

How We Wait for Christ's Return, Part 2

Luke 17:22-25

We are returning to the 17th chapter of Luke this morning, an amazing, amazing section on the coming of the kingdom and the coming of the Son of Man. And this is really Luke's introduction to the end times. There is more coming in Luke 21, which is the Olivet Discourse and that parallels Matthew 24 and 25 and then Mark 13, as well.

So, this is really just the beginning of Luke and eschatology or the eschatology that he records from Jesus. But I'm going to start back in Luke 17:20, so follow along as I read, "Being asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, he," that is Jesus, "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 among you, it 'is in the midst of you.'"

Jesus provides, here in these two verses, his disciples with three layers of protection. Three layers of protection against false reports about his return. The first layer of

protection is, just in kind of the, the, plain fact of identifying false reports. Identifying anything that sounds like this. That's protection in and of itself. Ju, just discern that!

They'll say to you, or really the verb here is an active voice, so it's, they will be saying to you, that is, Get used to it, folks, it's not going to end. The books are still going to be published and all the media is going to come out. Get used to it. They will be saying to you, active voice over and over, repeatedly with regularity, as infinitum, ad nauseam. "Look, there! Look, here!"

One commentator says, "this covers," quote, "all premature announcements of the approach of the last day, and it means all predictions of exact dates, all statements as to local," appearance, "appearances are to be mistrusted." We find evidence of false rumors, as early as Paul's letter to the Thessalonians, remember that. 2 Thessalonians 2:1 to 3, Paul writes there to a troubled church, he says, "Now concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered together with him, we ask you, brothers, not to be quickly shaken in mind or alarmed, either by a spirit or a spoken word, or a letter seemingly to be from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come. Let no one deceive you in any way."

So, the rumor that Christ had already returned, by the way, this is the error called, even today, called preterism, that Christ returned in some sense in AD 70 in judgment. That clearly contradicts what Jesus teaches. Clearly contradicts what the New Testament teaches on the whole. And these false rumors started very early, just as Jesus predicted, and it created instability, and anxiety, and fear, and worry, in the churches.

So, the first layer, protection, is just simply to identify these false reports. When you hear this kind of language, these false rumors of dates and seeing Jesus and all that stuff. If you hear any of that stuff, you know right away, what it is. You've discerned it. That's the first layer of protection. So, Jesus follows up with a straightforward command and this, is, provides a second layer of protection for us. He just gives a straight command, he says, "Don't go out or follow them." It's two verbs, it's two commands, two imperatives, but, really, they kind of combine as one heavy hitting command.

The first, *aperchomai*, can be translated, Do not go after or follow them. Second command is, *dioko*, *dioko*, and *dioko* is translated in the ESV as, follow, but it really means more like, pursue. So, it's more like, don't pursue them, don't run after them, don't go after them. So, the grammatical force of these

commands together, the way the grammar is, the way the tenses are, it's don't even start to go out, don't even start to go out and follow, don't even start to pursue them or run after them. That is just cut it off before it even happens. He's very clear here and he's very emphatic, strong.

The Bible's abundantly clear about this. It's the false teachers who announce signs of Christ coming, who set dates for the second coming, who see Christ showing up there, or here, or everywhere, or in their mind, or in their dreams, or out in the desert, wherever it is. So that means beloved, if it's false teachers that are purveying this kind of stuff, it is rebellious to dabble in it. It's rebellious to dabble in date setting, to get into sign seeking. It's sinful to flirt with this stuff. Turn it off. Jesus says, don't do that.

Nevertheless, in spite of Christ's clear warning, in spite of his explicit prohibition, I hear Christians still say this all the time. But what's the harm? Oh, I don't take it too seriously for myself, you know, it's just curious. I just find it interesting to watch for signs, and read articles, and watch videos from prophecy experts, and kind of get into discussions, and kind of stir it up a little bit.

So, what's the harm? Let me answer that. I'm glad you asked. Apart from simple things like squandering valuable time, attention, and energy, which we're stewards of this life, in our time, and attention, and energy, aren't we? So apart from squandering our time, attention, and energy, watching some YouTube so-called expert, getting involved in some Internet chat group, or any of that stuff, you need to understand that, entire cult movements have started in exactly this way, deceiving millions and misrepresenting the truth of our God. Inoculating people from hearing, really, what it is we're trying to say to them, that is not helpful.

