no need of anything to be written to you.

2 For you yourselves know full well that the day of the Lord will come just like a thief in the night.

3 While they are saying, "Peace and safety!" then destruction will come upon them suddenly like labor pains upon a woman with child, and they will not escape.

4 But you, brethren, are not in darkness, that the day would overtake you like a thief;

5 for you are all sons of light and sons of day. We are not of night nor of darkness;

6 so then let us not sleep as others do, but let us be alert and sober.

7 For those who sleep do their sleeping at night, and those who get drunk get drunk at night.

8 But since we are of the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet, the hope of salvation.

9 For God has not destined us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ,

10 who died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep, we will live together with Him.

11 Therefore encourage one another and build up one another, just as you also are doing.