

**“THE COMING OF THE KINGDOM”**

**I. Introduction**

- A. If you know for certain that something is going to happen, it is utterly foolish not to prepare for it.
- B. One thing that the Bible says is sure to take place is the second coming of Jesus Christ at the end of this age.
- C. The return of Christ is the great event that will usher in the final judgment and bring God’s plan of redemption to its point of consummation.
- D. This is the main subject in the verses that we are studying this morning.
- E. And as we study this passage today, we will see how it stresses the importance of being ready for Christ’s return in glory.

**II. The Inaugurated Kingdom and the Consummated Kingdom**

- A. Our text begins with the Pharisees asking Jesus when the kingdom of God will come.
  - 1. When the Pharisees spoke of the kingdom of God, they were thinking of the glorious restoration of the nation of Israel under the reign of the Messiah.
  - 2. The problem with that line of thinking is that even the Old Testament prophecies of the messianic kingdom made it clear that the scope of that kingdom is much bigger than just the nation of Israel.
  - 3. Consider what the Lord says about his anointed one in the messianic prophecy set forth in Isaiah 49: “It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to bring back the preserved of Israel; I will make you as a light for the

nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.”

4. The nationalistic conception of the kingdom held by the Pharisees and other first century Jews was far too narrow in scope.
- B. When the Bible speaks of the kingdom of God, it is referring to God’s kingly rule.
1. Of course, God reigns as king over all creation and over all peoples, but he is not presently acknowledged as king by everyone.
  2. As it says in the epistle to the Hebrews, “At present, we do not yet see everything in subjection to him.” (Heb. 2:8)
  3. The kingdom of God is the realm in which his kingly rule is made manifest.
  4. Because of this, it is proper to speak of two aspects of the coming of the kingdom of God: the inaugurated kingdom and the consummated kingdom.
  5. In this present age, we only see the inaugurated kingdom, which is characterized by Christ’s reign of grace.
  6. That is, God’s kingly rule is presently manifested in the lives of those whom he graciously saves through Christ.
  7. But at the end of this age, all the earth will see God’s consummated kingdom, which will be characterized by Christ’s reign in glory.
  8. On that day, God’s kingly rule will be gloriously manifested so that every knee will bow before Jesus Christ and declare that he is Lord.
- C. This helps us to understand what Jesus means when he says that the kingdom is not coming with signs to be observed.
1. This might seem to be in conflict with other passages that speak of the various signs of the end.

2. But in those passages, the point being made is simply that there are a variety of signs in this present age that bear witness in a general way to the approaching end.
3. None of those signs enable us to pinpoint the exact timing of Christ's return in glory.
4. Here in this text, Jesus's point is that in the present aspect of the kingdom's coming, the inaugurated but not yet consummated aspect, the kingdom is not marked by outward signs of dignity or glory.
5. God's kingdom does not advance in the manner that the kingdoms and powers of this world advance and gain influence.
6. Instead, Jesus says, "the kingdom of God is in the midst of you."
7. Some older translations rendered this phrase as "the kingdom of God is within you," but that is not a good translation in light of the context.
8. We have to remember that Jesus is speaking to the Pharisees here.
9. He never would have told the Pharisees that the kingdom of God is within them.
10. What he is saying is that the kingdom is present in him and in the lives of those who follow him.
11. Contrary to what the Pharisees were looking for, the kingdom comes in a non-spectacular manner in this present age.
12. It is seen in the changes that it makes in the lives of individual believers, who are called to take up their cross and share in Christ's sufferings as we live in this world as pilgrims seeking a better country, a heavenly one.

- D. Having said these things to the Pharisees, Jesus then turns to address his disciples.
1. He tells them that though the time is drawing near when they will long for his immediate coming in glory, they are going to have to wait for that.
  2. And while they wait for it, they need to be on guard against the many messianic pretenders who will arise and try to draw others after them.
  3. God's people should never be taken in by such imposters, because when Christ returns in glory it will be clear for all to see.
  4. Just as the lightning that lights up the entire sky cannot be missed, so also will it be impossible for anyone to miss it when Jesus comes again at the end of the age.
  5. But Jesus's first coming was not a coming in glory.
  6. As he says in verse 25, "But first [the Son of Man] must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation."
  7. At his first advent, Jesus came as the Suffering Servant, born under the law so that he might fulfill all righteousness and bear the curse of the law in our place.
  8. Only at Christ's second advent will there be a glorious consummation of God's kingdom.

### III. The Suddenness of the Consummation

- A. Having said these things, Jesus then calls our attention to the sudden nature of his coming at the end of the age to consummate the kingdom.
1. He begins by using two Old Testament examples as illustrations.

2. He speaks of what took place in the days of Noah and in the days of Lot.
  3. In both of those situations, life was going on as usual.
  4. People were living each day just as they had lived all the previous days of their lives.
  5. They were eating and drinking, marrying and being given in marriage, buying and selling, planting and building.
  6. Moreover, as we see so clearly in the book of Genesis, they were also living in immorality, with no fear of God.
  7. They were utterly unprepared for the judgment that suddenly came upon them.
  8. This is how it will be when Jesus Christ returns in glory at the end of this age.
  9. As John Calvin explains, "Christ declares that the last age of the world will be in a state of stupid indifference, so that men will think of nothing but the present life, and will extend their cares to a long period, pursuing their ordinary course of life, as if the world were always to remain in the same condition."
  10. Note how accurately those words describe the majority of the people around us.
  11. Most people are living out their days as if there will never be a day of reckoning.
  12. But this is the height of folly, because the Scriptures assure us that that day is coming, and there will be no time to prepare for it when it suddenly arrives.
- B. Jesus stresses this point by saying, "Remember Lot's wife."

1. You may recall that when Lot and his family were brought out of Sodom, Lot's wife looked back and she became a pillar of salt.
  2. Though she was right alongside those who were delivered from the judgment that befell Sodom and Gomorrah, she shared in that judgment because of her unwillingness to let go of the things that she enjoyed in those wicked cities.
  3. Lot's wife stands as a warning to us.
  4. She reminds us of the danger of loving the world.
  5. Don't seek your true and ultimate happiness in material things.
  6. When we love the world, our hearts are drawn away from God and his kingdom.
  7. As the apostle Paul says in Philippians 3, those whose minds are set on earthly things walk as enemies of the cross.
  8. We must remember that "our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself." (Phil. 3:20-21)
  9. It is that hope of future glory that drives us to give the kingdom of God first place in our heart and in our life, even if we have to endure suffering because of our loyalty to Christ.
- C. Our text ends with Jesus saying that at his return, there will be a complete and final separation between believers and unbelievers.
1. People who are working and living right alongside each other will be separated.
  2. One will be taken, and the one right next to him will be left.
  3. When we read these words, we may think of something that has been made popular by dispensationalism, a system of biblical

interpretation that emerged in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

4. Our dispensationalist brothers and sisters point to passages like this to support an idea that they refer to as the “rapture.”
  5. Now, let me make clear that I am not bringing this up in order to beat up on dispensationalists.
  6. The reason why I am bringing it up is because this text has been cited by dispensational teachers so often that many Christians simply assume that this passage teaches the rapture when in fact it does not.
- D. Now, perhaps you are wondering, what exactly is this notion that is referred to as “the rapture”?
1. At the heart of it is the idea that Christ’s second coming will take place in two stages.
  2. In the first stage, Jesus will come back invisibly in the clouds and take all of the Christians out of the world to reign with him in heaven.
  3. Then, some time later, in the second stage, Christ will return to establish an earthly kingdom in the land of Israel.
  4. The problem with this teaching is that Scripture does not teach that Christ’s return will take place in two stages.
  5. It is certainly not taught here in Luke 17.
  6. This passage is obviously not about an invisible return of Christ, which is what it would be about if it was about the rapture.
  7. Jesus says that his return will be as visible as flashes of lightning.
  8. He refers to it as “the day when the Son of Man is revealed.”

9. In light of this, it is clear that this text is simply telling us that there will be a separation between believers and unbelievers at the time of the second coming.
- E. Interestingly, it is not even totally clear which ones will be taken and which ones will be left.
1. It is possible to interpret Jesus to be saying that unbelievers are the ones who will be taken away in judgment on the last day.
  2. That being said, I think the context makes it more likely that those taken are believers, who will be caught up to Jesus, will be glorified with him, and will thus be spared from the judgment that will come upon everyone else at the second coming.
  3. Whichever way we read it, the main point is clear: the sudden return of Christ on the last day will bring about a final separation between believers and unbelievers.

#### IV. Conclusion

- A. The second coming of Christ is an absolute certainty.
1. Our Lord will not let the kingdom that he has already inaugurated remain unconsummated.
  2. A day is coming when the kingdom of grace will give way to the kingdom of glory.
  3. For this reason, the most urgent question for every person in the world is this: Am I prepared for Christ's coming in glory?
- B. The only people who will be prepared when that day suddenly arrives are those who are found clothed in the righteousness of Christ, the righteousness that God graciously imputes to us by faith.
1. For those who remain outside of Christ, the day when the Son of Man is revealed will be the day that ushers them into a state of



eternal torment and endless despair.

2. But for believers, the second coming will be the day when we enter into our eternal rest.
3. As it says in the answer to question 52 in the Heidelberg Catechism: “In all my distress and persecution I turn my eyes to the heavens and confidently await as judge the very One who has already stood trial in my place before God and so has removed the whole curse from me. All his enemies and mine he will condemn to everlasting punishment: but me and all his chosen ones he will take along with him into the joy and the glory of heaven.”