

THROUGH THE BIBLE STUDY

LUKE 17:20-18:43

Question: What do the countries of Bahrain, Norway, Tonga, Cambodia, Denmark, Liechtenstein, and Spain have in common? Answer: They are all monarchies.

They're "kingdoms," ruled by a king.

In the year 2021, there are 44 monarchies in the world, ruled over by 29 monarchs. Queen Elizabeth II of England rules 15 countries or a *United Kingdom*.

A monarchy is a country governed by a single ruler.

Humans have devised various forms of government: *tribalism, socialism, communism, totalitarianism, democracy, oligarchy*. America is a *constitutional republic*. But God's chosen form of government is a **monarchy**, ruled by one man, God's Son, King Jesus.

And Jesus came to bring about God's Kingdom!

At the outset of His ministry, Mark 1:14 tells us, "Jesus came... preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God." In Matthew 4:17, His message was "Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." Jesus came on the scene heralding the establishment of God's Kingdom.

Yet this created questions in the minds of the Jews...

Luke 17:20, "Now when (Jesus) was asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come..."

In the mind of a first-century Jew (living in the Roman Empire), kingdoms consisted of *militaries and parliaments, thrones and crowns, courts and markets, ambassadors and*

dignitaries, flags and fanfare, protocols and ceremonies, pomp and circumstance...

The Jews were looking for a visible, tangible, political kingdom. Over and over, Jesus had said God's Kingdom was *at hand*, but He'd produced none of its expected trappings. So the Pharisees ask Him, *"if you're really a King and you really have a Kingdom where is it? Show us some traces of this Kingdom?"*

"(Jesus) answered them and said, "The kingdom of God does not come with observation; nor will they say, 'See here!' or 'See there!' For indeed, the kingdom of God is within you." Here Jesus reveals the mystery of His Kingdom. *Before it comes physically, it first comes spiritually.* One day yet future, Jesus will establish an earthly Kingdom, but for the moment, it's hidden from the naked eye. His Kingdom flies under man's radar.

The Kingdom of God is spiritual. It works in the world incognito and maneuvers behind the scenes.

Today, God's Kingdom is a spiritual movement in human hearts, not an outward political force. *And when men try to make it political, they betray its nature.*

In Romans 14:17, Paul speaks of its spiritual nature, *"For the Kingdom of God is not food and drink, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit."*

Historian, Will Durant, summed up the difference between earthly kingdoms and God's Kingdom when he wrote, *"Caesar hoped to reform men by changing institutions and*

laws; Christ wished to remake institutions and lessen laws by changing men."

The goal of the Kingdom is not military conquest or political takeover. *God is changing the world one heart at a time.* This is the current priority of His Kingdom.

It reminds me of the father on vacation. He woke up early one morning while his family was still in bed. This dad wanted just a few minutes to himself - to read the newspaper - to sip his cup of coffee in peace.

But at 6 AM, his seven-year-old son joined him. He pleaded, "Buddy please, go back to bed." He just couldn't. The father said again, "Hey, it's not time to wake up yet." But the little guy was ready to greet the new day. Finally, the dad provided him a distraction.

He ripped out of his newspaper a full page picture of the Earth - tore it into pieces - and handed his son the scraps of paper, along with a roll of scotch tape.

The father said, "Ok now, I want you to go into the den, and see if you can put the world back together."

The boy was gone just a few minutes. It didn't take him long to complete the task. The son showed his daddy the taped up picture. The father was stunned.

He asked, "*how were you able to put the world back together so quickly?*" That's when the little boy turned the paper over and showed him the picture of a man.

He'd put the pieces together following the picture on the backside. He didn't know a lot of geography, but he knew the

shape of a man. The boy explained, “When you make the man right, you make the world right.”

This is God’s plan. It’s what He’s doing in our world today. He’s making the world right one man at a time.

Verse 22 “Then (Jesus) said to the disciples, “The days will come when you will desire to see one of the days of the Son of Man, and you will not see it.” Jesus knew He was ascending back to the Father. He would be gone soon. “And they will say to you, ‘Look here!’ or ‘Look there!’ Do not go after them or follow them.”

Not only was the Kingdom spiritual at that time, but it would continue to be for some time to come.

Eventually, Jesus will return to Earth and execute a military victory, establishing a political Kingdom. And everyone who loves Jesus is looking forward to that day. But in the meantime, His followers can’t allow their inner longings to lead them in the wrong direction.

Thus in the next few verses, Jesus provides us some signs of His future coming so we won’t be deceived...

