

Be Ready for The Full Coming of His Kingdom

Lk 17:20-37 (text)

30 June 2019, Reformed Church of Wainuiomata 10:30 am

(Put together by Pieter van Huyssteen with due acknowledgement)

Intro

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ,

In September last year, Hurricane Florence hit North and South Carolina.

Well, before this monster hurricane made landfall – yes, while it was still on its way to the east coast of the USA, the authorities issued mandatory evacuation orders! Yes, they used all forms of mass media to inform the people to leave their homes and cities in time and to travel further inland, for the biggest storm ever was on its way!

Sadly, quite a number of people did not heed these mandatory orders – and *mandatory* does not mean that the police will come knock on every door in every village, town or city, because the police simply don't have the manpower to go check whether every single person obeyed the orders!

The result?

Well, just in the Carolinas, at least 51 people died from Hurricane Florence.¹

Question:

Why is it so that, whenever people are warned and even given *mandatory orders* to evacuate before such an enormous event, some people just will not obey?

Well, an article tells me that *some* don't heed the call, because they have disabilities, and, sadly, they have no family or friends to help them get out!

Some *others* say they couldn't take their pets with them neither could they leave them behind, so they chose to rather stay with their beloved cat or dog or bunny, and just hoped for the best!

Still others claim that, despite all the mass-media warnings about the hurricane's coming, they *never got the message* that a hurricane was on its way!

Perhaps we can forgive some of these people for not evacuating!

But here are some inexcusable reasons...

You see, some people were just plain stubborn and simply *chose to ignore* the orders!

Yes, some said they had too many valuable possessions which they didn't want to leave behind out of fear that looters or burglars might come steal these!² But here's a question: What's more important – a marble statue in your lounge, or your life?

Well, in our text, our Lord Jesus is urging His listeners (also you & me) to be ready for the consummation – yes, for the full/final coming – of God's kingdom.

Why?

Well, one reason is: we want to live eternally with Him who so loved us that He gave us His Son so that we would not perish! Another reason is: if we are not ready – yes, if we have not received Jesus as our Saviour & Lord – then *surely* God's judgement awaits us – and that will make a hurricane look like child's-play!

So, Jesus urges us to be ready for the coming of His kingdom! And to impress the urgency of this upon us, He tells us about the 1) *when*, 2) *how*, and 3) *where* of the kingdom's coming!

¹ Cf. e.g. <https://www.worldvision.org/disaster-relief-news-stories/2018-hurricane-florence-facts>

² For more on the above, cf. e.g. <https://www.vox.com/science-and-health/2017/8/25/16202296/hurricane-florence-2018-evacuation-psychology>

Will you (will I) be ready?
Here's the first point...

When

My brother & sister,
Most Jews of Christ's day were sick & tired of the Romans who had been ruling over them for the better part of a hundred years!³
No wonder all Jews were eagerly waiting for God's kingdom to come – a kingdom which they thought would help them to, by way of *military power, skill and revolution*, get rid of those Romans!
And here's the thing: you see, the Pharisees had often heard Jesus teaching about the kingdom of God – yes, that the disciples should pray for the coming of the kingdom; and that the kingdom of God is at hand (is near)!
But many Jews didn't want to believe that it was *with Jesus* that God's long-awaited kingdom was coming!
Indeed, there was a time when even *John the Baptist* doubted in Jesus!⁴
Thus, was it now not logic that the Pharisees should ask Jesus the *when* question – when the kingdom was coming!?

