

## WHEN THE SON OF MAN IS REVEALED

Luke 17:20–37

Key Verse: 17:30

“...so will it be on the day when the Son of Man is revealed.”

Can people around you tell what’s going on inside you? Some people are good at hiding their thoughts and emotions. Others wear their hearts on their sleeves; people can immediately read their faces. Which kind are you? In today’s passage Jesus continues his theme in chapter 17, focusing on what’s going on in his disciples’ inner lives. So far, he’s taught them to be serious about their own sin, to forgive others by faith, and to live with the attitude of unworthy servants (1–10). When Jesus heals ten lepers and only one humble Samaritan leper comes back to him, the disciples get to see firsthand what wholehearted, thankful faith looks like (11–19). Now, in today’s passage Jesus teaches them the hope they’ll need in order to live in this godless world as his servants. What is this hope? Why is having it so important for a disciple? And how does it impact our lives? May God open our hearts and speak to us personally through his living words.

Look at verse 20a. “Being asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come...” Here they are again. From the beginning, the Pharisees have been critical of Jesus and his ministry.<sup>1</sup> Though they knew a lot about the Bible, they declined to be baptized by John the Baptist (7:30); they avoided any personal repentance. Jesus called them hypocrites (12:1). He said they focused on appearances instead of on what’s in the heart (11:39). Jesus made them so mad, they were “lying in wait for him, to catch him in something he might say” (11:54). They criticized him for not keeping the Sabbath to their standards (14:1) and for eating with sinners (15:1). They even ridiculed him for his teaching about money (16:14). This time, they ask when the kingdom of God would come. Given the context of all their hostility, it’s unlikely this question is sincere.

So what’s their point? At that time, the Jews were waiting for the kingdom of God to come. They thought God sending his Messiah would be an awesome day when he would overthrow all his enemies with his mighty power and establish his righteous kingdom. Jesus’ ministry didn’t look like that. Yes, Jesus was preaching the good news of the kingdom of God.<sup>2</sup> But to these Pharisees, Jesus’ ministry to outcasts and sick people looked weak and foolish.

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<sup>1</sup> 5:17,21,30

<sup>2</sup> 4:43; 8:1

How does Jesus answer them? He says, “The kingdom of God is not coming in ways that can be observed, nor will they say, ‘Look, here it is!’ or ‘There!’” (20b–21a). Jesus knew how the Pharisees thought. When he had cast out a demon from a mute man, they kept seeking from him a sign from heaven (11:14–16). They demanded him to perform signs from heaven to prove that God’s kingdom was coming through him. Their idea spread to ordinary people, who also wanted more and more signs. This is why, in earlier chapters, Jesus rebuked the people for not repenting and believing in him based on the mighty works he’d already done.<sup>3</sup> It’s also why he rebuked the crowds for being good at interpreting the weather forecast, but totally unable to “interpret the present time” (12:54–56).

What does Jesus want us all to see? Read verse 21b. “...for behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you.” He’s saying God’s kingdom is here, right in front of us. What does he mean? He’s referring to himself. Yes, the kingdom of God is going to come someday. But in fact, Jesus himself is the kingdom of God. His presence in the midst of us gives us access to the kingdom of God right now. It’s why he said earlier, “But if it is by the finger of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you” (11:20). The Greek expression for “come upon you” means it’s “already arrived.” This spiritual truth still applies today. If we repent and believe in Jesus, God’s kingdom comes upon us now. The Bible says Christ comes to dwell in our hearts through faith (Eph.3:17). We experience Christ in us, “the hope of glory” (Col.1:27b). We get “a foretaste of glory divine.”<sup>4</sup> When we repent and turn back to God, Jesus fills us with God’s grace and refreshes our souls (Acts 3:19–20). Instead of looking for signs and calculating about the future, it’s so much better to experience Jesus right now.

But it doesn’t mean our lives become problem-free. Read verse 22. “And he said to his 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.’” What does he mean? He’s talking about the period after his death, resurrection and ascension, but before his Second Coming. Later, he’s going to say more about those days (21:5–36). He predicts that there’ll be spiritual impostors, wars, natural disasters, persecution, great distress and perplexity. Around the world, believers are going through such days now. Jesus says quietly here, “...you will desire to see one of the days of the Son of Man.” As we endure the hardships in following him, we long for his return, as he promised. But days of severe suffering make believers vulnerable to false hopes. Read verse 23. “And they will say to you, ‘Look, there!’ or ‘Look, here!’ Do not go out or follow them.” These people are claiming to have some secret

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<sup>3</sup> 11:29–30,32; cf. 10:13

<sup>4</sup> From the hymn “Blessed Assurance” (1873), words by Fanny J. Crosby, music by Phoebe Palmer Knapp.

knowledge about Jesus coming back. They play on our fears and desires for relief. Our Lord Jesus clearly tells us not to go out or follow after such people.

