

Saving Faith Truly Sees Salvation

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- [0 : 00] Well, good afternoon, everyone. Welcome to our lunchtime service here today. Perhaps you'd like to open your Bibles with me, if you would, to page 876. Page 876 and Luke's Gospel, chapter 17.
- We're going to be looking at verses 11 to the end of the chapter. We're going to read from verse 20 just now. Luke 11 at verse 20. Being asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, Jesus answered them, The kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be observed.
- Nor will they say, Look, here it is, or there. For behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you. 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.
- And they'll say to you, Look there, or look here. Do not go out or follow them. For 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.
- But first, he must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation. Just as it was in the days of Noah, so will it be in the days of the Son of Man. They were eating and drinking and marrying and being given in marriage until the day when Noah entered the ark and the flood came and destroyed them all.
- [1 : 26] Likewise, just as it was in the days of Lot, they were eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building. But on the day when Lot went out from Sodom, fire and sulfur rained from heaven and destroyed them all.
- So will it be on the day when the Son of Man is revealed. On that day, let the one who is on the housetop with his goods in his house not come down to take them away.
- And likewise, let the one who is in the field not turn back. Remember Lot's wife. Whoever seeks to preserve his life will lose it. But whoever loses his life will keep it.
- I tell you, in that night, there will be two in one bed. One will be taken and the other left. There will be two women grinding together. One will be taken and the other left. And they said to him, Where, Lord?
- He said to them, Where are the corpses? There the vultures will gather. Keep your Bibles open and let's pray together. Heavenly Father, we thank you for your word, which comes to us as a shaft of light from heaven to earth.
- [2 : 38] So open our eyes, we pray, and the eyes of our hearts that we might see and hear and understand your word for us today. For we ask it in Jesus' name.
- Amen. I read somewhere this week in a magazine something that the rock singer Jerry Lee Lewis once said to Elvis.
- They were having a discussion about whether rock stars could possibly get to heaven. Here's what Jerry Lee said. Elvis, I'm going to ask you one thing. If you die, do you think you'll go to heaven or hell? And Elvis got real red in the face.

And then he got really white in the face. And he said, Jerry Lee, don't you ever ask me that again. He was really frightened. And he wasn't the only one. I worry about it before I go to bed.

It's a very serious situation. I mean, you worry. When you breathe your last breath, where are you going to go? Interesting.

[3 : 44] Jerry Lee Lewis in Elvis. It's an honest question, though, isn't it, that many people, I think, must ponder, even only if it's when they're faced with some crisis in life that shatters the normal, quiet illusion of our own invincibility and immortality, when something happens to face us with that kind of stark question about life, about eternity, and about the possibility of a coming judgment.

These, though, are the very stark questions that Jesus Christ addresses himself to right out in the open and gives very plain answers to all through the Gospels and right here in front of us in Luke 17.

He's asking questions about ultimate things. Look at verse 20. When will the kingdom of God come, they say? The last great day of judgment. That's a key question that all Jesus' teaching here is focusing on.

As is the question if you look down to chapter 18, verse 26. If it's easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man, somebody who seems to be so favored by God in this world to enter the kingdom and to be saved, then who on earth can be saved?

Well, the answer Jesus gives there, you'll see, is that in fact it is impossible with man, but not with God. That is when God opens blind eyes to see, to see what's so often hidden from men, to see the truth about who Jesus the Savior really is, and to see what Jesus' salvation really is all about.

[5 : 23] Now, Jesus talks a lot in these chapters, 17 and 18 of Luke's Gospel, a lot about salvation. And he talks a lot about seeing, about the faith that can open your eyes to see what salvation really means, and that can save you on the great day when the Son of Man is revealed, as verse 30 says, when he comes to judge the whole world forever.

I want to focus particularly today on verses 20 to 37 that we read, where Jesus wants to open our spiritual eyes to see what he really means by this salvation he's talking about.

What he really means by the coming of this kingdom that he's been teaching about all the time. Because according to Jesus, first of all, the faith that can save must be a faith that can truly see, that can truly perceive what his kingdom really is all about.

