

## What the World is Like before Judgment Falls

Luke 17:20-37

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Just like our world is today, the disciples in Jesus' day were obsessed with the end times. What happens next when the world ends has been a fascination of all cultures in all times throughout human history. And Jesus provides some clarity and guidance about how future events should impact our present living.

A few days ago, I was sent this conversation between a teenager and his father. The teen had recently passed his driving test and wanted to talk to his father about using the family car. So the father offered his son the following deal. "You study your Bible lesson each week, bring up your grades from a C to a B average, do your chores around the house, and get your hair cut. Then we'll talk about the family car."

So his son agreed. A couple months later, his father said, "Son, I've noticed you reading your Bible, you're grades are better than ever, and you've been doing your chores, but I'm disappointed you haven't had a hair cut."

His son said, "You know, Dad, I've been reading about that in the Bible. Seems pretty obvious to me that Moses had long hair; Samson certainly had long hair and so did John the Baptist. There seems to be some cultural evidence that Jesus had long hair as well."

Looked like Dad was cornered. After thinking about it for a moment, his father said, "That's true, but did you notice that wherever Moses and Samson and John the Baptist and Jesus went, they walked?"

That didn't work.

This young man got an education he wasn't expecting.

Well, the Pharisees are at it again. They arrive and once again attempt to stump Jesus. They deliver a rather arrogant, presumptuous challenge to Jesus.

And they're about to get an education they aren't expecting.

What Jesus will teach them, primarily His disciples, is a rather surprising description of what life will be like on earth before judgment falls; what life will be like on earth just prior to His return to set up His kingdom.

Now the Lord's description of those days is recorded in the Gospel by Luke, chapter 17, where we left off last time. We're now in verse 20:

*Being 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, nor will they say, 'Look, here it is!' or 'There!' for behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you."*

*Luke 17:20-21*

The Pharisees were already convinced that Jesus wasn't their Messiah. In recent years, Jewish people had followed false Messiahs.

They assumed that the Messiah would lead a revolt, smash the Roman Empire and restore the glory of Israel.

The Pharisees are wrong, and their timing is off, in fact, by some 2,000 years now.

First, the Messiah will experience a crucifixion in His first coming, and then at His second coming He will experience a coronation.

**Notice down at verse 25 Jesus says:**

*"But first he must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation."*

*Luke 17:25*

But the Pharisees are demanding miraculous evidence: "Let's see some proof that you're about to bring in the kingdom. If you're really the king, isn't it about time we saw evidence? At least show us another miracle!"

Jesus says back in verse 21, **"The kingdom of God is in the midst of you."** In other words, "You're not going to see the kingdom because you're rejecting the King who's standing in the midst of you right now."

"You don't need another miracle; you need to trust me as your Messiah."

Now with that, the Lord pulls over to the side of the cart path, so to speak, and gives His disciples some personal tutoring on what life will be like for those awaiting the coming of His kingdom.

He says to them, **here in verse 22:**

*“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. And they will say to you, ‘Look, there!’ or ‘Look, here!’ Do not go out or follow them. For 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.”*

*Luke 17:22b-24*

What day is Jesus referring? He referring to the day when He returns to planet earth to set up His kingdom.

**Look down at verse 30 where Jesus says:**

*“So will it be on the day when the Son of Man is revealed.”*

*Luke 17:30*

Let’s put verse 24 together with verse 30:

*“So will the Son of Man be in his day.”*

*Luke 17:24*

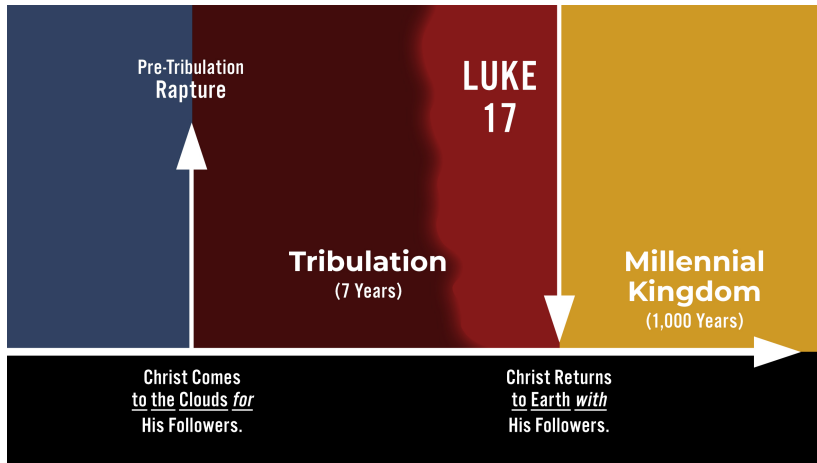
*“So will it be on the day when the Son of Man is revealed.”*

*Luke 17:30*

So from **verse 24 to verse 30**—really to the end of the chapter—Jesus describes what life will be like on earth before judgment falls and His kingdom comes.

