Luke 17:10-37 //Ready To Go

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Preacher: Martin Ayers

[0:00] The reading this morning is from the Gospel of Luke in the 17th chapter, beginning at verse 20. You'll find it on page 1051 in the Church Bibles. Luke 17, verse 20.

Once, on being asked by the Pharisees 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.
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. People will tell you, There he is, or Here he is.
Do not go running off after them, 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.
But first he must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation. Just as it was in the days of Noah, so also will it be in the days of the Son of Man.
[1:25] 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.

It was the same in the days of Lot. People were eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building. But the day Lot left Sodom, fire and sulfur rained down from heaven and destroyed them all.
It will be just like this on the day the Son of Man is revealed. On that day, no one who is on the housetop with possessions inside should go down to get them.
Likewise, no one in the field should go back for anything. Remember Lot's wife. Whoever tries to keep their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life will preserve it.
I tell you, on that night two people will be in one bed. One will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding corn together.
[2:42] One will be taken and the other left. Where, Lord? They asked. He replied, Where there is a dead body, there the vultures will gather.

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Thanks, Michael, for reading that. It would be great to keep the Bible open.
If you have one and you hadn't turned to it, it's page 1051 in the church Bibles, just to have a look there. And you can find an outline on the notice sheet as well.
Let's ask for God's help as we turn to his word. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we praise you and thank you for your goodness, your wisdom and your love for us.
And we ask that where we're distressed, you will comfort us. Where we've strayed, you will guide us. Where we feel convicted, you will restore us.
[3:40] Where we've been living foolishly, you will correct us. And where we're struggling to believe, would you grant us faith and assurance? For we ask in Jesus' name.

Amen. Well, what is the story of our world? For some people, we are a great cosmic accident humanity.
First, there was nothing. And now there is something, the universe. And on planet Earth, there is life. But it just came about through physical forces.
And so what does that mean? Well, you only live once. It's all meaningless. Better maximize personal pleasure. Other people today believe a similar kind of backstory, that we're all just a cosmic accident.
But they say that makes humanity awesome. Just think, without us, there wouldn't be anyone or anything to observe the beauty of the universe around us.
[4:40] The universe has just managed by physical blind forces to get to a point where there are conscious observers, humanity, to see the universe.

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And so that gives us, people like Professor Brian Cox, who's often in the media, would say, so that gives humanity these great moral obligations. We have to look after each other because we're so special.
But whether you think life is completely meaningless, because we came from nothing, or you think humans really matter because there's nothing else, both of those kind of backstories, those narratives to help you understand life, they end in despair, in darkness.
Because eventually, the solar system we're in will go cold, and the universe will go cold, and there will be nothing. All that we face is death and despair.
And some people face that darkness in despair, and feel that purposelessness in life weighing heavy on them. Others face that darkness in defiance. And so I think still the most common music played at a funeral in Scotland is Frank Sinatra's My Way, as people kind of go out saying, I made my choices, and that is that.
[6:02] I did it my way. Defiance. But is there any hope of a better story for our lives? Well, Jesus gives us that better story. He says that the world is a story about a kingdom, the kingdom of God.

And the big thing that God is doing all through human history is he is establishing his kingdom. It will outlast our lives, and it will outlast the world.
It's the one thing that matters. Today, the people around us are living for things that can seem so big to us. We can become so consumed by thinking, oh, I'm getting left behind.
They're running after that thing. I need to run after that thing. But in the future, people are going to look back on our times, and how the people around us lived, and the things we get busy with, and the things we talk about, and they're going to say, how did they miss this in Glasgow in the 21st century?
How did they miss it? Why did they spend their lives so distracted by triviality and worldly ambitions, and miss that the whole point, the whole story of the world, is the story of God building his kingdom?
[7:14] And that's the great theme of Jesus' teaching before us today in Luke's gospel. He starts with a brief word for those who doubt the kingdom. The Pharisees are not believers in Jesus, so they ask him skeptically, when is this kingdom of God going to come?

And Jesus says, it's not that kind of kingdom. Have a look at verse 20. 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.
In other words, as Jesus talks with them, the king is right there, in their midst, for any of them to acknowledge him and become part of his kingdom, his saving reign.
It's as though God has walked into the room of human history, and he's slammed on the table a great objective fact. Jesus is my king. Maybe you came today because you're curious.
And you're just looking in at Christianity. Well, Jesus is saying in these verses, if you're on the outside looking in, it's all about him. Make your curiosity about him.
[8:26] Be curious about him. That's the brief word for those who doubt the kingdom. And then Jesus turns to his disciples, his followers, and we get an important word for those who are in the kingdom.

