

The title of this morning's sermon is, "*The Battle of Armageddon and One Will Be Taken and the Other Left*"¹

On Sunday mornings we are working our way through Luke's Gospel verse-by-verse and we find ourselves at **Luke 17:33**.

I have met with Jehovah's Witnesses twice over the last few months. Yesterday they came to our door and Katie met with them as well.

We both agreed that they seem to know what they believe about end times. They can often point to chapter and verse.

It is discouraging to think that Christians might not be able to do the same. I don't want that to be the case with my church, so I hope this sermon equips you to better understand end times.

Let's start at **verse 31** for context...

Luke 17:31 On that day, let the one who is on the housetop, with his goods in the house, not come down to take them away, and likewise let the one who is in the field not turn back.

The context is the Second Coming of Christ. Jesus is destroying His enemies and establishing His Kingdom on the earth.

This isn't the time to **turn back** for possessions. Doing so would show a focus on the earthly versus the heavenly.

So, this is a warning to:

- People who are obsessed with the physical instead of the spiritual
- People who cling to their earthly lives despite all that heaven offers

Now Jesus provides the premier example of looking back and suffering as a result...

Luke 17:32 Remember Lot's wife.

Unless I'm mistaken, there are only two people in Scripture we are told to remember. One of them is Jesus...

Luke 22:19 He took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me."

The other is Lot's wife.

It is surprising that we are told to remember her, because we know almost nothing about her. We don't know:

- When she was born
- Where she was born
- Who she was born to
- We don't even know her name

So what are we supposed to remember about her?

We are not supposed to remember that she died. That's no big deal. Everyone dies. The Old Testament is filled with people who died.

We are supposed to remember that she was **SO CLOSE TO SALVATION**.

We could almost say she was saved because:

- The inhabitants of Sodom did not make it out of the city, but she did
- She had the city's destruction behind her
- She had her husband and children at her side
- She had life with a righteous man in front of her

Who wouldn't consider her saved?

But she perished with the people of Sodom.

Similarly, people can be so close to salvation, but still perish with the world.

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Now, before we read the next verse, let me briefly explain something...

A paradox is a statement that seems contradictory, inconsistent, untrue, or even absurd, but is still true...and there are several paradoxes in Scripture. Here are a few of them:

- **Matthew 23:11 Whoever wants to be greatest, should be everyone's servant.**
- **Mark 9:35 Anyone who wants to be first, must be the very last.**
- **2 Corinthians 6:10 As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, yet possessing everything.**
 - If you're sorrowful you're not rejoicing
 - If you're poor you don't make others rich
 - If you have nothing, you don't possess everything
- **2 Corinthians 12:10 and 13:9 When we are weak we are strong.** When you're weak you're not strong.
- **James 1:2 Count it all joy when you fall into various trials.** Joy is the last thing you experience in trials.

Maybe you can guess why we're having this discussion: we've reached one of the most well-known paradoxes in Scripture.

Look at **verse 33**...

Luke 17:33 Whoever seeks to preserve his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life will keep it.

And this brings us to Lesson One...

Lesson One: Give up this life to receive eternal life.

You immediately notice the paradoxical nature of this verse:

- You can't preserve your life and lose it. Preserving your life means you did NOT lose it.
- You can't lose your life and keep it. Losing your life means you did NOT keep it.

It's easier to understand this paradox if you break it in half...

When Jesus says **Whoever seeks to preserve his life will lose it**, He's referring to people who live for this life and pursue what the world offers. These people will not find eternal life.

Then when Jesus says **but whoever loses his life will keep it**, He's referring to people who give up their earthly lives for Him. If we do this we will find eternal life.

It's like Paul said in **Philippians 1:21 that to live is Christ.**

We surrender to Him, inviting Him to use us in whatever ways He deems best.

It's the language of **Romans 12:1**...

Romans 12:1 Present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

We are no longer living for ourselves. We're living for the Lord.