Well, before Jesus answered their *when* question, He had to first say something about the *nature* of the kingdom! You see, *when* the kingdom would come was closely connected with the *nature* of the kingdom – i.e. that God's kingdom is *not visible* in the normal sense! Yes, it would not come with pomp & glory; not with powerful display – yes, not with army tanks, helicopters, fighter jets, and with mortars (so to speak); yes, not in a military way with infantry, cavalry, artillery, chariots and bow and arrow!
That's why (in v.20-21) Jesus says that God's kingdom's coming does not happen in ways that can be observed – yes, not as if people would be able to *see* it, *point* at it and say "Look, here it is!" "Rejoice, for finally, here come those long-awaited war horses and chariots rushing into Jerusalem to free us from the Romans!"
No, that's not the way God's kingdom would come!
After all, God's kingdom is not just for Jews! It's for people of all nations!
So, what is Jesus saying?
Well, is He not saying that His kingdom is first & foremost *a spiritual kingdom*?⁵ Is that not what Jesus later on told Pontius Pilate when Pilate asked Him: "Are You the king of the Jews?"
Remember what Jesus answered: "***My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world.***"⁶
See? If Jesus' kingdom were of this world, then, as He was standing there in chains in front of Pontius Pilate, Jesus' soldiers on horses, and His foot-soldiers and chariots and artillery would have rushed in to kill Pilate and the Sanhedrin and free Him.

³ Yes, at the time our Lord Jesus was fulfilling His ministry, the Romans had already been ruling over Jerusalem for about 96 years (i.e. since 63 B.C.)!

⁴ Good point made by Bock, D. L. (1996). [Luke](#) (pp. 449–460). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House. Also cf. Lk 7:18-23 for John the Baptist's doubt and Christ's reply to that doubt!

⁵ Words used by Henry, M. (1994). [Matthew Henry's commentary on the whole Bible: complete and unabridged in one volume](#) (pp. 1887–1889). Peabody: Hendrickson.

⁶ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (Jn 18:36). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

So (back to our text), how does Jesus now answer the Pharisees?

Well, He says (in v.21), “...**behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you.**”⁷

What does He mean with “in the midst” of you?

Well, that in Him (i.e. in *Jesus* and His *message* backed-up by all His *miracles*), and *within*⁸ the hearts of all His followers, the kingdom (kingship)⁹ of God is *in their midst!*¹⁰

In other words, “Dear Pharisees, the kingdom’s coming is already happening in your nation, but you are not aware of it, because you are too spiritually blind to see it happening in your midst!”

“See, Pharisees? The kingdom of God does not come with guns of revolution!” “No, it comes with a “revolution” inside your *hearts* – yes, when, in total spiritual revolution, My kingdom changes proud, vain and carnal hearts into humble, Godfearing and heavenly hearts!”¹¹

So, *when* is the kingdom’s coming?

Well, its coming has already started!

But remember! The kingdom is also growing and growing and growing until it will be consummated – yes, until it will have *fully* come!

And, yes, you Pharisees, you want it to come with display of power? Well, then wait until the kingdom’s *full* coming (until its consummation)! *Then* you’ll see power & glory with the triumphal return of the Son of Man!

When will that *complete* coming of the kingdom happen?

Well, Jesus says (in v.25) that He had to first suffer many things and be rejected by the generation of His time! Of course, Jesus was referring to His suffering and cross-death!

But so, when will the fullness of the kingdom of God arrive?

Well, in v.24, Jesus says to His disciples as much as, “Not now, *for days of hardship & suffering 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.*

My brother & sister, if our *Lord* had to first suffer before the end-coming of God’s kingdom, who then are His *followers* that *they* should be spared suffering!?

That’s why Jesus told the disciples (in v.24) – and also you & me – that times will come in which we will long to have what the disciples had when Jesus healed the sick, when He walked on that storm-vexed sea, and when He raised the dead! But we will not see such days!

⁷ ESV

⁸ This is how some commentators and English Bible versions have rendered the Greek word *entos* (ἐντός), **inside, within, within the limits of** (Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., Bauer, W., & Gingrich, F. W. (2000). [A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian literature](#) (3rd ed., p. 340). Chicago: University of Chicago Press). Also cf. Hendriksen, W. 2004. Exposition of the Gospel according to Luke (In: Hendriksen, W. ed. New testament Commentary. Grand Rapids, MI : Baker Book House. p.805)

⁹ *Kingship* or *rule* is actually the most prominent meaning of the Greek word *basileia* (βασιλεία) a term relating to royal administration ① **the act of ruling**, ② gener. **kingship, royal power, royal rule** (Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., Bauer, W., & Gingrich, F. W. (2000). [A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian literature](#) (3rd ed., p. 168). Chicago: University of Chicago Press).