If we look down at these verses on our page in the Bible, just from verse 22 onwards, just look with me, and what you see is, very clearly there's a big idea coming up again and again in these verses.
So have a look at how often we get the mention of days. Verse 22, the days of the Son of Man.
Verse 24, the Son of Man in his day.
Verse 26, the days of Noah and the days of the Son of Man. Verse 28, the days of Lot. And then verse 29, the day that Lot left Sodom.
Verse 27, above the day that Noah entered the ark. Verse 30, the day of the Son of Man. On that day, verse 31. So Jesus is describing two things, clearly, isn't he?
[9:34] The days that we're in now, and then he's speaking of a coming day, the day, a cataclysmic day, the day he calls the day of the Son of Man. He's the Son of Man.

And it's the day he promises he will bring his kingdom. And we get three points about that day. The first is, it will be an unmistakable day.
So keep longing for it. He sets our expectations for what it's going to be like to live in our days. In verse 22, he says, 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.

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And one reason that we're going to long to see one of the days of Jesus is because of the pattern of life for his disciples. He sets that pattern in verse 25 when he says, he must suffer many things and be rejected.
And for Christians, these are days of suffering for following Jesus. He told us, if the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me too. He said, I have chosen you out of this world.
[10:38] That's why the world hates you. Two weeks ago in Ethiopia, 60 Christians were killed for being Christians. In northern Mozambique last week, six Christians were beheaded by Islamic militants for being Christians.

And maybe we don't feel it's right to compare, but here in the UK, there are places, aren't there, where we see the heat turned up on Christians, where Christians face derision, prejudice, anger, isolation, for living faithfully according to the words of Jesus.
And when those times come, we long for the days of the Son of Man. But we also face suffering in our world just for being human. Suffering is a reality in our world.
And whenever we experience disappointment, a family member getting a diagnosis they wish they wouldn't have got or feelings we have of fear, of anxiety about the kind of turbulence in the world today, feelings of regret, the times when we kind of mess up in the same old ways with the same old sins and we feel rubbish about ourselves.
In these moments, we long for a better world. And it's because our world is under enemy occupation. It's in the darkness of sin and death. And Jesus says it will be solved when the king returns.
[12:07] The better world we long for will come on the return of the king. And so he urges us as we long for him, don't be misled. Look with me at verse 23.

He says, people will tell you there he is or here he is. Do not go running off after them. 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.
Some of you are from countries where you are used to electrical storms and many of us will have been in electrical storms, maybe up a mountain or on holiday. Some years ago, we were camping in a tent in the south of France and we were by the pool one day and it was blue sky in the morning and then a cloud appeared and it was a storm cloud and it was getting rapidly bigger and bigger. And you could see the families around the pool all looking at this cloud thinking how long have we got and then starting to get their kids out of the pool and scrambling around for the sun cream under the sun bed and the goggles and the sinkers and then getting inside and it went dark like the night and then there was this deafening thunder and when the fork lightning was striking, the whole place was brilliantly lit up.
No one could miss that there was a storm. No one would have missed it and Jesus is saying here when he comes there will be no doubt that he has come.
[13:34] He wants to guard us from the terrible deceptions that people fall for today. The Church of Almighty God which originated in China that believes that Yang Xiangbin or Lightning Deng is the returned Messiah.

Or the Jehovah's Witnesses around our city who stand on our street corners who tragically have been lied to that the second coming was an invisible spiritual event in 1914 and then their magazine Watchtower said that his physical return would happen within the lifetime of those who were alive in 1914 and particular days were identified and then passed and then they got rid of the prediction as fewer and fewer of those people were still alive.
They abandoned the idea and yet still people don't leave the community because they're in this kind of captivity to what they've been lied to about to the fear of being excommunicated.
Or the Mormons who follow Joseph Smith's claims that he found this book and he's the only one who had the special glasses to read what it said in the Book of Mormon and it said that Jesus has come back to America and Jesus is saying don't fall for it.
When I come you won't miss it. And don't fall for the more subtle temptation for us of thinking that we can build the kingdom. We don't need him to come back.
[15:06] Of course when people come to know Jesus it transforms us morally and that affects society. It transforms society and that's a good thing.

But our expectation should be that there will still always be times when we're aware that the world is broken and we can't fix it and we long for Jesus' return. We pray for his return.

