

Chapter Seventeen (17:1-36)

THE SON OF MAN ON PREPARING FOR THE END OF THE WORLD

IDEAS TO INVESTIGATE:

1. What is a "temptation" and why is it inevitable in this world (17:1-2)?
2. Can a person really uproot trees if he has faith (17:5-6)?
3. Why is a servant "unworthy" when he has done his duty (17:10)?
4. Why speak of the leper being "cleansed" and then "healed" (17:14-15)?
5. What did Jesus mean, "the kingdom of God is in the midst of you" (17:21)?
6. What is Jesus warning the disciples about in 17:22-25?
7. What are we supposed to remember about Lot's wife (17:32)?

SECTION 1

Be Good (17:1-10)

17 And he said to his disciples, "Temptations to sin are sure to come; but woe to him by whom they come! ²It would be better for him if a millstone were hung round his neck and he were cast into the sea, than that he should cause one of these little ones to sin. ³Take heed to yourselves; if your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him; ⁴and if he sins against you seven times in the day, and turns to you seven times, and says, 'I repent,' you must forgive him."

⁵ The apostles said to the Lord, "Increase your faith!" ⁶And the Lord said, "If you had faith as a grain of mustard seed, you could say to this sycamine tree, 'Be rooted up, and be planted in the sea,' and it would obey you."

⁷ "Will any one of you, who has a servant plowing or keeping sheep, say to him when he has come in from the field, 'Come at once and sit down at the table'? ⁸Will he not rather say to him, 'Prepare supper for me, and gird yourself and serve me, till I eat and drink; and afterward you shall eat and drink'? ⁹Does he thank the servant because he did what was commanded? ¹⁰So you also, when you have done all that is commanded you, say, 'We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty.'"

17:1-2 Forbearance: Jesus warns His disciples against the careless, in-temperate lack of self-control that puts a stumbling-block in the way of someone else. The Greek word Luke uses here is *skandala*; it is the word from which we get the English word, *scandal* or *scandalize*. The Greek

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word literally means, "a trap, or snare." The Greek word most often used in the New Testament for "temptation" is *perisamos*, which means to "test, try" and sometimes means "the subjective desire to sin and thus put God's warnings to the test." God sometimes sends or allows a *perisamos* ("temptation or test") to come (cf. Heb. 11:17; James 1:2-4; James 1:12). But God does not entice or lure anyone to break His commandments (James 1:13-15); enticement to sin is the work of Satan (Rev. 2:9; I Pet. 5:8-9; I Thess. 3:5; I Cor. 7:5; Mt. 4:1; Lk. 4:2; Mk. 1:13). The Lord is warning that men may allow themselves to become tools of Satan and put "stumbling-blocks" in the way of other men. Even disciples of Jesus are vulnerable; if they do not trust completely in His word, to enticing others to sin.

So long as there are people in rebellion against God's will stumbling-blocks are inevitable. Anything done contrary to the will of God is a potential enticement to sin for someone else. Age, social status, economic circumstances and educational level has no bearing on whether a disciple may or may not be instrumental in putting a stumbling-block in another's way. Temptation to entice someone else does not discriminate. It may come upon us in a rush, galloping boldly at us, trying to overpower us—or it may come seductively, discreetly, slithering through the brush—but it comes. It comes every day and in all circumstances! Temptation is almost always camouflaged. Evil artfully masquerades as good. Evil appropriates the highest levels of life (sex, food, possessiveness) even religion, as its vehicles of expression.

Temptation may distort reality. This is the way the devil worked on Eve; ". . . has God said. . . ." Satan distorted the nature of God, portraying Him as a bully or an egomaniac. Some distort the real nature of God by imagining Him to be an indulgent grandfather type. Distort the nature of God and the reality of sin gets distorted. Temptation is more intense when we are near that which entices us to rebel against God. The case of David with Bathsheba is a classic. This is so obvious but so seldom acknowledged by men. As one person puts it: "It is not wise for a dieter to hang around a bakery!" "Flee youthful lusts. . . ." (II Tim. 2:22) is exemplified in Joseph's refusal to be seduced by Potiphar's wife. Temptation may be more effective when we have no fellowship with other believers. We are dependent upon the other members of "the body" for proper function (I Cor. 12:14ff.). Temptation may come at a time of great spiritual experience or triumph. It was right after David's greatest victories that he was tempted with Bathsheba; Israel's deliverance from Egypt was just before they made their golden calves; Elijah's despondency came right after his victories over the prophets of Baal; Jesus' most intense temptations apparently came right after His baptism and God's approving voice. Temptation may be based on the assumption that God's word is subject to our judgment, (cf. Jer. 5:12; Amos 9:10). The Corinthians fell into the trap. This is

