**Series – Dr. Luke’s Perspective on Jesus**

**Text – Luke 17:20-37**

**Message 69 (January 20, 2019)**

**THE KINGDOM PRESENT AND FUTURE**

***20Being asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, he answered them, “The kingdom of God is not coming in ways that can be observed, 21nor will they say, ‘Look, here it is!’ or ‘There!’ for behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you.” 22And he said to the 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. 23And they will say to you, ‘Look, there!’ or ‘Look, here!’ Do not go out or follow them. 24For 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. 25But first he must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation. 26Just as it was in the days of Noah, so will it be in the days of the Son of Man. 27They 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. 28Likewise, just as it was in the days of Lot—they were eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building, 29but on the day when Lot went out from Sodom, fire and sulfur rained from heaven and destroyed them all—30so will it be on the day when the Son of Man is revealed. 31On 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. 32Remember Lot's wife. 33Whoever seeks to preserve his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life will keep it. 34I tell you, in that night there will be two in one bed. One will be taken and the other left. 35There will be two women grinding together. One will be taken and the other left.” 37And they said to him, “Where, Lord?” He said to them, “Where the corpse is, there the vultures will gather.”***

**Introduction**

## When you hear the words, kingdom of God, what comes into your mind? What does that phrase mean? Jesus talked much about the kingdom of God. Luke often used the phrase. Is the kingdom future? Is the kingdom now? Are we, as believers “building the kingdom” or is that entirely an enterprise of God? We are said to be citizens of the heaven (and thus citizens of the kingdom) now and we belong to the King now. Jesus, as the king of the kingdom, seemed to speak of a present aspect of the kingdom but He also clearly spoke of a future aspect of the kingdom. So, is it now or later?

1. We are not the only ones who are asking these questions. The text this morning begins with the Pharisees asking when the kingdom of God would come.
2. After I read every commentary I have on Luke, I listened to a few sermons I was able to find on line, preached by men that I trust to have done their homework and who consistently teach the Scriptures with care. It didn’t take long to realize that most of them were struggling to understand what Jesus was saying here. One preacher admonished to not apologize if we don’t know what a text means because that weakens credibility, but his next sentence was, “I am just not sure what Jesus was saying.”
3. Let’s listen to the text and see if we can understand at least some of what Jesus was saying and why that should matter to us.

## I. WHEN AND WHERE IS THE KINGDOM (20-21)

A. It’s not what you think it is

1. The Pharisees asked the “when” question and Jesus answered, but the religious leaders probably didn’t like the answer He gave.

2. ***The kingdom of God is not coming in ways that can be observed.*** There are observable elements to the kingdom of God to be sure. In Luke 9, just before the Transfiguration, Jesus said to His disciples, ***“there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God.”*** That the language of observation. But in regard to the Pharisees who were always looking for a sign, Jesus was probably telling them that there would not be any sign in regard to the kingdom of God and even if there was, there would be no time to figure it out. It was not what they thought it was. He continues…

B. It’s not when and where you think it is

1. As Jesus was continuing His earthly ministry, people were not saying, ***‘Look, here it is!’ or ‘There!’***  That would come later, according to verse 23, but not right now. Jesus does not identify who “they” are? The point was that few, if any, were observing anything about the kingdom of God at this time.

2. The reason given was, ***“behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you.”*** Some of you have a translation that says, ***“the kingdom of God is within you.”*** That translation is possible and it supports the idea of the present aspect of the kingdom, but I think it is best to translate this as ***“in the midst of you”*** rather than ***“within you.”*** Here’s why. Jesus was talking to the Pharisees, most of whom were not believers in Jesus. Further, when Jesus spoke of the kingdom, He spoke of men entering the kingdom but not of the kingdom entering into men. The primary point Jesus was making was that He, the King, was standing right there in their presence, in their midst! Wherever the King is, there is the kingdom and He was standing right in front of them; they didn’t see it because they didn’t see Him for who He was!

3. Jesus pivoted from talking to the Pharisees to speaking with His disciples, and He told them what was coming. Before we dive in, I want to summarize what Jesus was going to say about the coming kingdom and the coming King. He was going to make the case that this coming kingdom would be unmistakable, people would not wonder what happened; it would be worldwide, everyone would see it. It would happen suddenly – there would not be time to analyze it; it would be inescapable. And for all who were not prepared, it would be utterly chaotic and tragic. Let’s see how Jesus spelled this out.

## II. WHAT’S COMING

1. The departure (22)
2. The day was going to come soon when the Son of Man would not be in their midst

anymore and His disciples, as they endured trials and tribulations, would long for that day when He would return.

2. No time period is indicated, except that there would be some time when the Son of man would not be “in their midst.” But that would not stop people from saying He had returned. The time of His absence and the longing for His coming could make His disciples susceptible to these bogus reports.

B. The claims (23-24)

1. Historically, many came in the early days of the church claiming to be the Messiah. Jesus told His disciples not to waste their time checking it out. His coming would not be secret or only to a few. For those who were under severe persecution, their desire to be delivered from their earthly existence would be great and they would be vulnerable to those who were making such claims, but Jesus told them to pay no attention and He explained why.

2. Using the illustration of lightning, the kind that lights up the whole sky, Jesus was saying that when the Son of Man comes, the whole world will know. There will be no uncertainty. One commentator said, ***“Like lightning, the Son of Man‘s arrival will be sudden, eye-catching, glorious, frightening, and celestial.”*** But there was something else that was to come first.

C. The cross (25)

1. Luke had already recorded four of Jesus’ predictions regarding His death; this is the fifth. The glory of His return would be preceded by His suffering. This prediction is almost an addendum to what is being discussed. It is a reminder that suffering precedes glory. Before the kingdom must come the cross.

2. “This generation” (v. 25), referred to those who would put Jesus to death. After Jesus spoke enigmatically of His death, He returned to the subject of the kingdom of God in relation to the judgment that was coming on all who rejected the King of the kingdom.

## III. WARNING

A. From history (26-32) Notice the formula, ***“Just as…so will it be…”*** Jesus gives two illustrations.

1. Noah and the flood – The wickedness of those who were destroyed in the flood and in the city of Sodom is not mentioned. Instead the references were to the normalcy of life without any expectation or awareness of any judgment. It is said of the people in Noah’s day, ***“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.”***They had warning from the preaching of Noah and it would have been impossible for at least those in the area not to see what Noah was doing, but it changed nothing in their lives. Everything was business as usual. They people were unprepared. They were ***“attentive to daily business as though it would last forever, and neglectful of eternity as though it would never come”*** (Edwards, p. 492). But the flood did come and ***“destroyed them all.”*** Only the prepared in the ark survived the judgment.

2. Lot and the destruction of Sodom – The same was true in relation to Lot and Sodom. The inhabitants of Sodom were ***“eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building…”***;it was business as usual. But as soon as God delivered Lot from the city, fire and sulfur rained from heaven and ***“destroyed them all.”***  Jesus made it clear: ***“so will it be on the day when the Son of Man is revealed.***“ All who were unprepared perished. There’s the warning from history

B. From promised judgment (31-36)

1. On the day that judgment comes, there will be no time to plan an escape and to pack a suitcase. Jesus used two illustrations, being on the housetop and being in the field. You don’t try to go back and gather a few things; you run! You get out of there!

2. The warning included something to remember: ***“Remember Lot’s wife.”*** The Bible does not tell us much, only that Lot’s wife turned back. Rather than running from the judgment, she longed to return to what she had; she longed to gather what she was being forced to leave behind – in her heart she was unwilling to leave Sodom behind, so, she perished. James Edwards writes, ***“Her longing look backward to Sodom became proverbial in Israel for disobedience, ‘a pillar of salt standing as a monument to an unbelieving soul’”*** (p. 492).

3. James Edwards, using Pilgrim’s Progress to illustrate, writes, ***“The urgency of the kingdom of God in an age of self-indulgence and moral indifference is the very point at which John Bunyan begins his Pilgrim’s Progress: a man has a vision of societal indifference to an impending disaster, and with a book in his hand (the Bible) and a burden on his back (sin) he forsakes the City of Destruction, even kindred and family, and sets out for the Celestial City”*** (p. 492).

4. With the Biblical illustrations of Noah and Lot and Lot’s wife in view, Jesus reminded His disciples, ***“Whoever seeks to preserve his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life will keep it.”*** Again, from Edwards, ***“Even if one, like Lot’s wife, escapes the destruction of Sodom but looks back with longing on what ‘might have been,’ one’s heart belongs to something other than the gospel. The kingdom of God is more than escaping wrath; it is receiving eternal life from the hand of the Son of Man, and whoever receives that life can no longer yearn for the life the world offers…The sober truth of v. 33 furnished (Bunyan) with its final sentence. Christian, Hopeful and Ignorance have crossed the river of death and are at the gates of Paradise, but Ignorance, even after the long and perilous journey to the Celestial City, had not the certificate of faith and was turned away. ’Then I saw’, says Bunyan, ‘that there was a way to hell, even from the gates of heaven, as well as from the City of Destruction’”*** (p. 493).

5. The context is judgment as Jesus continued to help His disciples understand. Relationships and friendships won’t help. When the kingdom comes there will be a separation; some will go to judgment and others to eternal life.

C. From proverbial declaration (37) - ***“Where the corpse is, there the vultures will gather.”***

1. What was Jesus’ saying? First, a few observations. This saying is also recorded in Matthew 24:28, which is a parallel passage, though Luke’s inclusion comes earlier in Jesus’ ministry than Matthew’s account. Matthew uses the word carcass. Luke uses the word body (though translated here as corpse). Both use the word for “eagles” and not vultures. I don’t think the word for vulture is used in the NT.

2. Having said that, if we should see vultures circling, we know there is probably something dead or dying nearby. Some of the things we can see may indicate evidence of things we cannot see. Though, as Jesus said, ***“The kingdom of God is not coming in ways that can be observed”***, there are some things that are happening that speak of the time when He will return. This enigmatic answer that Jesus gave comes after the disciple’s question, ***“Where, Lord?”*** I am not entirely sure what they were asking. Was the “where” with reference to where people would be taken in judgment? Was it more in relation to the question Peter would refer to many years later in his second letter – “Where is the promise of His coming?” And just when we think Jesus will clear it up for us, He speaks this proverb! Maybe Jesus is just telling us, when this happens it will be so clear no one will be asking “Where?”

**Conclusion**

1. There are more questions here than I can answer, but there are some things of which we can be sure.
2. Once again, quoting from James Edwards, ***“The Son of Man who will come again is the same Son of Man who is now ‘in your midst’ (v. 21). The journey will be long (v. 22), and disciples will be tempted to follow false leads (v. 23). Like the society in which they live, they can easily lapse into neglect and fail in wakefulness and watchfulness (vv. 26-30). They must beware of turning back, even when victory seems assured (vv. 31-34), and of allowing intimate human fellowship and belonging to human communities to replace their allegiance to Jesus and the gospel (vv. 33-36)*** (p. 495).
3. The bottom line for us is, are we ready? Are we prepared for His coming? Like Lot’s wife, what’s going on, on the outside. may not be what’s going on, on the inside. He’s coming back. Are we ready?