“For as the lightning that flashes out of one part under heaven shines to the other part under heaven, so also the Son of Man will be in His day.” Today, we scour and examine world events for *tangible traces* of God’s *spiritual kingdom*, but when Jesus returns, you won’t have to look for traces. He’ll come with a bang!

He returns with the subtlety of a lightning bolt. No one living at the time will miss Jesus’ second advent!

Verse 25, “**But first...**” Jesus will return, but first, a few events will take place... “**He must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation.**” Of course, **that will take place in the near future - over the next few weeks.**

“**And as it was in the days of Noah, so it will be also in the days of the Son of Man: They ate, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all.**” After Jesus’ suffering, and before His returns to establish God’s Kingdom, there will be a period of time where it’s business as usual on planet Earth. People will eat and drink, and marry, and go about their normal lives assuming there’s no end.

Judgment will be lurking, but people will be oblivious.

And what a picture of today. Our world is plunging headlong towards judgment, yet everyone lives with his head in the sand. They live as if they’ll live forever.

Notice the phrase, “**as the days of Noah.**” Read Genesis 6 and you’ll see the parallels between *the days of Noah* and *modern times*. It may surprise you...

Noah lived in a day of enormous population growth.

Sexual perversion and spiritual apostasy plagued the planet in Noah’s day. Read Genesis 5 and you’ll notice Noah lived at a time of scientific enlightenment and technological advancement - much like today.

The similarities are provocative. I believe it’s another of many scriptural indicators that ours is the generation that will literally see the coming of the Son of God.

Jesus speaks of *the days of Noah*, as well as the “*days of Lot*.” Verse 28, “Likewise as it was also in the days of Lot: They ate, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they built; but on the day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven and destroyed them all. Even so will it be in the day when the Son of Man is revealed.” Here’s the point, the citizens of Sodom were blind to the obvious.

On the day God’s judgment of fire and brimstone fell from heaven, folks were engaged in normal activities. Jesus is speaking of the time between Messiah’s *rejection* and *return*. And again it’s business as usual.

But something else happens during this time. **Before God’s judgment comes down His people come out.**

And Jesus uses Abraham’s nephew, Lot, as the example. God delivered Lot *from Sodom* before He delivered fire and brimstone *on Sodom*. This is what will happen at the end of the age. Jesus will return to Earth after a time of fierce and fiery judgment. But this Great Tribulation won’t *fall* until the Church *rises*.

In 1 Thessalonians 1:10, Paul promises the Church that Jesus will “**deliver us from the wrath to come.**”

God will judge this wicked world, but before He does the church will be raptured. We’ll be snatched up to Jesus. We’ll exit like Lot, **prior to God’s judgment.**

And notice, though He speaks of “*the days of Noah*” Jesus compares the Church to *Lot and family* - not *Noah and family*. Noah boarded the boat and *endured God’s judgment*. Noah passed through the flood.

Whereas Lot left and *escaped God's judgment*. Noah is a type of the Jews who endure the Great Tribulation. Lot represents the Church who will exit beforehand.

“In that day (or in the day of the rapture), he who is on the housetop, and his goods are in the house, let him not come down to take them away. And likewise the one who is in the field, let him not turn back.

Remember Lot's wife. Whoever seeks to save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life will preserve it.”

And this brings up a provocative point echoed in Matthew 25. There, Jesus speaks of ten virgins waiting on their bridegroom. Five have oil in their lamps, but five have allowed their oil to burn out. While they're gone to refill their lamps the groom returns and they're left behind. All ten were virgins, but all didn't go to be with the bridegroom because some were not ready.

1 Thessalonians 4 gives us a play-by-play of the rapture. We hear the voice of an archangel and the blast of a trumpet; then the saints are snatched up to heaven. Is it possible that between the two signals, the voice and trumpet - and the actual rapture - there's a time-lapse - enough time for folks to make a decision?

Could it be that a moment transpires which reveals the heart of every Christian? Like Lot's wife who turned back toward Sodom, will there be Christians at the time of the rapture who are so attached to this world that they return for their stuff? They love this world more than God and end up left behind.
Could it be?

Jesus says verse 33, *“whoever seeks to save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life will preserve it.”*

There’s one certainty. If we want to be raptured, we need to be ready! *Is your heart longing for Jesus?*

In verse 34, Jesus paints a picture of the event we’re discussing: the rapture of the Church. *“I tell you, in that night there will be two men in one bed: the one will be taken and the other will be left. Two women will be grinding together: the one will be taken and the other left. Two men will be in the field: the one will be taken and the other left.”* Let me just drop a heavy revelation.

God has revealed to me the exact time of the rapture: 3:00 AM. I guarantee somewhere in the world it’ll be 3:00 AM when Jesus returns for His Church.

