

**INTRO:** I'm sure we all know by now that Harold Camping, Evangelical broadcaster for Family Radio Worldwide, predicted that on May 21, just yesterday, 'a great earthquake will occur...and throw open all the graves. The remains of all the saved believers who have ever lived will be instantly transformed into glorified spiritual bodies...[but] the bodies of all unsaved people will be thrown out upon the ground to be shamed' (Richard Roeper, Chicago Sun Times, <http://www.suntimes.com/news/roeper/5414186-417/harold-camping-believes-the-world-will-end-saturday.htm>, accessed 5/17/11). According to the family radio website, the flood happened in 4990BC, and God told Noah in Gen 7:4 that seven days later, the flood would come. 2Peter 3:8 says that with the Lord a day is like a thousand years. So combining the 7 day warning in Gen 7:4 with the 1 day = 1,000 years equation, we can add 4990 years BC + 7,000 years = 2,011 AD, minus 1 for the year 0 at the turn of the ages. May 21, 2011 is the 17<sup>th</sup> day of the 2<sup>nd</sup> month of the Biblical calendar, which was the date of the flood in Noah's day. Therefore, the world was supposed to end yesterday. (<http://www.familyradio.com/graphical/literature/judgment/judgment.html>, accessed 5/17/11). But it didn't, which raises an important question. If we're not to wait for the return of King Jesus with attempted predictions and timelines, then **How should we wait for God's kingdom to come?** Please turn with me in your Bibles to Luke 17:20-18:8, where Jesus gives us 4 ways of waiting for God's kingdom to come. We should wait with Faith in Jesus as King (17:20-21), Faith in Jesus as Redeemer (17:22-25), Faith in the warnings of the OT (17:26-37), Faith Persevering in Prayer (18:1-8).

### 1. FAITH IN JESUS AS KING (LUKE 17:20-21)

The context in chapter 17 is important. Jesus has just healed 10 lepers. That's a sign that God's kingdom is near. God's restorative authority is at work in Jesus to show that the power of new creation is in the person of Jesus. It's right on the heels of that healing that Luke shows us this question from the Pharisees about the timing of the kingdom's arrival in vv.20-21. It's as if Luke is saying, "look at all that Jesus is doing to prove that He is king – healings, exorcisms, miracles of every kind...yet the Pharisees are still asking "When will the kingdom of God come?" It's like they're asking for a sign of the kingdom's arrival, right after a sign has just been given! At least, that's how Jesus answers their question, in terms of signs, and that's how the text reads.

But Jesus was doing signs, miracles. So why does he say in v.20 that the kingdom is not coming with signs to be observed? The kind of signs Jesus is ruling out is apocalyptic signs. The kingdom isn't coming with apocalyptic force, at least not yet. The Jewish expectation was of immediate catastrophe, immediate war, stars falling from the sky, overthrow of political oppression. And Jesus says, at least for now, none of that is on the kingdom agenda. The kingdom isn't coming like that...yet. Yet...Jesus did do some signs, eschatological signs, signs that the end times had arrived – healings, exorcisms. And so, since these were not the signs the Pharisees were looking for, they failed to see them for what they were.

And notice, Jesus refuses to answer the question as the Pharisees ask it, because they're asking the wrong question. The question is not "what will be the sign of the kingdom's arrival?" The question is, "What are you doing with the sign you have right in front of you, the sign of Jesus Himself in His person and miracles?" And isn't that often what he does with us? We ask Jesus a question, he doesn't answer it like we expect, and then we get frustrated with Him. But instead of asking for another sign, how about reconsidering all the signs Jesus has already given us in Scripture? Waiting for God to establish His kingdom means waiting in faith that Jesus has already proven Himself to be the king of that kingdom. It's waiting in faith that Jesus is Son of King David promised in 2Sam 7, come to be all that David was and all that David failed to be – the Great Shepherd and ruler of God's people who would reign on David's throne forever, world without end. And in truth, He is the new Adam, appointed by God as the New Ruler of all creation, and of all creatures, including us. Until you believe that, Jesus says you're asking the wrong questions. The first question we should be asking is not "when will the kingdom come?" It's "Has the kingdom already arrived in the person of the king Himself, Jesus?"