¹⁰ This is how some other commentators and English Bible versions have rendered the Greek word *entos* (ἐντός)

¹¹ Cf. Henry (ibid) “Then it *comes* when it makes those humble, and serious, and heavenly, that were proud, and vain, and carnal,—when it *weans* those from the world that were *wedded* to the world; and therefore look for the kingdom of God in the revolutions of the heart, not of the civil government.”

Of course, a first fulfilment of these words happened within the first forty years after Jesus' ascension, when the Jews so longed for a military messiah who could save them from Roman rule, that hundreds of messiahs came and claimed that they were THE Messiah promised by the Scriptures!

Jesus says, "Don't go out or follow them!" "They're false!"

Well, finally the year 70 AD came – the year in which the Romans annihilated the Jews and destroyed their villages and cities, and killed 1.1 million Jews! That was the First-Century Jewish holocaust!

So?

How do we sum up point one – i.e. the *when* of the coming of the kingdom?

Well, that, on the one hand, the kingdom has *already* come with Jesus' first coming; and that, despite hardship, conflict and persecution, it is now growing and growing!

On the other hand, the coming of the kingdom has *not yet happened* – i.e. not yet happened *in full*! Yes, the *consummation* of the kingdom has not yet happened! That will only happen on the Last Day! And only God knows the exact *when* of that day's coming! Until then (and ever), you & I are not to follow any other so-called messiah or any other religion or philosophy!

Well, so far re Point 1: "When"

Here is point 2...

How

My brother & sister, in v.24 our Lord says as much as, "Don't worry that you might perhaps miss out on the fulfilment of the coming of the kingdom of God!" "Don't worry about that, for what happened to those who claimed that they missed out on the news that a hurricane was coming their way – well, that will not happen to anyone regarding the final coming of the kingdom of God!" "Mark My words!" "You won't miss out on the return of the Son of Man, because that Day will come like a flash of lightning, which lights up all of the midnight sky no matter where the lightning bolt appears!"

Well, the place where I grew up (South Africa's North-West Province) counts among those places in the world that have the highest rate of lightning strikes in summer!¹² So, I, like other South Africans, have many stories to tell about lightning. However, this one thing stands out, i.e. that when one lightning bolt strikes, the whole air is full of electricity – as bright as daylight!

Well, Jesus says (v.24), "...*so will the Son of Man be in his day.*" "So, don't worry that you will miss My coming!"

And that's so different to how His kingdom is coming *now*, for, you see, whereas now (between our Lord's first and second coming), the kingdom of God is *not* coming *with display of power*, yet on the Last Day it *will!!!* Then all people – even those who rejected Christ – will see the power and glory of God.

You ask, "How else will the kingdom's fullness come?"

Well, it will come *suddenly*! It will come when you least expect it! As someone has said, "When you least expect it, then expect it!"¹³

Yes, Jesus compares it with the time of Noah and of Lot when it was "business as usual;" yes, when the people were eating and drinking and marrying and being given in marriage,

¹² For a world map showing the countries with the highest lightning-strike rates, cf.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Distribution_of_lightning#/media/File:Lightning_Flash_Density_12.gif

¹³ Sproul RC in his audio sermon on Lk 17:20-37 for which cf.

<https://www.ligonier.org/learn/sermons/kingdom-come/>

then suddenly disaster came upon them – the flood in Noah’s time, and fire & sulphur in Lot’s time!

Now, of course, Jesus did not mean to say that it’s wrong to eat, drink, and get married! Yes, there’s nothing wrong in all of these actions themselves! But when people perform all these actions without any acknowledgement of God, then *that’s* a great sin; yes, that gives an indication that you are not ready for the kingdom’s coming!