Notice here too, the three activities Jesus mentions: *sleeping, farming, and harvesting.* People sleep at night. They work the fields in the morning. And they grind grain after noon. That the rapture interrupts all three activities indicates it’s a global, worldwide event.

Chapter 17 closes, *“And they answered and said to Him, “Where, Lord?” So He said to them, “Wherever the body is, there the eagles will be gathered together.”*

Jesus has been answering the *“when”* of the rapture. It happens *between His rejection and return to Earth.*

But here they ask, *“Where, Lord?”* And He conjures up the image of a battlefield. Listen to verse 37 in the NIV, *“Where there is a dead body, there the vultures will gather.”*

Apparently, the rapture will occur along with a kind of military conflict. Birds will feed on the corpses.

The eagle was the insignia of the Roman legion. Perhaps a future Roman army will be involved at war.

Chapter 18, “Then He spoke a parable to them, that men always ought to pray and not lose heart...” Part of keeping our hearts looking and longing for Jesus is prayer. “*Men always ought to pray and not lose heart.*”

The antidote for discouragement is to stay connected to God, and the way to keep the line open is prayer.

Jesus exhorts us to pray with a story, “saying: “There was in a certain city a judge who did not fear God nor regard man.” He was guided only by his own whims.

In Jesus’ day, judges didn't wear nice robes and sit in paneled chambers in fancy courthouses. They traveled from town to town and set up a tent outside the city gate. The judge sat in the shade to hear cases while his aides monitored who could air a grievance. Usually, it took a bribe to get you on the day's docket.

“Now there was a widow in that city; and she came to him, saying, ‘Get justice for me from my adversary.’

This woman had three strikes against her: **First, she was a woman**, which in Israelis society meant she lacked the basic rights afforded to men. **Second, she was a widow**, thus she had no help from a husband. **Third, she was probably poor - unable to afford a bribe.**

But she had one thing going for her. She had strong *lungs*. She snuck up to the judge and cried for justice.

Verse 4 “And he would not for a while; but afterward he said within himself, 'Though I do not fear God nor regard man, yet because this widow troubles me I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me.'” Notice, this judge’s motive wasn’t right-ness or justice; he just wanted to shut-up a screaming woman.

The judge may also have been concerned for his own safety. The Greek word translated, “*weary*” means, “to blacken someone’s eye.” This was a widow with a vicious hook (*I wouldn’t say this where she could hear me, but maybe that’s why she was a widow. Her husband had made her mad one too many times*).

The judge didn’t want to be her next knockout.

Here’s a judge who didn’t respect God or even love humanity – but he was afraid of this desperate woman.

“Then the Lord said, “Hear what the unjust judge said. And shall God not avenge His own elect who cry out day and night to Him, though He bears long with them? I tell you that He will avenge them speedily.”

Here’s a parable of *contrast* not *comparison*. The rabbis called this form of reasoning, “light to heavy...”

If a hardened judge will hear a widow’s request, how much more will a caring God hear His children’s request. We pray to a loving dad not a jerk of a judge.

Notice also verse 8, we’re told God answers our prayers “*speedily*.” The Greek word is “*tachos*,” from which we get our word “*tachometer*.” Your car’s odometer measures the

distance you travel. Its tachometer measures the speed that you accelerate.

When Jesus says God answers us “*speedily*”, He's not talking about the odometer. There are times when He goes to some length to *manipulate circumstances* or *mold character* before He answers our request.

But as soon as the stage is set, and the lessons learned, and the purpose accomplished - God jumps into action. When God finally moves, He's speedy. Thus the lesson, don't *give up* before God *revs up*.

Be consistent and persistent in your praying! For Jesus asks, “*Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?*” True faith is always evidenced by our persevering prayer...

Then in verse 9, “*Also He spoke this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself...*”

Notice he's not praying to God but to himself. He addresses God, but *he's only talking to himself*.

The Pharisee says, '*God, I thank You that I am not like other men - extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector.*' What a *pompous prig!* He elevates himself and puts down the tax collector.

How does he know what's in another man's heart? Yet this is the essence of religion. It looks down at the *unrighteous* and becomes proud and *self-righteous*.

The Pharisee brags, “I fast twice a week...” The Law required just one fast, and *once a year*, not *twice a week*. But the Pharisee loved to show-off his piety. His was a strut-your-stuff spirituality - a showtime religion.

He continues to boast, “I give tithes of all that I possess.” He meticulously tithes out his spice rack. Every tenth grain of pepper was separated and tithed.