One of the most consequential date setting movements in this country started back with William Miller in the first half of the 19th century. William Miller sincerely believed that he could figure out the time of Christ's return, even though Christ said, "No one knows the day or the hour." William Miller said, yeah, but, I, you're not talking about me. Right?

So, he said, it's available to the skillful interpreter, ie. himself, to search the Bible carefully, find the clues, connect the dots by watching the signs of the times. And in 1818, Miller, Miller was convinced that he'd done just that. From the decree of Artaxerxes 457 BC, he counted 2300 years,

which he found that number in Daniel 8:14, and he landed on the date of 1843 or maybe it was 1844. He said both, depending on the calendar, differences in a Gregorian versus Jewish dating scheme and all the rest.

So, by 1840, William Miller was something of a celebrity. He'd been publishing his findings, even speaking everywhere, and the public, was stirred into a frenzy, the closer they came to that date of 1843. Pressed for clarity about, Can you get a little more specific? Miller was able to narrow down the date of Christ return as occurring sometime between March 21st of 1843 and March 21st of the following year, 1844.

Well, when both dates came and went, passing without incident, Miller immediately recognized his error, he'd been using the wrong calendar, so dug up a Karaite Jewish calendar as opposed to the Rabbinic calendar and he redid his math and reset the date for April 18th of 1844. Just about, just a little less than a month away. When that date failed as well, Miller was duly humbled by this point, embarrassed. He was ready to throw in the towel. He said, "I confess my error, I acknowledge my disappointment, and I still believe the day of the Lord is near, even at the door."

He stepped out, but his followers stepped in, and they continued the fight. One of Miller's converts was a man named Samuel Snow. He's in, he was an atheist, skeptic, skeptic. He, he, was converted after reading Miller's lectures, and he had a camp meeting in New Hampshire in August of 1844. Snow kind of reworked the math again and used typology to take a fresh look at Miller's Karaite calendar, Jewish calendar, in a message that he called, *The Seven Month Message* or *The True Midnight Cry* and he set a new date for Christ return October 22nd, 1844.

When that date failed, William Miller and the Millerites were pretty much crushed. Publicly embarrassed, it was known as the Great Disappointment. This, this is, this rebellious penchant for date setting, it led to spiritual devastation for many, many people. Many gave up on Christianity altogether, became cynical, skeptical, unbelieving. The rankest form of unbelief, because of all this.

Perhaps worse, many disappointed, grieving Millerites, they turned around and didn't give up hope and spawned new movements, but carrying the same paradigm forward. They gathered around false teachers like Charles Taze Russell to form the Jehovah's Witnesses. They followed the teachings of a very strange woman named Ellen G. White. She was a former Millerite,

turned false prophetess, and she founded the Seventh-day Adventist movement. That's just one story. But there are many, many of these stories.

The tendency to ignore Christ, here at this point, and flirt with distraction, and fail to keep one's pride, or religious zeal in check, or even ones' curiosity at check. This is the cause of so much confusion and so much spiritual devastation, like so many dandelions. Dandelion seeds blown through the winds, the seeds will eventually land and they'll take root in new soil, only to grow more weeds and spawn more confusion and on, and on, and on it goes.

Listen, hasn't Jesus helped us here? It's so simple. Verse 23. Whenever we hear reports like this, Look at this, look at that. What about this date? What about this sign? Beloved, we can know immediately that it's false, that we should pay no attention at all. Consider the track record of these people, Charles Taze Russell and the Watchtower Bible and Tract society, Jehovah's Witnesses, the date of Christ return was 1874. When that failed it was 1914. For Joseph Smith and The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, the day was 1891. Per Herbert W. Armstrong, The Worldwide Church of God, the date was 1935, oh wait, 1943 oh wait 1972, oh well 1975.



For Hal Lindsey, who joined in with Edgar Whisenant, the date was 1988. Whisenant actually wrote a book, *88 Reasons Why the Rapture Will Be in 1988*, and then the following year, eight, *89 Reasons Why the Rapture Will Be in 1989*. I was alive in 88 and 89, not a Christian, but I didn't see anybody disappearing in the Rapture; going up to heaven and leaving me behind. For Harold Camping, of Family Radio, it was 2011.