the temptation to read the Bible to prove our point of view rather than to honestly determine what the author actually intended to say! The more we contemplate that which tempts us, the more apt we are to fall to it. Sin is like a birth. First the temptation is "conceived" through the wish or desire (lust); then it "grows" as it is harbored or nursed; finally it is "born" as the sinful act itself. Just as a child is *alive* before birth, so sin is alive in the "conception" stage—it doesn't have to be an action to be a sin! Repentance from sin necessitates a change of mind, a change or renunciation of the desire.

The subject of stumbling-blocks is very serious. The apostles had a great deal to say about it. The possibility that any man might tempt another to sin is always there. "No man is an island. . . ." said the poet, but the Holy Spirit said it long before the poet when Paul wrote, "None of us lives to himself, and none of us dies to himself," (Rom. 14:7). Paul wrote this in a context dealing with stumbling-blocks (Rom. 14:1—15:13). Things innocent enough in themselves, engaged in without regard for another person's scruples, may become stumbling-blocks and therefore sins. If we cause another to stumble, even though the thing we have done may not be against our own conscience, we have sinned against Christ (cf. I Cor. 8:11-13). There are four main chapters in the New Testament which amplify and elucidate Christ's warnings here—they are Romans 14, I Corinthians 8, 9, and 10. The reader must study these chapters in connection with the Lord's imperative warning in Luke 17:1-2.

To be trapped by a stumbling-block is sin. The man who succumbs to a temptation is guilty. But Jesus goes even further behind the sin to search out the one who put the temptation there! The one who put the stumbling-block in the way of the sinner is even more guilty than the sinner. There are those who not only do sinful things "but also approve of others practicing them" (Rom. 1:32). Peter's refusal to accept the will of God for the crucifixion of the Messiah became a "stumbling-block" to Jesus (Mt. 16:23; Mk. 8:33). Now the Lord did *not* say that the punishment of such a one is that he should have a great millstone hanged about his neck and cast into the sea. He said it would be *better* for such a one if that happened to him! It would be better to cut off one's right hand than allow it to cause anyone to stumble (Mt. 5:29-30)! It would be better to starve to death than to cause someone to stumble (Rom. 14:13-21; I Cor. 8:13; I Cor. 9:12, etc.). No wonder Jesus said, ". . . woe to him by whom they (stumbling-blocks) come!"

The "little ones" are not necessarily children, but all "little" or weak or beginning ones in their relationship to God. The apostles discuss the "weak" brother in their writings on stumbling-blocks. Some, because of conscience or custom, see things and actions as contrary to God's will which others do not so see. The truly mature Christian will forbear and

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even forego his own liberty in such areas rather than cause another to violate his conscience, and cause him to be enticed to sin. On the other hand the "weak" brother must not be guilty of a legalism which insists on binding his scruples (opinions) on the other who has been set free in Christ. Legalism may be equally as serious as carelessness. Legalism may in itself become a stumbling-block!

17:3-4 Forgiveness: What if the reverse should be true; suppose some one puts a stumbling-block in your way, sins against you or offends you. What is to be your attitude toward him? First, I am to *rebuke* him (Gr. *epitimeson*, lit. "charge him to do the honorable thing"). I am to point out to him that the thing he has done is wrong, dishonorable. Then, if he repents, I am to forgive him. Actually, we must have a willingness to forgive even if our enemy does not repent. If he does not repent, our willingness to forgive will not profit him but it will certainly profit us, for it will make us sons of our Father who is in heaven (Mt. 5:43-48). Christ died willingly forgiving all men their sins against God, but His forgiveness is of no avail to those who do not repent. One cannot forgive another unless he is willing, in some sense, to bear the consequences of the offense done to him. The only way Christ could forgive us was to bear our sins in His body on the tree. If we are unwilling to forgive until the humiliation, hurt or offense is transferred back to the offender, we really have not forgiven!

One of our greatest temptations is to be unforgiving. As a matter of fact, to be unforgiving casts a sure stumbling-block in the path of another. Forgiveness is not a virtue of the worldly-minded. The pagan philosophy is: Be kind to friends, take vengeance on enemies. Even in the Old Testament, man's forgiveness of man is seldom mentioned. Some Jews appealed to Deut. 23:6 and Ezra 9:12 to indicate that forgiveness of some was *not* necessary. Forgiveness is uniquely a Christian virtue. Forgiveness is a *must* for Christ's followers (Mt. 6:12). No limit can be set to the extent of forgiveness (Mt. 18:21-22). Even if a man says he repents, and offends you seven times in one day, and says he repents seven times, you are to forgive him seven times. Love does not keep records of the evil done against it (I Cor. 13:5). Better for your character to forgive seven times, even if the offender appear to you to be insincere, than by refusing to forgive and thus cast a stumbling-block in his way.

To forgive one another "as God in Christ forgives us . . ." (Eph. 4:32) demands humility and self-denial. It requires a realistic acknowledgement of sin and stumbling-blocks. It requires loving others as we love ourselves. The Christian's responsibility toward someone who has offended him is not created by the fact that he has been wronged, but by the fact that the sinner has sinned and harmed himself! That is how God forgives us. Forgiveness is a two-way street. It is one part of a relationship that must be mutual if both parties are to be profited. Repentance is the other part.

The desired effect of forgiveness is to restore a relationship of harmony and peace. But that effect cannot be accomplished without repentance by the one forgiven. Failure of the offender to repent does not release the offended from his obligation to extend forgiveness because an unforgiving heart is also an impenitent heart! The unforgiving heart is not prepared for the end of the world!

17:5-6 Fidelity: All the apostles were shocked. Jesus had spoken startling words. He had challenged them to a life on the level of heaven itself. He was preparing them for the end of this world and the coming of the next. When the initial shock had passed, they cried out, "Increase our faith!" What they were saying was, "Lord, if we are to live like that, to forgive like that, we must have more faith." Their appeal was an intelligent one. Faith is what it takes to live like that. Any man can live without concern for others. Any person can say selfishly, "What I do is my business, and if anyone is offended by it, that is their tough luck." Any person who thinks this world is all there is to life is sure to seek vengeance, hold grudges and be unforgiving. Only the person who believes God's word about atonement, judgment and the world to come has the power to live on the spiritual level Jesus described.

Jesus' reply is very much in contrast with the way men think of faith. Men say, "increase our faith. . . ." as if more or bigger is better. Jesus said, in essence, "It is not more faith you need, it is better faith." Faith is not quantitative, but qualitative. He did not even give them any formula by which they might "increase" the amount of faith. He said faith as a grain of mustard seed was what they needed. Note, He did not say faith "as big" or "as small" as a grain of mustard seed. Jesus used the mustard seed to illustrate a faith that has life in it—seed—like faith. Life that is in a grain of mustard seed is powerful enough to overcome obstacles which seem insurmountable and produce a plant. Put a mustard seed into fertile soil and it will grow. If a clod or a rock gets in the way it will grow around it and come forth. The answer of Jesus was a strong rebuke which underscored the fact of their own personal responsibility for the quality of their faith. Christ cannot do for them what they must willingly do for themselves. He never *gave* them faith. He performed some miracles to prove Who He was and that His every word could be believed. But they had to do the believing. He always left people (including the apostles) to wrestle with their problems themselves by applying whatever lived in their hearts. If faith in Him lived there, any obstacle could be overcome; if unbelief lived there, even the smallest obstacle spelled defeat. Jesus is not talking about miracles of faith—but *works* of faith. He did not mean that everyone who believes can go around uprooting trees and dropping them into the oceans, literally. After all, trees and mountains are not man's real obstacles anyway! The real mountains to men are temptation, sin, guilt,

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death. Men can move mountains and trees with bulldozers—but not guilt. The most impossible things are possible and the absolutely unattainable things may belong to men who believe and follow the will of God. To keep from falling into temptation or from tempting someone else a person needs not miracles but a living, working faith. Jesus Himself overcame temptation, not by miracles, but by faith in God's word (cf. comments on Lk. 4:1-13). To forgive unlimitedly one needs not miracles, but a working trust in Christ's promises. We can live on heaven's plane if we believe. The kingdom of God on earth, the church, is supposed to be living on heaven's plane—it is in the world, but not of the world.

17:7-10 Fealty: Jesus told the parable of the "Unprofitable Servant" to warn all His disciples against thinking they can ever *merit* equal status with their Lord. God, by His grace through Jesus, may grant men joint heirship with Him, but they can never merit it. They may be called in at some time to sit down and eat, but they can never go in demanding it. Because they can never do more than they are obligated to do. The obligation of man is to believe and obey perfectly the Creator. Man is commanded to produce perfect service—he does not do so, therefore, he is an unprofitable servant. Until a servant has done *more* than is expected of him or that which is commanded of him he can expect no merit or reward. God owns us outright. We are His by right of creation. We are doubly His by redemptive grace. He does not owe us anything—we owe Him everything and *more*. This parable is aimed at erasing that kind of self-righteousness Jesus saw in the Pharisees and all who follow in their steps. The Pharisees arrogantly considered themselves to have done all they were commanded to do. They believed they had earned the right to *demand* from God a seat at the Master's table. This is no way to prepare for the end of the world. The way to prepare for being "called" in by the Master is to consider oneself an unprofitable servant, dependent totally upon the grace and goodness of God!

We must constantly remind ourselves that whatever God cares to give us is up to Him. There is nothing coming to us of good which we deserve! We can take no credit for our world, our wisdom, our opportunities. We are indebted to Him for everything. Even our expressions of thanks to Him add to our indebtedness to Him because even our thanks is borrowed. We would not even know how to say thanks as we should without his revealed Word. There are many things we would like to say to Him and should say to Him, but can't, which His Spirit says for us (cf. Rom. 8:26-27)! If we give Him our life we are only letting Him have what already belongs to Him. Only when we admit that we are born destitute (cf. I Tim. 6:6-7) of all merit and that we earn are we prepared to appreciate God. Only when we recognize He *gave* us our freedom to choose Him or not shall we be good servants. When we have this perspective, work in His vineyard is welcomed as a privilege and not as a necessary evil. Work

ceases to be work and become a way to express appreciation when we acknowledge that we are unprofitable servants.

To the non-Christian, "everything" must seem quite a price to pay for serving Jesus. But, in the light of God's "everything" it is nothing at all (cf. Rom. 8:31-39). It is the least we can do and live with our consciences—and not be depressed with unexpressed gratitude.

SECTION 2

Grateful (17:11-19)

11 On the way to Jerusalem he was passing along between Samaria and Galilee. ¹²And as he entered a village, he was met by ten lepers, who stood at a distance ¹³and lifted up their voices and said, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us." ¹⁴When he saw them he said to them, "Go and show yourselves to the priest." And as they went they were cleansed. ¹⁵Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice; ¹⁶and he fell on his face at Jesus' feet, giving him thanks. Now he was a Samaritan. ¹⁷Then said Jesus, "Were not ten cleansed? Where are the nine? ¹⁸Was not one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?" ¹⁹And he said to him, "Rise and go your way; your faith has made you well."

17:11-14 Made Well: A harmonization of the gospel accounts indicates that between Luke 17:10 and 17:11, Jesus was called to Bethany where His friend Lazarus had died. Jesus went there and raised Lazarus from the tomb. The account of this is found in John 11:1-57. From Bethany (which was a suburb of Jerusalem) Jesus retired to a remote area of Judea for a brief rest because the fateful Passover week of His arrest and crucifixion was only a few days away. The crowds were already gathering and forming caravans in the north (Galilee). Jesus wanted one final opportunity to evangelize, so He went through Samaria into Galilee to join one of these caravans bound for Jerusalem and the Passover. The time was the spring of A.D. 30. Luke takes up the record of His ministry here.

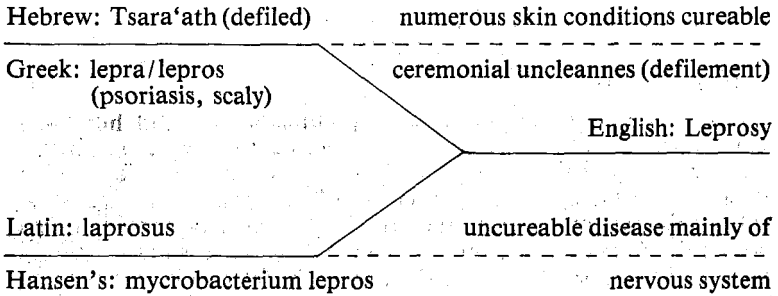
Before considering the incident of the ten lepers the student should refer to comments on Luke 5:12-26 concerning the information on Biblical leprosy:

