

Luke 17:11-37

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[0 : 00] Missing the obvious is a terrible feeling. I had a great experience of this this week. I got a letter in the post and I thought, oh goody, what could it be?

Opening it, I found that I had failed to see the signs where I had parked and received a lovely notice telling me that I should pay lots and lots of money very quickly if I wanted to get away with it.

And it's just like that. So often we seem to bumble our ways, our way through life and we miss the obvious.

And then you get a letter in the post, then you sit and you're embarrassed and you tell everybody that you know that you've got a parking ticket, which is a very foolish thing to do. And Jesus is going to point out some obvious truths to us this morning.

For many who should have known better completely miss the clear facts of the situation right in front of their faces. The nine lepers and the Pharisees in our passage completely miss who Jesus is.

[1 : 11] And so just before we dig in, can we pray together and ask that our God would help us to see and to hear and that we would understand what he has to say to us through this passage today.

Let's pray together. Father God, you are so good to us. And as we have sang together, as we have heard your word read, as we have prayed together, Lord, we ask that these things would not wash over us.

That as we focus in on this passage for a little while, we long that you would come and draw so close to us and open our eyes to see exactly who you are.

Father, that we would lose our blindness and that we would maybe for the first time catch a glimpse of your son and that we would turn and worship him truly today.

Father, help us, we pray. Help me as I try to present this well. Help each one of us as we try to hear your word. Give us ears to hear, we ask in Jesus' name.

[2 : 28] Amen. Before we dig into the main meat of our section, can I just draw your attention to a detail in verse 11? Our eyes naturally skim over this, but it's an important header to notice.

It says, Now on his way to Jerusalem, Jesus traveled along the border between Jesus and Samaria. The eagle-eyed among you may have noticed that when the author, Luke, gives us pointers on where Jesus is and where he's going, he's giving us an important structure.

Since 1321, as we've been journeying with Jesus towards Jerusalem, we've seen Jesus dealing with a single kind of main train of idea, a main question.

Who will be kingdom citizens? And this new section that starts here in 1711 and runs through for a few chapters, then builds on that idea.

And it asks, How then do we live in the present time as those kingdom citizens, as those people who are going to follow Jesus, while we both live in and wait for the kingdom coming?

- [3 : 39] And this is going to be a theme that we'll see over the next coming weeks. And our new section opens up with this little group of lepers who interrupt Jesus as he's going into a village.
- And they see an obvious miracle. These guys, they're outcasts. They're potentially infectious. They're not allowed to come into society as a whole.
- And from a distance, they call out to Jesus for help. I'm sure they'd heard stories. I'm sure that news had gotten to them. And do you notice the help that Jesus gives to them?
- Unlike so many other miracles where Jesus goes near or touches them, he doesn't. From the distance, he just calls.
- He just speaks the words. And he just gives them a simple command, exactly the same command as what the Old Testament said to do if you had already recovered from such a disease.
- [4 : 46] Go and show yourselves to the priests. It could be said that they are to act as if the miracle has already happened.
- And so this little band of ten folk, they go. I dare say some of them were dubious at whether this would work or not.
- If I had been among them, I'm sure in the back of my mind, there would have been a niggling doubt. But as they travel, the miracle that they had all hoped for occurs.
- Whether suddenly or slowly, we just don't know. But can you imagine the sheer elation of this group? As they see, as they look, and their skin is made clean.
- But one of them stops. And he does the most startling of things. He turns back. Turns back seemingly from what Jesus had told him to do.
- [5 : 50] He turns back and leaves the other nine and goes. Why? In order to go and to worship God properly and to thank Jesus for what he's done.
- Isn't that a hallmark of someone who's just realized who Jesus is and what he has done? Isn't that such a lovely veneer of what a Christian should be in terms of thankfulness and gratitude?
- These are fundamental aspects, elements of worship, as we see what God has done for us in our lives. But don't miss the scandal in the middle of this little story.
- The group of lepers, they're in border country, and so there seems to be both Jews and Samaritans among them. And yet only this Samaritan has done the right thing in turning around and glorifying God.
- Surely, if you had lived at the time, surely, if anyone would have, it would have been the Jews who would have worshipped God correctly.
- [6 : 55] But no, it was this Samaritan. This outsider. This outsider within the group of outsiders. The one with the crazy ideas about God.
- He was the one who recognized that this power that had healed him was the very power of God. Where the other nine seemed somehow to have missed it.
- And I think this gives us great confidence as we reach out to our friends and to our families with the good news of Jesus Christ. We don't need to be concerned that they don't have a good background.
- As we bump into maybe Mormon and as JW's knock on our doors, we don't need to worry that they've got their theology all wrong.
- What we need is to present Jesus to them all. Whether people of other religions or people of none. And as we do that, as we present Jesus in his power, we can trust that as they see him, that God could work the same miracle in them in opening their eyes as he did for the Samaritan.

[8 : 16] As he did for you and me at some point in our past. There was an obvious miracle happening here. And as we come to verse 20, we find what seems to be a quite different section.

