

THE SON OF MAN COMING LIKE THE LIGHTNING

Luke 17:20-37

Key Verse: 17:24

“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.”

Today’s passage tells us about the kingdom of God and the second coming of Jesus. The kingdom of God is here now, but not yet fully realized. It will be fully realized when Jesus comes again. Jesus’ coming again is a hot topic. Many people speculate about when and how he will come, and what will happen. Some have developed interpretative timetables that weave all kinds of prophecies into current events and make bold predictions. Though they are dogmatic about their teaching, their predictions have all been wrong, leaving people confused and anxious. Jesus said that no one knows when he is coming again. But we can see the signs of the end of the age and this should motivate us to prepare for Jesus’ coming. It has been a long time since Jesus foretold his coming, and still he has not come. So we may wonder if he is really coming, and if the kingdom of God will ever be fully realized. In this passage, Jesus teaches us that he will surely come, how he will come, and what we should do to prepare. We need a right view of the kingdom of God and of his second coming and to live accordingly. Then we will be ready when Jesus comes again. Are you ready to meet Jesus when he comes again? Let’s listen to Jesus’ instructions.

First, “The kingdom of God is in your midst” (20-21). Once, some Pharisees came to Jesus and asked when the kingdom of God would come. Jesus replied, **“The coming of the kingdom of God is not something that can be observed, nor will people say, ‘Here it is,’ or ‘There it is,’ because the kingdom of God is in your midst” (20-21).** Why did they raise this question? We can be sure that they were not sincere in seeking an answer. Most likely, they were looking for a way to discredit Jesus. They knew that Jesus always talked about the kingdom of God, but they saw no evidence of its coming. In spite of their insincerity, Jesus helped them to have a right view of the kingdom of God. The Pharisees were looking for an earthly kingdom based on political and military power like the kingdom of David. They had a vision to establish a theocratic kingdom with Israel at the center based on prophecies about the Messiah. This vision was born out of much suffering under the rule of world power nations over several centuries. They could

THE SON OF MAN COMING LIKE THE LIGHTNING

endure unbearable hardships with this messianic vision. Their vision seemed to be Biblical, but it actually ignored the Biblical teachings about the suffering of the Messiah and God's plan for world salvation through them. That is why they could not accept Jesus as the Messiah. Jesus was poor, unattractive, and uncertified. Instead of bringing swift justice to oppressors like evil King Herod, Jesus humbly served all kinds of sinners by healing the sick and driving out demons. Furthermore, Jesus taught the word of God lovingly to everyone, ignoring the traditions of the elders. Because Jesus was not the kind of messiah they wanted, they did not accept him. But in rejecting Jesus, they were rejecting the kingdom of God. To Jesus, what they really needed was to accept him as the Messiah. Then they could experience the kingdom of God in their hearts.

Throughout history, people have longed for the kingdom of God. So they have tried to establish paradise through philosophies and systems. Communists claimed that utopia would come through a classless society, with the motto, "From each according to his ability to each according to his need." This idea actually came from Acts 2. Yet it did not work at all because they removed Jesus, who died for our sins and rose from the dead. Ironically, communists who gained power established a strong elite class and used their positions to exploit the weak. On the other hand, capitalists claimed that utopia would come when private ownership was acknowledged and free markets established. Yet it also does not work well because people are selfish and greedy and take advantage of others. We can see the perfect paradise in Genesis 2, which tells us of the garden of Eden. It was paradise, not because the garden was so beautiful, but because God was there. God is the source of life and beauty. God reigns with love, peace and joy, and with righteousness and justice. When Adam and Eve accepted God as their king and obeyed his word, they could enjoy this paradise freely. But when they disobeyed God, they lost the kingdom of God. Since then man's relationship with God, with other people, and with nature was broken. Consequently, people are alienated and isolated and struggle to survive in a harsh, cold world. There is no genuine love or peace or understanding. Rather, people are filled with strife, jealousy, bitterness and complaints, and blame others. People use and abuse each other, and mutually wound each other. Even though people eat delicious meals, wear designer clothes, live in luxurious houses, and enjoy many vacations to exotic places, they are miserable. It is because they do not have the kingdom of God in their hearts. The kingdom of God comes only when

THE SON OF MAN COMING LIKE THE LIGHTNING

we repent of our sins sincerely and accept Jesus as our King. Jesus forgives all of our sins and accepts us as his children and rules over us with peace and love. Then we can enjoy the kingdom of God, no matter what conditions we live in. We can sing, “Since Christ my soul from sin set free, This world has been a Heav'n to me; And 'mid earth's sorrows and its woe, 'Tis Heav'n my Jesus here to know. O hallelujah, yes, 'tis Heav'n, 'Tis Heav'n to know my sins forgiv'n; On land or sea, what matters where? Where Jesus is, 'tis Heaven there.” Does Jesus reign over your heart as King? Or is something else ruling over your heart? When Jesus reigns in your heart, there is the kingdom of God.

Second, “the Son of Man will come like the lightning” (22-25). Now Jesus turned his attention to his disciples. Though they had accepted Jesus as the Messiah, they were influenced by the common understanding of their times. They thought the kingdom of God would be visible and earthly (Ac 1:6). Because of this, they were vulnerable to false teachings regarding the kingdom of God. They needed to be properly instructed. So Jesus taught them several things. First of all, Jesus taught that he would come again according to God’s time schedule, not according to their expectation. Jesus said, **“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”** (22). Here, “one of the days of the Son of Man” refers to the day of the restoration of the kingdom of God. They would long for this. It meant Jesus’ reign with love and peace, justice and righteousness, abolishing Roman oppression and injustice. They hoped that Jesus would redeem Israel because he had great power in word and deed (Lk 24:19,21). As Jesus approached Jerusalem, they eagerly anticipated that the kingdom of God would appear right away (Lk 19:11). But according to Jesus, it would not happen as they expected. The kingdom of God will surely come; yet it will come according to God’s time schedule, not people’s expectations. So they needed to trust Jesus, even when their expectations were not met. The same is true for us. We generally have great expectations from God. We want God to answer all our prayers and make our lives like paradise. But when it does not happen, we despair or even become bitter toward God. But God will surely work for our good, not according to our expectations, but his own purpose and time schedule. All we need to do is to trust God and wait patiently, believing that God is good all the time.

THE SON OF MAN COMING LIKE THE LIGHTNING

Secondly, Jesus' coming will be universal, like lightning. Though Jesus' people long for his appearing, they don't know when it will happen. In the time of hardship and suffering, they are vulnerable to fall into temptation. In times of difficulty, people are fearful and anxious. So they look for comfort and security—someone or something to trust in. When someone boldly and confidently says, "This is the way! ... That is the way!" it is tempting to follow them. So Jesus warned us, **"Watch out that no one deceives you," "Be always on the watch and pray"** (23; 21:8,36). Furthermore, Jesus explained clearly how he will come again. Let's read verse 24. **"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."** Jesus' coming will be sudden, unexpected, public and universal. Everyone will see him for themselves and will not need to be told by someone else. Jesus will come like the lightning. Do you know how fast lightning travels? It can go around the earth more than two times in a second. In a split second, everyone on earth will see Jesus at the same time. Revelation 1:7a says, **"Look, he is coming with the clouds,' and 'every eye will see him...."** We will all see Jesus with our own eyes when he comes again. So if anyone says Jesus is here or there, they are lying. Do not run off after them. If you do, you will be in big trouble.

Thirdly, before his coming, Jesus must suffer and be rejected (25). Let's read verse 25. **"But first he must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation."** The teachers of the law taught that Elijah would come first and prepare the way and then the Messiah would come in power and glory (Mt 17:10; Mk 9:11). This was traditional Jewish eschatology (Mal 4:5-6). They had no idea that the Messiah would suffer and be rejected. Jesus taught them repeatedly that he must suffer and die first. The word "must" indicates that this was the will of God. The disciples did not like the words "suffering" or "rejection." Actually no one does. If we can avoid these we will. But Jesus said he "must" suffer many things and be rejected by his entire generation. Why did Jesus have to suffer and be rejected? It was because of our sins—sins of pride, lust, selfishness, ingratitude, unfaithfulness, deception, laziness, rebellion, and more. Because of our sins, we deserve to be punished eternally in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. There was nothing we could do to avoid this destiny; no good works, no payment of money, no education or achievement could save us. Only Jesus can save us. It was the LORD's will to crush him and cause him to suffer (Isa 53:10). Isaiah cried out, **"He was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our**

THE SON OF MAN COMING LIKE THE LIGHTNING

iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all” (Isa 53:5-6). We can be saved by Jesus who suffered and died for us. This does not come by our own works; it is the free gift of God’s grace. Jesus becomes our Savior and Lord. Anyone who follows Jesus must participate in his sufferings (Lk 9:23). Then we will also share in his glory (Ro 6:5). Thank God for Jesus, who suffered and died for our sins on the cross. Let’s participate in his sufferings so that we may also share in his glory.