So, Jesus says (v.32), “Remember Lot’s wife!” Of course, Jesus, of all people, knew perfectly what happened to Lot’s wife. I mean, she stopped and turned around behind her husband’s back! Why did she do that? Did she perhaps have the same heart as those people in North & South Carolina who didn’t want to evacuate their homes because they just couldn’t get themselves to leave their precious possessions? And so, did she, on the day of God’s judgement on her town, turn around to see if, perhaps, she could save some things that she had idolised? Yes, did she look with a heart that was yearning for her lovely belongings?

Well, the Bible tells us (in Gn 19:26), ***But Lot’s wife, behind him, looked back, and she became a pillar of salt.***

Of course, my brother & sister, the coming of the kingdom of God (the consummation of it) – yes, that Last Day ***when the Son of Man is revealed***¹⁴ – will be a glorious day! But it will also be a dreadful day... for all those who come under God’s judgement!

Yes, God’s judgement will come... just as at the first time Christ’s words got fulfilled in 70 A.D. when God’s judgement came upon the Jewish nation because they had rejected their Saviour!

You see, the Romans came and, under General Titus, they annihilated the Jews and destroyed all their villages and cities – even Jerusalem, the Holy City, was razed to the ground! The Jewish historian, Josephus, tells us that altogether 1.1 million Jews were massacred in that event¹⁵ – which was the Jews’ First-Century holocaust!

Well, that was also the time that saw the first fulfilment of Jesus’ words of verse 31, which remind me of that plane crash that happened early last month at an airport in Moscow. You may remember how, *while the plane was already on fire*, some passengers still wasted time to get their luggage out of the overhead lockers before they left that plane.¹⁶

Jesus says, ***“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.”***

Then Jesus says (v.33-35), ***“Whoever seeks to preserve his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life will keep it. ³⁴I tell you, in that night there will be two in one bed. One will be taken and the other left. ³⁵There will be two women grinding together. One will be taken and the other left.”***

Sadly, some people have taken Jesus’ words as referring to the Rapture! But rather, Jesus is simply saying: one will escape judgement, and one won’t!¹⁷

RC Sproul reminds us that, “...in the ancient world, when the messenger came and announced that an invading army was coming into their territory, what did the people do? Where did they go to escape? It doesn’t matter whether it was Palestine or Germany or anywhere else – in the ancient world, when hostile forces entered the borders, the people fled to walled cities! Those walled cities were walled to be protection against invaders!

¹⁴ Cf. Lk 17:30 “...***so will it be on the day when the Son of Man is revealed.***”

¹⁵ Cf. e.g. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Siege_of_Jerusalem_\(70_CE\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Siege_of_Jerusalem_(70_CE))

¹⁶ It happened on the 5th May 2019 when an Aeroflot airliner crashed at Moscow's Sheremetyevo airport, killing 41 of the 73 passengers. cf. e.g. <https://phys.org/news/2019-05-lessons-moscow-airport-luggage.html>

¹⁷ Cf. Sproul (ibid)

But Jesus told His disciples: ‘When the enemy comes, flee to the hills – to the mountains!’¹⁸ And that’s exactly what happened in the first century. The *Jewish* population of Israel rushed to their walled city, Jerusalem, because it was the safest place to be (so they thought). But the *Christians* didn’t go to Jerusalem. They went to the mountains and were spared the holocaust. At least *most* of them went there; those that listened to Jesus and fled immediately, and didn’t want to wait around for confirmation. But those who were left behind were slaughtered by the Romans while the others found refuge in the mountains.”¹⁹

Well, the Pharisees who prompted this whole conversation have now heard about the *when* and the *how* of the coming of God’s kingdom!
Now they ask a final question – i.e. *where* – where will this judgement of God happen?
Well, that’s our last small point...