But here as Jesus is being questioned by the Pharisees, we find that they are also failing to see the obvious. Just like those nine lepers. They were waiting expectantly for the kingdom of God to come.

They were looking for a political leader. They were looking for someone to give the Jewish nation freedom. And as they read the Torah, the Old Testament, they searched it for clues about their coming king.

And so they ask this preacher, Jesus, when he thinks the kingdom will come. And the irony of this question is staggering.

Here they are, the experts, standing in front of the very person that they've been looking forward to. The king. And they're asking him for the directions to somewhere else.

[9 : 30] And Jesus tells them that the kingdom isn't coming as something that can be observed. There's delicious irony in this as we read a clear example of Jesus coming with an observable miracle.

We've just seen ten lepers cleansed, haven't we? But isn't it purely ironic that these Pharisees, who were the best of the best, they were the pious ones, they were the religious, they were the zealous.

They have searched diligently to know about the coming kingdom, but in it all they miss the clear and the obvious. Flesh and blood Jesus standing in the middle of them.

It's a classic example of not seeing the wood because of the trees. We have an obvious king and they're asking about the kingdom.

And perhaps we could bring this up to date with ourselves. Perhaps some of us have been looking for something spiritual. Some meaning in our lives.

[10 : 44] Something more. Something that would make sense of this world that we live in. And perhaps we've looked past Jesus and not recognized him for who he is.

I don't know whether you've heard all this before. Or whether this is the first time you've heard anything about this man Jesus. But if you aren't trusting him, if he isn't the king of your life today, would you consider him afresh?

Consider his claims and what he has done and what he has said and who he is. Would you consider him seriously?

Because we can laugh at these Pharisees all that we want. And as I read this passage, I chortle. Because these Pharisees are ludicrous.

And yet the worrying possibility is that we could be like them. We could be like them. Missing the obvious signs.

[11 : 57] And abandoning our cars. And coming back to find tickets. There is a clear king here.

And the kingdom has already come. And these guys completely miss it. And perhaps as we realize that we have a problem seeing Jesus clearly, our instinct could be to turn away.

To conclude that this whole Christianity thing isn't working. And to try and look somewhere else. But Luke here isn't teaching us this so that we will turn away.

But he's showing us our natural blindness so that we have an opportunity to think afresh. To look again. And ask that as we earnestly seek answers, that God would reveal Jesus to us.

Because that's the whole ballgame here. There was an obvious miracle. There's an obvious king.

[13 : 03] And as we followed the story, the Samaritans seeing Jesus, with the Samaritans seeing Jesus as the one who is worthy of worship. And yet the Pharisees missing Jesus as the king.

Now Jesus turns to his disciples. There's a clear pattern going on here. And with all of these ideas of spiritual blindness and of missing the obvious, Jesus knows that his disciples are needing to be taught about something.

About the realities of what this kingdom is going to look like after he has left this earth again. And Luke, by showing us that we're onto the last leg of Jesus' journey towards Jerusalem, he's alerted us how close the cross is coming.

And Jesus is forewarning us and he's forearming his followers for after that cataclysmic event. It's framed here in language that we will perhaps struggle a little with understanding.

But I think he gives just a few big ideas of what his return will be like and tells them when it will be. So he gives a few ideas about what his return will be like and then tells them when it will be.

[14 : 24] I occasionally get a bus to Bigger from Edinburgh here. It's the number 101. Maybe you see it. And it doesn't appear in the bus tracker system. And I love the bus tracker system because it lets me know it forewarns me and forearms me for the coming of the bus.

But I'm going for this one. And perhaps you're a little like me. You know the timetable. You've read it on the internet. You see that the bus is to come at 1605.

Sure not to come before then. But quite often I'm at the tail end of my time. I'm rushing to meet it at stop. And I begin to panic.

Maybe it came early this time. Just this once. Unlikely as that may be. Like that train in Japan. Maybe it drove past and somehow I didn't see it.

I was staring at my phones and I just didn't notice. And these doubts and these worries kind of bubble in my head. And it's all nonsense.

[15 : 29] And yet when we're waiting for something that we aren't entirely sure of we can be easily troubled.

And Jesus, he's dealing with that here. He's allaying his disciples' fears as to when he will return to the earth.

He's giving them a timetable for the second coming. In verse 22 he speaks of them longing to see Jesus. It's clear that a time is coming when Jesus won't be standing in front of them.

And he won't be performing obvious miracles as the obvious king. And down in verse 25 he explicitly tells them that it won't happen until this generation, these first century Jews, reject Jesus and he suffers.

Clearly these days of the Son of Man, this time when Jesus will be revealed, will happen after Jesus is crucified. But beyond that there's no clear time given.

[16 : 37] I think we need to be very careful about saying anything more specific. It is still to come. That's all we know. But going back to me at the bus stop, can you imagine what would happen if some random stranger came up to me and told me that there was a diversion on the route?

That I should go to a parallel street perhaps and wait at a bus stop there? Perhaps someone who's just been misinformed themselves?