Jim Elliot famously said, *"He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose."*

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Verse 33 flows perfectly from the previous verses, because in the previous verses we have three examples of what verse 33 is describing...and this brings us to lesson two...

Lesson Two: Lot's wife sought to preserve her life but lost it, and Noah and Lot lost their lives to keep them.

Lot's wife looked back to her true home, Sodom, which she valued more than the next life that God had for her.

She is a perfect example of someone who sought to preserve her life but lost it.

On the other hand, Noah and Lot preserved their lives by being willing to lose them:

- Noah was willing to let go of his life in the pre-flood world and get on the ark, and he preserved his life in the process.
- Lot was willing to abandon his life in Sodom, and he preserved his life in the process.

It is a question of what we desire:

- If we desire to preserve our lives in this world, then we will lose our lives.
- But if we are willing to lose our lives for Jesus's sake we will keep them.

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Now the context is the Second Coming, so how does this all relate to it?

Great question!

If we long for Jesus's return, we desire to see this life, as we know it, come to an end so that we can begin the next life in His kingdom. In this way we preserve our lives.

But people who love this life don't want to see Jesus return, because they don't want this life to end. They want to hold onto this life, and in the process they will lose their lives...as we will see in the following verses.

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Please look at **verse 34**...

Luke 17:34 I tell you, in that night there will be two in one bed. One will be taken and the other left. 35 There will be two women grinding together. One will be taken and the other left." 36 Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left

Verse 36 is only in some of your Bibles:

- If you have the KJV it probably contains **verse 36** without a footnote
- If you have the NKJV you probably have a footnote that says the NU omits **verse 36**. The NU is the manuscript used for modern translations, such as the ESV, NIV, or NASB.
- And if you have one of the modern translations, such as the ESV, NIV, or NASB, because they use the NU, say something like, "The oldest manuscripts don't include it **verse 36**," or the "Most reliable manuscripts omit **verse 36**."

It goes outside the scope of this sermon to go into detail about why you will occasionally see a footnote like this dealing with a word, a phrase, or even a verse, such as in this case. But in October and November of last year I taught Sunday school classes on the Bible's reliability and I explain this in detail. I would encourage you to listen to those teachings, and if you have trouble finding them, please let me know.

Here's the good news...

Whether your Bible does or doesn't contain **verse 36** doesn't change anything, because **verse 36** is just another example of what the previous two verses are discussing: one person being taken and another person being left.

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Let me briefly remind you about the prophetic, or future, order of events so these verses make sense...

In the First Coming Jesus spiritually established His kingdom on the earth. At Jesus's Second Coming He will physically establish His kingdom on the earth, and here are the order of events leading up to that and immediately after it, which I put on your bulletins:

- The Rapture of the Church
- The Seven Year Tribulation
- The Second Coming of Christ
- The Battle of Armageddon
- The Millennial Kingdom (the physical kingdom established on the earth)

Now this is where it gets a little confusing...

The verses describe some people being taken and other people being left, which sounds like the rapture. But let me ask you something...

Do your Bibles have headings around **verse 20**?

Probably something like:

- The Coming of the Kingdom
- The Coming of the Kingdom of God
- The Second Coming

The context for these verses is the Second Coming, which is seven years after the Rapture.

So, I am going to give you a lesson that hopefully makes this clear. And this brings us to lesson three...

Lesson Three: People are "taken" to the Battle of Armageddon or "left" to enter the kingdom.

When you think of the people taken away to the Battle of Armageddon to be judged, think of the way the wicked people in Noah's day were taken away by the flood.

Listen to the way the parallel account in Matthew's gospel is worded...

Matthew 24:37 As were the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of Man...39 and they were unaware until the flood came and SWEPT THEM ALL AWAY, so will be the coming of the Son of Man.

So, it says very clearly that the way the people were taken away by the flood looks to the way people are taken away at that Second Coming.

The people who are left, are left to enter the millennial kingdom that Jesus physically establishes on the earth.

Think of these people being left to enjoy a new beginning...