Where

Jesus uses an ancient Jewish proverb²⁰ to answer this question.
You want to know where God’s judgement will take place? Well, *there where the carcasses are, there the vultures/eagles²¹ gather together!*

¹⁸ Cf. Mt 24:15-20 “**So when you see the abomination of desolation spoken of by the prophet Daniel, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand), ¹⁶ then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. ¹⁷ Let the one who is on the housetop not go down to take what is in his house, ¹⁸ and let the one who is in the field not turn back to take his cloak. ¹⁹ And alas for women who are pregnant and for those who are nursing infants in those days! ²⁰ Pray that your flight may not be in winter or on a Sabbath...**”

¹⁹ My slight adaptation of the words of Sproul (ibid)

²⁰ Cf. Job 39:26-30 (especially v.30),

“Does the hawk soar by your wisdom?

Does it spread its wings to the south?

**²⁷ Or does the eagle fly high at your command
and construct its nest high?**

**²⁸ It lives on the rock and spends the night
on the rock point and the mountain stronghold,**

**²⁹ From there it spies out the prey;
its eyes look from far away.**

**³⁰ And its young ones lick blood greedily,
and where the dead carcasses are, there they are.”**

²¹ Some English versions read *vultures* and some others read *eagles*, because the Greek word *aetos* (ἄετός) can mean both. “In any case, the meaning is that birds of prey gather together where the carcasses lie. ἄετός, οὐ μ—‘eagle, vulture.’ ἐδόθησαν τῇ γυναίκί αἱ δύο πτέρυγες τοῦ ἀετοῦ τοῦ μεγάλου ‘they gave the woman two wings of a large eagle’ Re 12:14; ὅπου ἔαν ᾗ τὸ πτώμα, ἐκεῖ συναχθήσονται οἱ ἀετοί ‘wherever there is a dead body, there the vultures will gather’ Mt 24:28.

In Re 12:14 the emphasis is upon strength and speed, and therefore a term meaning ‘eagle’ is probably more satisfactory, but in Mt 24:28 (and the parallel passages in Lk 17:37) the reference is to the eating of dead flesh, and therefore a word meaning ‘vultures’ is more appropriate.

The basic distinction between eagles and vultures is that the former either capture their prey or feed upon dead carcasses, while vultures only feed upon dead carcasses. Only in the Western Hemisphere are there two distinct families of birds: (1) birds of prey, which also feed upon dead bodies (eagles) and (2) vultures, which never take live prey, but only feed upon carcasses” (Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). [Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains](#) (electronic ed. of the 2nd edition., Vol. 1, p. 44). New York: United Bible Societies).

Also cf. Sproul (ibid) for, “My translation says, ‘Where the *eagles* are gathered.’ And there are many NT scholars who believe that the reference to the gathering of the eagles is to the assembly of the legions of

My brother & sister, I have seen this several times in the game parks of South Africa. You're still driving your 4x4 slowly on the bush track, looking for animals, when suddenly you see birds of prey circling above! If you then drive closer, what will you see? The carcass of an animal with lions, cheetahs or hyenas still licking on it while the vultures gliding above can't wait to come finish the job!

So, what message is Jesus giving to His listeners (and to us)?

Well, in short, that, whether you lived in 70 AD in Jerusalem, or in our day and age, if you are spiritually dead – yes, if you are a spiritual carcass – then it is upon you (wherever you may be) that God's judgement will swiftly descend like eagles/vultures descend on a carcass!

So, dear Wainui member (and dear visitor), are you ready for the consummation of the kingdom of God? Are you ready for the return of our Lord Jesus Christ?

Jesus says (v.33), "***Whoever seeks to preserve his life will lose it...***" My brother & sister, he who tries to make himself right with God, will not be in the kingdom of God!

Do you realise that only those who have, *already now*, become a part of the initial coming of God's kingdom – yes, only those who have already now received Jesus Christ – will be ready for the full coming of the kingdom of God!?

I pray that that is you & me – yes, all of us who are sitting here; all of our children; all of our grandchildren; all those who still have to be born from us; all of our loved ones and dear church family...

AMEN (2958 words excluding footnotes)

Rome whose standards bore the symbol of the army – the eagle! So, if you want to know where the destruction is going to take place, watch for the eagles – watch for the Romans."