

## It's About Time Luke 17:20-37

I read recently in Yahoo news that some scientists predict the sun will run out by the year 2030. I suppose that stockpiling parkas and extra long johns would not be enough if that were to happen.

And then with the nuclear deal made with Iran this past week it won't be long and we'll be hearing a lot of rhetoric about the end of the world. Both pulpits and political pundits will weigh in heavily regarding this historic misdeal.

Stores that specialize in survival equipment and storable commodities will have a field day selling goods to doomsday preppers who fuel the frenzy. Maybe you have watched the Doomsday prepper show that has aired on National Geographic. For fun I took an online survey that would tell me how long I could survive should some major catastrophe occur. Based on my current preparedness I would survive 1-2 months after a cataclysmic event.

Then there are those who are seriously preparing for some zombie apocalypse. There is even an article about the scientific evidence that such an event is feasible.

So how do we as Christians sift through all the hype and sanely prepare for the end? I believe Jesus lays down some important truths in our passage. Scientists, politicians, despots, even theologians all have their theories about the end times. And Jesus gives an accurate picture of what to look for and how we should prepare. The probing question left for us to answer isn't how much we have stockpiled for a world changing disaster, but whether or not we are prepared to meet the sovereign king.

Since the time of Christ we have been exhorted to prepare for His return, to look for His return. Christ spoke of His return. At His ascension into heaven, two angels spoke of His return. Paul, Peter and

John spoke of His return. Throughout the history of the church we have been instructed to prepare for His coming again, not by stockpiling food and water, weapons and ammo, broadband radio and EMP proof vehicles. There is something even more crucial that we must do in preparation for that event.

The most pressing question we must answer is whether or not we believe in Jesus as Savior. The second being are we ready for His return whenever that may be. Let's remember that in the days of the early church and on through history to today, there have always been people who have mocked us for believing that Jesus will return. They either don't believe He ever existed, don't believe that He rose again from the grave or believe that He has turned His back on the world because of its depravity.

II Peter 3:1-7

People scoff at the prophetic Word of God regarding the end times, because they ignore the historical markers of the past when God destroyed the world for its rampant sin. The flood was a twofold sign of things to come. The first sign was that of redemption and salvation that God would provide mankind if they but obeyed Him and entered the ark for safety from His judgment. The second sign was that of judgment and destruction for those who rejected His offer of salvation. But we are getting ahead of ourselves. Turn to our passage in Luke 17:20-37. It's a passage about God's reign and Christ's return.

Straight talk about God's reign  
Straight talk about Christ's return

### I. STRAIGHT TALK ABOUT GOD'S REIGN – v. 20-21

In verse 20 we see a request regarding the kingdom.

#### A. A Request About the Kingdom – v. 20a

Jesus is continuing His trek to Jerusalem. He openly claimed to be the Messiah as He spoke to the

Samaritan woman at the well in John 4. “The woman said, ‘I know that Messiah’ (called Christ) ‘is coming. When He comes, He will explain everything to us.’ Then Jesus declared, ‘I who speak to you am He.’”

His teachings and His miracles authenticated His claim as did the genealogical records in Matthew and Luke, which substantiate that He is the promised seed from the lineage of David, the King who would reign forever.

But yet with all that, the Pharisees still wondered about Him, about the kingdom of God He said was coming. With Jesus headed toward Jerusalem and the statements He made about Himself, they were wondering when He was going to usher in the Kingdom of God. If He was the Messiah would He set up the kingdom once He reached Jerusalem? It was a logical question to ask since Jesus had been preaching that the Kingdom of God was coming.

For centuries the Jews had lived in heightened expectation of the Messiah’s arrival, especially at the Passover. With the Passover drawing closer, the Pharisees wondered if this was the year, the time, the prophesied event that would catapult Israel back into prominence on the world scene. They believed that the Messiah would cast off the shackles of subjection and establish a world kingdom in which they would be the supreme power led by the Messiah. They thought God’s Kingdom was a political kingdom. So it was a legitimate question that was hanging ripe on the minds of the Pharisees as they posed the question. They too, believed in the Kingdom of God, but we see by the response given by Jesus it was entirely different from the kingdom Jesus had in mind.

#### B. A Response Regarding the Kingdom – v. 20b-21

First, He explains what the kingdom of God is not. In what Jesus is describing here the kingdom of

God is not visible. It does not come by “careful observation”. That phrase means to watch closely. It is only used here in the New Testament. Medical writers used it to describe watching for symptoms of a disease. It was also a term used by astronomers observing the movement of stars. Jesus used the term to mean observing the future by signs. Close observation of external events won’t reveal signs of the kingdom of God. It wouldn’t come with great outward show so people could predict when it would come. They wouldn’t be able to observe it naturally. Why? because Jesus went on to explain the true nature of the kingdom of God He was referring to.

