

“The Days of the Son of Man”

Luke 17:20-37

A famous author enjoyed telling how he loved to visit an old man who gave violin lessons. He loved to visit this old man because he had a kind of homey wisdom that refreshed him. One morning the author walked in and said, “Well, what’s the good news today?” Putting down his violin, the old teacher stepped over to a tuning fork suspended from a cord and struck it a smart blow. “There is the good news for today,” he said. “That, my friend, is the musical note A. It was A all day yesterday, will be A next week, and for a thousand years.”

And you know, that’s true of the kingdom of God too. The patriarchs, the prophets, Jesus, and the apostles spoke of it in many different ways; but it’s always been the same eternal kingdom. It has a past, a present, and a future. Presently, *“It’s the moral and spiritual kingdom which the God of grace is setting up in this fallen world...”*

Some people have mistaken ideas about the kingdom of God. Some think the world will gradually become better and better by human effort, and that will usher in the kingdom of God. They see the kingdom as earthly, political and social. Others think the kingdom of God is not currently functioning; it’s something yet in the future.

In Luke chapter 17 and verse 20 the Pharisees asked Jesus a question about WHEN the kingdom of God would come. Jesus explained to them what they should expect – in the present, in the near future, and in the distant future. He indicated that there would be multiple “days of the Son of Man.” So I’ve titled our study “The Days of the Son of Man.” Listen now as I read the text, **Luke 17:20-37**.

In this text Jesus outlines several STAGES through which the kingdom will progress toward its fullness. Knowing these STAGES will help ensure we’re a part of the kingdom.

The First STAGE (of the days of the Son of Man) is,

The Present

The present is – the time of Jesus’ earthly ministry as it’s recorded for us here in the text and in the Gospels. It began with His birth and ended with His ascension to glory.

In our text the Pharisees are questioning Jesus about the coming of the kingdom. The Gospels tell us the Pharisees and Jesus’ disciples were looking for an earthly king with armies

and pomp, and power. They wanted to see signs and wonders. They had expectations of what the kingdom would look like when it came.

Let's not be too quick to fault them for those expectations. They didn't, as we say, "create them out of thin air." Read the prophets: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, and Zechariah. They all prophesied a literal earthly rule and reign of Messiah.

They prophesied that the new kingdom would be headquartered in Jerusalem; and all the nations of the world would bring their glory into the Holy City. Further, they prophesied the return of Eden-like conditions in the world; complete peace among humans, the animal kingdom, and more. No more extremes of weather; no drought, no floods, and so on. So there were lots of prophecies about physical restoration.

But...Isaiah also predicted God's suffering servant; one who would die for the transgressions of His people. Caiaphas acknowledged this prophecy in John 11:50. In His suffering and death Jesus would be so abused and mistreated that He would be physically unrecognizable. And that abuse and execution would be at the demand of His people.

Jeremiah prophesied that God would "*make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. Not like the covenant I made with their fathers in the day that I took them...out of Egypt.*" This new covenant wouldn't be written on stone tablets but on the hearts of the people so that ALL might KNOW the Lord.

And so the people of Jesus' time embraced the promised Messianic kingdom but rejected the Cross. "How different are we than they? Don't we often prove by our choices that we want the kingdom without the Cross?" Because Jesus' explanation of His present kingdom didn't fit their expectations, most of them missed it. Let's not make the same mistake!

First, Jesus said His kingdom would not follow the pattern of an earthly kingdom. Close watching of external events wouldn't reveal the signs of its coming. The word translated as observation is used only here in the entire New Testament. It was used to describe doctors watching the symptoms of a disease; or by astronomers making careful observations of the heavenly bodies. These physical observations, carefully made as they were, would not be sufficient to view the coming kingdom.

Further, the present kingdom of God was not a geographic location; either here or there. The people of Jesus' day were expecting a physical kingdom. They expected their king to set up his throne in Jerusalem; to rule from there and to deliver them from all their enemies. They saw

the kingdom of God as being imposed by force. There would be outward manifestations of that force. But Jesus said, “No, the kingdom of God is within you.”

Not all translations use the word, within. Some translate it as “the kingdom of God is among you,” or, “in the midst of you.” It seems it can be translated either way. But it’s beneficial to look at how specific words are used other places in the Scripture.

The only other place this word is used in the New Testament is Matthew 23:26. Jesus is rebuking the Pharisees for their emphasis on outward purity at the expense of inward righteousness. He said “*You blind Pharisee, cleanse first that which is (and here’s our word) **within** the cup and platter, that the outside of them may be clean also.*” That can only refer to the inside of the cup.

Jesus is telling the Pharisees and us that the present kingdom of God is something on the inside; it is **primarily spiritual**. It is organic; it springs from the soil of a new nature. This is what Jesus told Nicodemus; “you must be born again.” There must be a change on the inside.

Earlier in his gospel, Luke quotes Jesus as saying “*The kingdom of God is like leaven (or yeast), which a woman took and hid in three measures of flour, until it was all leavened.*” When you put yeast in bread dough, the yeast disappears; it’s no longer visible. But the effects of it are obvious as it reacts with the compounds in the dough and the dough expands.

It’s true, there are (and must be) physical aspects of the kingdom of God. But Jesus’ point here is that they are the effects of the kingdom, not the kingdom itself. Because the Pharisees rejected Jesus’ explanation of the kingdom, they became the source of persecution – persecution that would make the disciples long for “one of the days of the Son of man.” This leads us to...

The Next STAGE (of the days of the Son of Man) is,

The Near-Future

In the remainder of our text, verses 22 to 37 Jesus speaks directly to His disciples. He refers to the stage of His kingdom in the distant future. But He interrupts His discourse, in verse 25, to warn them about the suffering they will experience in the near future (the birth of the Church). This suffering will make them long for the kingdom of the distant future – one of the days of the Son of man; His earthly rule and reign. But before that distant future comes, Jesus must suffer rejection from the present generation.

In verse 25 Jesus makes reference to the near-future; His impending suffering, death, resurrection, and ascension. As I said before, Jesus followers were not totally wrong about the Messianic kingdom the prophets spoke about; they just were wrong in their timing.

Earlier I mentioned Isaiah's prophecy (in chapters 52 and 53) about the suffering servant. Many of the Psalms also spoke of a suffering Messiah. And Jesus repeatedly told His followers that because He suffered, they would suffer too.

In the West we know little about persecution; but our brothers and sisters who suffer greatly for their faith in Christ long for the kingdom of God in the distant future. So should we. Paul, writing to the Romans says *"For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God...And not only the creation, but we ourselves...groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies."*

The final kingdom, the distant-future kingdom, when soul and body will be fully redeemed, is not possible without the near-future kingdom; the suffering of God's people as He builds His church. And like the people of Jesus' day it is a stage of the kingdom we'd like to bypass. But suffering for Christ increases our desire for the fullness of the kingdom of God – the next stage in the days of the Son of Man.

The Final STAGE (of the days of the Son of Man) is,

The Distant Future

We could spend a long time on the remaining verses of this text, but Jesus gives more detailed teaching on this in Luke chapter 21. So we'll just take an overview of the distant future here. The distant future is comprised of the signs leading to the coming of Christ and the consummation of the age.

Jesus points out several characteristics that will be part of this distant future. First, there will be much deception. Jesus reminded the disciples that many will claim special knowledge of the kingdom and will prematurely expect its coming. Some try to link every current event to some prophetic Scripture. "Do not pay attention to them or follow them" is Jesus' command! Most of us alive today have seen those who claim to have special knowledge of that day. They've ALL been wrong.

Jesus further said that day will not come secretly to those anticipating it. Its coming will be like lightning flashing from one end of the heavens to the other; it will be visible to all. There seems to be a mixed reference here to the near future; that is the destruction of Jerusalem and the ending of old ideas about the kingdom, and the final consummation of all things.

Jesus then likens the conditions surrounding this future day to be similar to the days of Noah. The emphasis seems to be on the normalcy of life. The people of Noah's day were unprepared and unconcerned about the truth or the future. Like most people of our day they were just pursuing what we call "the good life." With no concern for their eternal future, this day of the Son of Man will take them by surprise.

Jesus strengthens this warning by his reference to Sodom; especially warning us to remember Lot's wife. Lot's wife was among the few "righteous" ones who escaped from the city before judgment fell. Yet we see clearly that though she left in body, her spirit was really back there. The life of ease and luxury had captured her heart. There was a lingering reluctance to part with present treasures; and the eternal loss was staggering. Hold your "stuff" with an open hand so when the Son of Man comes you can go without regret!

And then, that future day of the Son of Man will be intimate; it will be personal. In the normal interactions of life one will be taken, the other left. Whether evening, morning, midnight, or midday, the prepared will be caught away and the unprepared left wondering what happened.

Now the disciples have one final question; "where shall all this occur?" I appreciate this quote I found in my studies.

"As birds of prey scent out the carrion, so wherever is found a mass of incurable moral and spiritual corruption, there will be seen alighting the ministers of divine judgment,' a proverbial saying terrifically verified at the destruction of Jerusalem, and many times since, though its most tremendous illustration will be at the world's final day."

What lessons can you and I learn as we reflect on these STAGES of the days of the Son of Man? First, the kingdom of God is primarily internal. It is accepting and embracing the spiritual transformation wrought by grace through faith. As Jesus said, the kingdom we're part of, His kingdom, is not of this world. It does not act like, function like, or resemble the kingdoms of this world. Instead, from the standpoint of our human nature, it is an upside-down kingdom.

As we are in the near future of our text and waiting for the distant future it is imperative that we remain vigilant. Deception is rampant. The apostle Peter warns us that many will scoff at

the idea of impending judgment. Let's not allow ourselves to be lulled to intellectual and spiritual sleep by the progression of days, months, and years.

An even greater danger is that you and I can become like Lot's wife; so enamored with the things of this world that we lose sight of the eternal. We must not allow material wealth and possessions to be the agents that will harden our hearts and cause that backward look that forfeits heaven. If we do, we will not be ready when the final call comes; and there will be no opportunity to change.

My friend, are you prepared for that final stage of the days of the Son of Man? If not, today is your day of opportunity.