

Title: **THE DISTINGUISHING GRACE OF GOD**

Text: Luke 17:26-37

Introduction:

Let's begin in Luke 17:20. The Lord Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem to lay down his life for us, to die as our Substitute, "*the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God.*" This passage in Luke (vv. 20-37) is thought by many to be an abbreviated version of our Lord's Olivet Discourse given in Matthew's gospel (Matt. 24 and 25) because there are portions used in this passage of it that are exactly the same. But that is a mistake. Though here some of the words used by the Master are the same, the occasion is different.

- In Matthew 24 our Lord had already come to Jerusalem. Here he is on his way to Jerusalem, passing through the regions of Samaria and Galilee (v. 11).
- In Matthew 24 and 25 our Lord is answering question raised by his disciples concerning the destruction of the temple at Jerusalem and the time of his coming. Here his message begins as a response to the Pharisees who accosted him as to "*when the kingdom of God should come.*"

(Luke 17:20) "And when he was demanded of the Pharisees, when the kingdom of God should come, he answered them and said, The kingdom of God cometh not with observation."

Our Savior answered these Pharisees by telling them that their notions concerning the kingdom of God were carnal and altogether wrong. He told them that the kingdom of God does not come with observation. **These three things, at least, are meant by his words.**

1. **The kingdom of God does not come with pomp and pageantry.** — It does not come with an outward show of any kind. In fact, the translation given in the margin of your Bible is, "The kingdom of God cometh not with outward show."

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Readings: *Rex Bartley and Bobbie Estes*

2. **The kingdom of God does not come in such a way that men can observe it.** — God's kingdom is a kingdom no one can see, except he be born again. It is a kingdom none can enter, but by the new birth (John 3:3, 5).
3. Our Lord's words in verse 20 also mean, perhaps primarily mean that **the kingdom of God does not come by the observation of religious laws, ceremonies, traditions, and ordinances.** — The kingdom of God does not come by observing holy days and doing holy things: — Baptism — Sacraments — Good Works, etc. The kingdom of God is not a matter of religious dos and taboos (Rom. 14:17; Col. 2:20-23).

The fact is, if you and I see something that so greatly impresses our eyes, our natural senses, and/or our feelings that we are by what we see inclined to think "Surely, the kingdom of God is here," we are wrong, dead wrong. Look at the next line of our text and see if that is not precisely what the Master tells us.

A WARNING

"Neither shall they say, Lo here! or, lo there!" (v. 21). — What does that mean? Really, it is just an amplification of what our Lord has just declared. — *"The kingdom of God cometh not with observation."* Many in those days, in the days immediately following our Lord's earthly ministry, and at various times throughout the past 2000 years have said that this or the other false prophet is the Christ. Many have said the kingdom of God will appear here or there, at this or that time.

Our Lord warns us to ignore such claims, no matter who makes them, no matter how convincing their arguments are, and no matter how many follow them.

WITHIN YOU

Now, watch the Lord's next words in the latter part of verse 21. — *"Behold, the kingdom of God is within you."* It is a spiritual kingdom not a carnal kingdom, a heavenly kingdom not an earthly kingdom, an inward kingdom not an outward kingdom. It lies not in outward things, but in righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost (Rom. 14:17). **The kingdom of God is established in the hearts of chosen, redeemed sinners when Christ the King of Glory enters into the heart and establishes his dominion in them by his omnipotent grace.**

GREAT TROUBLE

In verses 22-25 our Lord turns to his disciples. He is now talking specifically to his own and warns us here of a time of great trouble. The time he is talking about is not any specific day, but any day in which the words of these two verses are applicable.

(Luke 17:22-25) "And he said unto the disciples, The days will come, when ye shall desire to see one of the days of the Son of man, and ye shall not see it. (23) And they shall say to you, See here; or, see there: go not after *them*, nor follow *them*. (24) For as the lightning, that lighteneth out of the one *part* under heaven, shineth unto the other *part* under heaven; so shall also the Son of man be in his day. (25) But first must he suffer many things, and be rejected of this generation."

The warning continues in verse 26.