Let me put this into a larger framework visually; we don’t know the day or the hour of either the rapture of the church or the return of Christ at the end of the tribulation when He returns to earth, wages war with the antichrist and destroy the unbelieving world and sets up His kingdom.

But we do have a general outline of these major epochs in biblical history.



We are living in the days prior to the rapture of the church.

Just as Noah and Lot, as we'll see in a moment, were rescued from the wrath of God, so the church has been promised to be saved from the tribulation—that seven-year period when the wrath of God is poured out upon the human race.

The rapture of the church will signal the beginning of this 7-year period of tribulation. In fact, the purpose of the tribulation isn't for the church, but to begin regathering Israel as God fulfills His promise to regather the nation, bring them to repentance and restore them in His coming kingdom.

These two events—**The Rapture** and **The Return** of Christ—are two different events in Scripture.

Let me give you several distinctions between the two events.

The rapture takes place, Paul writes, ***in the twinkling of eye (I Corinthians 15:52).***

In other words, it will be **invisible** to the world. The only thing the world will have to do is deal with the effects of millions of Christians disappearing into thin air.

But the return of Christ to earth after the tribulation will be very **visible** to everyone on earth. The Lord will slowly descend with His redeemed to battle the antichrist and then set up His kingdom.

Here's another distinction: the rapture of the church is **private**, but the return of Christ to earth is **public**. In fact, we're told by the prophet Zechariah that ***all Israel will mourn as they watch Him descend, the one whom they pierced (Zechariah 12:10).***

Here's another distinction: the rapture will be **misinterpreted** by the world, but the second coming will be **unmistakable**.

The rapture will be one of the most significantly misinterpreted events ever to take place in human history.

In fact, we're not told how the world will try to explain millions of people disappearing, but we do know the world at large will not repent and follow Christ. In fact, the world seems to move on. That's mystifying to me, frankly.

In my limited imagination, if it happened today, I can see the world being led to believe some massive alien abduction has taken place. And the world will just keep moving on.

Here's another distinction between the rapture and Christ's return to earth: at the rapture of the church, Jesus descends **to the clouds** and then takes His church back to the Father's House (1 Thessalonians 4) but at the end of the Tribulation, Jesus descends all the way **down to earth**.

So, at the rapture, Jesus comes **for** His followers, but when He returns later, we see Him coming **with** His followers (Revelation 19:14).

Here's another distinction: at the rapture, there's **no time to think**. No believer will have time to run inside his house and get his stamp collection—none of that will matter.

But at the second coming, people will have some **time to prepare**, and Jesus will refer to that here in Luke 17, as we'll see in a moment.

***So, here's what Jesus is teaching in Luke 17:***

He's describing what life will be like during the tribulation, just prior to His return to bring judgment upon the unbelieving human race, before setting up His millennial—thousand-year—kingdom on earth.

The description Jesus gives us of life on earth might surprise you.

***Now notice verse 26:***

*“Just as it was in the days of Noah, so will it be in the days of the Son of Man. 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.”*

*Luke 17:26-27*

Now we happen to know a lot more about the days of Noah than this paragraph here, going back to Genesis chapter 6.

- Lawlessness had taken over the world (5);
- The world was saturated with violence (v. 11);
- Wickedness was so rampant that God described it by saying that ***every intention of the thoughts on mankind's heart was only evil continually (v. 5)***

In other words, nobody in the human race, besides Noah and his believing family, had even one pure wholesome thought.

Everyone was corrupt, violent, self-centered, and wicked.

And God effectively said, "I'm starting over."

Well Jesus says, "Life on earth, just prior to My return to set up My kingdom at the end of the tribulation period, will be just like 'the days of Noah.'" And listen, you would expect Him to start quoting Genesis 6. Everybody knew all about Genesis 6.

But instead, Jesus says that life before that day of judgment will look like life does right now.

Jesus doesn't emphasize their wickedness; He emphasizes their indifference to God.

R. Kent Hughes, [Luke: Volume 2](#) (Crossway, 1998), p. 180

He doesn't emphasize their violence; He emphasizes their blindness to spiritual things.

The days of Noah were days—just like now—when warnings from God were considered ridiculous and the thought of judgment from God was considered impossible.

Until it started to rain.

The party stopped with the first pitter-patter of raindrops. And then suddenly the fountains of the deep erupted and a global flood inundated the world.

In fact, it would take just over a year for all the water to run off and fill the oceans and the lakes and the streams before Noah and his family of eight were able to stand on dry land once again.

Let me tell you, this judgment is known around the world today and it has been a warning for thousands of years.

Travel to North America, South America, Europe, Africa, Asia, the Far east, the Middle east, and the Pacific islands, all of them have a version of the flood which has been distorted over time due to a lack of care and a lack of interest.