The date setting continues today. The sign seeking, the measuring up, headlines of Bible texts, and all the rest, it continues. And we know one thing for certain; whenever we hear a date, whatever that date is, we know for sure that's not the date when Christ will return. Why? Because Jesus said, Matthew 24:36, "Concerning that day and hour, no one knows." No one.

Jesus says here in Luke 17:23, they'll be saying to you. They'll say it earnestly. They'll say it with conviction, "Look, there!", "Look, here!" But no one knows. Not even the angels of heaven, nor the son in his humanity, the son of man in his humanity, he too has limitations, like the date of his return, but the father only. So, stop going after them. Stop following them. Don't pursue them at all. Don't listen to them. In fact, don't even start. Christian, will you obey?

Date setting, sign seeking, connecting text with current events, it's rebellious and it is worthless. Why is that? Because verse 24 says, very clearly when Christ returns. When the kingdom comes, though no one anticipates it, it will be obvious to all. "As the lightning flashes, lights up the sky from one side to the other, so will the Son of Man be in his day." There will be no hiding the return of Christ. The event will be known from one end of the heavens to the other, universally recognized and acknowledged.

As the commentator Alfred Plummer says, "None will foresee it and all we'll see it at once, so that no reporting respecting it can have any value." End Quote. All that date setting, sign seeking, headline connection stuff will go right out the window because when Christ does come, all that stuff will be revealed for what it is, total rubbish. So, folks, don't go down the rabbit hole. Don't chase the theories. Don't listen to the prophecy gurus online. No need to keep watching that live video feed of the Temple Mount and the Western Wall in Jerusalem, cause when it happens you won't miss it. It will be obvious to all.

So, the disciples' expectation. What do we expect? We expect to live in a period of waiting. We wait in hope. We are

active and fruitful in are waiting, and we anticipate Christ's return. We're like the good slaves that Christ leaves behind, giving us Minas to invest. We invest them for the sake of the kingdom. We want a return from the stewardship that Christ has given us. That's our expectation, the disciple's protection. What protects us? Staying clear of anybody who tries to distract us, just obeying Jesus when he tells us, "Don't go after them, don't run after them or follow them." Jesus says in verse 25, "But first he," that is the Son of Man, "First he must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation.

So much to consider in that short little verse. Maybe I'll get some of that next time, but let me just at least say this, that's the shortest of Jesus' passion predictions and it's talking about the climax of his first Advent, the passion, the death and burial for sins. And he gives this passion prediction in the middle of teaching about, not his first Advent, but his second Advent. Why?

Connecting Christ's cross with Christ's kingdom, Jesus shows that the suffering servant of Isaiah 53 is one and the same person with Daniel's Son of Man. Post resurrection, this idea of suffering and triumph, suffering and glory, joined together in the one person, Jesus Christ. Post resurrection,

this is going to shape the mindset and set the, pd, disposition of Christian disciples for ages to come, down to our day.

First, we see in this verse and its placement in this context, that suffering and glory are joined together. Second, we see that suffering precedes glory, suffering first, then glory. And then third, we see that apart from Christ suffering, there is no glory of coming kingdom, not at all. So, suffering and glory joined together. Suffering precedes glory, suffering first and then the glory, and then we see that, apart from the suffering, no kingdom. So that sets our mindset. That sets the way we think. It frames our disposition. It shapes the character of our lives. It informs and educates all of our gospel preaching.

Notice that Paul did not say in 1 Corinthians 1:23, We preach Christ triumphant. No, but rather "We preach Christ." What? That's right, "Christ crucified." It's a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles. Christ triumphant, now that's a message that makes sense to the world. That's a message that the world can accept and embrace, and wins their approval. That's why the Roman Catholic Church built huge ornate edifices that they call churches. That's why they marched with mighty armies. That's why they exercised great political power.

Luther rightly criticized them in the Heidelberg Catechism, that theirs was a theology of glory and not a theology of the cross. Carl Trueman explains it this way, quote "God revealed himself as" as "merciful to humanity in the incarnation when he manifested himself in human flesh, and the supreme moment of that revelation was on the cross at Calvary. Indeed, Luther sometimes referred enigmatically to Christ crucified as God's backside, the point at which God appeared to be the very contradiction of all that one might reasonably have anticipated him to be."