Luke 17:26-37

(Verse 26) — "*And as it was in the days of Noe, so shall it be also in the days of the Son of man.*"

Notice that our Savior specifically says, "*in the days (not day) of the Son of man.*" He is talking about any day when he appears to make himself known. — His First Advent — His Second Advent — His Coming to Sinners in Grace.

While most are convinced that the verses before us are talking about our Lord's coming in judgment at the last day, I am convinced otherwise. In this passage our Savior is talking to his disciples about God's great distinguishing grace. Everything in life decidedly illustrates and confirms his doctrine (Matt. 11:25-26).

(Matthew 11:25-26) "At that time Jesus answered and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes. (26) Even so, Father: for so it seemed good in thy sight."

THE STATE OF MAN

- I. In verses 26-30 our Lord teaches us a lesson about the state of man in this world, a lesson about fallen humanity that we tend to forget. The lesson is this — **Man never changes.**

We all tend to think that the present generation is the worst that has ever lived. Do not misunderstand me. I do not, in anyway minimize or excuse the horrid ungodliness of this generation. But, in these verses, our Lord Jesus tells us plainly that the state of man upon the earth today is exactly as it was in the days of Noah and in the days of Lot. The human race is not getting better, and really, it is not getting worse. It is just bigger and less capable of hiding the things it would like to hide.

(Luke 17:26-30) "And as it was in the days of Noe, so shall it be also in the days of the Son of man. (27) They did eat, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark, and the flood came, and destroyed them all. (28) Likewise also as it was in the days of Lot; they did eat, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they builded; (29) But the same day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed *them* all. (30) Even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of man is revealed."

In the days of Noah, before God finally destroyed the whole race, except for Noah and his family, in the flood of his wrath, the whole human race lived to gratify their own lusts, and nothing more. The same was true in the days of Lot. The same thing is true today. And that is the way things will continue until Christ comes again to gather his elect unto glory in complete salvation and to destroy the rest in the execution of his just wrath.

What is the state and condition of this world? What is the state and condition of mankind? Let me make the question more personal. — **What is your state and condition before God right now?** If you are without Christ, turn with me to the book of Genesis, and see. Read what God says, and tremble. Tremble, because this is the state you are in. **You are ripe for and incessantly asking for the wrath of God.**

Our Lord's comparison between the days preceding his own coming and the days of Noah and Lot throws us back to the book of Genesis, chapters 6, 18, and 19.

- (1.) **In those days, as in ours ungodliness, corruption, lust, vanity, pleasure, engrossment with business of life in this world so**

utterly consumed the hearts of men, that there was no room for God either in man's thoughts or his world (Gen. 6:2, 5).

(Genesis 6:2) "That the sons of God saw the daughters of men that they *were* fair; and they took them wives of all which they chose."

(Genesis 6:5) "And God saw that the wickedness of man *was* great in the earth, and *that* every imagination of the thoughts of his heart *was* only evil continually."

They lived but to live as they pleased, gratifying their own lusts in this world. They had no other concern than food and drink, family and home, business and pleasure.

(2) **The same was true in Sodom** (Gen. 18:21).

(Genesis 18:21) "I will go down now, and see whether they have done altogether according to the cry of it, which is come unto me; and if not, I will know."

When he looked upon that city, he saw one righteous man there who "*vexed his righteous soul from day to day with their unlawful deeds*" (2 Pet. 2:8).

I cannot help noticing that our Lord makes no mention of the horrid perversity of homosexuality practiced in Sodom in either Matthew or in Luke, as he describes the wickedness of Lot's generation. Why? The omission is certainly not intended to imply that there is nothing in that reprobate behavior so common and so promoted in our day to make rational men shudder and cringe with anger. That immoral conduct is ever the result of self-willed idolatry, the ruin of social order and decency, and the result of divine judgment upon men.

So why didn't the Savior mention the one horrid sin for which Sodom is known throughout the world? The reason is obvious. — He would have all to understand that all who live unto themselves, for themselves, with no regard for God, his Son, his gospel and eternity are like those reprobate, filthy Sodomites, "*children of wrath*," abiding under the wrath of God, courting eternal damnation.