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He is going to bring the kingdom when he comes. So that's our first word. It's going to be an unmistakable day. Secondly it will be an unexpected day so be ready for it.
Jesus gives us two examples from history of what it's like when God acts in this way and he urges us to learn from them. Look at verse 26.
Jesus says just as it was in the days of Noah so also will it be in the days of the Son of Man. So God has given us moments in human history when unusually his judgment broke in so that we learn and it's amazing when people study different civilizations around the world it is remarkable how many of them have a flood narrative in their historical mythology a story in their cultural history that there was a great and devastating flood in the past and Jesus tells us what happened verse 27 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.
[16:43] We can picture how foolish Noah must have looked as he took God at his word and he started building the ark and he was preparing for this cataclysmic future and it seemed unthinkable and implausible people mocking mad Noah and his crazy idea and his stupid boat and then suddenly the floods came and there was only one way to escape you had to be on the ark and then Jesus speaks about Lot and a good number of you here were here last Sunday night when we looked at this in our series in Genesis it's been so well planned and not by us but that's what we did and Jesus gives us his summary if you weren't there in verse 28 he says it was the same in the days of Lot people were eating and drinking buying and selling planting and building but the day Lot left Sodom fire and sulfur rained down from heaven and destroyed them all and then this vital connection that makes it so important for us verse 30 Jesus says it will be just like this on the day the Son of Man is revealed now the focus in Genesis is on the rightness of that judgment when it fell we hear that Sodom was a city of shocking wickedness and violent crime and an angel warns Lot get out of the city because God's going to judge it and again

Lot looks so foolish he goes to see his sons-in-law and he tells them we've got to get out because of this news and what did they think? They thought he was joking they stay in the city look at the sky mate it's a normal day what have you been drinking?
the world keeps spinning like it always has the sun the moon the seasons it all just goes on as it always has the idea of a God of all of this who is bothered how we live and is going to come and judge us how primitive how naive how superstitious and then sure enough fire and sulfur came down on Sodom and it was destroyed Jesus says it's going to be like that it's remarkable isn't it to think who is telling us this this is Jesus Christ the most compassionate man who's ever lived so gentle Isaiah said of him a bruised reed he will not break a smoldering wick he will not snuff out this is a friendly warning and we recoil at the idea that there is a God who will judge how could a good God a loving God condemn people but God's judgment is going to come because he is good he's going to come and vindicate his people in Ethiopia and in Mozambique and northern Nigeria and we know too well from the news and what people have been talking about around us the last few weeks how we long for justice all of the interest in the Russell Brand trial all the interest now in the allegations about David Walliams a few months ago when the government announced the early release of prisoners because the prisons are overcrowded where did the press turn their attention? the widow of PC Andrew Harper because the two men who brutally killed her husband just after they got married are they going to be released early?
and there was great disturbance at that thought why? because we long for justice in fact not to be angry about evil is a mark that you don't really care about people and God is concerned enough to promise judgment is coming but what's so astonishing here is that what Jesus brings out for us about what people were up to in Noah's time and what they were up to in Lot's days is not how wicked everyone was being did you notice that?
[20:39] he says verse 27 they were eating and drinking and getting married and in verse 28 they were eating and drinking and buying and selling and planting and building in other words people are just going to be getting on with doing life they'll be on dating websites they'll be planning weddings revising for exams opening bank accounts waiting on Great Western Road for a free table at Pizano's so they can get pizza they'll be booking ski trips and Viking river cruises they'll be on Duolingo learning Gaelic they'll be on Right Move arranging to view houses and then bang the son of man is going to come and it will be completely unexpected so many people will just be doing normal things and missing the important thing that Jesus always said he's going to return and this is what it will be like it's hard to get your head round isn't it

