

Separation and the Coming Kingdom

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Date: 13 April 2025

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[0 : 00] We're looking forward to Josh preaching to us again from Luke a little bit later.! So let's turn now for our reading in Luke's Gospel. Chapter 17, starting at verse 11 and reading to chapter 18, verse 14.

So Luke's Gospel, chapter 17, verse 11 to 18, 14. On the way to Jerusalem, Jesus was passing along between Samaria and Galilee.

And as he entered a village, he was met by ten lepers who stood at a distance and lifted up their voices, saying, Jesus, Master, have mercy on us.

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

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

[1 : 23] And he said to him, Rise and go your way. Your faith has made you well. Being asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, he 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 will 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. Likewise, just as it was in the days of Lot, they were eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building.

[2 : 45] 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 the 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 the corpse is, there the vultures will gather. And he told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart.

[3 : 49] He said, In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor respected man. And there was a widow in that city who kept coming to him and saying, Give me justice against my adversary.

For a while he refused. But afterwards he said to himself, Though I neither fear God nor respect man, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will give her justice so that she will not beat me down by her continual coming.

And the Lord said, Hear what the unrighteous judge says. And will not God give justice to his elect who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long over them?

I tell you, he will give justice to them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth? He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and treated others with contempt.

Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus, God, I thank you that I'm not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector.

[5 : 11] I fast twice a week. I give tithes of all that I get. But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast saying, God, be merciful to me, a sinner.

I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.

Amen. The word of the Lord, and may it be a blessing to us today. Well, do open your Bibles once again to Luke chapter 17 and 18.

Now, we spend quite a lot of life preparing for things. To go on holiday, we prepare by booking flights or accommodation or travel insurance and the like.

Some people prepare for going on holiday by tidying and cleaning their house from top to bottom. Or we prepare for our working life by training or studying. We prepare for our retirement by saving into our pension and on and on.

[6 : 24] Now, this passage is all about being prepared for the coming kingdom of God. There is no event more significant, no preparation more important.

We come to a new section of Luke's gospel this morning, another section of Jesus' journey to and through Jerusalem and the cross to be taken up to glory.

A journey in which Jesus' teaching would be disciples what it means to follow him to his glorious kingdom. So notice, again, we have one of Luke's little structural markers at 17:11.

On the way to Jerusalem. And this section goes through to chapter 19, verse 27. And this morning, we're going to be looking at the first half of this section.

And a section dominated by the theme of the coming of God's kingdom. Do you see verse 20? When will it come? Ask the Pharisees.

[7 : 28] Or over to chapter 19, verse 11. It is supposed that the kingdom of God would appear immediately. And so the idea at the heart of this section is the coming of God's kingdom.

And in our passage, Luke wants to make clear that the coming of God's kingdom demands real faith. Here and now. Otherwise, when it arrives, there will be great and eternal separation.

Whereas where real faith is present, where Jesus' followers are prepared, persistent, and penitent, then there won't be grim separation, but glorious salvation.

Look at chapter 18, verse 8. When the Son of Man comes, will he find such faith on earth? When God's kingdom does come, will he find faith?

Well, we see then firstly, in chapter 17, verses 11 to 19, we see real faith embodied. Real faith embodied. Jesus' coming kingdom promises full salvation for those who recognize their need of mercy and come to Jesus in faith.

[8 : 46] And the first thing to see here in these verses is the theme of separation. Verse 11.

Typically, when we have the Jerusalem markers, the journey markers, it's unspecific about the towns and villages that Jesus passes through.

But here we're told he's passing along between Samaria and Galilee. This isn't incidental.

Remember, Luke is very careful with his details and his ordering.

And the separation here isn't just about geography. Jesus does pass between two places that would be separated on a map. But more than this, notice where the two places are, the significance of them.

Galilee and Samaria. Galilee was in Jewish territory. It was home to those who would have belonged to the professing church of the day. Whereas Samaria was the land of the Samaritans. Those who were hated by the Jews. The Samaritans' worship had been corrupted with all kinds of foreign influences. The Samaritans were like mongrels.