If we're blind to that, we can't be saved. In fact, he speaks a lot in these chapters, as you'll see, if you look at them, about spiritual sight, about perception. And Luke, very often in his writings, gives us a very vivid picture of what Jesus is speaking about.

If you look at verses 11 to 17, you'll see that's exactly what that's all about. He's passing between Samaria and Galilee, enters a village. He was met by ten lepers who stood at a distance, lifted up their voices, saying, Jesus, Master, have mercy on us.

[6 : 58] When he saw them, he said to them, go and show yourselves to the priests. And they went, as they went, they were cleansed. And one of them, when he saw, notice that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice, and fell on his face at Jesus' feet, giving him thanks.

Now he was a Samaritan. And then Jesus answered, were not ten cleansed? Were the nine? Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?

And he said to him, rise and go your way. Your faith has, literally, saved you. It's the same word as Jesus uses in chapter 18, verse 26, when he talks about who then can be saved.

Ten lepers are healed, a great gift of God's mercy, but only one of them, do you see verse 15, only one of them sees the real truth, the greater truth, that God's gift of gracious healing was given in order to make them go and fall at the feet of Jesus and see who really Jesus is and receive from Jesus something far greater even than the cleansing from their leprosy, but the salvation from their sins that only he can give.

And Jesus says to that man, your faith has saved you. One leper who was a foreigner, who had none of the blessings and the benefits and the privileges of being an Israelite, he saw the Savior and he found real salvation.

[8 : 42] Not just bodily healing, but he was brought back into fellowship with God himself in the person of the Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. Instead of being separated from all people because of his leprosy and separated from God because of his sin, he's brought right back into fellowship with the Lord Jesus himself.

He saw what so many of the others didn't see he saw that one day the only thing that was really going to matter is whether during your life you have found the one who is the real answer to that question of where do you go when you breathe your last.

And many in Jesus' day, despite all the long history and all the privileged knowledge that they had from the scriptures, the culture that had the Bible, many of them were blind to that real truth.

Just as many in our own day today are blind. Although we also have had the Bible for centuries. We've had open churches. We've had the truth of the gospel made available to us.

But it hasn't sent most people to the feet of Jesus Christ to praise God through him, has it? So we need Jesus' words to us just as clearly today as they needed in that day.

[10 : 05] And in verses 20 to 37 Jesus explains very, very clearly that the faith that saves must be a faith that really sees and understands the truth about what the gospel of Christ's kingdom is really all about and about what salvation really means.

See, Jerry Lee Lewis was right. The kingdom of God is not just about matters of this world. It's about an eternal world. And salvation is not just about healing in this world.

It's not just about deliverance from earthly ailments. It is about deliverance from the everlasting separation from Christ that can only be described as everlasting death.

Now Jesus, if you look here in verse 20, he speaks first to the Pharisees because they had a completely wrong idea of what his kingdom was all about. They thought it was here and now in this world.

They had vastly underestimated the cosmic scale of the problems of this world which are caused by the curse of sin. Now that is the natural problem of man, isn't it?

[11 : 16] That's the universal problem of people today who don't really understand just how serious sin against the Holy God really is. People think it's within man's power and gift to save himself, to save this world, to save the planet, whether it's by religion or whether it's by something else.

That's our world's thinking, isn't it? People think we can find salvation, that we can bring in the kingdom in all kinds of visible ways. That might not be the language that they use but often actually it is language like that.

People talk about saving the planet today, don't they? By a green manifesto or whatever it might be. Or saving humanity through all kinds of medical advances and technology and so on or scientific advances.

Or saving the world through new political treaties or military interventions or social change or whatever else it might be. And you see, because people think like that, the real danger is that in the Christian church we start to think like that too.

We often do. You hear people talking about building the kingdom and bringing in the reign of God by healing people's bodies or by helping the poor or by improving the environment or whatever these things might be.

[12 : 36] Now these might be good things in themselves, of course. But Jesus is telling us very plainly in these verses that the kingdom of God is not coming that way.