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I find it hard to get my head round but I don't think Jesus could have been any clearer than he is that he is coming back an unmistakable day an unexpected day the third thing we see about it is that it's a decisive day looking around us now it is quite difficult to tell sometimes who is really in the kingdom of God and who is not but look at verse 34 Jesus says I tell you on that night two people will be in one bed one will be taken and the other left two women will be grinding corn together one will be taken and the other left and the disciples are so kind of taken by this thought that judgments come in that they seem to think it's going to be in a particular location and they say where Lord and Jesus says that's the wrong question verse 37 he says where there is a dead body there the vultures will gather which I think is him saying that in the wilderness wherever there's dead bodies you get the vultures and I think he's saying wherever there are spiritually dead people judgment will come and the broader point is clear from the earlier verses that on that day there will be this great separation between the spiritually dead and any of us who put our faith in Jesus a separation across families within marriages among colleagues and friends there may be some great surprises on that day as what's really going on in people's hearts is revealed but it's going to be decisive
I don't think we're meant to take it literally and speculate about where do one group get taken and what happens to the ones left behind I think Jesus is actually still using the picture of what happened in Sodom to help us understand his return but his key point is that the divide between people from that moment onwards will be it's going to be sudden and it will be decisive and there will be no time to put things right with God from then for everyone who's already turned to Jesus and is longing for him it will be a day of surpassing joy and unbridled relief and wonder and for those who've kept their distance from him the pictures of verses 34 and 35 are there to tell us it will be too late then it'll be too late so folks this is really going to happen and that's what I've had the privilege because of my job of having to think about these last few days and it's been good for me and I hope it's what you'll think about today and in the coming days we're surrounded by people who scoff at the idea that Jesus is going to come back and the
Bible tells us that that's exactly what we should expect the Apostle Peter says in 2 Peter 3 people will scoff at the idea of the Lord's return but the day of the Lord will come and after Jesus died the tomb was empty and he was seen alive again to demonstrate his credibility it's striking for me that we did this series in Kings just before we returned to Luke and again and again in Kings the message is the same God does whatever he says he's going to do every time and this is what Jesus says he's going to do he's revealing something that is critical for us to know that we couldn't know otherwise because it's about something cataclysmic we cannot deduce this from empirical reasoning but he gives us this revelation that one day while people are out shopping and booking ski trips and out for pizza and planning dates and revising for exams he's going to come unmistakably unexpectedly decisively and it will all suddenly stop and the question
I think Jesus is asking you and me today is are you ready he says in verse 31 don't look back it sounds a bit like a fire policy doesn't it as you read it if you see a fire evacuate don't go back for anything I was amazed recently in church about fire extinguishers we were having them all checked and then it turns out if there's a fire we're not allowed to use them we just have to go but we have to have them working but Jesus it's a bit like that with his return don't go back but I think he's not saying that as though we need to know that in the moment when he comes back it will be irrelevant in the moment he's telling us it now so we understand today we need to make sure that we're ready when Jesus comes everything about our hearts needs to be looking forwards wanting to be going forward with him not yearning backwards to what will be left behind and he frames it like a warning about the day he returns so that we can make it as a personal test of how we feel in the present to ask is there anything dividing your heart between the call of
[27:12] Jesus and the call of the world and then he gives us this sobering example in verse 32 very small verse remember Lot's wife as Lot and his wife and his daughters were fleeing the city of Sodom an angel had said to them don't look back and don't stop and Lot's wife looked back and she became a pillar of salt why because of what the look meant she looked back because she left her heart behind in Sodom and the 19th century writer J.C.

Ryle who was bishop of St. Silas wrote a brilliant chapter in his book Holiness on this one verse remember Lot's wife I've read it twice this week it's the only command Jesus makes in our whole passage today remember Lot's wife and Ryle urges us to mark well!
that Jesus makes the command not to unbelievers but to disciples and of all the people he could have told us to remember he says remember her a loving warning to us that she was married to a

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believer her daughters were believers her uncle was Abraham and it did her no good at all she looked back because in her heart there was a secret love for the world without Jesus and how easy it is for this to happen to us all the time for the love of other things to grow in our heart and take possession of our heart and become what we dream about because we've tethered our hearts to things in the world so what do we do if we think that's a danger for us well I think we go back to that first word about the kingdom that we started with from verse 21 that Jesus has been teaching that the kingdom of God is coming but he also says it's in your midst concern yourself with him with the king set your heart on him long for him think of him in the previous scene just above that that we looked at last week ten men with leprosy their lives completely broken just asking
Jesus for mercy and with a word they're healed and cleansed and the one who runs back to him and falls at his feet and thanks him and he's saved forever his past completely forgiven his future dealt with think of Jesus in verse 11 we're told on his way to Jerusalem so that when he speaks to his disciples and they're asking where's this judgment going to happen he says where there's a dead body soon they'll see his body dead as he chose to let the flood of God's judgment against sin engulf him and the fire and sulfur rain down from heaven against our sin on him so that he can save us from it to be with him forever let's have a moment of quiet to reflect on God's word and then I'll lead us in a prayer almighty and loving heavenly father these are sobering words from
Jesus and words that are quite far from our day to day lives right now and everything that's going on but they are so important for us Lord Jesus we thank you for your clear teaching and your saving mission we worship you we love you for who you are and what you've done we give you thanks we praise you come quickly we pray to bring in your kingdom Holy Spirit would you grant us the eyes of faith to believe these prophetic words from Jesus and for every one of us give us we pray the resolve to long for the days of the son of man and be single-minded not looking back grant that our hearts are ready today for Jesus' return in his name we pray amen well

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