

**Home Group Leaders Discussion Guide**  
**Luke 17:20-37**

- Q. What are you currently looking forward to or waiting for? (possible icebreaker)**
- Q. Articulate your understanding of the Kingdom of God. What is the essence, nature, and character of the Kingdom of God? What is attractive about the Kingdom? What is confusing about the Kingdom? What is desirable about the Kingdom? (What, for some, might be undesirable about the Kingdom?)**
- Q. When you think about the 2<sup>nd</sup> Coming/return of Jesus, what thoughts and feelings are evoked in you?**

This passage starts out with a question from the Pharisees. We get no real indication from them or from Jesus as to the motive or tone of the question. Was it a doubtful, skeptical, testing, sort of question? Was it a question of genuine curiosity? It's hard to say. (Though the increasing tension with the Pharisees that we've seen in Luke would easily cause us to think the former.) They wanted to know WHEN the Kingdom of God would come. Jesus' response exposed their inaccurate view regarding the nature of the Kingdom. (We shouldn't fault them too much about that...no one had an accurate view of the Kingdom.)

Jesus' answer to WHEN was basically "Right now" (to paraphrase His rather cryptic response). The way the NIV translates verse 21b, "...because the kingdom of God is within you.", easily leads to overly spiritualizing the nature of the kingdom. Jesus was not simply talking about "the reign of God in our hearts" (in a very real, tangible way). A better way of translating it would be, "...the kingdom of God is among you, in your midst, within your grasp." In other words, "it's HERE, NOW, because I am here." (And the physical/tangible nature of the kingdom is still here, and is seen/expressed through the Church.)

Oddly, we're not told how the Pharisees reacted to that. In Luke's telling of the story, Jesus quickly turns His attention to the disciples. Perhaps Jesus knew the Pharisees wouldn't/couldn't grasp the truth of that statement. But the disciples were growing in their understanding of who Jesus was, so He took the opportunity to give them some expanded teaching on the subject.

What would they have understood regarding Jesus' teaching here, and what are we to glean from it?

While the kingdom was present in Jesus (and has been ever since), it is also not fully consummated. That is still to come. So while the disciples might have initially thought, "Yes! The kingdom is here, now, and we're buddies with the King!", Jesus wanted them to know tough times were ahead. They would soon long for the days of the Son of Man. While the kingdom would be present, and Jesus would be present by His Spirit and among His people, it would not be the same. Don't you and I also long for the physical presence of Jesus? And Jesus

also warned them, in their longing, to not go running after claims of a false Messiah. When Jesus returns and consummates His kingdom, it will be unmistakable and unmissable. But before the Kingdom can come in its fullness, some very important business needs to be attended to...namely the Cross (verse 25). The cross is essential for a number of reasons. First, by Jesus' sacrifice it offers us atonement for our sins. That's pretty important! Secondly, and just as important (maybe even more important), the subsequent resurrection demonstrates Christ's victory over evil (victory over sin, death, and Satan). The salvation this imparts on us has far reaching consequences that go beyond where we end up when we die. It shows/teaches us that the "way of the cross", the cruciform life of humble, sacrificial service is THE WAY of Life, THE WAY of the Kingdom. It shows us the pattern of how life ought to be lived NOW, in the present reality of the Kingdom. Yes, it's still to be fully consummated, but there is a way of living into now. That's what we are called/invited to by following/trusting Jesus.

It is popular to look for "signs" of the 2<sup>nd</sup> coming/return of Jesus, or to predict the conditions in which He will appear. But that sort of misses the point Jesus was making about the days of Noah and the days of Lot. Notice what Jesus said: "*People were eating, drinking, marrying and being given in marriage...*" (vs 27) and "*People were eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building.*" (vs 28) In other words, life was going along as life typically goes. There will be a suddenness, and unexpectedness, an unforeseeable-ness about it.

Most people are familiar with the story of Noah, but less are perhaps familiar with Lot. We're introduced to Lot back in Genesis 12 as the nephew of Abram. We learn a little more about him in Genesis 13-14. But the part of Lot's story that Jesus was referring to can be found in Genesis 18-19. As Lot and his family were fleeing for their lives they were told to not look back as Sodom was destroyed. But Lot's wife looked back and became a pillar salt. Many scholars believe that her "looking back" is meant to be understood as longingly looking back with affection and attachment on what she was leaving behind.

**Q. As you think about your pre-Christian days, is there anything you miss? Explain. Why do you think Jesus used this particular reference at this time? What point was He trying to make?**

It should be pointed out that not everyone agrees that this passage is actually dealing with the 2<sup>nd</sup> coming of Christ. Some feel that Jesus is referring more to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD throughout this passage. Personally, I think a case can be made either way...there may even be room for "both/and" as sometimes Biblical prophecy have more than one level of fulfilment. Though there is room for disagreement on specifically what this passage is pointing to, what is important and can be agreed upon is the two-stage nature of the Kingdom that we've already mentioned, and that the second-stage, the return of Jesus in glory, is something we can all find hope in.

The questions asked by the disciples is an interesting one, isn't it? "*Where, Lord?*" (verse 37). Unlike the Pharisees who asked "when?", the disciples asked "where?" And Jesus' response is again cryptic. "Eagles" is a better translation than "vultures" in this verse...which is one of the

reasons why some people feel this passage points to the destruction of Jerusalem, as “eagles” were an imperial symbol of Rome.

- Q. Why do you think the disciples asked “where?”?**
- Q. What are some of the 2<sup>nd</sup> coming/end times scenarios you are familiar with? Do you hold to any one in particular? Why that one?**
- Q. What is at risk if we under-emphasize the 2<sup>nd</sup> coming of Jesus? What is at risk if we over-emphasize the 2<sup>nd</sup> coming of Jesus?**
- Q. What is at risk if we don’t understand the Kingdom of God as a two-stage phenomena?**