This is the second part of His response. The kingdom of God as He explained it was something that was internal. It is within you. It can also mean to be in the midst of. He is not saying that the Pharisees belonged to the kingdom of God. He was telling them that they shouldn’t look around for the kingdom of God somewhere out there unless it is first in the heart. The Pharisees wanted to know the where and the when. Jesus was telling them the how and why. They wanted to fit the kingdom into their preconceived ideas of when that would occur and in so doing were missing out on the greatest thing that would happen in history.

This kingdom begins in the heart. But He also meant that it was in their midst, referring to His presence.

The kingdom of God Jesus spoke about was something that was spiritual not political. It happened in the heart as people yielded to the rule of God over their lives submitting to His reign over them, something that occurs at salvation. While He did not deny a future, earthly kingdom He was emphasizing here the spiritual aspect of the kingdom. It comes by faith and brings the believer into the kingdom as a citizen.

John 3:1-8, 16

A person enters the kingdom of God only by being born again through believing on Christ for salvation. The Pharisees were unwilling to accept that and therefore were not part of this kingdom. *A person cannot enter the kingdom if he or she rejects the King.* So because they had rejected Christ as the Messiah they had not accepted the new birth, and therefore would not be part of the kingdom. I Corinthians 2:14 “The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned.”

But the kingdom of God is not only spiritual, it is also physical, something that is yet to come. The Pharisees thought that because they were Israelites they were automatically part of the spiritual kingdom and therefore part of the physical kingdom when it came. Jesus indicated that to be part of that kingdom you must be born again. Only then could a person be part of the physical kingdom of God that is yet to come.

Jesus had some straight talk about God’s reign.  
Jesus had some straight talk about Christ’s return.

To the Pharisees Jesus spoke of the kingdom of God as something that is present, in the heart of a believer. It was a spiritual kingdom. Then to the disciples he went on to explain that the kingdom of God is something that is also future, something that is also a physical kingdom. If you don’t want to miss out on the physical kingdom you must first belong to the spiritual kingdom.

## II. STRAIGHT TALK ABOUT CHRIST’S RETURN – v. 22-37

Jesus turned His attention to the disciples to teach them about what to expect in anticipation of the physical, future kingdom of God. With the exception of Judas Iscariot, the 11 other disciples were already a part of the spiritual kingdom of God.

He wanted to give signs of what to look for as the day of God’s physical kingdom approached.

Back in the early ‘90’s we began to see the emergence of a series of books that were marketed for people who had various interests but no skill. It was a new generation of “how to” books designed for people like us. Even if you find the title somewhat offensive and lacking in political correctness books for Dummies have sold over 100 million copies.

There is photography for dummies  
Gambling for dummies  
Congress for dummies  
Law for dummies  
NASCAR for dummies  
Accounting for dummies  
Algebra for dummies

If you are interested in a topic, most likely there is a book for dummies just for you. There is even the book of Revelation for dummies. There are volumes of books and articles on prophetic events.

Hollywood has no lack of interest in post-apocalyptic movies either. They all carry a theme of significant devastation caused either by natural or man-made catastrophes. With the exception of the recent remake of the “Left Behind” movie there is nothing Biblical about these end of the world events. Jesus sets it straight. First He speaks about an untruthful assertion.

### A. An Untruthful Assertion – v. 22-23

There can be a tremendous danger in trying to fit every event into some end-time prophecy. And some people and scholars try to do just that. Now I believe that everything is in some way leading to the return of Christ, but to try and fit every little thing into some tidy package and stamp it as end-time in some way paints God in a corner. After 9/11 happened someone took a dollar bill and if you

fold it just right you it looks like the world trade centers in smoke and they claimed that even our currency was showing us this event.

What follows this danger is the risk of placing dates on Christ's return. *People then become fixated on a date for Christ's return rather than on the mandate following Christ's resurrection.* We become so preoccupied with dates that we lose sight of our responsibility which is to spread the gospel so that others can be prepared spiritually for His return. Yet many and I mean many have been obsessed with putting a date on when that will occur. And there are many who hear these dates and become fearful. They not only become fixated on the when, they wonder about the how. Will it be by nuclear bombs? Will there be massive natural disasters?

The other night Robyn and I were talking about these Doomsday preppers planning for some catastrophic event and we both agreed that while such an event would be terrible we wouldn't fear death, we have no reason to fear such an event. Sure I might miss mowing the lawn and shoveling snow – okay, not really...but hey, if something like that occurred I would be in God's presence.