The Chinese symbol for a boat is eight people inside a floating vessel.

The Peruvians believe that everyone drowned in a flood, except for a few people who became the forefathers of all the different ethnicities.

Cubans have their legend of an old man who learned a flood was coming so he built a boat and filled it with his family and animals.

A Mexican flood tradition tells of a man and his family saved during a flood by floating on a raft he constructed. He sent out a hummingbird to find land, and soon it returned, carrying a branch with green leaves on it.

The Hindus of India tell of a man who built a ship and with his family of eight survived the flood and ran aground on a tall mountain.

Alaskans believe their first ancestor dreamed a flood would destroy the earth. So, he built a raft and brought his family and animals on board. During those ancient days, animals could talk, and they soon complained of the long voyage. “How long is this going to last” they would ask.

Reminds you of your own kids: “Are we there yet?” After all the water subsided, everyone got off the raft, but the animals could no longer speak, as punishment for complaining. You might tell your kids that part.

The judgment of this flood was preceded by 120 years of warning from Noah, ***a preacher of righteousness (2 Peter 2:5).***

And what was life like during the days of Noah? Just like life is today in your town.

Crime? Yes. Wickedness? Yes. But for the most part a nice place to live; some gardening on the side; grilling hamburgers on the weekends, going out with friends; filling your child’s backpack with school supplies; sending out wedding invitations; going to work; planning the next vacation or the next career move.

None of which is wrong; it’s life.

But Jesus delivers the warning that life has a dangerous way of overshadowing the reality of eternal life; busy events distracting people from listening to their troubled soul.

So, they live it up for the here and now, heading toward cataclysmic judgment.

***Jesus goes on now in verse 28:***

*“Likewise, just as it was in the days of Lot—they were eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building, but on the day when Lot went out from Sodom, fire and sulfur rained from heaven and destroyed them all—so will it be on the day when the Son of Man is revealed.*”

Luke 17:28-30

The Bible makes it very clear before sulfur came raining down on Sodom and Gomorrah, we're also given descriptions of their moral evil: the entirety of their cities given over to homosexuality.

In Judaism, for centuries, the flood of Noah and the fall of Sodom and Gomorrah were typically coupled together to show the evil of mankind and the just righteous judgment of God.

***The apostle Peter writes in 2 Peter 2:6 that God:***

*He condemned [the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah] to extinction, making them an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly.*

2 Peter 2:6

God also predicted that Sodom and Gomorrah would never be inhabited again in **Jeremiah 49:18**; this prophecy has come true, and these cities were never rebuilt.

But again, what Jesus is emphasizing here is not their *perversion*, but their *preoccupation*.

Jesus is making a broader judgement here that would have incorporated every generation and every country and every person on the planet.

He's basically saying that humanity is in trouble with God and here's what that trouble looks like:

- people are busy with life, but they never factor God into their cultural or personal lives.
- life is most dangerous when it has nothing to do with God and God is not even missed.

And prior to any judgment from God, mankind is willfully blind to His warnings.

God graciously continues to issue warnings of coming judgement.

The tribulation period is one long seven-year period of warning—over and over again—of the coming judgment when Jesus returns to destroy the antichrist and set up His glorious kingdom.

As it relates to the flood of Noah, the world has gotten the message. The flood narrative, to some degree, is known around the world.



And I think of the modern world which has been reminded as well when Answers in Genesis built that life-size ark in Kentucky. Marsha and I have visited it ourselves. Several million people have visited it, national news has covered it and millions more been reminded of it. I like to think of it as one more modern-day warning of God's judgment.

I also think of the new discoveries related to Sodom and Gomorrah. These two cities were discovered in 1924, excavated in the 1960s and 1970s.

The burn destruction is visible and human bones are still lying there, having been buried under layers of sediment and sand, undisturbed for 2,000 years.

A lot of so-called scholars want to discredit it, deny what it means, explain it away.

But what they can't explain away is the discovery of sulfur balls in that region that are still, to this day flammable.

Our own Shepherds seminary professor of archaeology is posting videos of his discoveries and findings. His video on Sodom and Gomorrah has been viewed nearly 2 million times.

Dr. Kramer was curious about any remnants of these sulfur balls; he had seen two of them in a museum there in the Middle east. And that was about it.

He talked to one scholar who said that the balls of sulfur would have burned up, *unless* they had landed in the water of the Dead Sea nearby, where they would have been preserved.

So, Dr. Kramer correctly understood that that the shoreline of the Dead Sea had receded over the centuries, and he began to explore the sediment and sand inland, between Sodom and Gomorrah and the Dead Sea. He found thousands of sulfur balls preserved in the sediment.

They are found nowhere else on the globe. And that's because they are not man-made or made from some cosmic recipe; they were made by God.