[9 : 53] They were separated not just geographically, but separated because of corrupt worship. They were contemptible to Jewish people. Then notice verse 12.

The ten lepers stood at a distance. Of course, lepers were forced to keep themselves separate. Not just because it was a condition that could spread.

But because Leviticus makes clear, very clear, that to come into contact with a leper was to become defiled. Richly unclean. And so their whole lives were a picture of separation.

Indeed, a picture of the polluting and corrupting presence of sin. Leprosy pictured physical separation. But it also pointed to spiritual separation. And so in a sense, it isn't a surprise that Luke

puts us in a little detail here about them standing at a distance.

Except that the last time we saw Jesus encounter a leper, in chapter 5, we're told very specifically, and indeed rather beautifully, that Jesus touches the leper as he heals him.

[11:00] And so Luke means us to see separation here. There's even separation at the end of this picture as one is separated from the other nine.

Separation is highlighted then. But let's look at what actually happens to these ten lepers. They cry out to Jesus, Master, have mercy on us. And that word translated Master is only used seven times in the New Testament, all of them by Luke, here in his Gospel.

And each time we see Jesus' disciples calling him Master, it's in the context of not really grasping who he is. So back in chapter 5, Simon Peter, aboard his fishing boat, says, Master, we toiled all night and took nothing.

With a hint of skepticism in his voice about Jesus telling him to put his nets out again. Only for a few verses later to see Simon Peter fall on his knees before Jesus as he recognized who Jesus was.

In chapter 8, we see something similar when the disciples are on the boat amidst the storm. Master, we're perishing. Only for Jesus to answer, where is your faith? And the same is the case here.

[12:15] Do you see they ask, verse 13, Master, have mercy on us. And Jesus does grant them mercy. Maybe, verse 14, he sends them to the priests to be certified clean because that's what Leviticus required.

And as they do, they're cleansed. Then verse 15, one of the ten separates from the group and turns back to praise God. Falling down at Jesus' feet, just as Simon Peter had done.

The leper gives thanks. Now, that little detail about giving thanks isn't to be underestimated. It's not a small thing. It's often suggested that in hard times, it would be very helpful for us to make a list of all that we're thankful for, to give us perspective, to help us stave off bitterness with God and other things.

I think sometimes that advice is heard as being quite trite. It's a nice idea, but come on, give me a real solution to what I'm going through now. But listen to Paul in Romans 1, speaking of those who face the wrath of God against unrighteousness.

Paul says, For although they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks to Him. But they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened.

[13:33] Claiming to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man. One writer says, Rebellion against God does not begin with the clenched fist of atheism.

But with the self-satisfied heart of the one for whom thank you is redundant. Feeling to give thanks to God. Making the idea of giving God the glory merely a kind of pious platitude.

That's the entrance to the path that leads to darkened hearts. And to exchanging the God of grace for idolatry. Giving glory to God.

Thanking God. Recognizing and turning in praise. To God. Giving thanks to Him is not a small thing. It isn't the case of, well, it's good if you can get round to it.

Glorifying God isn't just a tagline for life. Something you knew you ought to throw into the mix every so often. It is the most fitting response in the world to an encounter with the grace of God's kingdom.

[14:38] And that's what this leper does. But there's more here. Luke hasn't quite dropped the hammer yet. For right at the end of verse 16, we see that this sole thankful leper is a Samaritan.

Remember that detail in verse 11 about where this was taking place between Galilee and Samaria. And so I take it that we're meant to conclude then that at least some of the ten were Jewish lepers. But here the lone leper, the one who exemplifies faith, for faith is what we see here, is a Samaritan. A foreigner, a mongrel. Basically part of a people who are as good as apostate. This would be like Jesus using as a model of faith today, not a good Presbyterian, but someone who belongs to one of the cults.

A Jehovah's Witness. A Mormon. That's the shock here. But the example of faith in this leper isn't primarily to shock. It is once again to show something of the theme of separation.

[15:45] Here was someone who ought to be separated in every which way. Religiously compromised. Riddled with disease. Riddled with disease. Richly unclean. But rescued.