The reason (ga.r) they won't say "Look, here it is" or "there!" is that "*the kingdom of God is in the midst of*

you” (evnto.j ‘umw/n). The kingdom in its first appearance would not be something that people could see coming down from heaven. It’s not here or there, it’s not on the horizon. It’s right in your midst, among you. In other words, truth be told, the kingdom of God had already come, quietly, without fanfare. Jesus Himself embodies the reign of God. His supernatural miracles prove the kingdom’s power. His perfect obedience proves His worthiness to reign over it. He establishes God’s kingly reign over evil through His earthly ministry, his death, and his resurrection. And He is the person through whom God reigns over all earthly and spiritual powers. So to say “*the kingdom of God is in your midst*” is not to say that the kingdom is purely spiritual or immaterial, as if it’s only inside us, like a platonic ideal. It’s actually the opposite. It’s to say that Jesus is the kingdom personified, He is the reign of God in the flesh. The kingdom of God had already materialized in the person of Jesus.

When religious people in the Bible had questions about the end times, Jesus didn’t always answer them directly. He didn’t give them a timeline or a graph. He didn’t explain how it all worked, or what it would all look like. He didn’t point them to current events, or spell out the meaning of geo-political conflicts in the middle east. He pointed them to Himself, to the presence of God’s royal reign in His own authority, and he pressed people to respond to Him, and to His authority. The way you wait for the coming of God’s kingdom is by obedient faith in the King who has already come, and who will one day come again. (Cf. 10:21-22 enigmatic discourse in Goppelt, *Theology* 1:175).

## 2. FAITH IN JESUS AS REDEEMER (LUKE 17:22-25)

In v.22 Jesus now turns his attention from the Pharisees to His disciples. The meaning of v.22 is debated, but with what Jesus says in v.23 about the future, v.22 probably does not mean that they’ll soon be longing to go back to the good old days when they had Jesus walking around with them. Verse 22 is forward-looking. The days will come when you will long for days still future when the Son of Man will have returned and made all things new. Jesus is implying that life on earth will get hard for His disciples. And while they’re waiting for His return from heaven to judge all the earth, things will be bad enough that it will be tempting to believe people when they say “look there! Or Look, here!” Their trials and temptations in v.22 will make them want to believe the misguided reports of v.23. And Jesus says “*Do not go out or follow them.*”

But don’t be fooled, because the second coming of Christ will not be hidden or mysterious. Verse 23 is saying, don’t listen to people like Harold Camping, because it will not be secret. You won’t be dependent on someone else’s knowledge of it. The end will come suddenly, unannounced, like lightning, for everyone. And you won’t be able to miss it. It will be as obvious as lightning that lights up the night sky from one end of the horizon to the other. Christ’s second coming will be strikingly public. It will be universal, unmistakable, irresistible, and inescapable (cf. Zech 9:14). You will not control the terms of your own engagement with that day. It will be like lightning – you will be helpless in front of it. But if you are His, you will not need to fear that you missed it.

But before we would suffer, Jesus would suffer. In v.25 the only real sign of the coming of the Son of Man is the one sign that no one would have been looking for: His own suffering and rejection. “*First he must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation.*” Suffering was not on anyone’s timetable for the coming of the Son of Man. But Jesus says not only that He will, but that he must suffer. It is necessary for the Son of Man from **Dan 7:13-14** to suffer before He ascends to the throne and claims His kingdom. Why? Why was it necessary? What made it necessary for Jesus as the Son of Man to suffer and be rejected by His own generation? The most fundamental reason is that God the Father ordained it from eternity past. Peter says in **1Pet 1:20** that Jesus was foreknown as the Lamb of God without blemish or spot before the foundation of the world. But Jesus didn’t obey the Father against his own will. Jesus’ suffering was also necessary because Jesus Himself was voluntarily committed to it. He says in **John 10:17-18** “*For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord.*” And it was also necessary because the teaching and ministry of Jesus drew so much hatred and envy