Trueman goes on, "The theologians of glory, therefore, are those who build their theology in the light of what they expect God to be like. And surprise, surprise, they made God to look something like themselves. The theologians of the cross, however, are those who build their theology in the light of God's own revelation of himself in Christ, hanging on the cross." End Quote.

Just get this down as a summary of this; don't be a theologian of glory, be a theologian of the cross. That revelation of God, in the incarnation of Christ, at the climax of his ministry, verse 25 "First he must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation." That "word of the cross is

foolishness to those who are perishing. But to us who are being saved, it is the power of God." There's no kingdom without it. There's no triumph without that suffering.

Jesus intends to set expectations for his disciples to guard them perpetually against this perennial error of triumphalism. We see this error of triumphalism at work today in a muscular version of theonomy, and dominionism, and hypermasculinity, all that is a caricature of true humanity. It's a post-feminist reaction to all this toxic masculinity stuff. It's, I mean, all that stuff is abhorrent. We get it. So much of this is hermeneutically inconsistent. It's exegetically unsound. It's theologically unmoored. And listen, it is sailing to yet another shipwreck in the opposite ditch of that premillennial caricature, because it's just another theology of glory.

It's just a bunch of young men who want to be thought of as tough and want their theology to be masculine and muscular, not bending from the government and all that stuff. We're not put on this Earth, Jesus said, Listen, "My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would get up and fight."

But as it is, it's not of this world, we're theologians of the cross. We've reached the humility of Christ. We've reached the crucifixion of Christ. Why? Because right now, during this

time of waiting, you know what Christ is doing, he's populating his kingdom with citizens, who are saved by the grace of his cross. Let's preach that.

Pattern set by our Lord, suffering proceeds glory. This sets a pattern for how we live our lives too. In Hebrews 12:1 to 3, the writer calls us to look back to Chapter 11, the Great Hall of Faith. Look at that great cloud of witnesses, many of whom learned to endure suffering while awaiting God's fulfillment of restoration promises. They saw from a great prophetic distance, so to speak, the fulfillment of those promises.

They saw from a great prophetic distance the king of the kingdom that they serve, and the writer says that, as they did that, we need to do that. "Let us also," the writer says, "lay aside every weight. And the sin that clings so easily and closely and let us run with endurance the race that's set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and the perfecter of our faith, who, for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross and despised the shame." You know where he is? Seated at the right hand of the throne of God. Suffering to glory.

Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or faint

hearted, because, beloved, if we follow Christ and we preach his gospel, we too are going to endure from sinners' hostility against ourselves. If you're not enduring any hostility at all. If life is pretty easy for you and you get, yeah, really bumping like a pinball in a pinball machine off of different people's criticisms and objections, and Oh you're critical, Oh, you're this, Oh, you're that; your real problem maybe a need to take a good hard look in the mirror and see; are you being clear as a Christian.

May the Lord grant us, Grace Church, may the Lord grant us a great clarity of understanding together. May he bring us to unity in the truth. The world of one mind and one heart together, for the sake of the gospel. May he keep us steadfast, immovable, and always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that our labor in the Lord is never in vain. May we do that with our eyes fixed on the hope of the second coming. Amen?

Let's pray. Our father, thank you so much for sending the Lord Jesus Christ. He's our Savior and our Lord. He is the suffering servant, and he is the triumphant Son of Man. And we await for the full manifestation of his glory in the second coming. We are like those who long for one of the days of the



Son of Man. We just, we just wanna see him triumphant, walking this earth.

We want to see nations bowing before him. Kings and officials, governments, and people alike, bringing their, their, gifts before him, bringing their tribute. Bow at his feet and proclaim him King of Kings and Lord of Lords. That is what he is. That's what we want him to be recognized as. We want to see the full vindication of your truth, and your righteousness, and your faithfulness, our God. And we know that that comes in the person, in the triumph, and the second coming of Jesus Christ.

Let us be good servants of yours as we wait. Let us not be lazy. Let us not be chasing distraction, and let us not fall into a different era, an era of triumphalism and political action and all the stuff trying to, trying to, wrench out of this world some modicum of bowing the knee, when the hearts are standing up on the inside and defiant.

Father, let us instead, be proclaimers of the message of the cross, that is foolish to those who are perishing. But to those who were being saved, it is the very power and wisdom of God. Thank you, father, for our opportunity to, to, hear the word today, to listen and learn from Jesus, our Savior. It's in his name we pray. Amen.