Here, bowed before Jesus, giving thanks and praise. And then verse 17, Jesus asks, what about the other nine? And verse 18, the focus then fixes now firmly on the one whose response was right,

this foreigner.

And then the precious words to him. Rise and go your way. Your faith has saved you. This single leper has an added blessing from Jesus.

All ten were cleansed. That is, made well from their skin disease. But only one was saved. That is, made well from his sin disease. And so just like the previous instances of Jesus being called master, where a deficient understanding of Jesus ends with a clarification, here we see the same again.

Here is one who didn't just grasp that there was something significant about Jesus. He grasped, verse 16, that he was to be bowed down to. That he's to be worshipped.

[16:58] And so this single leper thanks Jesus, praises him. And look at how Jesus sees it, verse 18. This praising Jesus was giving thanks to God.

This verse embody, these verses embody and illustrate real faith. Faith that cries out for mercy. That knows we need help. That knows we're diseased.

And upon receiving such help, bows down before Jesus in worship. That is faith that overcomes separation and joy, salvation.

And so here in this picture, we have an illustration of the wonders of the kingdom of God. That in Jesus, there is a way out of the separation that we deserve. Our faulty worship, where we ascribe to all manner of things the place of God alone.

To money, to relationships, to our place in the world. And all kinds of other things that we look to for identity and security and purpose. Our faulty worship can be dealt with.

[18:05] Separation can be overcome, even for a Samaritan. Our sin-riddled hearts can be healed. And the separation that we would otherwise deserve can be overcome.

Overcome with real faith. And so we see, secondly, the rest of the passage from chapter 17, 20 through to 18, 14. We see real faith explained.

Real faith explained. There will be no event of more significance in this world than the day when God's kingdom finally and fully comes. When Jesus returns.

When salvation will be by sight. And no longer only by faith. But that day will also be a day of great judgment. And so as Jesus' gospel word comes to us today.

A word that declares the victory of Jesus' kingdom. It's a word that commands and demands the response of faith. And we see in these three episodes what real faith looks like in the face of God's coming kingdom.

[19:11] We see, firstly, that faith is prepared for Jesus' return. Verses 20 to 37. Real faith heeds the challenge of Jesus' earthly ministry.

Heeds the challenge of his kingdom. And so prepares for Jesus' return. The Pharisees, first of all, are looking for Jesus' kingdom here and now.

Verse 20. When is it coming? Where is it? They've consistently refused and refuted Jesus. And they're all mixed up about what his kingdom would look like.

They wanted it right now. Right here in this world. Not conceiving of just how monumental and cosmic God's kingdom will be. And that's because they couldn't understand the depth of the sin problem.

And so instead of salvation to them, and so instead to them salvation looked like something that would alter the present. And that isn't too uncommon, is it?

[20:12] To have ideas about bringing in the kingdom today. To have wild and fanciful ideas about saving the world or the planet through our own good works. The Pharisees might have expected a military intervention to overthrow the Romans.

That would be salvation. Perhaps today some think that education for all might be it. Or the right green credentials. Or alleviating poverty.

But Jesus says, no, no. Even where the world thinks like this, my people mustn't. God's kingdom isn't coming in ways that can be observed. So that we can say, look, there it is.

Or there, or here, look. No, says Jesus. It's in the midst of them. Verse 21.

In the midst of them by the means of the challenge of Jesus' miraculous ministry. Which is confronting them here and now with eternal realities. With the inbreaking of his kingdom. With hints of it, glimpses of it.

[21:14] Of a kingdom that's yet to come. But also then of the need for repentance and faith.

That's what we've already seen. Jesus has already said that the kingdom of God has come near.

In chapter 10, through his disciples' ministry. He said in chapter 11, to those who opposed him. Just like the Pharisees. He said, the kingdom of God has come upon you. As Jesus goes about his ministry.

And so Jesus' answer to the Pharisees is that the kingdom of God is in the midst of them. Indeed, its challenge is right here. Right in front of your face. Right now. And so right now is the time to hear and to heed it.

Well, Jesus then addresses his disciples. To make it abundantly clear that there is a great and terrible day that is coming. That is yet to come. And so he spells six things about, spells out six things about that coming that will serve to prepare his followers for it.

