

CONCERNING THE WAY

April 17, 2012

LESSON 136: THE GOSPEL OF LUKE



Chapter 17

Luke 17:1-2 Jesus said to his disciples, "It is inevitable that temptations to sin will come, but how terrible it will be for the person through whom they come! (2) It would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck and he were thrown into the sea than for him to cause one of these little ones to sin."

- Jesus was saying here that you can't avoid temptations, but make sure you're not the one doing the tempting!
- The Greek method of capital punishment was to hang a heavy millstone (a heavy stone used for grinding grain) around the neck of the condemned man and then throw him into the sea to drown.
- "Little ones" – in this story in Matthew 18:1-6, Jesus calls a little child to Himself, but He could also be referring to people who are like children spiritually, those who are immature in the faith and could easily be deceived (also see Luke 10:21, Mark 10:24).
- Considering the context, the sinning referred to is "not believing" that Jesus was the Messiah. Jesus had already said that the Pharisees were not only refusing to enter the kingdom but were also keeping others from entering (Luke 11:52).
- God is serious about causing someone else to sin. That's why I think there must be an especially horrible lower level of hell where drug dealers will be sent. But we should examine ourselves – where are we leading people to? Is your life causing someone to stumble? Your children?

Luke 17:3-4 "Watch yourselves! If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him. (4) Even if he sins against you seven times in a day and comes back to you seven times and says, 'I repent,' you must forgive him."

- The Rabbis had a saying that if you forgave someone three times, you were a perfect man. The Christian standard takes the Rabbinic standard, doubles it and adds one; but this isn't about numbers, Jesus means that the believer's standard of forgiveness must go way beyond the best the world can do.
- Notice the key here is if the person comes to you and repents, we should never refuse to forgive. Every believer should want to restore a relationship quickly instead of holding back forgiveness.

Luke 17:5-6 Then the apostles said to the Lord, "Give us more faith!" (6) The Lord replied, "If you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you could say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and planted in the sea,' and it would obey you!"

- The disciples must have been overwhelmed by what Jesus just said, and asked Jesus for more faith, He answered that they needed not more faith but the right kind of faith. Even the smallest amount of faith (like a mustard seed, the smallest seed) could do amazingly miraculous things, such as uprooting a mulberry tree, a tree with deep roots.
- Remember that it was the eastern custom to use language in the most vivid possible way to get a point

across. Jesus was saying that something that looks completely impossible becomes possible, if it is done with faith. We must always remember that we are never alone in the things we attempt to do for Him, but that we have God and all his power at our disposal (Philippians 4:13).

Luke 17:7-10 "Suppose a man among you has a servant plowing or watching sheep. Would he say to him when he comes in from the field, 'Come at once and have something to eat'? (8) Of course not. Instead, he would say to him, 'Get dinner ready for me, and put on your apron and wait on me until I eat and drink. Then you can eat and drink.' (9) He doesn't praise the servant for doing what was commanded, does he? (10) That's the way it is with you. When you have done everything you were ordered to do, say, 'We are worthless servants. We have done only what we ought to have done.'"

- There are people that think that because they try to follow the Sermon on the Mount and are good neighbors and try to love people, that someday God is going to pat them on the back and say, "What a good person you are! You have earned your way to heaven." If you keep the Ten Commandments and the Sermon on the Mount, which you cannot, you are doing only what you are supposed to do. Salvation is a gift, you can't work for it.
- This is simply the attitude we should have when we do things to serve Christ. When we do our best, we've just done our duty. God doesn't owe us any reward, although He will reward us. But as slaves of Christ, we owe Him everything, we are indebted to Him (Romans 1:14-15, 8:13, 15:1, 1 John 4:11, Hebrews 5:12, 1 John 2:6).