(3) **The just and righteous sentence of God upon Noah's generation and upon Sodom was announced, and men were urged to repent**

by God's servants; but they continued in their hellish rebellion, living in the lust of their own hearts until Noah entered into the ark and the Lord God rained fire and brimstone upon Sodom
(Gen. 6:3, 7, 13; 19:11-14).

(Genesis 6:3) "And the LORD said, My Spirit shall not always strive with man, for that he also *is* flesh: yet his days shall be an hundred and twenty years."

(Genesis 6:7) "And the LORD said, I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth; both man, and beast, and the creeping thing, and the fowls of the air; for it repenteth me that I have made them."

(Genesis 6:13) "And God said unto Noah, The end of all flesh is come before me; for the earth is filled with violence through them; and, behold, I will destroy them with the earth."

(Genesis 19:11-14) "And they smote the men that *were* at the door of the house with blindness, both small and great: so that they wearied themselves to find the door. (12) And the men said unto Lot, Hast thou here any besides? son in law, and thy sons, and thy daughters, and whatsoever thou hast in the city, bring *them* out of this place: (13) For we will destroy this place, because the cry of them is waxen great before the face of the LORD; and the LORD hath sent us to destroy it. (14) And Lot went out, and spake unto his sons in law, which married his daughters, and said, Up, get you out of this place; for the LORD will destroy this city. But he seemed as one that mocked unto his sons in law."

(4.) **Yet, even in those evil days, the Lord God had an elect remnant whom he was determined to save, and he would not destroy the world until Noah was safe in the ark, or Sodom until Lot was safe in Zoar.**

"The longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water" (1 Peter 3:20). So it is now! And so it shall be until the end of time. God's determination to save his elect makes him long-suffering toward them because he is not willing that any should perish, but that every loved, chosen, redeemed sinner be saved. And his long-suffering is the salvation of his people (2 Pet. 3:9, 15; Gen. 19:17-22).

(2 Peter 3:9) "The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance."

(2 Peter 3:15) "And account *that* the longsuffering of our Lord *is* salvation; even as our beloved brother Paul also according to the wisdom given unto him hath written unto you."

(Genesis 19:17-22) "And it came to pass, when they had brought them forth abroad, that he said, Escape for thy life; look not behind thee, neither stay thou in all the plain; escape to the mountain, lest thou be consumed. (18) And Lot said unto them, Oh, not so, my Lord: (19) Behold now, thy servant hath found grace in thy sight, and thou hast magnified thy mercy, which thou hast showed unto me in saving my life; and I cannot escape to the mountain, lest some evil take me, and I die: (20) Behold now, this city *is* near to flee unto, and it *is* a little one: Oh, let me escape thither, (*is* it not a little one?) and my soul shall live. (21) And he said unto him, See, I have accepted thee concerning this thing also, that I will not overthrow this city, for the which thou hast spoken. (22) Haste thee, escape thither; for I cannot do any thing till thou be come thither. Therefore the name of the city was called Zoar."

(5) **As in the days of Noah and Lot, God's sovereign, distinguishing grace was both manifest and effectual so it is now and so it shall be until time shall be no more.** — "Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord." And Christ, the Angel of the Lord, brought Lot out of Sodom, "*the Lord being merciful unto him.*"

Now, read verse 30 and rejoice! "*Even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of man is revealed.*" Oh, clap your hands and sing praise! "*The foundation of God standeth sure. The Lord knoweth them that are his.*" He knows how to deliver his own; and he will!

GOD'S DISTINGUISHING GRACE

II. In verses 30-36 **the Lord Jesus displays the distinguishing grace of our God,** calling us to continually consecrate ourselves to him.

As in Noah's day and in Lot's day, so it is today. None will repent and believe, until the Lord God almighty, by an act of omnipotent grace brings them into the Ark Christ Jesus and mercifully forces them to flee for their

lives from Sodom, finding refuge in Zoar. But, blessed be his name forever, some shall be shut up in the Ark. Some shall flee to Christ. God will see to it. — Look at verses 30 and 34-36.

(Luke 17:30-31) "Even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of man is revealed."