The Jewish Mishnah, a rabbinical commentary, described the Pharisee, “He tithes all that he eats, all that he sells, and all that he buys, and he is not a guest with an unlearned person, so as not possibly to partake of what may have been left un-tithed.” Yet all his detailed tithing was born out of selfish ambition. It was a way of *promoting himself*, not *pleasing God*.

But this is the story of two men praying... Verse 13, “And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me a sinner!’”

The tax collector knew he was a sinner. He “*beat his breast*” - a sign of regret. He knows he doesn't deserve God's blessing, so he throws himself on God's mercy.

His approach is opposite the Pharisee's.

But Jesus says of the tax collector. Verse 14 “I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”

I like how Peterson paraphrases this verse, “This tax man, not the other, went home made right with God. If you walk

around with your nose in the air, you're going to end up flat on your face, but if you're content to be simply yourself, you will become more than yourself.”

The *self-righteous* remained *unrighteous* while the confessor ended up clothed in God's righteousness.

“Then they also brought infants to Him that He might touch them; but when the disciples saw it, they rebuked them.”

Mark's Gospel says Jesus "was greatly displeased" with His disciples' reaction. *How dare they assume that little children would be a bother to Jesus?*

“But Jesus called them to Him and said, "Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of God. Assuredly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will by no means enter it." Rather than a nuisance to Him, Jesus holds a child up as a model for us all. His Kingdom is for adults who are kids at heart.

You grow and prosper as a child of God if you're not so grown up that you become phony, or skeptical, or bitter, or independent, or proud. Rather, do you have the humility, and simplicity, and trust of a little child?

Verse 18, “Now a certain ruler asked Him, saying, "Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?"

Luke says this man was a ruler. **Matthew** tells us he was young. **Mark** mentions he had great possessions.

Put it all together and this was a “rich, young, ruler.”

This guy had it all - wealth and health, youth and power. But what he lacked was what he needed most, *peace with God*. He was worried about his soul.

And notice what he calls Jesus, "*Good Teacher*." The critical word he uses is "*good*." No rabbi was ever called "*good*." Judaism reserved that term for God.

Thus, Jesus asks, "*Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God*." In essence, Jesus is asking, when you call Me "*good*", do you realize you're calling me "*God*?" Is that your conclusion?

"Are you ready to submit to Me on that basis?"

Jesus continues, "*You know the commandments: 'Do not commit adultery,' 'Do not murder,' 'Do not steal,' 'Do not bear false witness,' 'Honor your father and your mother.'*" It's interesting, Jesus reads off the second table of the Ten Commandments. The first five commandments dealt with man's relationship with God, the last five with his relationship with his fellow man.

And here Jesus rules out the last five, for the young man's problem is not with his fellow man, but with God.

"And he said, 'All these I have kept from my youth.'"

Matthew tells us that the young man added, "*What do I still lack?*" He sensed there was more to being right with God than just being kind to other people. The rich, young ruler's problem was not in his relationship with man, but with God. *He had made money his God.*

“So when Jesus heard these things, He said to him, “You still lack one thing. Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me.” Remember, this conversation was in response to the rich, young, ruler’s initial question, “*What shall I do to inherit eternal life?*”

Some readers have wondered if this means you have to sell all your possessions to be saved? Well, for this young man that's exactly what it meant. This may not be Jesus' requirement for all rich folks, but it was certainly what he expected from this particular fellow.

The rich young ruler had made money an idol.

Money is not evil. It’s a tool to use for good, but he took a *good thing* and treated it as *an ultimate thing*. The all-consuming thing in your life becomes your idol.

And this is why Jesus tells him to “*sell all.*” He wants no other rivals! Once you turn an *item* into an *idol* it’s hard to wean away. Idols become addictive. At times to break their hold you’ve got to go cold turkey... “*sell all.*”

1 Thessalonians 1:9 describes how the believers in Thessaloniki had come to Christ, “(They) turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God.”

Salvation is free, but you can't follow Jesus dragging along your idols. Jesus won't be just one of the gods you serve. *If He's not Lord of all, He's not Lord at all.*

Verse 23 is a sad verse. “But when he heard this, he became very sorrowful, for he was very rich.”

Possessions have a way of possessing us.

It was John D. Rockefeller who said, "The poorest man I know is the man who has nothing but money." Remember Lot's wife. Cling to your God, not your gold.

"And when Jesus saw that he became very sorrowful, He said, "How hard it is for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God! For it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God." G Campbell Morgan wrote "possibly by the 'needle's eye', our Lord was referring to the small gate of a city, through which no camel could pass except unloaded, and bending down"

At night, the main gate was closed, so the only entrance was the needle gate *or gate within the gate.*

The camel could only enter the smaller gate if it was unpacked and stripped down. It had to crawl through the needle on its knees. Likewise, a rich man can't enter the Kingdom of God until he strips himself down of all other affections and bows his knee to King Jesus.