Luke 17:11-19 One day, Jesus was traveling along the border between Samaria and Galilee on the way to Jerusalem. (12) As he was going into a village, ten lepers met him. They stood at a distance (13) and shouted, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!" (14) When he saw them, he told them, "Go and show yourselves to the priests." While they were going, they were made clean. (15) But one of them, when he saw that he was healed, came back and praised God with a loud voice. (16) He fell on his face at Jesus' feet and thanked him. Now the man was a Samaritan. (17) Jesus asked, "Ten men were made clean, weren't they? Where are the other nine? (18) Was none of them found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?" (19) Then he told the man, "Get up, and go home! Your faith has made you well."

- The lepers stood far off (see Leviticus 13:45-46; Numbers 5:2.) There was no specified distance to keep, but I've read one authority that said that, when he was upwind of a healthy person, the leper should stand at least fifty yards away. Lepers lived completely isolated lives, but banded together.
- Only one of the men—a foreigner, a Samaritan—came back to thank Jesus. This one understood the significance of what had been done for him. He was praising God and he threw himself at Jesus' feet, an attitude of worship. He apparently understood that Jesus is God, because he put his faith in Him.
- The lack of gratitude by the other nine was typical of the rejection of His ministry by the Jewish nation. He alone had the power to cleanse the nation and make it ceremonially clean. But, the nation did not respond properly to Him. The nation accepted the things that Jesus could do (such as heal them and feed them), but it did not want to accept Him as Messiah. But those outside the nation (such as this Samaritan leper—a person twice as repulsive to the Jews) were responding.
- Abraham Lincoln once said that ingratitude was one of the greatest sins. This story shows how ungrateful people can be. The lepers came to Jesus desperate to be healed; he cured them; and nine never came back to give thanks. So often, once a person has got what he wants, he never comes back.

- Sometimes we pray desperately for something; God answers our prayer, time passes and we forget God. We forget to be grateful. God gave us his only Son and often we never give Him even a word of thanks. The best thanks we can give him is to try to deserve his goodness and his mercy a little better. "Praise the Lord, O my soul, and do not forget all his kind deeds." (Psalm 103:2.)
- And we don't just do this with God, but other people. We are not grateful to our parents, or with other people who have blessed us in some way. And it's not enough to just mumble a "thanks", but we need to, like this Samaritan, come back and with a loud voice and sincere heart thank them. It is not necessary to fall at their feet and worship them, though! That is reserved for our Savior!

Luke 17:20-21 Once Jesus was asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come. He answered them, "The kingdom of God is not coming with a visible display. (21) People won't say, 'Look! Here it is!' or 'There it is!' For the kingdom of God is among you."

- This was a logical question to ask, because He had been preaching for quite some time that the kingdom was near. First he said that you would not be able to tell the coming of the kingdom by signs to watch for. The Jews were always looking for signs. But Jesus was saying, "I'm the sign!".
- Some versions like the King James and the NIV translate verse 21 as "the kingdom of God is within you", which is inaccurate and has caused many people to be confused and misled by what Jesus was saying here. The Pharisees were the ones asking the question and they had rejected Jesus and His offer of the kingdom, so to tell them that the kingdom was within the Pharisees makes no sense. Better translations use "among you" or "in the midst of you" or "near to you", which is more accurate to the original Greek text. The best Greek scholars say the force of the expression is "within your reach." It has been on its way and has arrived, but it has not started yet.
- This refers to Jesus Himself. Jesus' point was that He was standing right in their midst. He is the embodiment of the Kingdom, and most people did not recognize Him. All they needed to do was acknowledge that He was the Messiah who could bring in the kingdom—and then the kingdom would start.
- So this is not referring to a spiritual kingdom. That is not to say that there isn't a spiritual aspect of the kingdom of God. When we are born again (John 3:3) we are born spiritually into the kingdom of God.

Luke 17:22-25 Then he said to the disciples, "The time will come when you will long to see one of the days of the Son of Man, but you will not see it. (23) People will say to you, 'Look! There he is!' or 'Look! Here he is!' Don't go and chase after him. (24) For just as lightning flashes and shines from one end of the sky to the other, so will the Son of Man be in his day. (25) But first he must suffer a great deal and be rejected by this generation."

- Jesus then turns to His disciples and gives them several facts about the Kingdom. First He tells them that a time would come when they would long to see Jesus return, but they would not see it. This is directed to the disciples, who did not live to see Christ's return, but we also must be patient as we look for Him to return. We know Christ will return someday, but even though there will be times we wonder, "how long?" we must realize that God's timing is not our timing.
- Then He says that you'll never have to wonder if the Kingdom has come or not. When it comes, everyone will know it. It's not only a spiritual kingdom, but a physical one that the whole world will see.
- Jesus said His appearance will be like lightning across the whole sky, no one will miss that. In Matthew's

account of this discussion, we get more detail:

Matthew 24:29-30 "Immediately after the suffering of those days, 'The sun will be darkened, the moon will not give its light, the stars will fall from the sky, and the powers of heaven will be shaken loose.' (30) Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all the tribes of the earth will mourn when they see 'the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven' with power and great glory.

- The signs will occur during the Tribulation period before the kingdom comes, as Jesus describes here. The sign of the kingdom will be the coming of the King, and everyone will see and know who it is. The ones who are not prepared for Him will mourn.
- But, in verse 25 of Luke 17, Jesus says that, before the kingdom comes, He will suffer greatly and be rejected. This is a very clear doctrine of the postponement of the kingdom. If the Jews had accepted Jesus as Messiah, the Kingdom would have started then, but because they rejected and killed their Messiah, it was postponed. It will still come, just exactly as the many Old Testament prophecies speak about, but it has now been delayed for over 2,000 years, during which time the age of the Church has been going on, a mystery (something not before revealed) to the Old Testament prophets.

Luke 17:26-30 "Just as it was in the days of Noah, so it will be in the days of the Son of Man. (27) People were eating, drinking, marrying, and being given in marriage right up to the day when Noah went into the ark. Then the flood came and destroyed all of them. (28) So it was in the days of Lot. People were eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building. (29) But on the day when Lot left Sodom, fire and sulfur rained from heaven and destroyed all of them. (30) The day when the Son of Man is revealed will be like that.

- There's nothing wrong with the things Jesus mentions in verse 27 and 28. But the problem was they were doing all these things without God. They thought He did not exist, and were not prepared for the end of their lives, when judgment waited for them.
- It's interesting that Jesus uses the example of Lot here. In that story God delayed judgment on Sodom and Gomorrah until the righteous people were taken out of there. They were rescued before the judgment occurred. I believe that is a picture of the rapture of the Church. Before the Tribulation period, which Jesus describes in more detail in Matthew 24, believers will be rescued before judgment falls on the earth.
- Jesus compared the coming of the kingdom to the coming of the flood in Noah's day and to the coming of judgment on Sodom. By bringing up these two events, Jesus was stressing the judgmental phase of the kingdom. When He comes again to establish His kingdom, people will be judged to see if they will be allowed to enter it. Jesus reminded His disciples that people in Noah's day were not prepared for the Flood, and so they were completely destroyed (Genesis 6). It will be the same problem when the kingdom comes—people will not be ready. Keep in mind Jesus is not speaking of the Rapture, but about His 2nd coming to the earth, after the Tribulation period.
- Days of Noah - many of the features of the days of Noah and Lot are definitely recurring today, telling us that the return of Christ may be soon. It's true that all of these things have always existed, but they seem to be increasing exponentially and by the time just before Christ's return it will be as bad as it was in the time before the flood. They include the following:
 - 1. Unrestrained physical appetites (Luke 17:27)

- 2. Secularism (Luke 17:28) – the world wants to live life as if there is no God
- 3. Disregard of marriage (Matthew 24:38) – the assumption of this verse is that people were going ahead and getting married but without understanding that God created it as a sacred union between a man and a woman. Today it has been reduced to simply a civil contract between two people of any sex, and even thought of as not even necessary by many.
- 4. Uniformitarianism (2 Peter 3:2-6, Hebrews 11:7) – the world today thinks that things have always been the same in the history of the universe – it is the basis for the theory of evolution. People believe that God has not miraculously intervened in history and never will.
- 5. Disobedience (1 Peter 3:20)
- 6. Ungodliness (Jude 15)
- 7. Unbelief (2 Peter 2:5)
- 8. Blasphemy (Jude 15)
- 9. Population increase (Genesis 6:1, 11)
- 10. Hedonism (Genesis 4:21) – society becoming more and more self-indulgent, pleasure-seeking, decadent
- 11. Technology (Daniel 12:4)
- 12. Violence (Genesis 6:11, 13)
- 13. Corruption (Genesis 6:12)
- 14. Sexual Promiscuity (Genesis 4:19; 6:2)
- 15. Homosexuality (Genesis 19:4-5)
- 16. Organized Satanic activity (Genesis 6:1-4)

Luke 17:31-33 "The person who is on the housetop that day must not come down to get the belongings out of his house. The person in the field, too, must not turn back. (32) Remember Lot's wife! (33) Whoever tries to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life will preserve it.

- Jesus here confirms that the amazing story of Lot's wife really happened (Genesis 19:26).
- Jesus tells His followers that people should not be attached to their material things at the time of the coming of the kingdom because they, like Lot's wife, will be judged for that. People who are working or relaxing on their roofs (many of which are flat in Israel) should not try to get things out of their houses when "that day" comes. People working in the fields shouldn't go to their houses to try to save their possessions, there will be no time. So whoever tries to keep his life by going back for his things will lose his life.
- In Matthew 24, Jesus calls this period of time The Great Tribulation. Matthew gives us much more of the discussion that Jesus had with His disciples about this future time:

Matthew 24:4-20 And Jesus answered and said to them, "See to it that no one misleads you. (5) "For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and will mislead many. (6) "You will be hearing of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not frightened, for those things must take place, but that is not yet the end. (7) "For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and in various places there will be famines and earthquakes. (8) "But all these things are merely the beginning of birth pangs. (9) "Then they will deliver you to tribulation, and will kill you, and you will be hated by all nations because of My name. (10) "At that time many will fall away and will betray one another and hate one another. (11) "Many false prophets will arise and will mislead many. (12) "Because lawlessness is increased, most people's love will grow cold. (13) "But the one who endures to the end, he will be saved. (14) "This gospel of

the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all the nations, and then the end will come. (15) "Therefore when you see the ABOMINATION OF DESOLATION which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand), (16) then those who are in Judea must flee to the mountains. (17) "Whoever is on the housetop must not go down to get the things out that are in his house. (18) "Whoever is in the field must not turn back to get his cloak. (19) "But woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days! (20) "But pray that your flight will not be in the winter, or on a Sabbath.

- We know from Daniel that the Abomination of Desolation will take place halfway through the 7-year Tribulation period. That is when the antichrist apparently will enter the Jewish temple and declare himself as God (2 Thessalonians 2:3-4). Jesus warned that future generation of Jews in Israel that when that happens, it's time to "get out of Dodge" (Jerusalem, actually), not even to go back for their belongings, because this is when the antichrist will turn on the Jews and break his covenant with them. As Jesus goes on to say in Matthew:

Matthew 24:21-22 For at that time there will be great suffering, the kind that has not happened from the beginning of the world until now and certainly will never happen again. (22) If those days had not been limited, no life would be saved. But for the sake of the elect, those days will be limited.

- We've done a much more thorough study on Matthew 24 & 25, the Olivet Discourse, which you can find on the concerningtheway.com web site, so we won't dissect all these Matthew passages. This last 3 ½ years of the 7 year Tribulation is called the Great Tribulation ("great suffering" here). Jesus said that this period of time will be unlike anything that has ever happened before. The prophets Daniel, Isaiah, Ezekiel, and others prophesied about it. Jesus spoke about it to His disciples. One of those disciples, John, had a vision about this coming Tribulation, which he wrote down in the book of Revelation.