- a. There is no mention of leprosy (defilement) after the death and resurrection of our Lord. Old Testament Law was nailed to the cross and fulfilled. When that was accomplished there was no such thing as ceremonial defilement for "psoriasis" or "scaly sores." The apostles healed the sick, cast out demons, raised the dead, caused the blind to see, the lame to walk, the deaf to hear, the dumb to speak, but *never cleansed a leper!* We therefore conclude that the significance of "psoriasis" in the Old Testament and in Jesus'

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ministry ("leprosy") was the need to be ceremonially cleansed, not healed. Biblical leprosy was not Hansen's disease.

- b. Actually the English word, leprosy, is a misnomer for both the Old Testament *tzara'ath*, for the New Testament *lepra* or *lepros*, and for modern Hansen's disease!



- c. What these ten "lepers" had was not Hansen's disease and a rotting away of the flesh, but a scaly skin disease like psoriasis which by Old Testament law caused them to be declared "defiled" and in need primarily of being declared, "cleansed."

Ten lepers came to meet Jesus as He entered a village near the border of Galilee and Samaria. Lepers were religiously defiled and therefore banned from all associations with other people. They haunted the roads leading into cities and villages (they were not allowed to live within the walls of the towns). Frequently they lived in caves. Whenever healthy people came near them they were to cry out, "Ame, Ame!" ("Unclean, unclean"). These lepers stood "at a distance" and cried out to Jesus, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us." Jesus healed them of their disease. Nine of them looked and found themselves "cleansed" (healed, too, of course) which apparently emphasizes they were Jews and thus restored to ceremonial cleanness with their healing. All they needed to be permitted to worship again in the Temple and to be restored to society was official declaration from a priest. One of them, a Samaritan, was also "healed" but since he was not allowed in the Temple of the Jews anyway, there was no need to emphasize that he had been "cleansed." No doubt, even the Samaritans (because of their close adherence to the first five books of Moses) enjoined some social bans against lepers too, thus the only companionship this Samaritan could find was nine leprous Jews. It is a sad commentary on human nature, but true nevertheless, that human misery is the only condition that seems to draw people together *without* racial distinctions. Had these Jews and this Samaritan not been suffering the social ostracization of leprosy, they would probably never have associated with one another.

Some interesting observations about this healing:

- a. Jesus did not even touch the persons healed. He simply said a word and they were healed.
- b. Jesus did not pray for them to be healed, or to have faith.
- c. He sent them away before the miracle took place—to test their faith.
- d. He healed nine people whom He knew (by divine foreknowledge) would be ungrateful, hoping they would be grateful.
- e. He demanded no money, no praise, no testimonies—nothing—as a result of their healing.
- f. The one with the least privilege was thankful.
- g. The ingratitude of the nine apparently shocked and hurt Jesus.

17:15-19 Made Whole: Jesus addressed the Samaritan who returned to thank Him, “Rise and go your faith has made you well.” Actually Luke reports Jesus as saying, “. . . your faith has saved you,” using the Greek word *sodzo* which may be translated, “saved, preserved, made whole, delivered, set free, rescue.” It was the Samaritan’s attitude that “saved” him, or set him free, not the healing. Miracles do not save, attitudes do. The statement of Jesus implies that although the nine others were healed, they were not saved because they did not have the attitude of thanksgiving. Ingratitude is a symptom of disbelief. Ingratitude leads to futility and darkening of the mind in unbelief (cf. Romans 1:21). Nine of these lepers wanted to be cleansed (or healed), but that is all they wanted. They simply wanted to exploit the power of Jesus for their own selfish ends. They really did not wish any further commitment to Him. Ingratitude belies a condition of the heart making it impossible to receive grace. The ungrateful person refuses to acknowledge receipt of anything by grace. But it is only by grace that man can be saved. The man not willing to be saved totally by grace, really does not obey the will of Christ by faith—he obeys it hoping to merit salvation by self-righteousness.

SECTION 3

Guarded (17:20-37)

20 Being asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God was coming he answered them, “The kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be observed; ²¹nor will they say, ‘Lo, here it is!’ or ‘There!’ for behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you.”

22 And 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, ‘Lo there!’ or ‘Lo, here!’ Do not go, do not 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. ²⁶As it was in the days of Noah, so will it be in the days of the

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Son of man. ²⁷They ate, they drank, they married, they were given in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all. ²⁸Likewise as it was in the days of Lot—they ate, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they built, ²⁹but on the day when Lot went out from Sodom fire and sulphur 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 him who is on the housetop, with his goods in the house, not come down to take them away; and likewise let him who is in the field not turn back. ³²Remember Lot's wife. ³³Whoever seeks to gain his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life will preserve 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 body is, there the eagles will be gathered together."

17:20-25 Missing the Kingdom: Jesus had said a great deal about the "kingdom" of God in His ministry. He had worked many miracles; He taught with great wisdom and grace. Many believed He was speaking as a prophet of God and that He had some divine information about it. Others, however, were antagonistic toward Him because His teachings about the "kingdom" did not fit their materialistic, militaristic views. Jesus said much about the kingdom, but so far as they could see, He had done nothing to bring about what the Jews expected of the golden age of the Messiah. The Jewish Apocrypha reveals two fundamental expectations in Jewish tradition about the Messianic Age (or, the Kingdom of God):

- a. Politics — the Messiah will be a warrior, he will conquer the enemies of the Jewish people, subdue them and rule over them in an earthly kingdom with the throne in Jerusalem. He will kill many of the Gentiles and reduce all the others to servanthood to Israel.
- b. Prosperity — There will be great material prosperity for Israel. Some of the prosperity will take on supernatural proportions in the golden age of the Messiah. All Jews would be blessed with an abundance of worldly wealth.

So, when Jesus proclaimed Himself as the "Anointed One" (the Messiah) the majority of the Jewish people expected Him to show signs according to their concept of the "kingdom."

Jesus informs these Pharisees that they are completely unprepared for the messianic age because they are not on guard spiritually. They are watching for a materialistic kingdom but the Messiah's kingdom is not "of" this world—it is spiritual. Luke uses an interesting word to report Jesus' answer. He uses the word *paratereseos* which is translated "signs to be observed." The word is most often used to mean "watching with hostility" (cf. Mk. 3:2; Lk. 6:7; 14:1; 20:20; Acts 9:24 and Gal. 4:10). What Jesus

is saying then is that the kingdom of God is not recognizable by those watching for it with views hostile to it. Those who are looking for it with a worldly-minded concept are unable to see it because it is a spiritual kingdom. Pilate could not see Jesus' kingdom (Jn. 18:33-38) because it was a spiritual kingdom. His kingdom is not provincial—not localizable—because it is not earthly. His kingdom is wherever the King is in body or Spirit. His kingdom was right then in the very midst of the Pharisees because the King was there. But they did not see it. His kingdom is not at Jerusalem or on Mt. Gerizim, but in spirit and in truth (cf. Jn. 4). His kingdom is His rule in the hearts of men and is therefore universal.

Even His own disciples will be tempted to want an earthly utopia in place of a spiritual kingdom. The King will have to leave His disciples for a while and go back to heaven. The absence of the King will especially pressure His citizens to want Him to come back and set up an earthly Eden. Men will try to seduce the King's subjects into thinking that His kingdom is an earthly one and that it has been set up "Here" or "There." But Jesus' disciples must not let down their spiritual guard. They must not be seduced into thinking the kingdom is worldly in nature or they shall not be prepared for the ultimate manifestation of His "other-worldly" kingdom.

17:26-37 Manifestation of the Kingdom: Some day the Son of man will come back, bodily, to destroy the world and give the consummate manifestation of His kingdom. When the King comes back there will be no doubt by anyone as to the true essence of His kingdom. It will be revealed in a flash of brilliance like the lightning lightens the sky. In the meantime, the kingdom does exist in the world. The Spirit of Christ is ruling in that kingdom as He rules in the hearts and lives of men and women. But the world goes blindly on in its way of materialism unable to see the kingdom because it is spiritual. Some will try to say, "Lo, there!" or, "Lo, here!" or, "He will be here when you see this sign or that sign. . . ." but do not go running off after them. But keep your spiritual guard up. God does not operate according to man's concepts or man's time-tables. Christ never really stated times or seasons for His return. As a matter of fact, He stated that He would return when the world's society was functioning normally! The ultimate, final manifestation of His kingdom will not be preceded by any abnormal, extra-ordinary "signs" pointing to a definite time. It will be just like the days preceding the flood in Noah's time. There were no extra-ordinary signs that God was going to destroy the world before the flood. The only warning was the promise of God through the preaching of Noah. In Noah's day life went on its normal path. People married, built, ate and drank. Suddenly the end came. Business as usual—and without a signal, the end was there. So will the coming of the Son of man be. "The Son of man is coming at an hour you do not expect" (Mt. 24:44). "Of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven nor

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the Son, but the Father only" (Mt. 24:36; Mk. 10:32-33). If men cannot see the signs of His kingdom while it is here in the world, and surrender to it, they would not surrender to it in faith and obedience should spectacular signs be given to precede its final manifestation.

The final manifestation of the Son of man in His kingdom will be just like the days of Lot. There will be people still clinging to this world and its goods as if it were the only world. People who will not renounce all their worldly goods now for the kingdom will not be prepared to do so when the end comes. Remember Lot's wife! She had invested her life in Sodom, not in the spiritual heritage of her uncle Abraham. She could not give up this world.

The time to turn loose of this world's pull is now. When the Son of man reveals His kingdom for the final time it will be too late. And since no one knows when He will reveal His kingdom for the final time, since it could be the very moment you are reading this sentence, it is imperative that you and I lose our lives for His sake every day, every hour. If you are a disciple of Jesus you must be prepared every moment to leave all your worldly possessions behind. You must also be prepared to be separated from all your friends and relatives who are hostile to the kingdom. Because when the Son of man comes the great judgment of separation will take place. "One will be taken and one left." This is not to be taken literally, of course, that out of every bed one will be taken and the other left. In some beds and in some kitchens ("grinding at the stone") perhaps all will be taken, or all will be left. The idea is that those who have seen the spiritual kingdom and become members of it by faith and obedience will be taken—while those who have not seen it and are clinging to this world will be left to be destroyed with it. Would Jesus sneak up on the world? Yes! He is coming "as a thief in the night" (Mt. 24:27-51; 25:1-13; I Thess. 5:2-3; II Pet. 3:8-10). Thieves do not announce their coming ahead of time. If He came tonight would you go with Him? Is there anything or anyone you couldn't leave behind in order to go with Him? If there is, you aren't ready—you've let your spiritual guard down.

All this eschatological imagery excited the disciples so they eagerly asked Jesus, "Where will all this take place Lord?" Jesus replied, "Where the body is, there the eagles will be gathered." Wherever the dead are is where the vultures gather. The most important thing about Biblical eschatology is its emphasis on the certainty of the end of this world and the judgment. Where (and when) the rotten comes needs dealing with, there the Lord will come and deal with it—which is, of course, all over! The Lord's return will be instantaneous and universal. Jesus never spoke of His final coming in terms of time or place (see comments on Lk. 21), but of condition. There is only one way to be certain Jesus is coming again—that is to take His word for it. He promised, and His promise is authenticated by His

resurrection from the dead (Acts 17:30-31). That is the only sign this evil world will be given (cf. Mt. 12:38-42; Lk. 11:29-32). It is spiritually recognized and spiritually anticipated and comes neither at the first nor finally with "signs" perceivable by carnally-minded people.

Obviously, Luke 17:26-37 indicates Jesus does not expect to find "the faith" universally triumphant on the earth when He returns (cf. Lk. 18:8 which is connected to this discussion). There will be some (perhaps the majority) who will be indifferent or who have lost heart. Only those who have prayed and endured and kept up their spiritual guard will be vindicated (declared to have been right all along) when He comes back. Only those are prepared for the end.

STUDY STIMULATORS:

1. Just how careful must we be in our conduct in not causing someone else to stumble?
2. Does the "weaker brother" have any responsibility in the area of scruples?
3. Can you forgive like Christ forgave—even when you know the offender will not accept it? What if you don't?
4. How much does the willingness to forgive demand of you?
5. Why does it take faith to forgive?
6. Why doesn't Jesus *give* faith? Do miracles produce faith? If we had more miracles, wouldn't we have more faith?
7. Do you ever catch yourself thinking you are a worthy servant? Are you?
8. Does the church today need to be on guard against misidentifying the kingdom? How?
9. Is it possible that there are religious teachers today showing "signs" that the kingdom will come physically or materially "here" and "there"? What should you do about that?
10. If Jesus came to the world at midnight tonight, could you leave *all* your worldly possessions, even some of your kinfolk, and go with Him? He won't force you to, you know!