Third, “remember Lot’s wife” (26-37). In this part Jesus explains how he would be rejected in his generation by using the historical examples of Noah’s time and Lot’s time. We should take Jesus’ warnings here seriously. Apostle Paul said, **“These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the culmination of the ages has come”** (1Co 10:11). After giving warnings, Jesus instructs us how to live in such a time. In the days of Noah, people were so corrupted that every inclination of the thoughts of their hearts was only evil all the time (Gen 6:5). Their wickedness was expressed through the way they married. Ignoring God, they married at random based on their lustful desires. They were also very violent. They grieved God’s Spirit so much that he regretted he had made them. When a tree branch becomes diseased, we can cut it off. But when the tree’s roots are diseased, the whole tree must be destroyed. This is how God saw mankind. So he decided to destroy them all with a flood. But before doing so, he gave them 120 years to repent. In that time, God called one man, Noah, who was righteous before him, and walked faithfully with him. God shared his plan with Noah and commissioned him to build a huge ark and fill it with every kind of animal that moved on the earth. Noah’s ark must have attracted a lot of attention because it was so big and took so long to build. You can see a life-sized replica by visiting Williamstown, Kentucky, just 1 ½ hours from Louisville, Kentucky where the 2018 ISBC will be held. Though the people of Noah’s time saw the huge ark being built and every kind of animal coming to it, they intentionally ignored it. They fully indulged in eating, drinking and marrying up to the day Noah entered the ark. They had eyes, but did not see, and ears but did not hear. They were senseless, faithless, heartless, and ruthless. Then the flood came and destroyed them all. No one survived, not even one, except for Noah and his family members who entered the ark.

THE SON OF MAN COMING LIKE THE LIGHTNING

In the days of Lot, the sin of the people of Sodom and Gomorrah was so grievous, and injustice so widespread, that the outcry reached God in heaven (28a; Gen 18:20-21). The angels of the Lord visited Sodom and the people there responded by trying to have violent, unnatural sex with them. God decided to judge the city. When Lot warned his sons-in-law, they laughed at him, thinking that he was joking. People were like brute beasts without any awareness of God or his impending judgment. They were concerned only with eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building (28b). But the day Lot left Sodom, fire and sulfur rained down from heaven and destroyed them all (29). The common factor in these two events is that people were totally ignorant of God's judgment, yet it came suddenly and no one escaped. God's judgment came upon everyone who was doing evil with no exception. God did not compromise with people even though they were all united in doing evil. God is not bound by will of the majority. God judges each and every person based on the truth (Ro 2:6-8). Jesus said, **"It will be just like this on the day the Son of Man is revealed"** (30). It will be sudden, unexpected, public, universal and final. No one will escape. There will be no place to hide. For those who reject the truth, it will be horrible beyond imagination.

In verses 31-35, Jesus tells us how to prepare for his coming. If someone is on his housetop when Jesus comes again, there will be no time to go down to get something to take with him. If someone is in the field, there will be no time to go back home and get something (31). So we should not be too attached to the things of this world. We should be ready to leave them in an instant, at any time, when Jesus comes again. Jesus warned, "Remember Lot's wife" (32). In the time of judgment, God's favor was upon Lot's wife. All she had to do was not look back, and she would be saved. But she was so attached to her jewelry and treasures, hidden in a special safe under the bedroom floor. She unconsciously looked back and became a pillar of salt. This teaches us that we should overcome attachment to the things in this world, not only in theory, but in practice. Paul said, **"...the time is short. From now on...those who buy something [should live] as though it was not theirs to keep; those who use the things of the world, as if not engrossed in them"** (1Co 7:29-31). It is very good for us to practice a giving life and to be generous. Then we can be free from worldly attachment and will be ready for Jesus' coming again. In verse 33, Jesus gave a general

THE SON OF MAN COMING LIKE THE LIGHTNING

principle: **“Whoever tries to keep their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life will preserve it.”** Here, “losing one’s life” is for Jesus and the gospel (9:24; Mk 8:35). Jesus wants us to live sacrificially for him, not only in how we use material things, but in every area of life. It may seem to be foolish, like a losing business. But in light of eternity, it is very wise.

God knows who lives by faith in Jesus and who does not. Even though two people are in the same bed, and we assume Jesus means husband and wife, one will be taken and the other left (34). At that moment, we cannot rely on someone else’s faith, even our spouse’s. Even though two women will be baking bread together, one will be taken and the other left (35). God cannot be mocked. No one will fool God when Jesus comes again. So we should be serious about living by faith in Jesus daily. It is a matter of our eternal destiny. The disciples wanted to know where these things would happen. Jesus answered, **“Where there is a dead body, there the vultures will gather”** (37). Jesus meant that just as you see vultures from afar and know what they are up to, so you will see the coming of the Son of Man and know what is happening. It is going to happen. Are you ready?