



# Central Peninsula Church

Catalog No.  
1286-52  
Luke 17:20-37  
Mark Mitchell  
February 12, 2006

## The Kingdom—Already and Not Yet

SERIES: *A Savior for All People*

Let me start by asking you a few questions:

*How many of you really believe Jesus will one day return?*

*How many of you believe he could return any time?*

*How many of you gave any serious thought to that this week?*

It's that last one that gets us, isn't it? While most of us believe that Jesus will come back and that could happen at any time, very few of us give much thought to that in our daily life, myself included.

It's kind of like a volcano. Volcanos are disasters waiting to happen. A ton of stuff happens beneath the surface, which scientists track, before the thing erupts. Mount St. Helens had a huge chamber of molten magma cooking beneath it for years before it erupted in 1980 and killed 60 people. Today, Mt. Rainer has a similar profile. But nobody in little nearby towns like Orting, Washington seem to care because they don't want to let go of the lives they live there. When asked to account for the incredible destruction caused by volcanos, a research scientist observed, "When a volcano is silent for many years, people forget that it's a volcano and begin to treat it like a mountain."

We do that as well. We ignore the warnings of Scripture. Though we live on a volcano, we treat it like it's a mountain. Someone has calculated that one out of every 30 verses in the Bible mentions the subject of the end of the world. In the NT there are well over 300 references to the return of Christ. If we really believed he was coming back, we would want to be ready every day.

It's not that people aren't interested in this subject. Oh, we're real fascinated by it. Look at what we read. In the entire decade of the 1970's the book that sold more copies than any other was *The Late Great Planet Earth*, which was all about the end times. And of course the *Left Behind* series has sold about 75 million copies in the last ten years. We're interested, but more like a science fiction novel. When it comes right down to it, it doesn't really impact much of what we do.

This morning, as we continue our study in the gospel of Luke, we see that Jesus confronted a somewhat similar situation. Turn with me to Luke 17:20-37. In this passage, Jesus will first address the Pharisees on this issue and then he will address his own disciples. And he has a very different message for each.

### I. The "already" of the kingdom

Let's start by reading vv. 20-21. "Now having been questioned by the Pharisees as to when the kingdom of God was coming, He answered them and said, 'The kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be observed; nor will they say, "Look, here it is!" or "There it is!" For behold, the kingdom of God is in your midst.'" The Pharisees want to know when the kingdom of God is coming. "When will God bring about His glorious rule?" The Pharisees believed this would come about when the Messiah arrived. They believed he would come in a powerful way and rescue Israel from the hands of the nations. They looked at passages like the one in Daniel 7:27: "Then the sovereignty, the dominion, and the greatness of all the kingdoms under the whole heaven will be given to the people of the saints of the Highest One. His kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom, and the dominions will serve and obey Him" (Dan.7:27). That's what they were looking forward to when the Messiah came.

Jesus responds to them and says the kingdom is not going to come in the way you think it is. It's not going to come with observable signs and data. You're not going to be able to study the signs of the times and figure out when he's coming. It's not going to start like a political movement where you can say, "Here it is," or "There it is." It's not going to come with a lot of fanfare.

Instead, Jesus says, the kingdom of God is in your midst. If you have the NIV it says the kingdom of God is "within you." That's one way to translate this, but that's not what Jesus meant. The kingdom of God is never described in the Bible as something that is inside of you, rather we're inside of it. And Jesus would never say to the unbelieving Pharisees, that the kingdom of God was within them. God wasn't ruling in their hearts. So, a better way to translate this is as the NASB does: "the kingdom of God is in your midst," or as the NLT says, "The kingdom of God is among you."

He's saying, "You're looking out there for signs of the kingdom, but you don't realize it's right under your nose." The kingdom was standing in their midst in the person and work of Jesus. They were looking up in the sky for the Messiah-King, but he was right there in front of them. This is what Jesus meant in chapter 12 when he said, "When you see a cloud rising in the west, immediately you say, 'A shower is coming,' and so it turns out. And when you see a south wind blowing, you say, 'It will be a hot day,' and it turns out that way. You

**hypocrites! You know how to analyze the appearance of the earth and the sky, but why do you not analyze this present time?"** (vv. 54–56).

Remember what Jesus said when he started preaching? Remember his message? He said to people, **"The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand..."** (Mk. 1:15). The coming of Christ brought the kingdom near to people, but the Pharisees were missing it.

This happens today as well. I've seen people get all caught up in end times hysteria. They read all the books and they know all the charts, but when you really look at their lives there is little evidence that Christ is ruling in their hearts. They study the newspaper and get excited because they find fulfillment to prophecy in every major disaster and calamity, but their lives are a disaster. There have even been people who go into greater and greater debt without any worry because their soon departure from planet earth will provide the perfect escape from financial responsibility. Don't get so caught up in the details of how he will one day come back and rule that you forget that he wants to rule in your heart today. W. Barclay once said, "The best way to prepare for the coming of Christ is never to forget the presence of Christ."