- The way Noah and his family was left to enjoy a new beginning after the whole population of the earth was taken in the flood.
- Or the way Lot and his family were left to enjoy a new beginning after the people in Sodom were destroyed by the fire and brimstone.

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Listen to the way it's worded in the Amplified...

Luke 17:34 I tell you, on that night [when Messiah comes again] there will be two [sleeping] in one bed; the one (the non-believer) will be taken [away in judgment] and the other (the believer) will be left. 35 There will be two women grinding [at the mill] together; the one (the non-believer) will be taken [away in judgment] and the other (the believer) will be left.

The Amplified clarifies that the unbelievers are taken, and the believers are left.

And there are two footnotes on these verses in the Amplified. Listen to this:

1. The first footnote: *"This is not the sudden catching up (or rapture) of believers as described in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 when Christ returns in the air (not to earth), and gathers believers to be with Him."*
This is one of the main differences between the Rapture and the Second Coming:
 - a. At the rapture Jesus meets the church in the air without stepping foot on the earth.
 - b. At the Second Coming Jesus returns to the earth.
2. The second footnote: *"The believers are left and will be with Christ on the earth during the Millennium."*

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Now look what the disciples ask in **verse 37**...

Luke 17:37a And they said to him, "Where, Lord?"

They mean where are the people who are judged taken to?

Luke 17:37b He said to them, "Where the corpse is, there the vultures will gather."

Some Bibles say eagles instead of vultures, because the Greek word can be translated either way, but it's more appropriate to think of vultures because they are the birds that **gather** or circle above corpses.

And this brings us to lesson four...

Lesson Four: Associate Jesus's Second Coming with birds (visibility) and corpses (judgment).

It might seem strange, or even graphic, to associate Jesus's Second Coming with vultures and dead bodies, but when you study it out, it makes perfect sense.

Listen to what God said to Job when He questioned him...

Job 39:27 Is it at your command that the eagle mounts up and makes his nest on high? 28 On the rock he dwells and makes his home, on the rocky crag and stronghold. 29 From there he spies out the prey; his eyes behold it from far away. 30 His young ones suck up blood, and WHERE THE SLAIN ARE, THERE IS HE."

In other words, vultures provide visibility. You can tell where corpses are from great distances, not because you can see the corpse, but because you can see the vultures circling overhead.

Similarly, people will be able to see where the Battle of Armageddon is from great distances, because of the vultures circling overhead.

And the reason the vultures are circling overhead is because the Second Coming is going to result in numerous dead bodies when Jesus destroys His enemies.

Go ahead and turn to **Revelation 19**. We will not turn back to Luke.

This is the Second Coming. We don't have time for me to fully explain all these verses, but you'll get the idea that they vividly portray Christ's holy wrath against sinners.

Let's start at **verse 11**...

Revelation 19:11 Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war.

Jesus has two comings to His people, and both times He comes on animals.

His First Coming...

Zechariah 9:9 Your king is coming to you...humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

This is Jesus's humble first coming to make peace between God and man.

It stands in stark contrast to His Second Coming on **a white horse [to] judge and [make] war**.

God is longsuffering, but His patience is finally exhausted with sinful, rebellious men and He's coming to unleash His fury.

Look at **verse 12**...

Revelation 19:12 His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems, and he has a name written that no one knows but himself. 13 He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is The Word of God.

Whose blood is on Jesus's robe?

It's possible to think back to the cross and see it as Jesus's blood, but the context doesn't support that view. Instead, we should see it as His enemies' blood. The garments look ahead to the slaughter of His enemies.

And Jesus doesn't return alone. Look at **verse 14**...

Revelation 19:14 And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses.

The **armies of heaven** include saints and angels. I could provide lots of verses explaining this, but I'll keep it short with just one for each...

To know saints are with Jesus...

1 Thessalonians 3:13 [the Lord] may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus WITH ALL HIS SAINTS.

To know angels are with Jesus...