(Luke 17:34-36) "I tell you, in that night there shall be two *men* in one bed; the one shall be taken, and the other shall be left. (35) Two *women* shall be grinding together; the one shall be taken, and the other left. (36) Two *men* shall be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left."

The Lord God has mercy on whom he will have mercy.

- He saves Abel and passes by Cain. He saves Noah and his family and passes by the world.
- He chose Abraham and passed by all the rest of the inhabitants of Ur.
- He saves Lot and passes by his wife, his sons-in-law, and his other daughters, along with all the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah.
- He loved Jacob and hated Esau.
- He takes one as it pleases him, and passes by another as it pleases him.

Illustration: *Tommy Bailiff and Me*

AN UNDIVIDED HEART

III. Here is a third lesson plainly taught in our text. — **The Lord Jesus Christ demands consecration to himself. He demands an undivided heart** (vv. 31-33).

(Luke 17:31-33) "In that day, he which shall be upon the housetop, and his stuff in the house, let him not come down to take it away: and he that is in the field, let him likewise not return back. (32) Remember Lot's wife. (33) Whosoever shall seek to save his life shall lose it; and whosoever shall lose his life shall preserve it."

What a solemn warning our Lord gives us about divided allegiance. He says to us who profess to be his disciples, "*Remember Lot's wife.*"

- Remember, she left Sodom with her husband, Lot.
- Remember, she was married to a righteous man.
- Remember, she worshipped God with Abraham.

- Remember, she willfully disobeyed God's explicit command. — She looked back! Why did she look back? She had a divided heart. She left Sodom with Lot, but she left her heart in Sodom.
- Remember, she perished with the Sodomites, though she was standing in the presence and company of three angels and her righteous husband. God struck her dead in an instant!
- Remember this, too. — As it was in that day, so it is today, and so it shall be until the end of days. There are many who make a profession of faith because they fear the wrath of God, who live with their hearts in Sodom, many who hope to go to heaven with a divided heart. It shall not happen.

(Luke 17:33) "Whosoever shall seek to save his life shall lose it; and whosoever shall lose his life shall preserve it."

Now, look at verse 37.

EAGLES AND THE CARCASS

(Luke 17:37) "And they answered and said unto him, Where, Lord? And he said unto them, Wheresoever the body *is*, thither will the eagles be gathered together."

The disciples failed to understand what the Lord was saying, as they often did and we often do. They wanted to know where this manifestation and division would take place, looking upon our Lord's words as a prediction of something that was to take place at a specific time and in a specific place.

TRANSLATION

What is the meaning of our Lord's answer? Modern translations have not helped, but only compounded the confusion. Most translate the word "*body*" as "carcass" and the word "eagles" as "vultures." In both cases such translations are wrong. Our translation is exactly as it should be. — "*He said unto them, Wheresoever the body is, thither will the eagles be gathered together.*" The word "*body*" means the body of one who has been slain. Notice the definite article. Our Lord said, "*Wheresoever the body is* (not wheresoever bodies are), *thither will the eagles be gathered together.*" Also, notice that he speaks eagles (not buzzards) in the plural. Perhaps you are thinking, "Well, that doesn't help. Hang on. It will."

CONTEXT

Remember the context. Our Lord is talking to us about the distinguishing grace of God. He is talking about faith in himself. The body of the One slain is our Lord Jesus Christ. "*The eagles*" are God's elect who are gathered to him in faith. Let's see if the Book of God teaches this.

God's elect are spoken of in the Scriptures as eagles. His church is given "*the wings of the eagle, that great eagle*" (Rev. 12:14). — "*They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles*" (Isa. 41:31).

(Deuteronomy 32:8-12) "When the Most High divided to the nations their inheritance, when he separated the sons of Adam, he set the bounds of the people according to the number of the children of Israel. (9) For the LORD'S portion *is* his people; Jacob *is* the lot of his inheritance. (10) He found him in a desert land, and in the waste howling wilderness; he led him about, he instructed him, he kept him as the apple of his eye. (11) As an eagle stirreth up her nest, fluttereth over her young, spreadeth abroad her wings, taketh them, beareth them on her wings: (12) So the LORD alone did lead him, and *there was* no strange god with him."