If you have Christ in you there is nothing to fear, not natural disasters, nuclear blasts or fallout, not even zombies if that ever happened. Whenever someone says Christ is here, don't be deceived. Matthew 24:4-27 (23-28)

Men have been setting dates for many years. From William Miller who set the date of 1844 to Edgar Whisenant, a retired NASA rocket engineer who set the date of 1988, each of these men has obviously picked the wrong date. They would recalculate and then set a new date. Paul had to write and calm the fears of the Thessalonian believers because there were some who came teaching that Christ had already come back. Everyone who sets a date has been and will be wrong and they will continue to be wrong, no matter how many supposed natural or

Biblical or mathematical "proofs" they think they have. Scripture expressly states that only the Father knows when that day and time will be.

Matthew 24:36 "No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father."

Date setting has alarmed Christians and harmed the cause of Christ among unbelievers who must be sitting back laughing at us thinking that this whole thing is one giant hoax. No wonder there is no fear in them about the return of Christ or any interest in preparing. The fear factor has worn off. Christians have cried wolf too many times and nothing has happened.

Jesus is telling the disciples that they are not to rush after those who claim to know times and dates for the 2<sup>nd</sup> coming. The study of prophecy is good but not at the exclusion of attending to the work we have been given by Christ to spread the gospel. Acts 1:6-8

There was an untruthful assertion.  
There will be an unexpected arrival.

B. An Unexpected Arrival – v. 24  
Acts 1:9-11  
I Corinthians 15:51-52  
Matthew 24:42-44  
II Peter 3:10

The common thread running through these verses is that Christ's appearance will be sudden, when least expected. It will be like a flash of lightning which is sudden, swift, and seen by all.

We can spend a lot of time worrying about the future, when Christ will come and how it will all end. Are the stars that fall actual stars or was it a picture of nuclear bombs that John saw? When the earth melts with a fervent heat is it from a significant solar flare up or is it from nuclear radiation? Instead of being concerned about those

things we need to be focused on today and the task given to us by the Lord. We need to be looking for His return but we also need to remember that it will be unexpected in the sense of being sudden.

Christ's return is going to be just like a flash of lightning.

Lightning strikes 100 times every second somewhere on the earth.

Lightning occurs suddenly at a rate of 1/10,000 of a second. For those who think they can repent to be saved when they hear the trumpet blast, it is already too late.

Lightning has incredible power. In the split second that lightning flashes the channel it weaves through the sky heats up to 1,400 degrees F. The rapid heating creates a shock wave we call thunder. The energy discharged in a single stroke of lightning carries enough power to lift a two ton weight 62 mile straight up. Christ's first advent was as the Lamb of God, meek and gentle. His second advent will be as the Lion of Judah.

Lightning is not only sudden, it's unexpected. People will literally be shocked at His coming. Why? Because they never planned for it.

I watched a segment of Shepherd Smith from Fox News who interviewed a physicist from City College in New York who explained the ticking time bomb that is in the Pacific basin off the shore of California. This is much larger than the San Andreas fault. Two giant plates are waiting to shift which will send a 100 foot wave toward Japan and reach our coast in 15 minutes wiping out the coastland from Washington south. It has happened about every 250 years for as far back as time itself based on research from their samples. The last one occurred in 1700. The physicist went on to explain that it is just a matter of time before it happens again because by all historical accounts it is past due and most people on the coast he says are oblivious that it is imminent. They aren't prepared for it.

Christ will return suddenly and most people aren't prepared. But something had to happen before His

return could take place. He speaks about it in verse 25. There is an unprecedented arrest.

### C. An Unprecedented Arrest – v. 25

Jesus was telling the disciples that the 2<sup>nd</sup> coming would only happen after the cross. He was telling them about His impending death. But while He speaks of His death, He alludes to His resurrection. He couldn't come again if He was still in the grave. His death and the cross were necessary if He would accomplish what the Father sent Him to do – to be the sacrifice for sin, the payment for our debt.

He would suffer and He would be rejected. His arrest, trial and brutal treatment was unprecedented. It wouldn't be by some future generation, it would be by that generation of people. Now this suffering and rejection wouldn't come only at the hands of that generation as they stood before Pilate chanting for Him to be crucified. He would also suffer and be rejected by God the Father for the sin He bore on behalf of mankind while God poured out His wrath on Christ for our sin.

Christ will not return until Israel's rejection ends. When Israel cries out for God to save them from her enemies, it will not only be a cry for physical deliverance, but also a cry for salvation. God's covenant promise with Israel will be fulfilled. Following the cross, following the future salvation of Israel, Christ will return to set up the Kingdom. Zechariah 14:4-9

Then the Lord will return in power and might.  
Then the kingdom of God will be set up.  
Then He will reign.