from the leading Jews that it became inevitable that they would kill him to be rid of Him (Stott, *Cross*, 35-37).<sup>1</sup> But then we should ask, why did God the Father ordain Jesus' suffering? Why did Jesus voluntarily commit to it? And the answer is that God, as our holy creator and righteous judge, is completely holy, perfectly upright, morally impeccable, and man as His creature has made himself thoroughly sinful by his rebellion against the law and love of God. Every sin deserves the wrath and curse of God. The wages of sin is death, the curse of God for the rebellion of man. We were hostile to God, and God was hostile toward us. Yet God was not content with that hostility. He wanted to be reconciled to His rebellious creatures. And if that were to happen, He would have to do it Himself, without our help. And so He sent His only begotten Son, Jesus, the second person of the Trinity, to live the sinless life we should have lived. And he died the death we should have died. Jesus had to suffer because if God were to reconcile any of mankind to Himself, then Jesus would have to become a curse for us. And that's exactly what he did, hanging and dying on that tree. He became sin for us, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. And when He rose from the dead on the third day, He proved that He did not die for any sin on His part. He died as the substitute penalty for our sin, and that death was sufficient. And if we trust in Jesus' blood to atone for our sins, and His righteousness to make us right with God, and if that faith produces repentance, a turning from sin, then we can be reconciled to God by the blood of Jesus.

That is the gospel, the good news, the message that Jesus has commissioned the church to proclaim. Jesus is the Redeemer. And so we wait for the coming of God's kingdom, we wait for the return of Jesus as the Son of Man, with Faith in Jesus as the redeemer, whose blood atones for all the sins of all those who will ever repent and believe. The cross of Jesus, His suffering and rejection, his death and resurrection, is central to Christianity. There is no Christianity without the suffering and death and resurrection of Jesus. It is absolutely necessary. If we lose our faith in the atoning power of Jesus' blood, if we lose our nerve in testifying to a crucified and risen Lord, if the church loses the centrality of Jesus' suffering, then we have failed to wait for Jesus with faith in Him as our Redeemer, in which case His coming would not mean redemption but condemnation. Waiting for God's kingdom to come means waiting with faith in Jesus not only as King, but as Redeemer by virtue of His vicarious suffering and atoning death. It also means waiting with faith in the warnings of the OT....

### 3. FAITH IN THE WARNINGS OF THE OLD TESTAMENT (LUKE 17:26-37)

In vv.26-32 Jesus compares the coming of the Son of man to two judgment narratives from the OT – the flood, and Sodom & Gomorrah. In both cases, the point is the same. Judgment came suddenly and unexpectedly in the midst of daily and seasonal routine. In v.27, all the verbs are imperfects – they were eating, drinking, marrying. This was their habit of life, day after day, year after year. Life was rolling along, and everyone felt safe, until one day...one day... the flood (*kataklysmo.j*) came and destroyed them all. By the way, did you notice that **pre-flood life was concerned and even preoccupied with marriage and family**? People before the flood loved going to weddings, they loved having babies, they loved eating together as families and friends. That's how they spent their time. That's what they lived for, what gave meaning to their lives. But it didn't save them, did it? Prioritizing the nuclear family doesn't necessarily mean that you will be saved from the judgment to come. Being a family-oriented person is not what saves. It's being a Jesus-oriented person that saves. The flood warns us that **family living is not the gospel**. And even more, it warns us that the final judgment will come swiftly, suddenly, unexpectedly, while many if not most people are distracted with their daily routine. There will be no time to prepare. By then it will be too late. Now is the time to repent of your sin and believe in Jesus. Now is the time to get in the ark. And our ignorance of the exact time makes it more urgent.