How can we know when Jesus is really coming back? Read verse 24. “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.” Earlier, he told his disciples that the Son of Man will “come in his glory and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels” (9:26). Here, he says it will be like lightning that flashes and lights up the sky. The point is, it will not be secretive, but sudden and obvious to everyone on earth. We don’t have to worry about missing it. Rather, we should be concerned about being ready.

How can we be ready? Read verse 25. “But first he must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation.” Why does Jesus add this? He knows our common human desire for glory without suffering. We want to have glory with Jesus now, without all the suffering. So he says it plainly: we have to go through suffering and rejection like he did before we can enjoy this future glory with him. Jesus our Lord set the example for us. He calls us all to follow in his steps. If we’re truly following him in the way of obedience to God’s will, the way of suffering and rejection, then we’re ready for his coming at any time.

Jesus goes on to say more about that day. Read verses 26–27. “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.” Jesus first reminds us of the flood in Noah’s day. Just as God’s judgment came on people suddenly, so it will happen when Jesus comes again. He adds that people “were eating and drinking and marrying and being given in marriage.” These activities are all normal, not inherently sinful. The problem is, people filled their lives with these physical things and had no real interest in God himself. As God’s people, it’s hard to live with those who ignore God and only enjoy physical life. It’s hard not to be influenced. Jesus warns about such an inner life so that we won’t be drawn into it.

He gives another example for emphasis: “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 sulfur rained from heaven and destroyed them all...” (28–29) This time, the destruction came through fire and sulfur. But people were just the same as in Noah’s time. They were eating and drinking. In the city of Sodom they were also buying and selling, planting and building. Again, these activities are not inherently sinful. But people were so preoccupied with their own business that they had no time for God himself. They didn’t think being obsessed with their own business mattered. They didn’t think all their flagrant, defiant sins mattered. But God saw all that

was going on. And God's righteous judgment came upon them just as suddenly as it did in Noah's day.

Read verse 30. "...so will it be on the day when the Son of Man is revealed." "Revealed" implies that people will have no idea it's about to happen. When his glory is revealed, most people will be caught totally unprepared. And it will be tragic. As in the days of Noah and of Lot, there will be no more chances to escape, no more chances to repent. Why does Jesus say this? He wants us to believe his promise that he will come again to bring God's final judgment on this sinful world. He's not telling us to do anything outwardly; he's urging us to believe what he's saying. And he wants all his disciples to be aware of what that day will be like. The day of Jesus, the Son of Man, will be glorious. The day of Jesus will be obvious. The day of Jesus will be sudden. The day of Jesus coming again will be the most dreadful day for all those who ignored God and chose to rebel against him.

Jesus says more. Read verses 31–33. "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." He's telling us to be inwardly detached from our material possessions. When he comes, we won't be able to take anything with us anyway. Frankly, attachment to material things is idolatry. It's why Lot's wife looked back at Sodom, disobeying God's instructions, and turned into a pillar of salt. Jesus wants us to keep our hearts in him and in the promise of his kingdom, not in the things of this world. He wants us to simply depend on God, not on money or possessions. Having such inner faith is another element in being ready for his coming at any time.

He concludes with two more vivid images. Read verses 34–35. "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." In both cases, each person was doing exactly the same thing outwardly: sleeping and grinding. So what makes them different? Surely it's their inner lives. One person is living with faith and hope in Jesus and in his coming in his soul; the other has no spiritual life at all. Human beings often can't tell the difference, but Jesus can. He knows our inner life, what's in our hearts. He's looking for faith in him, love for him, hope in him. Just living with other believers won't be enough. Our hope in Jesus has got to become genuine and personal. We can't fake it.

When his disciples ask "Where, Lord?" he ends on a grim and cryptic note (37). Why is Jesus saying all these things? He wants us to live differently. While waiting for him, he wants us not to get sucked into the ways of the world, engrossed in physical life

and personal business. He wants us not to be anxious about worldly things, but to live a faithful spiritual life, in undivided devotion to him (1Cor.7:32–35). We need to guard our hearts to live with faith and hope in Jesus.

Read verse 30 again. “...so will it be on the day when the Son of Man is revealed.” May God help us live with this glorious hope in our hearts. May God help us not to become engrossed in physical life, material things, or our own business. May God help us be ready, at any time, for the day when the Son of Man is revealed.