(Job 9:25-26) "Now my days are swifter than a post: they flee away, they see no good. (26) They are passed away as the swift ships: as the eagle *that* hasteth to the prey."

Our Lord's answer to his disciples' question, "*Where, Lord?*" is this — "Wherever Christ crucified is set forth in the preaching of the gospel, wherever the crucified Christ is revealed to men by the power and grace of his Spirit through the preaching of the gospel, there will his elect be gathered unto him *'in the day when the Son of man is revealed.'*"

Christ's eagles "gather" to him who is their food. He is the One upon whom we live. He is to us life eternal. The body of our slain Savior, Christ crucified is the meeting-point of his elect. He is the great magnet, drawing needy souls like eagles to the carcass. He said, "*I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me.*"

God our Creator, in the Book of Job, says of the eagle, His creature — "*she abideth upon the rock from thence she seeketh the prey; her eyes*

behold afar off... where the slain are, there is she." **God our Savior** adds His application — as the eagles gather round the corpse, so the souls of men chosen, redeemed and called by my grace, are gathered unto me.

Keen and swift as eagles for the prey are God's elect for Christ crucified. My soul, these are the words of our blessed Savior. Let not one of them fall to the ground. — "*Wheresoever the body is, thither will the eagles be gathered together.*"

The eagle is a bird of prey. In all birds of prey there is great, vast quickness of scent to smell their proper food, even from a great distance. Added to its sense of smell, the eagle has a ravenous appetite. Compelled by hunger and its sense of smell, it flies quickly, at every opportunity to its feast.

But the eagle is not a vulture. It does not feed on dead things, but living. And the crucified Christ, upon whom our souls feed, though once slain as our Substitute, is alive for evermore!

If Christ has given us life in himself, if he has made us alive by his grace, he gives us a continually increasing appetite and hunger for himself. Does he not? Do you not hunger, my friend for him? — For his grace? — For his embrace? — For his face? — For his righteousness? — For his blood? — For his presence?

Hungering for him, his eagles fly to the place where he is, as famished birds hastening to the prey.

- His House.
- His Word.
- His Ordinances.
- His Throne of Grace.

"If Jesus be indeed the one blessed object of thy desire, will not this be manifested by the earnestness of thy desires?"
(Robert Hawker).

As David long for the waters of Bethlehem when he was thirsty, O let my soul long for Christ. "*As the hart panteth after the water brooks,*" so he longed for his God. May the same be true of you and me. Oh for grace to have my soul hungering for Christ crucified day and night! As the eagles

gather together unto the prey, so should we be found feasting upon Christ crucified relentlessly.

In him, in his glorious excellencies, is everything our souls need.

- His name is our Salvation and High Tower.
- His blood is our atonement.
- His righteousness is our dress.
- His perfections are our delight.
- His promises are our meditation.
- His grace is our assurance.
- His visits are our sweet memories.
- His presence is our joy.
- His strength is our comfort.
- His glory is our ambition.
- His coming is our hope.
- His company forever is our heaven!

Crave him! Crave him, O my soul! Like birds of prey crave their food, Spirit of God, let me crave my Savior! We have tasted that the Lord is gracious in times past. Let us feast upon him! Oh blessed Savior, give me such an appetite for you! Create a hungering in me for you, a hungering that graciously forces me ever to fly to you, like an eagle to the prey! Give me an insatiable, constant, ever-increasing hunger for you. — For everything you are! — For everything you have given me! — For everything you have done for me! — For everything that belongs to you! — For everything that touches you! — For everything that smells of you!

- For Your Condescension!
- For Your Cross!
- For Your Crown!
- For Your Communion!
- For Your Coming!

Let me so lose my life, my great God and Savior, in you that I care nothing for my stuff in the house of this time world! O let this desire be so insatiable, so earnest, so unceasing, that nothing I have of you may so satisfy me that I long no more after you. Let all that I have of you, O blessed Christ, cause me to hunger for more enflaming my heart's hunger more and more, until you bring me at last to feast upon you and with you forever in Glory Land above.

Wherever Christ is, there will his people fly, as eagles to the prey and as doves to their windows (Isa. 40:8).

Amen!