One of the things that the Pharisees failed to realize about the coming of the kingdom is that it has both an "already" and a "not yet" aspect to it. It's already here in the first coming of Jesus and his desire to rule in our hearts today, but it's "not yet" here because we're still waiting for his second coming where the kingdom will be consummated.

The Pharisees were too focused on the "not yet" and missed the "already." But most of us have the opposite problem—the "not yet" rarely even crosses our mind. So Jesus turns and addresses his disciples starting in v. 22, he talks about his future second coming. He says five things about it.

## **II. The "not yet" of the kingdom**

**A. Jesus' return will come after a long delay:** The first thing he says is that it will take place after a long delay. Look at vv. 22–23. **"And He said to the disciples, 'The days will come when you will long to see one of the days of the Son of Man, and you will not see it. They will say to you, "Look there! Look here!" Do not go away, and do not run after them.'**" Jesus says a time is coming when you disciples will long to see me come again, but you won't be here to see it. He predicts that they will go through hard times which make them ache for him to come back and make things right. He was right. They would all suffer intense persecution. Most all of them would be killed for their faith. And successive

generations of disciples have gone through the same things. And whenever you suffer you long to have him come back and set things right. I think that's why WE often don't really long for his coming, because we don't really have to suffer that much. Life is pretty good here. Why should I want to leave? It's suffering that makes us ache for him. But it also makes us vulnerable. And so Jesus warns against being seduced by prophecy experts who say, "There he is!" or "Here he is!" It's like on March 29, 2000 when Benny Hinn announced the Jesus would make a physical appearance on the platform of an upcoming crusade. It's tempting to fall for that \*#&%, but Jesus says, "Don't go!"

This long delay is also the reason some people mock the whole idea of his coming back. The apostle Peter dealt with this. He said, **"Know this first of all, that in the last days mockers will come with their mocking, following after their own lusts, and saying, 'Where is the promise of His coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all continues just as it was from the beginning of creation'"** (2 Pt. 3:3,4). And then a few verses later he adds, **"But do not let this one fact escape your notice, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance"** (2 Pt. 3:8,9). So don't let the long delay lull you to sleep. What we're in is just a gracious little window of opportunity to repent.

**B. Jesus' return will be unmistakable:** The second thing he says is that his return will be unmistakable. Look at v. 24. **"For just like the lightning, when it flashes out of one part of the sky, shines to the other part of the sky, so will the Son of Man be in His day."** Jesus calls himself the Son of Man here because that was the term Daniel used to speak of the Messiah. He says, when the Son of Man shows up no one will miss it. Imagine a 24,000 mile long lightning bolt tearing through the sky, simultaneously seen by people in Africa, South America, Greenland and Southeast Asia. There will be no doubt in anyone's mind what's happening. Some people talk about the "secret rapture of the church." Well, this isn't a secret. No one will wonder, "Gee, I wonder if this is it." No, it will be unmistakable.

**C. Jesus' return will follow his suffering:** But before that happens, before Jesus comes in glory, something else has to happen. The third thing Jesus says is that his return will follow his suffering. Look at v. 25. **"But first He must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation."** Before his glorious reign, there would have to be humiliation and suffering. That Jesus was to be despised and rejected was repeatedly prophesied in the OT Scriptures. That was the price he had to pay for our salvation, and it didn't take him by surprise. Isaiah said 500 years before Christ, **"He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, and by His**

scourging we are healed” (Is.53:6). Jesus knew that so he says that before he returns in glory the present generation will reject him.

**D. Jesus’ return will find many unprepared:** This rejection of Christ would actually continue right up until the end, to the extent that when he finally does come many won’t be prepared. This is the fourth thing he says in vv. 26–30.

**"And just as it happened in the days of Noah, so it will be also in the days of the Son of Man: they were eating, they were drinking, they were marrying, they were being given in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all. It was the same as happened in the days of Lot: they were eating, they were drinking, they were buying, they were selling, they were planting, they were building; but on the day that Lot went out from Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven and destroyed them all. It will be just the same on the day that the Son of Man is revealed.**

Jesus uses two OT examples to make his point that his coming will find many unprepared, and the result will be judgment and destruction. The people of Noah’s day were not prepared for the flood and so when it came it destroyed them. The people of Sodom and Gomorah were not prepared for fire and brimstone from heaven. This is scary stuff. Kind of like a volcano. The return of Jesus will not be good news for many.

Notice how Jesus describes them. He doesn’t describe them as awful sinners. He doesn’t say anything at all about sinful behavior. Instead, he talks about everyday life—eating, drinking, buying, selling, working and getting married. Those are not bad things, those are good things that we all do. The problem is, that’s all they thought about. That IS their life. The problem is NOT sin; it’s indifference. It’s funny, we can be preoccupied with good things and be really responsible and miss out on the one thing that in the end really matters. Does this sound familiar to anyone? Isn’t this where we live? We get all caught up in our jobs and paying bills and arranging rides to soccer games and fixing up the house and planning the trip to Tahoe and making sure that we change the oil in our car. All good things. But deadly things if we let them numb us to the reality that judgment is coming.

It’s interesting, Noah was no paragon of virtue. Neither was Lot. If you really study their lives they were rascals. Noah drank too much. Lot was a terrible father. Those guys weren’t rescued from destruction because they were morally superior to their contemporaries. They were rescued because they believed God’s word that judgment was coming and they were willing to let go of the things everyone else thought mattered so they could have the one thing that really did matter. That’s what made the difference.

That’s why Jesus says in v. 31–33. **"On that day, the**

**one who is on the housetop and whose goods are the house must not go down to take them out; a likewise the one who is in the field must not turn back. Remember Lot’s wife. Whoever seeks to keep his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life will preserve it."** Remember what Lot’s wife did? As she and her husband were fleeing from Sodom, she ignored God’s warning NOT to look back and turn into a pillar of salt. Her looking back was symbolic of her attachment to this world. People who are attached to this world that, like Lot’s wife, they won’t even look back and try to recover some of their goods on the day Jesus returns will lose their life. Can you imagine doing that? It sounds kind of goofy—Jesus appears in the clouds as lightning rips through the sky and someone says, "Will you wait just a minute. I need to go grab my IPOD." It sounds pretty bizarre, but the point is that attachments to things is really stupid but real and it’s the thing, along with all preoccupation with all the normal activities of this life, that will do us in. Like Lot’s wife, we can have just enough double-mindedness to cause us to look back to something that we think matters and in doing so lose what matters the most. It’s those who, like Noah and Lot, are willing to lose everything, will preserve their life.

**F. Jesus’ return will separate humanity:** At the end there will be separation between those who are ready and those who are not. Look at vv. 34–37. **"I tell you, on that night there will be two in one bed; one will be taken and the other will be left. There will be two women grinding at the same mill; one will be taken and the other will be left. Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other will be left. And answering they said to Him, 'Where the Lord?' And He said to them, 'Where the body is, there the vultures will be gathered.'" Notice once again that people are just doing their normal things—sleeping, working, etc. One is done at night and the other in the day—we don’t know if Jesus will return in the day or night. But when he comes, some will be taken and some will be left. It doesn’t matter how close they were, husband and wife could be sleeping together in bed, father and son could be working together in the field, mother and daughter could be working together at the mill, and all of a sudden one is taken and the other is left. Like Noah was taken and locked up in the ark, and like Lot was taken out of Sodom, so some will be taken away to meet Christ and spend eternity with him. Others will be left for destruction as the people of Noah’s day and Lot’s day were.**

The disciples are really into this so they want to know where this is going to happen. They’re focused on the place, but Jesus’ answer focuses not on the place but on the effects. "Where the body is, there the vultures will gather." It’s kind of like a flash flood—you don’t

know where it's going to happen until you see the effects when it's all over. Vultures come around after the carnage. In the same way, you will know where judgment has taken place after it's over and you see the effects.

## **CONCLUSION**

I started out this morning by asking how many of you had given much thought this week to the possibility that Christ could return at any time. Now I would ask you, based on what we have heard Jesus say this morning, what difference would it have made if you had?

You certainly wouldn't have been caught up in end times hysteria. You wouldn't have been looking for newspaper clippings on how the events of today point to some kind of date or time of his coming. You wouldn't be looking for Jesus to show up in person on the platform of some preacher. You wouldn't be so wrapped up in the future coming of Christ that you ignored the present lordship of Christ. You would keep the balance between the "already" and the "not yet" of his kingdom.

What I think you would do and I would do if we really lived our lives in light of his coming is that we would be like those who visit another country. Do you know what I mean? Last year I went to Cambodia and I spent about a week there. It was a great place to visit. It was so interesting. I loved trying out all the different foods. The bat was delicious! I loved just watching the people and learning about them. And of course I was there to do ministry so I also loved going all out for a week to do what God had called me to do. But the one thing about being in a place like that is you know you're not home. You're never really all that comfortable. The language, the food, the weather, the way of life, you're never very comfortable. You certainly don't get that attached to the place. You can't wait to get home.

I think that's how we would live everyday if we lived in light of his anytime coming. I think we would live in this world and enjoy this world and be engaged with this world. But I think we would know that we're just here for a little while and were not home. I think we would pour ourselves into what God has called us to do. I think we would do what Noah and Lot did—tell everyone we can that this world's going down and you better get ready. I certainly don't think we would get very attached to this place.

I must tell you that's hard for me. It's hard for me because if I am honest, for the most part, I really like it here. I like the house that I live in. I like the way my family is right now. I like watching my kids play sports. I like driving my son to school. I like rooting for the Giants and the Niners. I like the way this church is right now. So I have to fight every day to stay unattached; I have to fight every day to remember Lot's wife who had just enough double mindedness in her to cause her to look back to something that she thought mattered and in doing so lose what mattered the most.