Verse 26 "And those who heard it said, "Who then can be saved?" The disciples thought Jesus was being unduly strict. "But (Jesus) said, "The things which are impossible with men are possible with God." Every time any person is saved, it is the result of a miracle.

Salvation is never the result of human ingenuity or merit, but the work of God's Spirit. Our redemption is an impossibility made possible by the grace of God.

“Then Peter said, “See, we have left all and followed You.” So He (Jesus) said to them, “Assuredly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or parents or brothers or wife or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, who shall not receive many times more in this present time, and in the age to come everlasting life.”

There is a cost involved in following Jesus. For each of us, there will be attractions and possessions we’ll have to forsake. Yet in the end, nothing we’ve abandoned for Jesus will be considered a sacrifice.

Our so-called “*sacrifice*” will be more than rewarded in both time and in eternity. Swapping the world for Jesus is the most lucrative deal you'll ever make.

A former oil baron once said, “If you know how rich you are, you're not very rich.” That’s true for Christians. We are infinitely rich in yet-to-realized spiritual riches.

“Then (Jesus) took the twelve (disciples) aside and said to them, “Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and all things that are written by the prophets concerning the Son of Man will be accomplished. For He will be delivered to the Gentiles and will be mocked and insulted and spit upon. They will scourge Him and kill Him. And the third day He will rise again.”

But they understood none of these things; this saying was hidden from them, and they did not know the things which were spoken.” It wasn't what they were expecting to hear, so it all sailed right over their heads.

Even though Jesus had told them, the disciples were still expecting a throne not thorns, a crown not a cross.

“Then it happened, as He was coming near Jericho, that a certain blind man sat by the road begging.”

"Jericho" means "city of palms." It's a warm weather resort near the Dead Sea. This is why Jericho had more than its share of outcasts and street people. Like a South Florida beach town, the indigent and the in-firmed were the only eyesores in this beautiful city.

And here we find an apparent contradiction that's been cleared up by archeology... Luke says Jesus met the blind man entering the city. Matthew says it was as He left. Archeology has shown there were actually two Jerichos - an ancient, and modern city built by Herod.

Jesus met the blind man between the two cities. He was leaving old Jericho and entering new Jericho.

“And hearing a multitude passing by, he (the blind man) asked what it meant. So they told him that Jesus of Nazareth was passing by. And though this beggar was blind physically, he saw more than most men.

He'd heard of Jesus, and had concluded that Jesus was King, the Messiah, "*Son of David.*" He now seized his opportunity and “cried out, saying, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me! Then those who went before warned him that he should be quiet; but he cried out all the more, "Son of David, have mercy on me!"

Please, beware of your so-called "*friends*" who'll discourage you from crying out and coming to Jesus.

They don't want you to embarrass yourself or lose any social standing. They're afraid you're getting too fanatical.

They're made uncomfortable by your need for Jesus. They'll try to cool you down to their frosty temperature. I'm glad this man turned a deaf ear to the skeptics, or he would've been robbed of a miracle.

Verse 40 "So Jesus stood still and commanded him to be brought to Him. And when he had come near, He asked him, saying, "What do you want Me to do for you?" And he said, "Lord, that I may receive my sight."

Then Jesus said to him, "Receive your sight; your faith has made you well." And immediately he received his sight, and followed Him, glorifying God. And all the people, when they saw it, gave praise to God."

And what sites his healed eyes would now see...

In the next week, Jesus will be crucified for the sins of the world and raised from the dead on the third day. How much this man would've missed if he'd allowed himself to be intimidated from crying out to Jesus! *I hope you don't miss a single blessing God has for you.*

So let's wrap up this morning...

We started by understanding the kind of Kingdom, Jesus is building in the world today. Let's not get overly political when God's Kingdom is still spiritual. Our King Jesus is saving the world one person's heart at a time.

A physical kingdom is coming like a flash of lightning. Jesus was rejected, but He will one day return. And in between His rejection and return, as He builds His Kingdom, we're told of the events that will occur...

In one sense, it'll be like *"the days of Noah"* - this evil world will carry on its business as usual, while like *"the day Lot went out of Sodom,"* God will rescue believers. Before judgment *comes down* the church will *go up*.

So we should pray to God continually...

And approach Him humbly as a child...

And have no idols. We bow to Jesus alone!...

For like the blind man who was healed, great will be the sites we'll see if we don't let anyone stifle our desire to seek Jesus and to cry out for His mercy...