It's the same thing in vv.28-30 in Sodom & Gomorrah. In Lot's day, Gen 19, they were buying, selling, planting, and building. The economy was humming right along, prosperity was flourishing, consumerism was thriving, the crops were growing, the cities were expanding, the construction industry was booming. Everyone felt safe...until one day...one day... fire and sulphur from heaven came down and destroyed them all. Notice,

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<sup>1</sup> V.25 "this generation" is article + noun + demonstrative pronoun (th/j genea/j tau,thj). It's used here for the specific generation that was alive in Jesus' time, as also in Lk 7:31; 11:29-32, 50-51; which makes it likely in the more controversial passage, 21:32 (16:8 is a reflexive personal pronoun ('eautw/n)).

in both instances, at the end of v.27 and the end of v.29, the catastrophe destroyed “them all”. No one escaped except those who believed the warning of God – Noah’s family, and Lot’s family. That’s just how the day of the son of man will come to pass – on a day that started out like any other, but then suddenly, clearly, irresistibly, **inescapably**, Jesus will return, and judgment will begin.

That’s why Jesus says in v.31 “*let the one who is on the housetop, with his goods in the house, not come down to take them away, and likewise the one who is in the field not turn back.*” Two-story houses back then had an outer staircase from the ground to the roof. What Jesus envisions here is someone who gets caught on the roof and is so eager to escape judgment that he doesn’t even go back in his house. He just jets down the outer stairs. And so he says in v.32 “*remember Lot’s wife.*” Don’t get so attached to the things of this world that you aren’t able to turn your back on them when Judgment Day comes, because it will all be destroyed, just like at the flood, just like at Sodom. Except for God’s people, the destruction will be indiscriminate.

The flood, and the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, are dual warnings of the end of the world. **2Peter 2:5-9.** “*If [God] did not spare the ancient world, but preserved Noah, a herald of righteousness, with seven others, when he brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly; if by turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to ashes he condemned them to extinction, making them an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly; and if he rescued righteous Lot, greatly distressed by the sensual conduct of the wicked... then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment until the day of judgment, and especially those who indulge in the lust of defiling passion and despise authority.*” The judgments of the OT illustrate and typify the great judgment to come. Jesus and Peter are teaching us how to read and interpret the OT. They are modeling a typological hermeneutic. The events of the OT illustrate greater, more significant events not only in NT times, but in the end times as well. It will be like back then, only intensified and expanded. That goes for both salvation and judgment. God’s saving and judging works in the OT announce and prefigure what he will do to save and judge humanity in the NT and at the end of time. So when I read about the flood in my quiet time, I’m supposed to think about Judgment Day. It will be sudden, cataclysmic, inescapable destruction, and the only way to be safe is to heed these warnings by repenting and believing in Jesus.

**Vv.31-33 Self-Denial for Salvation.** The principle that Jesus is talking about in verses 31-32 is self-denial. “*Whoever seeks to preserve his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life will keep it.*” You preserve your soul when you deny yourself. This is related back to the daily routines and temporal pleasures that preoccupied the people of Noah’s day and Lot’s day. If you preoccupy your heart with eating, drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, buying, selling, planting, building – if you seek your life and your soul’s contentment and safety in those things – you will lose your soul for all eternity. You cannot love the world, or the things of the world, and be saved. You cannot look back over your shoulder at worldly pleasure, moral autonomy, and material goods, and be saved from the judgment to come. That’s why he says “*remember Lot’s wife.*” Don’t look back to the destruction of the worldly things you’ve grown to love, because if you’re not careful, you’ll share their fate.

*Whoever seeks to preserve his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life will keep it.* This is the conundrum of the Christian life, the riddle of repentance (cf. 9:24). It does you no good to gain the world and lose your soul, and make no mistake, the world is competing for your soul. You cannot seek your security in the things of this world, and then expect salvation and blessing in the world to come. And this goes both for now and for the day of Jesus’ return. The application is to live life now, deny self now, say no to worldliness now, so that when Jesus comes, you’re not tempted to look back at the world as if you don’t want to let it go, as if you’re wishing God wouldn’t destroy it, as if you wish you could take it with you. Living like this is what Paul means in 1Cor 7 when he says “*the appointed time has grown very short. From now on let those who have wives live as though they had none...and those who buy as though they had no goods, and those who deal with the world as though they had no dealings with it. For the present form of this world is passing away*” (1Cor 7:31; 1Jn 2:17; 1Pet 4:7). You have to lose this life if you would gain the next.

And we see in vv.34-36 that the judgment will involve a radical separation in even the closest relationships. The point here is not a ‘secret rapture’ doctrine. This is where Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins get their title “Left Behind.” But it’s not that one will be “left behind” to experience the great tribulation while the believer is taken up into the air to escape it. The subject in Luke 17 is still the final coming of the Son of Man, which will be obvious to everyone, not a secret whisking away of the elect before his final coming. So it’s not that two people will be driving along in a car and all of a sudden the driver will be taken and the passenger will be left scrambling to steer. It’s a picture of sudden separation. There will be a distinguishing, separating, distinction-making effect. The coming of the Son of Man will not mean the same thing for all people, and it will divide along the most intimate lines – even between those who share a bed. The point, then, is similar to 12:51-53, where Jesus comes not to give peace but rather division, even within the nuclear family. The coming of the Son of Man will have a discriminating, distinguishing, sifting, separating, sorting effect. And it will not matter who you share a bed with, or who you work with, or whose family you’re a part of. All that will matter is that you are repenting of your sin and self righteousness, and believing in Jesus. The lesson is, be repenting and believing now, so that you’re ready for the sudden separation then, because it will come unannounced.

Verse 37 is hard to understand. The disciples ask where this judgment will take place. And again Jesus answers indirectly, with a cryptic-sounding proverb. “*Where the corpse is, there the vultures gather.*” In verses 20-21, Jesus answered the “when” question by saying basically, “you don’t need a timetable, because I’m already here.” Now in v.37, He answers the “where” question by saying “You won’t need a map. If you’re looking for a dead carcass in the wilderness, all you need to do is look up and see where the vultures are circling.” Jesus’ appearance at the end of time will be unmistakable in the same way – you won’t need to ask “where”. It will be obvious. Jesus is going to make it easy to recognize his return, which is both gracious and demanding. It’s gracious because He’s not trying to fool us. He will not come and go without letting us know, and He has warned us of all this beforehand. Yet there is a great accountability in that knowledge. It’s a grim picture that Jesus gives – vultures hovering over carcasses. No one will be able to say, “I didn’t see Him.” Everyone will see. Those who love Him will welcome Him, but those who don’t will weep bitterly over the reign of the one they rejected. They themselves will be the carcasses – so get in the ark before it starts raining.

#### **4. FAITH PERSEVERING IN PRAYER (LUKE 18:1-8)**

Luke sets up this parable in 18:1 by giving the point of the parable at the outset. “He told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart.” Now, in the context of chapter 17, this is probably not just a generic exhortation to pray more about everything in our lives. Luke 17:20-37 were all about the sudden arrival of the Son of Man. So what’s the most likely subject of the prayers that Jesus thinks we ought to be praying? In context, it’s continual prayer for the return of the Son of Man. The widow in the parable is seeking justice. The application would be that we are to be praying continually for the arrival of the Son of Man so that justice will be done “on earth as it is in heaven.” What we’re to be praying for is not simply my next job, or my personal finances, or my relationship with my kids, although we are to pray for all those kinds of things. But here, the idea is that we’re to be praying that the Son of Man would return quickly, and that we ourselves would be ready for it, and that he would vindicate the cause of God’s suffering people.

We should notice, by the way, that the word for “ought in 18:1, ‘they ought always to pray,’ is the same word translated “must” in 17:25, which referred to Christ’s sufferings. It was necessary for Jesus to suffer. And it is now necessary for us to pray. It’s the same word, *dei/*. It is necessary always to pray, and it is necessary to pray that the Son of Man would return soon, that we’d be ready, and that He would vindicate our cause as we remain loyal to Him. We ought to do that – it’s morally necessary, and we should not give up. The parable tells us why.