Matthew 25:31 When the Son of Man comes in his glory, AND ALL THE ANGELS WITH HIM, then he will sit on his glorious throne.

So as believers we are with Christ, and we are on white horses too, like our King. But even though we are part of the army of heaven, we don't help Jesus in the battle. Notice there's no mention of us having weapons. It's unnecessary because Jesus accomplishes the victory by Himself.

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So now for the most famous battle in Scripture. Even most unbelievers have heard of it. But the truth is that it's anticlimactic. There's never been a more lopsided battle in history.

Look at **verse 15**...

Revelation 19:15a From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron.

Pause here.

We shouldn't think literally of a sword coming out of Jesus's mouth. This is another symbol that's easy to interpret. Scripture as a sword is one of the most common metaphors for God's Word: **Ephesians 6:17 The sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.**

The idea is Jesus wins the battle simply by speaking. Remember He spoke the universe into existence. He can speak to destroy His enemies as well.

Listen to these verses prophesying of this:

- **2 Thessalonians 2:8 The lord Jesus will KILL WITH THE BREATH OF HIS MOUTH and bring to nothing by the appearance of his coming.**
- **Isaiah 11:4 He shall strike the earth with THE ROD OF HIS MOUTH, and with THE BREATH OF HIS LIPS HE SHALL KILL THE WICKED.**

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Look at the rest of **verse 15**...

Revelation 19:15b He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty.

A **winepress** was a trough in which workers stepped on grapes with their bare feet. This is why the word **tread** is used. Then the juice would flow out of the winepress into a vat.

The **winepress** is a vivid symbol describing how Jesus will defeat His enemies:

1. First, Jesus's enemies have about as much strength against Him as grapes do against a heel coming down on them.
2. Second, it pictures the spurting of blood and the awful human carnage that will be present at this battle. We'll see how bad it is in just a moment.

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Look at **verse 16**...

Revelation 19:16 On his robe and on his thigh he has a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords.

In these verses there's been a real emphasis on Jesus's names:

- **11b The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True**
- **12b he has a name written that no one knows but himself.**
- **13b the name by which he is called is The Word of God.**

Now we're told about this **name**. It looks like a title, but it's called a **name**. In ancient society a name revealed a person's character, and so this name emphasizes His sovereignty over all human rulers. It's especially appropriate here when Jesus is about to overthrow all who oppose Him.

The location of the name is fascinating. It's on His thigh where the sword was usually strapped...

Psalm 45:3 Gird your sword ON YOUR THIGH.

The name could be here, in the place of a sword, reminding us that the real sword is the Word that comes out of His mouth.

Since He's riding on a horse, the name on His thigh would be highly visible, like a banner.

Now we move to the next section, which describe the frightening holocaust that's unparalleled in human history...and this brings us to lesson five...

Lesson Five: The Battle of Armageddon is an execution versus a battle.

There's no real conflict. Look at **verse 17**...

Revelation 19:17 Then I saw an angel standing in the sun, and with a loud voice he called to all the birds that fly directly overhead, "Come, gather for the great supper of God,ⁱⁱ 18 to eat the flesh of kings, the flesh of captains, the flesh of mighty men, the flesh of horses and their riders, and the flesh of all men, both free and slave, both small and great."

Now we are introduced to the birds, or vultures, from **Luke 17**.

The Battle of Armageddon begins with an angel summoning these birds, or vultures, to feed on the corpses of those who will be killed. They serve as a cleanup crew, coming in to devour all the human carnage.

By summoning them to do this it shows the angel declaring God's victory before the battle even begins.

You might have noticed the repetition of the word **flesh**. It occurs five times in this verse and then one more time at the end of **verse 21**. God really wants to make sure we don't miss just how bloody this is.

Now we see Jesus's victory over the Antichrist and false prophet...

Revelation 19:19 And I saw the beast and the kings of the earth with their armies gathered to make war against him who was sitting on the horse and against his army.

The **beast** is the Antichrist. He is joined by **the kings of the earth [and] their armies to make war** with Christ.

More than likely they're joined by the people who were taken to the battle as we read in **Luke 17**.

Revelation 19:20 And the beast was captured, and with it the false prophet who in its presence had done the signs by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped its image.ⁱⁱⁱ These two were thrown alive into the lake of fire that burns with sulfur.^{iv}

The **lake of fire** is what we think of as hell. It's the place of eternal punishment for all unrepentant rebels, angelic or human, who refuse to submit to Christ

It doesn't pay to serve the devil. We might previously have thought the devil would be the first inhabitant in hell, but the Antichrist and false prophet end up there 1,000 years before him.^v

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Of all the doctrines of the Christian faith, the doctrine of eternal punishment is one of the most rejected. Sentimentally it might be hard for us to believe in hell – it's hard for me – but Scripture is clear about it, and this is one of those clear places.

Notice it says **These two were THROWN ALIVE into the lake of fire.** This is a strong argument against being annihilated as Jehovah's Witnesses or Mormons would teach

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The last verse discussing the destruction of the armies...

Revelation 19:21 And the rest were slain by the sword that came from the mouth of him who was sitting on the horse, and all the birds were gorged with their flesh.

We see repetition in this verse:

1. First, again, the focus on Jesus speaking and destroying His enemies.
2. Second, again, the focus on the vultures gorging themselves on the corpses.

All remaining sinners in the world will have been executed, and the vultures of will identify the location of the corpses of those taken...just as Jesus said in Luke 17.

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Let me conclude with this...

When Jesus returns to judge His enemies there will be a separation of the saved and the lost:

- The saved will be left to enter the glorious kingdom of God established on the earth.
- The unsaved will be taken away in judgment to the Battle of Armageddon to be executed by Christ.

We want to make sure we are not like those in Noah's day who were taken away by the flood, or those in Lot's day who were destroyed by the fire and brimstone, or like Lot's wife whose heart was so committed to Sodom that she looked back and was killed.

We are regularly observing evidence that our day looks more and more like the days of Noah and the days of Lot.

Jesus can return for His church at any time, so we must be ready.

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If you have any questions, or I can pray for you in any way, I'll be up front after service, and I'd consider it a privilege to be able to speak with you.

Let's pray.

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ⁱ Done:

1. Wiersbe
2. JM
3. Moody
4. Expository
5. [Seven Characteristics of the Coming King, Part 1 \(gty.org\)](http://gty.org)

6. <https://youtu.be/e9RKsaBoURk?t=1515>

7.

ii This supper forms a strong contrast to the marriage supper of the lamb in verses 6 through 10.

iii While there are lots of reasons for the false prophet's judgment, the one mentioned is that he deceived people into receiving the mark and worshiping its image.

iv Fire and brimstone are frequently associated with divine judgment: **Revelation 14:10, 20:10, 21:8, Genesis 19:24, Psalm 11:6, Isaiah 30:33, Ezekiel 38:22, Luke 17:29.**

One other evidence against annihilation is 1,000 years later it says they're still there suffering: **Revelation 20:10 and the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.**

Some other verses making this same point that it's eternal suffering versus annihilation:

- **Revelation 14:11 And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever, and they have no rest, day or night, these worshipers of the beast and its image, and whoever receives the mark of its name."**
- **Isaiah 66:24 "And they shall go out and look on the dead bodies of the men who have rebelled against me. For their worm shall not die, their fire shall not be quenched, and they shall be an abhorrence to all flesh."** (quoted in **Mark 9:48**).

The New Testament says a lot about eternal punishment: **Revelation 14:10-11, Matthew 13:40-42, 25:41, Mark 9:43-48, Luke 3:17, 12:47-48.**

v In a moment the world's armies are without their leaders. **Daniel 7:11 "I watched then because of the sound of the pompous words which the horn (the Antichrist) was speaking; I watched till the beast was slain, and ITS BODY DESTROYED AND GIVEN TO THE BURNING FLAME.**