Or maybe someone who wants to somehow profit from my desperation? Maybe just to get a laugh. That seems to be why Jesus talks about his return being like lightning here.

Did you notice that phrase? Like lightning comes and flashes on one side of the sky and flashes to the other. It's going to be obvious to everyone.

You're not going to miss it. Don't worry about missing Jesus coming back. And we certainly shouldn't believe anyone who tells us otherwise.

[17 : 45] Don't follow people or listen to people who say, oh, the kingdom's coming over there. Or Jesus is coming back over here. It will be absolutely obvious, like lightning in the sky.

But it will also be sudden. Just as that bus appears around the corner without forewarning, without fanfare or ice cream van music or anything else.

And the Old Testament illustrations that Jesus uses here to show us this are striking, and they're very deliberately chosen, aren't they? These stories of Lot and of Noah, they speak to the suddenness and the unexpectedness of the return while everyone else is just getting on with life.

And this is why seeing Jesus is an urgent need. This is why we need to spend the time now and think seriously of this.

Because he's coming back to deal with this sin-sick world. He's coming back to wash away all of the evil and all of the pain.

[18 : 59] And he will come suddenly, and we must be ready. There will be no time for us then to see him as king and to become part of his kingdom.

Jesus is to come back, and we find that it's going to be both obvious and sudden. And the natural response to hearing these truths is twofold.

Firstly, it takes away our worry and our anxiety that many have about these things. we need not panic.

Jesus' coming is sure to be clear. But it also shows us that we ought to be ready. We ought to have our lives ordered in light of these eternal truths.

This little section then, in verses 31 to 33, open up these ideas further. And the point here is that we must see where our lives are centered.

[20 : 02] when Jesus returns, our hearts' response will be one of two. Either it will be a wholehearted looking to him in whom we have placed our trust, or we will look around at the lives that we have built here, and we will choose them.

I'm not saying that in that moment we are going to make a different choice than what we've already made, but in that moment it will become clear where our lives are to be found.

Just like Lot's wife. She was told about the destruction that was coming. That the evil of Sodom was about to be punished. She was even taken and rescued from the city and placed outside.

And yet, even as she was given the promise of safety, yet she still looked back to the life that she had built in Sodom and was lost.

And if we're not seeing Christ as King now and finding our life in Him presently, we will not change our tune on that day.

[21 : 28] We will look around and we will not leave our lives here. And in that, we will be seeking to preserve our lives and yet lose them.

Rather, we need to be those who daily, who hourly, lose our lives in the here and now. as we live as kingdom citizens and keep looking for the coming King.

Analogies never stretch terribly far and I think my bus analogy is quickly finding itself out of its depths. But perhaps we can get one more detail through it and you'll forgive me for stretching it far.

When the bus comes and the doors open, not everyone who is standing at the bus stop will get on board. There will be a distinction made between all of us who have stood at that stop, between those who have waited for that bus and those who don't.

And that is what we see, I think, in verses 34 and 35 to underline that Jesus coming will be discriminatory.

[22 : 47] I don't mean that in the bad sense that we hear that word used. I'm using that in the dictionary sense. There's going to be a distinction made between people. Even those, Jesus is illustrating, even those who share a bed, even friends who work together in the very same place, that distinction, although it isn't elaborated here, is not to do with intellect.

It's not to do with looks or family or social class. It isn't based on the membership of a club or money in the bank account. But it comes down to whether or not we have truly seen who Jesus is and what he has done for us and responded correctly in worship.

Or on the other hand, if we've missed him, even with all of our information about him. There's an obvious miracle, there's an obvious king, and there's going to be an obvious return.

And as we come to the conclusion of our passage, the final verse wraps up the whole train of thought perfectly, almost as if the author had some idea in his mind that he wanted to convey.

the disciples wonder when all this and where all this will transpire. They're interested in learning more detail. But Jesus has given them all that they need already.

[24 : 24] Rather than giving them more information, Jesus uses this little proverbial saying at the end to underline what our focus has been all along.

It's going to be obvious. Just like in desert countries when there's a dead body in the ground, there's an obvious sign because the vultures will gather to pick off the corpse.

It's going to be obvious. Although as Jesus followers we may not physically see him now, although his work in this world is concealed from clear vision at the moment, yet it will become clear when he comes back in his glory and we see him.

And so we must ask ourselves, we must seriously consider, are we seeing Jesus clearly in his word? And are we living our lives based on that reality?

Or have we overlooked Jesus? Are we distracted by our lives here? And are we not thinking about the fact that Jesus will come back?

[25 : 42] I've been struck recently that this has been something that has faded in my mind over years. We can respond like the nine lepers and overlook Jesus despite the obvious miracle.

We can respond like the Pharisees and overlook Jesus as the obvious king. But there will come a day when we cannot overlook Jesus and he appears to judge sin and to set up his everlasting kingdom.

And so just as we close, take a moment to think to yourself, how will you respond to Jesus today? Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.