Luke 17:34-37 I tell you, two people will be in the same bed that night. One will be taken, and the other will be left behind. (35) Two women will be grinding grain together. One will be taken, and the other will be left behind." (36) Two people will be in a field. One will be taken, and the other will be left behind. (37) Then they asked him, "Where, Lord, will this take place?" He told them, "Wherever there's a body, there the vultures will gather."

- Jesus said that, at the end of the Tribulation period, when He comes back to begin the Kingdom, some will be taken into judgment. In some parts of the world it will be nighttime (people will be in... bed); in other parts it will be daytime (people will be going about their daily work, such as grinding grain or working in the field).
- This is definitely not the "rapture", or "catching away" of the Church that Jesus is speaking of here (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18). These people are not being taken away to meet Jesus and "forever be with the Lord", but taken away to judgment. Those who are "left behind" here will enter the Millennial Kingdom.
- The return of the Lord, like His first coming, will involve many events stretched over a period of time. It will be started by the sudden catching up of believers out of the unbelieving world (1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:10). So the Lord often urged His disciples (including us) always to be watchful and ready for His coming (e.g., Luke 21:36), a warning that would be pointless with any other interpretation of end times

Scriptures.

- The disciples asked where these people would be taken. Jesus' answer, where there is a dead body, there the vultures will gather—has been interpreted in different ways. It seems best to understand that Jesus was just confirming that these people would be taken into judgment. Like a dead body causes vultures to “gather” on it, so dead people are condemned to judgment if they are not ready for the kingdom. This also may be a reference to the carnage and judgment of Armageddon, which John describes in Revelation:

Revelation 19:11-21 Then I saw heaven standing open, and there was a white horse! Its rider is named Faithful and True. He administers justice and wages war righteously. (12) His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many royal crowns. He has a name written on him that nobody knows except himself. (13) He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is called the Word of God. (14) The armies of heaven, wearing fine linen, white and pure, follow him on white horses. (15) A sharp sword comes out of his mouth to strike down the nations. He will rule them with an iron rod and tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty. (16) On his robe and his thigh he has a name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS (17) Then I saw an angel standing in the sun. He cried out in a loud voice to all the birds flying overhead, "Come! Gather for the great supper of God. (18) Eat the flesh of kings, the flesh of commanders, the flesh of warriors, the flesh of horses and their riders, and the flesh of all people, both free and slaves, both unimportant and important." (19) Then I saw the beast, the kings of the earth, and their armies gathered to wage war against the rider on the horse and his army. (20) The beast was captured, along with the false prophet who had performed signs on its behalf. By these signs the false prophet had deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and worshiped its image. Both of them were thrown alive into the lake of fire that burns with sulfur. (21) The rest were killed by the sword that belonged to the rider on the horse and that came from his mouth, and all the birds gorged themselves with their flesh.

- This will be the final event of the great tribulation, when the rebels of the earth are all destroyed by Christ at Armageddon, and “all the birds gorged themselves with their flesh” (Revelation 19:21).

So, this is a sobering warning to the Jews by Jesus about what would be happening when He returns to establish His kingdom. Those who are not ready, who have not accepted Him as Messiah, will be destroyed and taken away to judgment. Those who have prepared themselves by believing in Jesus will enter into the Kingdom.

Jesus was speaking of the time just before His return, and the message is directed toward those who will be living in the time of the Great Tribulation. I believe the Bible teaches that those who have trusted in Christ for their salvation will already be in heaven with Him at that time, and will return with Him to the earth (verse 14 above). But the message is still relevant to us today. We also need to be faithful, to recognize the signs of the times, and to live so that we are ready for Christ's return. We should be looking for the coming of the Lord.

1John 2:18 Children, it is the last hour; and just as you heard that antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have appeared; from this we know that it is the last hour.

1 Thessalonians 4:16-18 For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. (17) Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord. (18) Therefore comfort one another with these words.