So he says, firstly, it will be apparent. Verses 23 and 24. We will be left in no doubt that God's kingdom has fully arrived when it happens.

[22 : 25] We won't need to wonder. Was this it? Was that it? And so we needn't and mustn't fall for the weird and wonderful predictions that rumble around this world.

About when it will happen. About has it happened. About what it will look like. And all the rest. Jesus bursts the bubble of all of that. Verse 23. People will say, look there. There he is.

No, no. Look here. I find Jesus. All manner of cults and sects make such claims. But Jesus says, no, no. There will be no doubt on that day.

Verse 24. As the lightning flashes and lights up the sky from one side to the other, so will the Son of Man be on his day. There will be no doubt. There will be apparent.

But we do have to reckon with why there will be all manner of people making claims about his arrival. Or what's more, we have to reckon with why people fall for it or want to fall for it.

[23 : 24] Why it would be tempting to listen to the charlatans who claim, look, here's Jesus coming now. And the answer is secondly in verse 25 where we see affliction.

The days until Jesus appears will be marked by affliction. There is no crown without the cross.

Jesus' journey towards being taken up in glory, his journey to be raised up from the dead and to ascend in glory to his father's side, is a journey that is unmistakably and undeniably through Jerusalem and through the cross.

Jesus must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation. But here's the reality. When we read this generation in the Gospels, it's usually speaking of more than simply a people in a particular time.

It's pretty much always negative. It's usually a statement of condemnation. This generation refers to those who won't believe the Gospel. And the reality is that all who would follow Jesus on his path towards glory are really following Jesus on that path, which is a path that will be marked by opposition from this generation.

Opposition from those who still resist and refuse and revolt against Jesus and so his people. Jesus tells us they hated him first and so they'll hate his followers.

[24 : 53] Jesus' kingdom will come. And when it does, it will be obvious, apparent, unmistakable. But until then, it will be marked by affliction.

And Jesus is saying, don't let that affliction cause you to look for a way out. Don't follow those who promise a crown without a cross. Verse 23, don't follow them.

Thirdly, verses 26 to 30, it will be abrupt and astonishing. The coming of God's kingdom will astonish those who are unprepared for it. Those who have scoffed at the Gospel.

They'll be confronted in an instant with a terrible reality, a terrible judgment. They won't be prepared for that day because they haven't been listening. But the truth is that that is a recurring pattern throughout history, isn't it?

People failing to hear and heed God's word of warning, carrying on as if everything is fine and normal, only to be greeted with a terrible surprise. Verse 26, that was the case with Noah in his day.

[26 : 01] It was an age of great wickedness and sexual perversity. And on they went, eating and drinking and marrying until, verse 27, until Noah entered the ark and the flood of judgment came.

Or in Lot's day, the people of Sodom, again marked by wickedness and sexual perversity. They wouldn't listen. And they kept on, verse 28, eating and drinking and buying and selling and planting and building.

Carrying on with the everyday concerns of life in this world, life devoid of God. And so despite the wickedness and the warnings, they carry on preoccupied, absorbed in the everyday.

And so here, everyday life continues until it's too late, the flood and the fire come. That is, it was too late for those who hadn't responded to God's gracious word of warning in his gospel.

And Jesus says, verse 30, the same thing will happen when he returns. An abrupt and a terrible judgment. We need to listen to this.

[27 : 09] We need to heed this. Listen to Ralph Davis. He says, it's easy to assume that it's non-Christians who are always preoccupied with their own stuff. And as we say, are only gazing at their own navels.

But there's a word here to the modern disciple. You too are liable to be so taken up with brushing your teeth, choosing your earrings, closing property deals, building houses, going to work, getting through your education, passing your exams, taking kids to music lessons, running sports teams, going to church, the beauty shop, the grocery store, text messaging, mowing the grass, finding a new hairdresser, paying the dentist, collecting prescriptions.

All these things. All these things. But it's almost like you're living in Sodom. It's the frenzied pace of one thing after another that loses sight of the coming of the Son of Man.