At that point His return will be so sudden that there will be an unaware assembly.

### D. An Unaware Assembly – v. 26-29

Jesus provides two significant events in history that depict how things will be when Christ returns. The first example is Noah. During the 100 years it took Noah to build the ark, he preached the judgment of God on the world for its continued and blatant rejection of God and willful sin. They continued on with their lives as if nothing catastrophic was going



to happen. They ate, they drank, they married – nothing changed and Jesus said they did this up to the day Noah entered the ark. But by then it was too late. The flood came and destroyed everyone but Noah and his family.

The second example is similar with the exception that whereas the flood was global, the event that occurred at Sodom and Gomorrah was localized to that area, yet the destruction was the same. Everything was totally destroyed. People were living it up and carrying on as if nothing was going to happen and instantly the cities were vaporized. In spite of Lot's efforts to warn others they would not listen. Lot could have had a positive influence on the city when he moved there, but instead it had a negative influence on him. His warnings went unheeded.

In both instances people lived their lives as if nothing was wrong. That's how people are today. Romans 1:32 sums it up: "Although they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them."

Philippians 3:19 "Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is on earthly things."

Two things were happening in both those instances. One thing is that there was extreme wickedness. Wickedness was rampant. We read in Genesis 6:5 some very somber words: "The Lord saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time."

Folks, that's us. That's the world we live in today. Wickedness is run amok and people don't care. What's good is now bad and what is bad is now good. That's the second thing that was going on in the two examples Jesus cited. Some folks may not have participated in wickedness but they didn't do anything to stop it. So in reality they condoned such behavior. Relativism isn't something that is new in our age. It was going on then. Whatever you want to do is fine, we need to be tolerant of anything and everything because it's right in the

eyes of the person doing it. Who am I to condemn it? If it feels good do it. Even Christians today are condoning wickedness.

Paul wrote about what people would be like in the last days. If we think it's bad now, it's only going to get a whole lot worse.

II Timothy 3:1-5

People in the days of Noah and Lot were unaware when God poured out His wrath and that is how people will be living when Christ returns. So when it comes to His judgment there will be an unbiased assessment.

E. An Unbiased Assessment – v. 30-37

This passage is not speaking of the rapture, but of judgment. Those taken are the ones who will be judged. Just as Noah and Lot were left and so were the ones saved so those left are the ones who will be welcomed into the kingdom of God. Those who think about going back for possessions show that they are more interested in material goods than in their own spiritual preparedness. That was the true heart of Lot's wife. While fleeing from the destruction that was being poured out, her heart was really in the city and her possessions and she died because in her heart she turned back.

I John 2:15-16 warns us not to love the world because if we do the love of the Father is not in us. Like in the parable of the soil, the gospel message will be choked out because people will be concerned about pursuing worldly things.

These verses also speak of the global nature of this event. Sleeping refers to night and grinding grain refers to the activities of the day. No matter where people are in the world whether it's night time or day time, it won't matter. God's judgment will be on the entire world. Jesus concludes with a vivid picture of judgment. Vultures are scavengers and are associated with judgment.

John MacArthur concludes that "Wherever in the world the bodies of the unregenerate lie and the vultures gather will be where Christ has been in judgment."

I have painted a very bleak picture about what is to come. Jesus painted a bleak picture. The Pharisees had an inaccurate view of the Kingdom of God and Jesus addressed their false perception. They were not part of the kingdom of God, but could be if they acknowledged and believed that He was the Messiah. Then He went on to tell the disciples the evidences of what to look for in the last days. For the believer there is nothing to fear about the future. As a matter of fact, if I could leave you with one word about this passage it would be the word HOPE. Because of faith in Christ there is hope. It is not a wishful desire that these things may happen, but rather the confident assurance that they will and that one day, maybe today we will be brought into the kingdom of God because we are part of the kingdom of God through Christ in us.

There is hope not only for the believer as we wait for the return of Christ to establish the kingdom of God here on earth, but I also want to tell you that there is hope for the unbeliever because while we wait for the Lord's return that means there is still time for many to repent. There is still hope for that family member or neighbor or classmate.

II Peter 3:8-15a "But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. The Lord is not slow in keeping His promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare. Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. But in keeping with His promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness. So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with Him. Bear in mind that our Lord's patience means salvation..."

We are to look for His coming only in the sense of being prepared through faith in Christ as Savior. We

can study end-time prophecy, but we shouldn't obsess over it. Until that day we have a more urgent responsibility and that is to warn as many others as possible of impending judgment that they might turn to Christ and be saved.

That is our hope.

Christ is our hope.

Is He your hope?

Soon and very soon we are going to see the King.