I have one in my study at home. It is a reminder to me that I am to warn my generation that the judgment of God is coming.

Are you safe?

For those who reject Christ and end up alive during the tribulation period, this warning here in Luke 17 is specifically for them. It will also be encouraging to those who come to faith in Christ during the tribulation period.

This will remind them to look for Jesus, who will soon descend and set everything right in His glorious kingdom.

And with that, Jesus now describes that cataclysmic event of His arrival here in verse 30:

*“So will it be on the day when the Son of Man is revealed. 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.”*

*Luke 17:30-31*

Remember, the descent of Christ at this point will be slow enough for all the world to tune in. Every camera will be trained toward the sky as **Revelation 19** unfolds, at the end of the tribulation.

Jesus and the hosts of heaven—that includes you and me—will return with Him as He descends to conquer and be crowned.

Let me break the rest of this passage down into four descriptions of what will take place.

**First, there is Unanticipated suddenness.**

For the unbelieving world, they won't be ready, they'll race home to hide or gather their treasures and run for the hills.

Secondly, there will be **Uncovered loyalties.**

In other words, what matters most to people will be uncovered or exposed.

The unbelieving world will try to gather their possessions; they care more about their stuff than the Savior.

***In fact, Jesus adds this historical note here in verse 32:***

*“Remember Lot’s wife. Whoever seeks to preserve his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life will keep it.”*

*Luke 17:32-33*

You could translate this, “Whoever cares more about keeping the life they’ve always had, they’re going to lose everything.”

And the classic illustration of that was Mrs. Lot.

As she’s ushered out of the city by angels before the city goes up in flames, she turns back. She’s not just curious, she’s resistant. She turns back because she wants to go back.

I've often wondered why she turned into a pillar of salt. We're not told. But consider the fact that salt was something the Old Testament believer added to his offerings to God as a testimony of loyalty to God.

God effectively reveals outwardly what she is inwardly, her loyalty is to Sodom and the life she has back there.

So, you have:

**Unanticipated suddenness;**

**Uncovered loyalties;**

Third:

**Unexpected separations.**

**Verse 34:**

*"I tell you, in that night there will be two in one bed. One will be taken and the other left. There will be two women grinding together. One will be taken and the other left."*

*Luke 17:34-36*

Now you need to remember this isn't the rapture.

The one **taken** isn't taken up to heaven, but *taken away* in judgment, more than likely killed in the judgment of Christ as He descends.

And the one who is **left** has survived the tribulation, placed their faith in the Messiah, and they now are left alive to enter the kingdom.

Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Courageous* (Victor Books, 1989), p. 58

This corresponds with Matthew 25 where Jesus separates the goats from the sheep when He returns.

The goats are **taken** away to judgment and the sheep are **left** to enter into the kingdom.

And what this means is that there are going to be surprising, disturbing, unexpected separations.

**Notice again here in verse 34:**

- **two people are in the same bed**, which indicates a family or marital relationship— one is saved and the other one isn't.

- **two women are working together**, doing the chores of life, indicating friendships—one is saved and the other one is lost.
- **two men are working in the field**; they're in business together, they share the same career, they're on the same floor at the shop—one is a believer and the other is not.

In other words, no one is going into the kingdom because they belong to a family with Christians in it.

No one is going to live with Christ because they have Christian friends or because they work with Christians.

It's possible to live with Christians and work with Christians and hang out with Christians and be heading for the judgment of God.

I knew this full well as an unconverted teenager. As a 16-year-old, I'd slip out of my bed at night and peek into my younger brothers' room to see if they were still there. I knew that just because they were going to heaven didn't mean I was.

On this terrible day of judgment, spouses and family members and close friends, and business associates will be separated, and that separation will last forever.

One more description here. I'll call it:

### **Universal devastation.**

#### ***The disciples want to know where the unbelievers are taken, verse 37:***

*And they said to him, "Where, Lord?" He said to them, "Where the corpse is, there the vultures will gather."*

*Luke 17:37*

In other words, it's going to be a place known for death and decay and utter devastation.

No doubt the world objects that Jesus is giving a really grim reply here. "The vultures are waiting!"

Of course He's giving a grim response. One author writes, "If Jesus is speaking the truth about judgment, how could it be anything other than grim?"

Davis, p. 74

And I would agree.

Judgment is grim. It's painful. It's devastating.

- You don't put cushions on an electric chair hoping people will be more comfortable with it.
- You don't paint smiley faces on these sulfur balls hoping people will be happy about it.

The judgment of God is coming. It has come in the past, in different ways, as Jesus has pointed out, and it's going to come again, at different times as well.

But here's the good news: you can avoid all of it. You never have to face the judgment of God.

You can avoid it all by coming to Christ, who took the wrath of God on your behalf, who died for you so that you can be forgiven, so you can live with Him forever.

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