Jesus tells his followers to be prepared for his return. Don't be caught out by it. Be careful that your everyday life doesn't obscure your view of what is to come.

Eternal realities are paramount. His return will astonish those who haven't heeded, who weren't interested. And so Jesus also says, fourthly, watch your affections, verses 31 to 33.

[28 : 28] We can so easily be caught up with this world and all that it offers. But Jesus' words here about being prepared are that we ought to hold lightly the things that belong in this world.

The career we long for. The bank balance. The bigger house. The title. Whatever it is. When Jesus comes, it will be abrupt. And so when he comes, verse 31, do not be going down from the roof to gather your things.

Jesus is saying that we mustn't let the attachments of this world hold too much of our affections. Lest we be like, verse 32, Lot's wife. Remember Lot's wife.

Jesus has already alluded to her at the end of chapter 9. She looked back. She had a divided heart. Even as she saw the fiery sulfur raining down on Sodom.

Even as she could see the judgment that had come. There was a longing for what she'd left behind. One preacher says, Yahweh's agents could try to get Mrs. Lot out of Sodom.

[29 : 32] But couldn't get Sodom out of Mrs. Lot. She looked back. Her eyes followed her affections. And so Jesus is crystal clear.

When we go out of our way to preserve our lives here, we'll lose them. But whoever loses it will keep it. To be prepared for Jesus' return means guarding our affections.

And not holding on to this life for all that it's worth in this world. Because we know that Jesus is coming back. And his return will be a return in salvation. Wondrous salvation.

And a return in judgment. Woeful judgment. Judgment greater even than the flood and the fire of Noah and Lot's day. It will be a judgment that brings, fifthly, verses 34 and 35, alienation.

On that day will be exposed a complete separation. When Christ returns. When God's kingdom fully comes. Then it will mark a distinct division.

[30 : 37] The sheep will be separated from the goats. Those who are prepared for his return will be separated forever. From those who are unprepared. For those who haven't heeded Jesus and haven't heeded his gospel.

Those who have refused him will face an alienation from God and from all his people. A separation so stark that it cuts through families, marriages, workplaces, colleagues, friends.

Do you see that verse 34? A couple will be in bed. And one will be taken. Taken. Just like those who were taken by the flood.

Or taken by the fire. And so it's clear. Jesus return. The coming of God's kingdom. And all the ramifications will be sixthly. Verse 37. Acute.

The experience of that last day will be severe and intense. It's a picture of life and death. Salvation and judgment. Heaven and hell. But the disciples ask verse 37.

[31 : 37] Where? And then we have this slightly puzzling response. Where the corpse is. They're the vulture circle. Whatever the exact detail.

This is clearly a picture permeated by death. A corpse and circling vultures. This alienation. This separation. Is ultimately bound up with death.

With the ultimate curse. From the very beginning of the garden. Death as a picture of the opposite of life. Of what we're made for. Created for. Created to be.

Graciously given at God's hand. God's judgment will be full and final. Eternal death. Death. As we have seen Jesus speak of already.

As we saw so terrifyingly last week. And it will be obvious. To all involved. Perhaps that's what's meant by the circling vultures.

[32 : 34] It's so often an obvious sign that there's a corpse or a carcass. Isn't it? Circling vultures. The final coming of God's kingdom will be the day when eternal death.

And eternal life. Are fixed. Are set. And so in light of all of this. Jesus is saying that those who have the eyes of faith. That is real faith.

Will see these realities. Be prepared for them. Living in light of them. But real faith also persists until Jesus returns.

Chapter 18 verses 1 to 8. Persists until Jesus returns. God's people will need to learn patience and perseverance in this life. Even as they long for Jesus' return.

The parable of the persistent widow teaches us that verse 1. We ought to continue to pray and not lose heart. Now Jesus isn't talking about prayer in general.

[33 : 34] But rather prayer that flows from what Jesus has just spelt out. Prayer like. Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as in heaven. Until Jesus returns.

This world will know the creaking of life under the curse. The frustration of life in a fallen world. And his people will know the attacks of those who abhor Jesus. And all of that as we wait.