The parable of the unjust judge and the persistent widow is another ‘how much more’ parable. God is not being compared to the judge. He’s being contrasted with the judge. The logic is not that God Himself will become so annoyed with our persistence that he will give in to our requests against his will. It’s, “if an ungodly judge will give justice to a persistent widow because he’s annoyed with her persistence, how much more will our good

God and Father give justice to His children whom he loves, and who cry out to Him for justice day and night?”

I had a sad moment this week where I saw my son get his feelings hurt by one of his little friends. I was picking him up from a friend’s house to take him home, and he was trying to say goodbye and give a hug to his friend, and his little friend had said goodbye to our daughter Olivia, but then walked away just when Braden thought it was his turn to give a hug. And the look on his face when he realized he had gotten snubbed was just pathetic. He wasn’t bawling, but I could tell he was holding back a tear. Now that was a little nothing, right? But all I wanted at that moment, as his dad, was to make it right for him. I had an inordinate amount of compassion well up in my heart for my boy. I wanted to rescue his heart from that little hurt that he felt. That is just a speck of what Jesus is talking about here in the Fatherly compassion of God for His suffering children.

Jesus says in v.6 “*Hear what the unrighteous judge says.*” In Jesus’ mind, the point of the parable hangs on what the judge says in v.5 “*Because this widow keeps bothering me, I will give her justice so that she will not beat me down by her continual coming.*” Even a godless, heartless judge would give in to the persistence of a needy widow. Surely God, who has an infinitely greater heart than this judge, will God give justice to those who cry out to Him for it day and night? And He will give it to them not because He’s annoyed, but because of His compassionate love for His children. Faith in His compassion should drive our perseverance in prayer. But again, this is not just about prayer in general. It’s about praying for God’s kingdom to come and His will to be done on earth as it is in heaven. It’s asking for the consummation of God’s kingdom. Christian, when was the last time you prayed that God’s kingdom would come and that He would consummate it? When was the last time you prayed in your own private prayers for the expansion of the gospel on earth, the up-building of this church and other local churches, the tearing down of doctrinal error, the wrapping up of all things in Christ Jesus as Head? And if you are not praying for those things, then friend, what have you been praying for? It’s not wrong to pray for the concerns we have in this life. God wants us to bring everything to Him in prayer. But concerns about God’s kingdom should predominate in our prayers.

So when Jesus asks in Luke 18:8 “*When the son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?*” He’s not asking whether or not anyone will be left who believes in Him. He’s asking, “Is anyone going to be praying the Lord’s Prayer, “Thy kingdom come”? Will anyone be looking for Him when He comes looking for us? Or will all our prayers be consumed with eating and drinking, buying and selling, family and friends? Brothers and sisters, that question should haunt us. Who will be left praying for justice, for the vindication of the cause of Christ and His people? Who will be left who cares about kingdom concerns more than personal concerns?

Christian faith is the faith to persevere with God in prayer. Jesus does not consider us people of faith unless we are people of prayer. This is one reason that we gather every other **Sunday evening** to pray, as a means of holding each other accountable to being people of prayer who prioritize God’s kingdom in our prayers; we all need that accountability. Will God find us praying, or looking back over our shoulder like Lot’s wife? Will he find faith-filled perseverance in prayer among us, or will He find the cares and worries of the world choking out our corporate prayer life together? We want Jesus to find faith on the earth when he comes back, and we want Him to find that faith among us as a congregation, expressed in faithful corporate prayer. Look at your own prayer life, both individually and as you participate in the corporate prayer life of the congregation. Is Jesus’ concern in v.8 justified in your own case?

## CONCLUSION

**How should we wait for God’s kingdom to come?** It’s obvious that we should not be waiting like Harold Camping, drawing up timetables and maps. His return will be unpredictable and yet obvious, just like lighting; so we should wait with faith in Jesus as king, faith in Jesus as redeemer, faith in the warnings of the OT, and faith persevering in prayer. This is what it means to wait well for the coming of Christ – it means to wait in faith. Are we, as a church, waiting faithfully? Are you...? Let’s pray....