The fullness of the kingdom of Jesus and the full salvation that this world under the curse of sin needs can only come through something much more radical, through a cosmic transformation of this world.

And that will only happen through God's final purging of this world. of all evil and sin and its total recreation in a new world.

So Jesus is explicit in verse 20. Do you see? The kingdom of God is not coming in this age with signs to be observed. No, he says to them, in this age, it's a spiritual reality.

It's something that's spiritually perceived. But it's nonetheless real, Jesus says, and in fact, it's already begun. Do you see? It's begun in the person of Jesus. The kingdom is already in the midst of you, he says, because the king is in the midst of you.

[13 : 46] And you must see it, says Jesus, and you must perceive that spiritual reality, and you must respond now with real faith or else be condemned.

And that response is urgent in Jesus' ministry because, make no mistake, he tells us, one day, one day that kingdom will be visible, unmistakable, when Jesus returns as promised to usher in the new age, the age to come, the age of everlasting glory.

But on that day, the opportunity will have ended. Because on that day, as Jesus has said already in his teaching, a great chasm will have been fixed between those who have been restored and reconciled to him and those who have resisted him.

So if you look at verse 22 onwards, you'll see there, Jesus turns to his disciples because he wants them to know. He makes it absolutely clear that the call to Jesus Christ in faith is all about a salvation which is from the ultimate judgment that's coming on that day.

A cataclysm which will leave the flood and the destruction of Sodom as just pale, pale previews of what's going to happen one day. So look, will you with me?

[15 : 14] Jesus makes five things very clear that we need to see and understand about his kingdom when it comes on that last day. First of all, he says, it will be seen.

It will be a seismic event that is absolutely evident and unmistakable to all in this world. Verse 24, just as lightning lights up the whole of the sky, so will the Son of Man be in his day.

And that's why verses 22 to 24 are so clear. He says, don't be fooled by anyone who claims, oh look, there's the sign of the kingdom coming. Oh look, here is the great outpouring of the Spirit Jesus told us about and we all longed for.

Or here's the great movement that's going to be the answer to all of these things. Don't listen to that, Jesus says. See, he's real, isn't he, in verse 22.

He knows that there'll be a natural longing among his followers for the glory of the kingdom. A natural longing for the end of sin and suffering and sorrow.

[16 : 17] A longing for the coming of what Jesus promised. But wherever there's a longing, we're very prone to wishful thinking, aren't we? That's why the prosperity gospel all over the world today is thriving so greatly.

Because it plays to people's longings for the age to come, for the glory of the kingdom. And many, many, many Christians are lured by promises of glory now.

Promises of healing now. And promises of wealth now. And promises of the kingdom now. Look, here it is. Here's the answer. A fullness. Look at verse 23.

Don't go out and follow people like that, says Jesus. That's how many cults have started, isn't it? The Mormons, the Jehovah's Witnesses, and all the others like them.

Here at last, they say, is the real Messiah. Here's the one who's going to bring everything that Jesus didn't quite manage to bring. Isn't that right? Don't go out and follow them, says Jesus.

[17 : 19] That's really the message, isn't it, of the Islamic State, ISIS or ISIL, whatever you call them today, in a very different way, isn't it? That's what they're saying. Here's the kingdom of God on earth.

Sharia law and all the rest of it. That's what's luring these foolish teenagers to go and live there as though somehow that was paradise on earth. How could they think that? Their minds are so twisted.

No, no, no, says Jesus. There will be no missing. Absolutely no missing. No missing. The real coming of his kingdom. Every eye will see him like the lightning in the sky.

It will be seen by all the earth. Secondly, though, Jesus says, it will be a surprise. That's the message of verses 25 to 30. It'll be a surprise to a secular society that has rejected Jesus.

He'd be rejected, he says, by that generation. Verse 25, they scorned his claim to be the son of God, but also, of course, he's been rejected by every generation since. So, if a society like even the Christian West has so ignored the first coming of Christ and rejected his gospel, well, of course, it's got no thought of his second coming at all, has it?

[18 : 34] And so, just as it was in the days of Noah and Lot, says Jesus, when God's judgment came with great surprise, so it will be, verse 26, the day the Son of Man is revealed.

Verse 30, so it will be on the day when the Son of Man is revealed. A surprise. Now, those ancient days were full of wickedness. God saw that society was utterly wicked.

And actually, it's not without notice that in both of those occasions, one of the symptoms and signs of that wickedness was great sexual degradation and promiscuity and perversion in society. But nobody in that day thought that anything at all was amiss.

Life was going on just unblinking, verse 27, eating and drinking, marrying, planting, sowing, building, as though nothing ever changes, as though things can only get better. We've heard that before, haven't we?

Until, verse 27, do you see? The day when the flood came and deluged them all. Or verse 29, when fire and sulfur rained down from heaven and destroyed them all.

[19 : 39] All except those who escaped by heeding God's warnings, his gospel of salvation. And so it will be, says Jesus, on the day of the Son of Man.

Great surprise to a godless world. Third, verses 31 to 33, it will be sudden and swift with no time then to make ready or prepare.

for the world to come. Everything you have, Jesus says, will be left behind and everything will depend on what you have become and what you have treasured in this life.

Remember Lot's wife, Jesus says. Well, what Lot's wife treasured were the things of this world. And so even when judgment was imminent, she was looking back, longing for the things she was leaving behind, longing to preserve it.

You can't do that, says Jesus. Verse 33, if you do, you'll lose the only life that matters, eternal life. You can lose everything in this life, but don't risk losing the real life, the true life, the life that you were made for.

[20 : 53] We need that warning, don't we, again and again, you and I, against all the possessions, all the desires, all the relationships that can cause us so easily to look back with longing.

Could make us miss out on the great joy of his coming kingdom. Don't think that you can do that, says Jesus, and there'll still be time at the end to put everything right. No, his coming will be sudden, it will be swift, and then it will be too late.

Because look forth, what will be sudden and what will be swift will be, verse 34, a separation forever between those who are prepared and those who are unprepared.

Just as the flood took all away and so cleansed the wickedness of the earth, just as the sulfur rained down and swept away the evil in the city of the plain, so, says Jesus, at his coming, those who are unprepared will be taken away, separated from eternity.

Those who have shared the same bed. Those who have shared the same workplace. And so, fifth and finally, Jesus says, the consequences of his coming will be deadly serious.

[23 : 17] Verse 37. Whatever that enigmatic statement about the vultures means, it's pretty plain, isn't it, that it's a picture of grim seriousness.

It's a picture of death, isn't it? That's what this separation means, says Jesus. Death. Death as the opposite of life. The opposite of eternal life.

Eternal death. One writer says, the Son of Man's return means massive judgment. It will be final. It will carry the stench of death. The return will be deadly serious.

You should not be on the wrong side when it comes. Judgment will be universal and permanent and unmissable.

Obvious to all. Just as obvious as the circling vultures above a kill tell you the place in the presence of death is there. That's what my kingdom is really all about, says Jesus.

[23 : 20] it's coming. And when it does come, it will be finally established over this whole world and it will bring everlasting life but also everlasting death.

And real faith, the faith that prepares you for that coming sees that. It sees that that's what the gospel is really all about.

and it grasps hold of it now as the greatest priority that could ever be in this life on earth. To believe the gospel with all your heart and to proclaim that gospel to all the world.

That's what kingdom mission is all about according to Jesus. And nothing in this world can ever possibly be more important if what Jesus is saying is really true.

When you take that last breath, what happens? So let me ask you, do you see that truth? Are you prepared today for that day when the Son of Man is revealed swiftly, suddenly, forever?

[24 : 41] Are you prepared? And are you preparing others for that day as the greatest priority for their life and for yours?

That's the question Jesus puts to us here. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you for the clarity of your word which we cannot miss.

Help us as we wrestle with its solemnity help us to grasp with both hands the promise of your grace through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.