And so Jesus gives us an example of the unjust judge. Who didn't fear or respect. Fear God or respect man. This judge is badgered and pestered.

She is down at every turn. By a widow seeking justice or vindication. That's what the word means in verse 3 and 5. Vindication against her adversary. The picture here is that the judge can't get any peace for this woman.

We don't know what wrong she suffered. But she longs for justice. In verse 5. Her persistence pays off. Not noticed because of his character.

[34 : 42] But rather his desire to have a bit of peace. Persistence works even with unrighteous judges. But remember what we've already seen. Back in chapter 11.

If even earthly fathers. If even wicked fathers. Know how to give good gifts to their children. How much more is that true of God? He tells us he won't give us a scorpion.

If we ask for an egg. And how much. How much greater a judge is. The righteous one. The truly righteous one. When we come to him seeking vindication.

He won't grunt it merely because we pester him. The reality is. God is more interested in justice than we are. Look at verse 7.

I think it's better read or translated. And will not God give justice to his elect. Who cry to him day and night. Though he delays long over them.

[35 : 41] And the answer is yes. It's certain. It's sure he will. But it won't be immediate. The need for persistence.

Comes from the delay. It seems like a delay to us. Despite God saying it will come speedily. But let's remember why there is a delay. For God to grant justice.

To vindicate his people. Would mean his final judgment happening. It would mean that there is no longer. Any opportunity for anyone to repent. We knew as Peter tells us.

That God is patient. Desiring that all might reach repentance. And so yes. We long for the day. When all afflictions are turned upside down.

We long for the day. When every painful aspect of life. Lived in this world has ended. When nobody will ever try to beat the faith out of us. Or mock the faith out of us. We long for the day.

[36 : 35] When we'll no longer have our old nature pawing us. Tempting us. Pressing us to breaking point. We long for the day. When the specter of death. No longer hangs over us. Where we don't have to face the terror.

Of being robbed of our loved ones. Or bearing the pain of seeing people dear to us. Diagnosed with awful diseases. We long for the day. When these bodies will no longer ache. When Jesus' people will exchange weakness and folly and dishonor.

For power and wisdom and glory. But as we long for it. We do so conscious that it will come in God's time.

When he is ready. When his grace is extended as far as he would have it. That is faith. Trusting on and on in the midst of a sin-stained world.

Persistently praying on for the great day when God will. He will ensure perfect justice. And so we mustn't give up on it.

[37 : 34] Listen to the words of a commentator. He says this praying is for God to give justice to his weary and beaten down people. God's people live in a world in which they are sealed, assaulted and sometimes annihilated.

And so in face of that, they must never give in or lose heart or throw in the towel. They must keep praying for God to put things right. This prayer requires unrelenting tenacity.

And isn't there something oddly comforting or helpful about the fact that Jesus needs to tell us to persist in prayer. To persist in prayer for that day.

Him telling us indicates that it will be a challenge. It will be a struggle at points. If you find that, you won't be the only one.

But he's telling us we must keep praying. We must keep longing for the day of indication. Because verse 8, that is the faith that Jesus longs to see when he returns. Faith that has eyes to see and be prepared.

[38 : 40] Faith that is persistent. Faith that knows justice will be done. Vindication will come. Because we have a good and righteous judge. So real faith persists.

But also, when Jesus returns, he's going to be looking for faith that isn't presumptuous. And that's what we see in this final little episode. Real faith is penitent in light of Jesus' return.

Verses 9 to 14. Real faith never presumes upon God's grace and mercy. It's always penitent and never proud. Notice verse 9.

This parable is told to those who trust in themselves. So treat others with contempt. It's a parable to expose self-righteousness. And so we have a Pharisee and a tax collector praying in the temple. The Pharisee stands by himself to pray. And he thanks God that he's not like other men. Not like extortioners or adulterers or that tax collector over there. So he thanks God for what he is not.

[39 : 46] And then verse 12. He thanks God for what he is. I fast twice a week. I tithe all that I have. Now we can probably spot quite quickly something troublesome here.

But I wonder if we see it quite as clearly as Jesus intends. After all, these are things to get to thank God for. If God in his grace has spared us from all manner of evil desires and temptations, that is something to give thanks to God for.

But notice two things about this Pharisee's thanks. The first, he goes beyond what God requires. Notice he says, I fast twice a week.

That's more fasting than was ever required in the law. There's one fast laid out in the law in Leviticus 16, and it was to be once a year. And so one must be very careful not to establish in our minds or in our church habits that become a barometer of righteousness.

Habits that go beyond what we find in the scriptures. I'm a proper Christian because I fast twice a week. It's easy to build a form of righteousness based on what we've decided to do.

[40 : 58] And in so doing, we can mix up an application with a principle. So think about an example of that, perhaps in relation to children. A right principle, it is the responsibility of parents, not the state, to decide what is best for our children's education.

It's a right principle that we must grasp, all the while bringing them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. But an application of that principle can look different. That could be homeschooling.

That could be a Christian school. It could be a local school. But to make homeschooling a barometer of righteousness would be to confuse application for principle.

Going beyond the scriptures, setting up a sense of self-righteousness. But the same thing can happen with our approach to all manner of things, to alcohol, to the Sabbath, even how we spend money.

All manner of ways we can do that. It is important to hold principles clearly, but to be generous around how a principle can be rightly applied.

[42 : 06] Because we mustn't seek to be more righteous than God. Because that won't be righteousness. It would be a twisting of His good law. And so the second thing about the Pharisee's prayer, verse 9, those who think themselves righteous like this, treat others with contempt.

It follows, doesn't it? If we formulate our own pictures of what a real Christian looks like, what a righteous Christian looks like, and it entails absolute particulars about what to do with our children,

what we spend our money on, what Bible we must use, how we must dress, and on and on and on, all these things.

If we develop our own sense of self-righteousness, then what goes hand in hand with that is always going to be contempt, judgment upon those who differ. Notice, the Pharisee didn't give thanks for being spared the desire for adultery, but rather that he wasn't like these people.

That's the pathway of superiority and contempt. Because we always weigh up well, don't we? With our own standard. We can always find people that we're better than, or we think we're better than. And so this Pharisee has contempt for the tax collector. In truth, if we were to meet both of them, we'd likely prefer to interact with the Pharisee. If we were to have one of them as a neighbor, we'd prefer the Pharisee.

[43 : 31] Polite, respectable. Whereas the tax collectors were dishonest crooks. But notice the posture of verse 13. The tax collector stood far off.

Notice again separation. Aware that that was what he deserved. And so he won't even lift up his eyes to heaven. He can only beat his breast in sorrow for sin.

Which ironically is one of the reasons for fasting, according to Isaiah. To show sorrow for sin. And notice his prayer. Just as we began with the lepers. Be merciful to me.

A sinner. He was aware of the truth. No pride. No presuming upon God. Not thinking I deserve this. Not making demands. Be merciful to me.

A sinner. And so Jesus lands it. One of these two went home justified. One of these two went home saved. There's a tax collector.

[44 : 33] Notice we began with an episode through the lepers that has a request for mercy from those standing far off. And we see giving thanks. And here we have a tax collector standing far off.

Asking for mercy. And we see a Pharisee giving thanks. But it's thanks that's skewed. Because real faith, penitent faith, gives thanks for mercy that has been received.

Unearned. Undeserved. It can be tempting to look at this parable and think to ourselves, thank God I'm not like that Pharisee. But that is to forget that the great leveler for humanity is that we are all desperately in need.

That is to forget that in light of the coming judgment, every single one of us requires mercy. And so real faith is penitent.

Not proud or presumptuous. And so Jesus' message here in this passage is to tell us that my kingdom is coming. And so he asks, when it does, will I find faith?

[45 : 47] This kind of faith. Real faith. Faith that is prepared. Faith that is persistent. And faith that is penitent. Let's pray.

Lord, I would need your help. We need your help when this world assails us all around. So grant us all the grace we require to never give up on or lose sight of your glorious kingdom.

Temptations will abound to choose an easier way. Our patience will be tested. And so we ask you to grant us the eyes of faith and guide us and guard us for that day.

For we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen.